



20 JUN 2008

Date/Dyddiad:
18th June 2008

Our Ref./Ein Cyf.:

Your Ref./Eich Cyf.:

Dear Ms Williams

Re: Proposed Healthy Eating in Schools Measure Committee

Please see below, in detail, our response to the Consultation Document – 'Proposed Healthy Eating in Schools Measure Committee' on behalf of the Lifelong Learning and Leisure Directorate of Monmouthshire County Council.

1. Within Monmouthshire County Council a substantial amount of work has been undertaken in collaboration with schools, the school meals service and Healthy Schools with an aim to improve the provision of food in school throughout the day. There are a number of existing initiatives such as the development of whole school food and fitness policies, Breakfast Clubs, free Key Stage One milk etc that stakeholders have embraced to improve healthy lifestyles. In order to further develop this work and to ensure consistent best practice throughout all our schools and across Wales we no longer need to rely on the willingness of stakeholders participating in this improvement agenda. Monmouthshire County Council would welcome the proposed measures as we feel it is an essential mechanism in ensuring that many of the proposals in the Appetite for Life Action Plan would be made statutory.

2.1 Monmouthshire County Council supports the recommendations there it is a duty on Welsh Ministers, Governing Bodies, head teachers and Local Authorities to promote healthy eating in schools. Through providing this guidance, it will ensure that we have a committed, consistent approach across the whole of the authority. It is important that this guidance also refers to incidental activities such as school visits, walks etc. The expectation of schools to have a food and fitness policy in place by September 2008 would further reinforce the significance of healthy eating within schools.

2.2 Monmouthshire County Council supports the proposals that healthy eating should be part of the inspection process and includes reporting requirements on Welsh Ministers, the Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales and Governing Bodies. It should be an essential requirement that any Estyn Inspector is suitably trained and qualified to implement this. Monmouthshire welcomes the proposals to interview samples of pupils, catering staff and observe activities during

breakfast, break and lunch as well as reviewing the contents of vending machines and relevant documentation as part of the inspection process. With regard to reviewing menus for breakfast, snacks and school lunches against the relevant standards however, this should not form part of the inspection programme unless the school has a delegated budget for meals, and it is the school Governing Body which has a responsibility for the provision of these meals. Where the Local Authority has a responsibility, Monmouthshire County Council feels that this should be inspected and commented upon as part of the Local Authority monitoring process.

2.3 Monmouthshire County Council supports the measure that it would be the power of Welsh Ministers to specify nutritional standards, including the requirement to specify maximum levels of salt, sugar and artificial additives in food and drink provided for pupils on school premises through regulation. It is essential that any changes made to the nutritional standards for school meals, in light of new research, are done so in an incremental process.

2.4 Monmouthshire County Council is in agreement with encouraging the take up of school meals through promotion and marketing. We agree with protecting the identity of those receiving free school meals through, for example, cashless systems, as long as there is available funding to support this initiative.

2.5 Monmouthshire County Council supports ensuring the availability of free drinking water and recognises the importance of appropriate levels of hydration for pupils. It should, however, be the responsibility of schools to provide freely available drinking water and the cost of this should be reflected in the Revenue Support Grant from the Welsh Assembly Government.

3. The practical implications for putting these provisions in place are:

3.1 Promotion of healthy eating is currently being addressed through a variety of initiatives as previously mentioned. This will be further enhanced through the new National Curriculum 2008. This will require additional training for school staff, the availability of appropriate practical cookery facilities and equipment and the revision of schools short term planning for curriculum provision. The recommendations for a Food & Fitness Policy will require schools to consult with key stakeholders. This in itself is a timely but important process that will impact on an already stretched school day. The cooking bus is an excellent resource for the promotion of healthy eating that supports practical cooking skills within the curriculum. It is, however, disappointing that there is only one cooking bus for the whole of Wales and therefore it significantly limits the number of schools that can access this resource.

3.2 The criteria that ESTYN will use in their inspection process of either the school or the Local Authority must be made readily available in order to effectively disseminate information and to provide appropriate support and guidance.

3.3 There will be practical implications for new nutritional standards including additional food costs, ongoing practical training for caterers and use of nutritional analyses software, and the purchase of additional equipment. Although some funding has already been made available from the Welsh Assembly Government, this is not sufficient and does not take into consideration additional food costs.

3.4 There will be a financial and administrative impact on the promotion of school meals. Although there will be funding available to support this action there may well be a significant administrative impact as not all Local Authorities have a robust marketing strategy in place. There will be practical implications for schools and Local Authorities introducing electronic systems for determining eligibility for free school meals. These will include funding, training, maintenance and promotion.

3.5 Provision of access to free water will have funding implications for schools on a long-term basis in order to ensure sustainability.

Monmouthshire County Council has already established a multi-agency steering group, as a result of the commitment and enthusiasm of its members, to oversee the implementation of many of the initiatives in the Appetite for Life Action Plan.

4. A further provision that we would like to see included in the measures would be the statutory requirement of a Food and Fitness Policy for all schools in order to have a consistent approach to this agenda throughout Wales.

5. It is difficult to ascertain whether the proposed Assembly Measure will achieve its overall purpose and aim, i.e. to enable a holistic, comprehensive 'made in Wales' policy on nutrition in schools, in its current format. It is certainly a move towards encompassing all of the work that it is currently being undertaken in schools and by Local Authorities.

Please direct any further correspondence regarding this matter to myself. I would not be prepared to provide oral evidence to the Committee.

Yours sincerely



Emma Taylor
Healthy Schools Co-ordinator
Monmouthshire County Council

Direct Line/Llinell Uniongyrchol: (01633) 644498
Fax No./Rhif Ffacs: (01633) 644488
Email: emmataylor@monmouthshire.gov.uk