

NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM AGENDA



Wednesday 24 October 2007

at 4.00 pm

**at Owton Manor Community Centre,
Wynyard Road, Hartlepool**

MEMBERS: NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM:

Councillors Akers-Belcher, R W Cook, Coward, Cranney, Flintoff, Gibbon, Griffin, Henery, Richardson, Simmons and Turner

Resident Representatives:

Ann Butterfield, Linda Shields and Vacancy

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS

3. MINUTES

3.1 To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 19 September 2007.

4. RESPONSES FROM THE COUNCIL, THE EXECUTIVE OR COMMITTEES OF THE COUNCIL TO FINAL REPORTS OF THIS FORUM

No items.

5. CONSIDERATION OF REQUEST FOR SCRUTINY REVIEWS REFERRED VIA SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE

No items.

6. CONSIDERATION OF PROGRESS REPORTS/BUDGET AND POLICY FRAMEWORK DOCUMENTS

No items.

7. FORWARD PLAN

No items.

8. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Scrutiny Investigation into School Meals

8.1 Draft Final Report – *Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Forum*

Scrutiny Investigation into Transportation Links to Hospital Services and Neighbourhood Services Transport Provision

8.2 Verbal Evidence from the Authority's Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Communities – *Scrutiny Support Officer*

8.3 Evidence from the Neighbourhood Services Department

(a) Covering Report – *Scrutiny Support Officer*

(b) Presentation – *Head of Technical Services*

9. ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS ARE URGENT

ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

Date of next meeting Wednesday 12 November 2007 at 4.30 pm venue to be confirmed.

NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM

MINUTES

19 September 2007

The meeting commenced at 4.00pm in Owton Manor Community Centre,
Hartlepool

Present:

Councillor: Stephen Akers-Belcher (In the Chair)

Councillors: Rob W Cook, Kevin Cranney, Bob Flintoff, Steve Gibbon, Sheila Griffin, Carl Richardson, Christopher Simmons and Mike Turner

Resident Representatives:
Ann Butterfield and Linda Shields

Officers: Mike Blair, Traffic and Transportation Manager
Doreen Wilkinson, Catering Manager
Sandra Saint, School Improvement Co-ordinator
Claire Watson, Community Nutritionist Project Manager
Charlotte Burnham, Scrutiny Manager
Angela Hunter, Principal Democratic Services Officer

Also Present: Andy Bayston, Head Teacher, St Hild's Secondary School

27. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors John Coward and Gordon Henery.

28. Declarations of interest by Members

None.

29. Minutes of the meeting held on 8 August 2007

Confirmed subject to the addition of apologies for absence received from resident representatives Ann Butterfield and Linda Shields.

30. Responses from the Council, the Executive or Committees of the Council to Final Reports of this Forum

None.

31. Consideration of request for scrutiny reviews referred via Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee

None.

32. Consideration of progress reports/budget and policy framework documents

None.

33. Forward Plan

None.

34. Scrutiny Investigation into School Meals – Health Eating Agenda (*Scrutiny Support Officer*)

The Scrutiny Manager presented a report which informed Members that a presentation on the Healthy Eating in Schools Agenda would be given by the School Improvement Co-ordinator. The presentation was comprehensive and detailed and provided information on the national programme of healthier living and learning in schools throughout the school day which was jointly operated by the Department for Education and Skills and the Department of Health. To be registered as a healthy school under this programme, there was a requirement for each school to meet 41 minimum standards. Currently in Hartlepool 21 schools had achieved this level with the remainder working towards this. The Authority had entered into a Local Area Agreement and set a challenging target that 100% of schools in Hartlepool would have achieved this standard by July 2009. Whilst acknowledging that this was a high standard to expect, the School Improvement Officer was confident that this target was achievable within the prescribed timescale.

A discussion ensued in which the following issues were raised:-

- Members questioned the percentage take-up of school meals across the town. The Catering Manager responded that the average take-up within primary schools was 58% and for secondary schools it was 62%. It was recognised that there were areas of best practice within some schools and there were plans to share this across all schools at a future town-wide training event. The School Improvement Co-ordinator

advised Members that the aim of the strategy was to increase the take-up of school meals and encourage healthy eating.

- Members were concerned that the message of healthy eating was not always recognised in the home and it was important to educate parents as well children. The School Improvement Co-ordinator indicated that part of the strategy for healthy eating in schools was to educate the whole school community, including the parents. Whilst it was acknowledged that schools can not enforce contents of children's packed lunches, guidelines can be produced within a school policy to indicate the standards of healthy eating expected. There were several initiatives across the town to encourage healthy eating including workshops and a 'What's Cooking' programme and these had proved extremely successful.
- Members sought reassurance that there was capacity to deal with an increase in the take up of school meals across all schools in the town. The Catering Manager responded that some schools would need minor changes but any increase would be accommodated and welcomed.
- Views were sought on whether making school meals compulsory was a way forward. The Catering Manager indicated that this initiative had been tested in Hull and this lead to an increase to 55%. However, in Holland school meals were compulsory at high school level.
- It was acknowledged that there was a clear level of positivity involved and that credit should be given to all employees involved. It was evident from this investigation that the Authority was clearly looking forward with a view to ensuring healthy eating remains high on the agenda for children across the town. The Chair thanked all staff and the management team for the service provided.

Decision

Members noted the content of the report and presentation.

35. School Meals – Evidence from Head Teachers – Covering Report (*Scrutiny Support Officer*)

The Scrutiny Manager presented a report which introduced the Head Teacher from St Hild's Secondary School who was in attendance to provide verbal evidence in relation to school meals. In addition to this, it was noted that the views of the Head Teacher at Fens Primary School were attached to the report as Appendix A.

The Head Teacher from St Hild's Secondary School advised Members that improving the standards in healthy eating in schools was a high priority with the quality of food and range of choice of food having improved significantly. The policy adopted at St Hild's school had been a 'lock-in' policy with only a handful of students (approximately 20) who lived within a two minute walk being allowed to leave the site at lunchtime to go home for their lunch. The lunchtime period was 45 minutes and this timescale was fully utilised to

enable all students to have their lunch without having to rush. It was felt that this policy was better for the students from a safety perspective and better from the community viewpoint in relation to anti-social behaviour and littering. The Head Teacher indicated that he would encourage all the secondary sector to keep pupils on site over the lunch-time period as it had been a great success at St Hild's.

A discussion ensued in which the following issues were raised.

- It was noted that there had been a significant improvement in the area around the school in relation to the cleanliness of the area but that it was important that children still had a choice of the type of lunch on offer. The Head Teacher advised Members that there was a wide range of choice within the school meals which even included chips as a choice occasionally but that there were no fizzy drinks or crisps available.
- Members sought the Head Teacher's view on whether the policy of keeping pupils on site across lunchtime could be rolled out across all schools. The Head Teacher responded that he felt this would need to be a national directive as some school buildings would be more suitable than others and that the level of supervision would need to be increased. Whilst this approach had proved a success at St Hild's it would be worth further consideration. It was noted that another secondary school in the town was already undertaking a similar scheme and that it was an issue that could be considered as part of the Building Schools for the Future programme.
- In response to a Member's question the Head Teacher indicated that compulsory school meals may be a way forward but that this issue would also need to be driven forward on a national basis. He added that although the main issue in relation to healthy eating was education, the importance of choice still remained.
- Clarification was sought on the type of meal and menu served across the town, was this standardised? The Catering Manager advised Members that there were guidelines and standards to be followed across all schools in relation to the level of carbohydrates, vegetable choices, meat and fish dishes served with each meal.
- Members referred to the note submitted by the Head of Fens Primary School which was attached as Appendix A. Members did not support the view in this note that children should be charged for bringing packed lunches into school. Whilst it was acknowledged that this may lead to an increase in the take-up of school meals, primary age children would need to be supervised across the lunchtime whichever meal type they chose.

The Head Teacher for St Hild's Secondary School was thanked for his attendance and for answering Members' questions.

Decision

That the report and presentation be noted.

36. School Meals – Consultation Results (*Scrutiny Support Officer/Young People and Play Co-ordinator*)

The Scrutiny Manager presented a report which included the findings of a consultation exercise carried out with young people about school meals. Members were asked to note that a number of groups were approached about the possibility of gaining young people's views about schools meals. However, the consultation results related to 5 to 11 year olds only and although was generally very positive responses Members were asked to be mindful during its consideration as response was a relatively small sample. Unfortunately, due to the short timescales involved and the congested work programme of the Youth Service it had not been possible to access further consultation within the available period of time. The Scrutiny Manager added that this was the concluding piece of the evidence being gathering for this investigation.

Members were disappointed in small response to the consultation exercise, although acknowledged that the timing of the survey over the summer months had probably not been the best time. It was recommended that another fuller survey could be undertaken later with the results being reported back to this Forum. Members did, however, acknowledge the positive feedback received and felt that another survey should bring more evidence of this.

The Scrutiny Manager confirmed that a draft final report would be submitted to the next meeting of this Forum for approval.

Decision

- (i) Members noted the report.
- (ii) That a draft final report be submitted to the next meeting of this Forum which would include all the evidence gathered during this investigation together with proposed recommendations.

37. Scrutiny Investigation into Transportation Links to Hospital Services and Neighbourhood Services Department Transport Provision – Scoping Report (*Scrutiny Support Officer*)

The Scrutiny Manager presented a scoping report for the Forum's investigation into transportation links to hospital services and Neighbourhood Services Department Transport Provision which included the following issues for consideration by the Forum:-

The aim of the investigation

To gain an understanding of the issues around transportation links to hospital services and Neighbourhood Services Department transport provision and to seek to make recommendations for improvement in relation to this issue.

The terms of reference for the investigation

- (a) To identify who are the key stakeholders / service providers of transport links to hospital sites;
- (b) To gain an understanding of the statutory and regulatory framework for transport links to hospital sites;
- (c) To identify provision in local strategies / planning documents of relevance to transportation links to hospital sites and Neighbourhood Services transport provision;
- (d) To explore the various planning exercises and work streams conducted under recent reviews of hospital services in the Tees Valley in relation to transportation links to hospital sites, in particular, the role and successes of the Tees Valley Health and Transport Partnership;
- (e) To seek the views of local bus operators, NHS organisations and neighbouring local authorities in relation to transportation links to current and future hospital sites;
- (f) To explore the issue of access to existing hospital sites outside of the town;
- (g) To establish what work, if any at this stage, has been undertaken to identify potential locations of the proposed new hospital site accessible to the people of Hartlepool, Stockton, Easington and Sedgefield;
- (h) To investigate what accessibility planning will be carried out in relation to potential hospital sites;
- (i) To explore what information is available to patients and relatives seeking to access hospital services ;
- (j) To examine the Neighbourhood Service Department's current, and future plans in relation to, transportation provision;
- (k) To consider how the Authority and partner organisations can maximise the effectiveness of transportation links to existing, and new, hospital sites; and
- (l) To explore how the Forum can help and assist in the planning for the new hospital by identifying the transport issues that the future planning

for the new hospital could, and should, consider.

Potential Areas of Enquiry/Sources of Evidence

- (a) Member of Parliament for Hartlepool;
- (b) Elected Mayor;
- (c) Cabinet Member with Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Communities;
- (d) Neighbourhood Services Department Officers;
- (e) Tees Valley Joint Strategy Unit;
- (f) North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Trust;
- (g) Hartlepool Primary Care Trust;
- (h) North Tees and Hartlepool Patient and Public Involvement Forum
- (i) Local Bus Service Operators;
- (j) Neighbouring Local Authorities;
- (k) LSP involvement;
- (l) Local residents;
- (m) Neighbourhood Consultative Forums;
- (n) Representatives of minority communities of interest or heritage; and
- (o) Ward Councillors.

The Scrutiny Manager suggested to Members that the Tees Valley Health and Transport Partnership be included within this list.

Timetable of the Scrutiny Investigation

19 September 2007 – Scoping and ‘Setting the Scene’

24 October 2007 – Evidence from Neighbourhood Services Department.

28 November 2007 – Evidence to be determined.

9 January 2008 – Evidence to be determined.

13 February 2008 – Evidence to be determined.

19 March 2008 – Consideration of Draft Final Report

18 April 2008 – Consideration of Final Report by the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee

28 April 2008 – Consideration of Final Report by the Cabinet/Council (tentative date).

Discussion ensued in which the following issues were raised:-

- It was suggested that Members of the Forum be invited to take a bus journey to the University Hospital of Hartlepool, North Tees University Hospital and James Cook Hospital as part of the investigation to gain an insight into how they operated.
- A member of the public informed the Forum that there were groups in Middlesbrough who were also examining this issue and suggested gaining their views may prove productive.
- It was recognised that the ambulance service would be a useful contributor to this investigation and consideration should be given to inviting their views.
- Clarification was sought on a proposed train service operating to James Cook Hospital. The Traffic and Transportation Manager indicated that this was being examined as part of the Tees Valley Metro proposals although no decision had yet been taken.
- Members requested that a feasibility study be undertaken to examine the possibility of a Council-run transportation service to the hospitals across the region. The Scrutiny Manager responded that this would form the basis for discussions with the Mayor and the Portfolio Holder.
- Members recalled previous discussions in relation to using the transport associated with the Community Voluntary Sector. The Scrutiny Manager indicated that this issue would be covered within the terms of reference – local bus operators.

It was recognised that this was a very important issue and Members were requested to forward any further views on possible additional areas of consultation to the Scrutiny Support Officer. During the investigation a public meeting will take place as part of the consultation exercise to gain public opinion and views. It was suggested that a list of questions be prepared for submission to the Mayor and Portfolio Holder prior to their attendance to enable full responses to be prepared.

Decision

That the Terms of Reference of the Scrutiny investigation as outlined in section 4 of the report be agreed and the comments received be taken into consideration as part of the Forum's inquiry.

STEPHEN AKERS-BELCHER
CHAIRMAN

Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Forum

24 October 2007



Report of: Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Forum

Subject: SCHOOL MEALS – DRAFT FINAL REPORT

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To present the draft findings of the Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Forum following its investigation into School Meals.

2. SETTING THE SCENE

- 2.1 The issue of School Meals was a suggestion for this Forum's Work Programme from a meeting between the Chair of this Forum, the Mayor (as Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Liveability) and the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Communities.
- 2.2 At the meeting of this Forum on 13 June 2007 Members determined their Work Programme for the 2007/08 Municipal Year. The topic of School Meals was selected as the first Scrutiny topic for the current Municipal Year. Members suggested that, in light of other work programme priorities, this should be a short investigation and should focus, where possible, on the Neighbourhood Services Department's area of responsibility for this issue.
- 2.3 According to the School Food Trust the last three decades have seen a profound shift in food culture, particularly the increased consumption of highly processed and fast foods. These tend to be energy dense due to their high levels of refined carbohydrates and fats (including saturated fat) and they frequently have a high salt content and low fibre content. This is significant because children who have poor nutrition during infancy, childhood and adolescence can ultimately display poorer rates of growth and development and are more likely to have lower cognitive abilities, lethargy, reduced attention span and reduced success intellectually. It is, therefore, imperative that children receive a well balanced diet if they are to meet their full learning and development potential.

3. OVERALL AIM OF THE SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION

- 3.1 To gain an understanding of school meal provision within the town and how Hartlepool compares nationally and regionally for this issue.

4. TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION

- 4.1 The following Terms of Reference for the review were agreed by the Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Forum on 4 July 2007:-

- (a) To gain an understanding of the Government's guidance in relation to the delivery of school meals;
- (b) To gain an understanding of how school meals are delivered locally;
- (c) To examine how, and to what standard, school meals are provided locally in comparison with national and regional standards, in particular in relation to:-
 - (i) The take-up of school meals (e.g. the average amount spent on meals, take up of free school meals, procurement arrangements and comparisons with other local authorities);
 - (ii) The standard of meals (e.g. quality, variety, choice and price, sources of food supplies etc.);
 - (iii) The school meals experience (e.g. length of break, size of dining facilities, helpfulness of staff etc.)
 - (iv) Nutritional value of school meals;
- (d) To seek the views of people from minority communities of interest or heritage, in particular in relation to awareness around the availability and provision of school meals; and
- (e) To gain an understanding of the healthy eating agenda.

5. MEMBERSHIP OF THE REGENERATION AND PLANNING SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM

- 5.1 Membership of the Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Forum for the 2007/8 Municipal Year:-

Councillors Akers-Belcher, R W Cook, Coward, Cranney, Flintoff, Gibbon, Griffin, Henery, Richardson, Simmons, and Turner

Resident Representatives:

Ann Butterfield and Linda Shields

6. METHODS OF INVESTIGATION

- 6.1 Over the course of the investigation Members have considered evidence from a range of sources, within the tight timescales prescribed for this investigation. These included:
- (a) Hartlepool Borough Council Officers;
 - (b) The Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Communities;
 - (c) The Head Teacher from St Hilds Secondary School;
 - (d) The Head Teacher from Fens Primary School; and
 - (e) Consultation with young people through summer play schemes.
- 6.2 In addition, Members of the Forum undertook a site visit to Kingsley Primary School and English Martyrs Secondary School to witness the school meals service first hand.

FINDINGS

7. Government Guidance

- 7.1 Over the course of its investigation the Forum gained an understanding of the Government's guidance in relation to this issue. In particular, the changing nature of best practice and advice from the Government was explored during the early stages of the investigation.
- 7.2 In 1988, the Local Government Act introduced Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT), compelling all Local Authorities to put school meal services out to tender and, according to the School Food Trust, the quality of the food became subservient to cost. In 1997 Best Value was introduced to replace CCT as Central Government adopted an approach of 'what matters is what works'. In April 2001, the Government reintroduced nutritional standards into school meals, 'Education (Nutritional Standards for School Lunches) Regulations 2000'. Furthermore, the White Paper 'Choosing Health: making healthy choices easier' was published in November 2004; this was subsequently followed by 3 delivery plans.
- 7.3 In October 2005 'Turning the Tables: transforming school food' was published. This reported on the development and implementation of nutritional standards for school lunches. Subsequently, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) introduced compulsory interim food-based standards for school lunches in September 2006. Consequently, over the past 20 years school meals have shifted from a commercial enterprise

towards an area that is increasingly concerned with healthy eating and the health agenda, more generally.

- 7.4 According to the School Food Trust, the government believes that local authorities should take the lead role in the implementation of new standards into their school lunch provision. However, if the transformation is to be a successful one, a co-ordinated approach between schools, local authorities and caterers is recommended.
- 7.5 Under the current guidance the responsibility for the provision of school meals lies directly with the schools if the Local Authority has delegated the school meals budget, which this Authority has done. This includes ensuring that the current food provision meets the interim food-based standards for lunch, and the forthcoming standards for, “food provision other than lunch,” and the, “food and nutrient-based standards for lunch”. In addition, Ofsted is monitoring the way schools approach healthier eating as part of its regular inspection of the school.
- 7.6 In May 2006 the Government announced new standards for school food. These have developed as outlined below:
- (a) **September 2006** - All schools to follow the “Interim food-based standards for school lunches”
 - (b) **September 2007** - All schools to implement “Food based standards for food other than lunch” (schools could choose to adopt these standards earlier it but was not compulsory)
 - (c) **September 2008** - Primary schools to implement the nutrient-based standards and the new food based standards for school lunch.
 - (d) **September 2009** - Secondary schools to implement the nutrient-based standards and the new food based standards.

8. Delivery of School Meals Locally.

- 8.1 All but one of the 38 Schools in Hartlepool uses the Council’s School Meals Catering Service, which is part of the Neighbourhood Services department. Dyke House School decided to manage the catering service themselves in July 2006 and staff that were working there at the time were transferred. The Catering Service has about 250 staff.
- 8.2 Members of the Forum established that all of the primary schools follow the same menu, which was devised to ensure that the Governments guidelines were being met. The menu consists of a traditional meat or poultry dish, a fish dish, a vegetarian dish and either a full salad bar or sandwiches and salad bowls. As well as the main items the children are offered a choice of three potato dishes (chips are available only once a week) and three vegetables, along with salad bowls. A choice of two traditional puddings,

fresh fruit, fruit salad, yoghurt and cheese and biscuits are also available. This selection ensures that most tastes, dietary and ethnic diversity needs, can be accommodated without making too many alterations to the original menu. The current cost of a primary meal is £1.55 having risen by 5p September 2007.

- 8.3 The secondary schools have similar types of 'traditional' food options to primary schools – with the additional option of quiche. However, the students have the option of buying the main meal on its own rather than as part of a two course meal. The current cost of the two course lunch is £1.75, which like primary school meals has risen by 5p in September 2007. As well as the option of the traditional counter, students can choose from other counters within the food court, these include pasta/rice, salad, sandwich and jacket potato bars. Members who attended the site visit indicated that the choice of food available at both the primary and secondary schools they visited was very good.
- 8.4 The Service Level Agreement entered into with primary schools includes the provision of a midday meal to any pupil entitled to a free school meal. At the end of each trading period the schools are charged for any paying pupil and any adult taking a meal. The schools themselves collect the dinner money from the pupils and bank it to their own accounts. On a daily basis they inform the cook of how many pupils will take a meal. The cost of providing the food courts and the cashless systems (see paragraph 8.5) in the secondary schools has been met by Neighbourhood Services Catering Section. The schools are charged for any free meal served but unlike the primary schools the money from paid meals is collected by the catering service and banked by them.
- 8.5 Members also gained an understanding of the cashless system over the course of the investigation, which operates in secondary schools. Students use swipe cards which ensure anonymity to free meal recipients by transferring the money onto cards electronically, either by the pupil using a "reval" machine, or by parents sending in a cheque which is credited to the card. Any pupil entitled to a free meal has their card automatically credited with the free meal allowance. In all cases, no money changes hands at the till point, this speeds up the service considerably and queuing is reduced. This system has addressed the stigmatism which used to arise with free school meals. Members were extremely supportive of this system over the course of the investigation and Members who attended the site visit commented that it worked extremely effectively.
- 8.6 Members were very pleased about the price charged to young people for their school meals, noting that they were provided at well below the national average cost and that they provided good value for money. In addition, the Forum commented positively about the healthy diets provided locally and the wide range of choices available to young people.
- 8.7 However, the Forum was informed that food costs have risen substantially, due to the implementation of higher standards and an increase in food costs

generally. Against these increased costs, the Catering Service has managed to remain viable by improving efficiency year on year, whilst increasing charges by only 3% per annum.

8.8 Nevertheless, the Forum was made aware that additional costs of providing more “healthy” food alongside restrictions limiting or banning other foods has meant that for the first time it seems likely that the school meals service may run into financial difficulties. To aid the situation and to offset some of the costs the Catering Service has agreed to provide function catering to Council departments. The service started in April 2007 and officers are receiving very good feedback from customers. Whilst this side of the business seems to be developing positively, the department is monitoring the service closely. The Forum was supportive of the efforts being made by the Catering Service to branch out into other areas to sustain the school meals service.

8.9 One of the main purposes of this investigation was to ensure that Hartlepool continues to provide a good local school meals service and to improve this wherever possible. However, a number of factors were outlined in the Head of Neighbourhood Management’s report from 8 August 2007, which makes this increasingly difficult:

- Job evaluation
- Increasing food costs
- Increasing food standards
- Healthy eating resistance; and
- School budget pressures

8.10 However, according to evidence provided by the Neighbourhood Services Department, the Government have given a grant of over £100k this year, shared equally between schools and the local Children’s Service to promote healthy eating and ease school budget pressures in this regard. Nevertheless, officers argued that schools generally appear to be using their funding to ensure they balance their books rather than towards school meals.

8.11 Indeed, when providing evidence to the Forum the Director of Neighbourhood Services indicated that school meals were part of a bigger package in terms of health and lifestyle. Not only was this a healthy service in terms of the meals provided to young people it was a social service in terms of the jobs (and money) it provides to the local economy – particularly for low paid workers from single parent families. This view was supported by Members of the Forum. In addition, the Director of Neighbourhood Services expressed concern that the additional costs likely to be incurred through job evaluation should not be met through charges for school meals, which would have a negative impact on the take-up levels of school meals. It was argued that the Authority should seek to find additional funding to support the service in light of the enhanced pressures outlined above.

9. Local Standard of School Meals

9.1 Over the course of the investigation the Forum explored the standard of School Meals across a number of factors. These were:-

- 1) Take-up of School Meals;
- 2) Standard of School Meals;
- 3) The School Meals experience; and
- 4) Nutritional value of School Meals.

Take-up of School Meals

9.2 The take-up of School Meals within the town was found to compare well with other authorities. Although the percentage take-up levels of school meals has been sustained, the Catering Service serves fewer meals year on year as there are less children on the school register. The local take-up of school meals for the January to June period for the past three years is outlined below:-

	2005	2006	2007
Primary school			
Average % take-up	60.9%	61.6%	62.3%
Daily meals served	5050	4870	4780
Secondary school			
Average % take-up	52.7%	53.9%	54.2%
Daily meals served	3520	3530	3000

9.3 In comparison the School Food Trust reported that in 2005/6 primary take-up was 42.3% and secondary was 42.7% nationally, and regionally primary take-up was 55.5% and secondary was 38.3%. These figures represent a drop in uptake from the previous year of 5.8% primary and 4.9% secondary.

9.4 The local take-up level for those entitled to free meals is also very high compared to the national average. In the primary sector we have an average of above 90% take-up and the secondary schools have above 60% take-up.

9.5 Evidence provided by the Head of the Fens Primary School suggests that the new nutritional standards, whilst welcomed for the positive benefits they have on young people's benefits, are not always popular with young people themselves. Members discussed the notion that the Government should allow schools to charge young people to bring packed lunches into schools. This was suggested as a means to enhance take-up of school meals.

However, the Forum was generally not supportive of this view. It was argued that it was not desirable to charge young people to bring packed lunches into schools. In addition, it was argued that primary school children will require an element of supervision over lunchtime, whatever meal type they choose.

Standard of School Meals

- 9.6 The Head Teacher from St Hilda's Secondary School indicated that healthy eating in schools was given a high priority, during his evidence gathering session with the Forum, and indicated that the quality of food and range of choice had improved significantly. In addition, the Head of Fens Primary Schools, in her written submission to the Forum, highlighted that the choice of food is good and the standard of the food itself is also good.
- 9.7 As part of the Forum's investigation young people were consulted through a number of playschemes during the school summer holiday period, the full questionnaire results are attached at **Appendix A**. When asked if they liked school meals 79.2% of those eating school meals said they liked them; 66.6% said that they thought they were healthy; and 60.4% said they thought there was lots of choice of food to eat.
- 9.8 During discussions with the Director of Neighbourhood Services Members commented that they felt the Authority was delivering this service at a very reasonable price and would like to congratulate the department for the standard of the service.

The School Meals Experience

- 9.9 The 'School Meals Experience' relates to factors such as the length of the dinner break, the quality of the dining facilities and the helpfulness of the staff. The Forum was informed that Hartlepool had sought to be at the forefront of new developments in this regard. For example, Hartlepool was one of the first authorities to introduce food courts and cashless systems in secondary schools and to make improvements to primary kitchens and dining rooms.
- 9.10 However, it was also recognised that the schools are different in both their requirements and facilities. Some schools work very closely with the school meals service, having regular meetings and reviews, while others tend to leave the running of the service more directly to the department. The Head of Fens Primary School indicated that it is beneficial to involve catering staff in the 'life' of the schools they work in. In addition, some schools have more than adequate kitchen and dining facilities, while others are very limited, which can impact on the type of experience schools are able to provide.
- 9.11 During the investigation the Head Teacher of St Hilda's School was asked if he thought the policy adopted at his school of keeping pupils on site across lunchtime could be rolled out across all schools. It was argued that some school buildings are more suitable than others for this approach and that the

level of supervision would need to be increased. Whilst this approach had been a success at St Hilds, and was worthy of consideration at other schools, the Head Teacher indicated that he felt that more universal implementation of this would need to result from a national directive, rather than a local one. The Forum could see the benefits of keeping young people in schools over the lunch period. However, Members were also conscious that it is not always practical for schools to do so, due to the variety of facilities across the schools within the town and other factors such as the weather and costs.

- 9.12 During the investigation Members discussed the involvement of the Catering Manager had, had in the development of the dining facilities at the new St Hilds School. Members regarded this as an example of good practice and expressed a desire to see this type of partnership working extended throughout the Building Schools for the Future project.
- 9.13 In response to the consultation exercise 75% of young people thought that lunchtime staff were helpful; 62.5% of young people said that lunchtime staff helped them to choose food; 79.2% thought the lunchtime break was long enough; and 77.1% thought the dining hall was big enough for everyone to eat in.

Nutritional Value of School Meals

- 9.14 Measuring the nutritional content of school meals is not legally required until 2008 and the Authority is working to ensure that a system is in place to guarantee that the Council is compliant by the due date. Members were informed that a software package has been purchased to enable the measurement of nutritional content of menus. It was highlighted to the Forum that it is increasingly difficult to reach the targets set by the School Food Trust and to provide meals that young people want to eat. For example, the levels for some nutrients, such as iron are very high and the levels of others are incredibly low, such as fat. Nevertheless, the Catering Service is seeking to increase the levels of iron, vitamins and minerals in the foods. In addition, the Catering Manager went into some detail, both during the site visit and in the Forum, over how the school meals diet was balance according to nutritional value. These comments were welcomed by the Forum.

10. Seek the Views of Minority Communities of Interest or Heritage

- 10.1 Under the Equality Standards for Local Government the Council is seeking to further develop its links to minority communities of interest or heritage. As part of this process Scrutiny has been looking to build upon its approach to community engagement further by seeking to make more explicit connections to minority communities of interest. As such the views of local diversity groups were sought during the early stages of this investigation. Given the dietary requirements of different religious and ethnic communities

the local 'Talking with Communities' group was consulted about their views in relation to this issue. However, no comments were received at, or following on from, the Talking with Communities meeting in late June 2007.

11. Healthy Eating Agenda

- 11.1 Following a request from a Member, during discussions of the initial Scoping Report for this investigation, an additional strand was added to the terms of reference for this investigation around the healthy eating agenda.
- 11.2 To become a 'Healthy School', schools need to provide evidence of how they meet criteria in the four key themes of: 'Personal, Social and Health Education'; 'Physical Activity'; 'Emotional Health and Well-being'; and 'Healthy Eating'. The Healthy Eating theme has the most relevance to this Scrutiny Investigation. Consequently, Members focused their attention on this strand of the healthy schools agenda during their investigation.
- 11.3 The aims of the Hartlepool local strategy are to:-
- 1) Raise the standard of all school food provision throughout the extended school day;
 - 2) Support schools to use every available opportunity to promote and provide healthy, nutritious food and drink;
 - 3) Educate the whole school community with the knowledge and understanding, attitudes and values and skills necessary to make consistently healthy food choices;
 - 4) Improve the health of children and young people, in turn increasing their ability to meet their full educational potential;
 - 5) Including the uptake of school meals (including free school meals); and
 - 6) Monitor this strategy and action plan for evidence of impact.
- 11.4 Members were concerned that the healthy eating message may not always be recognised at home – it is important to educate parents as well as children. Indeed part of the local healthy schools initiative is to educate the whole school community, which includes parents. In addition, the Authority provides a town-wide initiative to supply advice to parents around what should go into healthy packed lunches. This is linked to the Authority's implementation of the Government's Healthy Eating in Schools Agenda.
- 11.5 During the evidence gathering session focused on the healthy eating agenda Members commented that there seemed to be a very positive approach to this agenda locally and credit should be given to employees involved in this. It was also evident that the Authority was forward looking and aimed to ensure that healthy eating remains high on the agenda for children across the town.

12. CONCLUSIONS

12.1 Over the course of this Scrutiny Investigation the Forum has reached the following general conclusions about School Meals:

- (a) The provision of school meals is set within a rapidly changing agenda that is increasingly focusing on healthy eating.
- (b) Hartlepool Borough Council and the Catering Service, in particular, has been at the forefront of developments to ensure that school meals are both accessed by large numbers of young people and provide healthy and varied choices for them.
- (c) Members concluded that the choice of foods available at schools was very good, which was supported by evidence from Head Teachers and young people.
- (d) The 'Reval' cashless system in all secondary schools was regarded as an example of extremely good practice, both in terms of the efficiency it creates in ensuring the quick service of school meals, and in the stigma it removes from young people being provided with free school meals.
- (e) Due to the relatively low number of young people responding to the consultation over the summer period Members of the Forum requested that further consultation is conducted with young people in the future in relation to the school meals service.
- (f) The costs of food are likely to increase through increased food prices (generally) and the need to provide more nutritious food through the Government's food standards (more specifically). In addition, the likely outcome of the job evaluation and 'equal pay' processes is that low paid female workers will achieve parity with their male counterparts. Whilst this parity is welcomed the additional costs for catering staff in combination with enhanced food costs could have a dramatic impact on the school meals service.
- (g) That the Authority should seek to find additional funding to meet the increased demands, through enhanced food costs and the job evaluation process, being placed on the Catering Service through other means than increased school meal charges. This is particularly significant given the benefits of healthy eating to young people's development and concerns that a combination of healthy food options and increasing prices will lead to a drop in take-up levels.
- (h) That the notion of charging young people to eat their packed lunches on school premises was discussed by the Forum, as a potential means to enhance take-up of school meals. However, this view was not supported by the Forum as a desirable approach.

- (i) That the healthy eating agenda is being taken forward proactively and positively locally and that staff should be commended for their role in this.
- (j) That further publicity around the healthy eating message, in particular around healthy packed lunches, would help to ensure this message reaches as many parents as possible across the town.

13. RECOMMENDATIONS

13.1 The Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Forum has taken evidence from a wide range of sources to assist in the formulation of a balanced range of recommendations. The draft recommendations to Cabinet are outlined below for discussion / approval / amendment by the Forum:-

- (a) That the Authority congratulates the Catering Service and it is commended for the quality, variety and cost of the service it has provided over the years.
- (b) That the Authority seeks to find additional funding to meet the increased cost of school meals provision through means other than enhanced charges for school meals.
- (c) That the Catering Manager is involved in the planning and design of any new dining facilities in schools resulting from the Building Schools for the Future programme.
- (d) That further consultation is undertaken with young people and minority communities of interest or heritage about their views on school meals.
- (e) That the Authority further promotes the advice it provides in relation to healthy packed lunches.

14. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

14.1 The Forum is grateful to all those who have presented evidence during the course of the Scrutiny Inquiry. We would like to place on record our appreciation for all those witnesses who attended the Forum. In particular the Forum would like to thank the following for their co-operation during the Scrutiny Investigation:-

English Martrys Secondary School

Kingsley Primary School

Andy Bayston – Head Teacher St Hild's Secondary School

Muriel Bousfield – Head Teacher Fens Primary School

Hartlepool Borough Council:

Councillor Peter Jackson – The Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Communities

Councillor Jane Shaw – Chair of the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum (for attending the site visits)

Dave Stubbs – Director of Neighbourhood Services

Denise Ogden – Head of Neighbourhood Services

Doreen Wilkinson – Catering Manager

Shirley Hogg – Primary Catering Manager

Lynne Bell – Secondary Catering Manager

Sandra Saint – Healthy Schools Co-ordinator

Claire Watson – Community Nutritionist Project Manager

Tracy Liveras – Young People and Play Co-ordinator

**COUNCILLOR STEPHEN AKERS-BELCHER
CHAIR OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM**

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background papers were used in preparation of this report:-

- (a) Report of the Scrutiny Support Officer entitled *Scrutiny Investigation into School Meals – Scoping Report* 4.07.07
- (b) Report of the Head of Neighbourhood Management entitled *Scrutiny Investigation into School Meals* 8.08.07
- (c) Report of the Scrutiny Support Officer entitled *School Meals – Evidence from the Authority's Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Communities* 8.08.07

- (d) Report of the Scrutiny Support Officer entitled *School Meals – Site Visit Verbal Update – Covering Report* 8.08.07
- (e) Report of the Scrutiny Support Officer entitled *Scrutiny Investigation into School Meals – Healthy Eating Agenda – Covering Report* 19.09.07
- (f) Report of the Scrutiny Support Officer entitled *Scrutiny Investigation into School Meals – Verbal Evidence from Head Teachers – Covering Report* 19.09.07
- (g) Report of the Scrutiny Support Officer / Young People and Play Co-ordinator entitled *Scrutiny Investigation into School Meals – Consultation Results – Feedback* 19.09.07
- (h) Minutes of the Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Forum meetings held on 4 July 2007, 8 August 2007, and 19 September 2007

APPENDIX A

CONSULTATION RESULTS

Question	Yes	No	No Response
Do you like school meals?	38 (79.2%)	7 (14.5%)	3 (6.3%)
Do you think school meals are healthy?	32 (66.6%)	15 (31.3%)	1 (2.1%)
Do you think there is lots of choice of food to eat?	29 (60.4%)	19 (39.6%)	0 (0%)
Do you tend to eat the same as your friends?	18 (37.5%)	30 (62.5%)	0 (0%)
Are the lunchtime staff friendly & helpful?	36 (75%)	12 (25%)	0 (0%)
Do the lunchtime staff help you choose to choose healthy food?	30 (62.5%)	17 (35.4%)	1 (2.1%)
Do you tell your parents what you have had to eat at school each day?	27 (56.3%)	21 (43.7%)	0 (0%)
Is the school dinner break long enough?	38 (79.2%)	7 (14.5%)	3 (6.3%)
Is the dining hall big enough for everyone to eat in?	37 (77.1%)	11 (22.9%)	0 (0%)
Would you rather not stay for school meals?	17 (35.4%)	28 (58.3%)	3 (6.3%)
Do you think school meals are worth the money you pay?	25 (52.1%)	21 (43.7%)	2 (4.2%)

Table One: Young people (aged between 5 and 11) eating School Meals

Questions	Yes	No	No Response
Do you go home for lunch?	3 (11.5%)	23 (88.5%)	0 (0%)
Would you prefer to stop for school dinners?	8 (30.8%)	17 (65.4%)	1 (3.8%)
Do you bring a packed lunch for your dinner?	26 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Do you eat with everyone else for your dinner?	23 (88.5%)	3 (11.5%)	0 (0%)
Would you prefer to eat a school dinner rather than a packed lunch?	9 (34.6%)	17 (65.4%)	0 (0%)

Table Two: Young people (aged between 5 and 11) not eating School Meals

NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM REPORT

24 October 2007



Report of: Scrutiny Support Officer

Subject: TRANSPORTATION LINKS TO HOSPITAL SERVICES AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES DEPARTMENT TRANSPORTATION PROVISION – VERBAL EVIDENCE FROM THE AUTHORITY'S PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR NEIGHBOURHOODS AND COMMUNITIES – COVERING REPORT

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Members of the Forum that the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Communities has been invited to attend this meeting to provide evidence in relation to the ongoing investigation into Transportation Links to Hospital Services and Neighbourhood Services Department Transportation Provision.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 Members will recall that at the meeting of this Forum on 19 September 2007, the Terms of Reference and Potential Areas of Inquiry/Sources of Evidence were approved by the Forum for this scrutiny investigation.
- 2.2 Consequently, the Authority's Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Communities has been invited to this meeting to provide evidence to Forum in relation to his responsibilities, and views on, Transportation Links to Hospital Services and Neighbourhood Services Department Transportation Provision.
- 2.3 During this evidence gathering session with the Authority's Neighbourhoods and Communities Portfolio Holder, it is suggested that responses should be sought to the following key questions:-
- (a) What are your responsibilities in relation to the provision of transportation links to hospital sites and Neighbourhood Services transport provision in local strategies / planning documents;
 - (b) What do you consider to be the key issues in terms of accessing existing hospital sites outside of the town;

- (c) What planning and assessments will be carried out in relation to potential hospital sites and what are your views on this;
- (d) What are your views on the availability of information to patients and relatives seeking to access hospital services about existing transportation links;
- (e) What are your views on the Neighbourhood Service Department's current, and future plans in relation to, transportation provision; and
- (f) How do you consider the Authority and partner organisations can maximise the effectiveness of transportation links to existing and new hospital sites.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That Members of the Forum consider the views of the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Communities in relation to the questions outlined in section 2.3.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background paper was used in preparation of this report:-

- (a) Scrutiny Investigation into Transportation Links to Hospital Services and Neighbourhood Services Department Transportation Provision – Scoping Report (Scrutiny Support Officer) 19.09.07

NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM REPORT

24 October 2007



Report of: Scrutiny Support Officer

Subject: TRANSPORTATION LINKS TO HOSPITAL
SERVICES AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES
DEPARTMENT TRANSPORTATION PROVISION –
EVIDENCE FROM THE NEIGHBOURHOOD
SERVICES DEPARTMENT– COVERING REPORT

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Members of the Forum that a detailed presentation from officers in the Neighbourhood Services Department will follow at today's meeting as part of the ongoing investigation into Transportation Links to Hospital Services and Neighbourhood Services Department Transportation Provision.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 Members will recall that at the meeting of this Forum on 19 September 2007, the Terms of Reference and Potential Areas of Inquiry/Sources of Evidence were approved by the Forum for this scrutiny investigation.
- 2.2 Consequently, evidence from the Neighbourhood Services Department was identified for the first evidence gathering meeting of the Forum's investigation into Transportation Links to Hospital Services and Neighbourhood Services Department Transportation Provision.
- 2.3 During this evidence gathering session with the Neighbourhood Services Department a detailed presentation will be provided on the following areas:-
- (a) Background to the issue of transportation links to hospital services, and the role of the Neighbourhood Services Department – Local Authority perspective;
 - (b) Past, present and future work streams / actions by the Local Authority of relevance to transportation links to hospital services; and
 - (c) Neighbourhood Services Department transport provision – in particular the development of an Integrated Transport Unit (ITU) and social

enterprise and the potential connections between these and transportation links to hospital services.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That Members note the content of the report and question the attending officers where appropriate, following their presentation to the Forum.

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