

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

EDUCATION COMMITTEE: 22 MARCH 2005

ORGANIC MEALS, SUSTAINABILITY AND LOCAL PRODUCE

Report by Executive Director of Educational & Social Services

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To advise Members of a successful pilot scheme at Hurlford Primary School and to propose an extension to a further 10 schools.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Guidance produced by the Scottish Executive in 2004, through the Environment and Rural Affairs Committee, established as a policy that public sector procurement should take account of relevant sustainable development and healthy eating objectives when awarding contracts for food and catering services, and taking account of developments elsewhere in the UK, the Government aims to make 70% of organic food sold in England home grown.
- 2.2 We believe that organic food and fresh local produce will eventually become an accepted – even an expected – part of food service for the catering industry, and that school meals are an excellent place to start and to lead the way in support of sustainable development and farming in the local economy.
- 2.3 From our own research and awareness of consumer and Scottish Executive led developments, there is evidence that organic food fulfils an increasingly important role in the public's perceptions of what constitutes a modern, healthy diet. The demand for organic food increased nationally by 10 – 16% last year.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE PILOT

- What does it cost to offer locally produced organic meals in schools?
- Can organic ingredients be locally sourced and offer the added benefits of supporting the local economy and reducing environmental costs?
- Can we offer 'Food for Life' meals at a price we can afford now and in the future?
- What supply, administration and workload issues are identified?
- How will customers and employees react to this type of school meals service?

4. PILOT SCHEME AT HURLFORD PRIMARY SCHOOL

- 4.1** The pilot scheme at Hurlford Primary School is probably the first organic school meals service in the country. The pilot initiative was implemented to investigate the real and perceived health benefits of organic food and consider how the spend on school meals might support the local economy by buying our produce from local farmers and food producers. This is just one of the ways that the school meals service in East Ayrshire has gone beyond the Scottish Executive's 'Hungry for Success' Programme, and introduced an approach to school meals that is significant in the context of the Council's employment, economic regeneration and health improvement agenda.
- 4.2** At Hurlford Primary School the number of pupils taking school meals increased by 10% in just a few months - and these figures are rising. We believe this is directly linked to sourcing local and organic produce and introducing innovative menus in a Mediterranean, Scottish and International style. Since starting the organic school meals pilot in August 2004 it has won the backing of the school, parents, food campaigners, catering staff and pupils.
- 4.3** Independent academic research supervised by Julie Armstrong of Caledonian University is being arranged.
- 4.4** The project has received significant and positive media coverage in The Herald, Times Educational Supplement, Guardian, BBC Good Food Magazine, BBC Radio and Television, 'Scotland's Health', Executive Briefing Magazine and cross party support in the Scottish Parliament.

5. PROPOSAL

- 5.1** The Soil Association promote a scheme 'Food for Life' which requires food provided on a menu to be:
- 30% Organic
 - 50% Locally produced
 - 75% Unprocessed
- 5.2** This is an achievable target already tested at Hurlford Primary where the food provided is 50% organic, 70% locally produced and 100% unprocessed.
- 5.3** The proposal is to extend the pilot scheme to a further 10 schools.

6. FINANCIAL/LEGAL/POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1** A contractual framework for the procurement of food will be developed to allow the Organic and Local Produce Pilot to be extended to a further 10 schools. Based on the performance of Hurlford Primary the anticipated additional cost would be £20,000 and this can be met from the Scottish Executive funding allocated to Education for improving school meals.
- 6.2** The pilot scheme will support a range of council's economic regeneration and health improvement policies, in particular the Council's Community Plan.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1** It is recommended that Members:
- (i) note the success of the Organic and Local Produce pilot at Hurlford Primary School;
 - (ii) approve that the pilot be extended to a further 10 schools.
 - (iii) approve that a full and independent academic evaluation is undertaken and the outcome reported to a future Education Committee; and
 - (iv) otherwise to note the content of the report.

John Mulgrew
Executive Director of Educational and Social Services

RG/MM
24 February 2005

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

Hungry for Success – Scottish Executive Report on a Whole School Approach to School Meals.

For further information contact John Mulgrew, Executive Director of Educational & Social Services Tel: (01563576017) or Robin Gourlay, Head of Onsite Services Tel: 01563 555710.

Implementation Officer : Robin Gourlay, Head of Onsite Services.