

Don't put the bite on parents

APSE has today cautioned against local authorities passing on costs associated with new food based standards in school meals by imposing price hikes on parents.

APSE Chief Executive, Paul O'Brien, stated **"Whilst welcoming the clear need to improve the quality of school meals the level of up-front funding for English authorities is significantly less on a pro-rata basis than that put forward by the Scottish Executive."** Paul O'Brien added **"APSE would caution local authorities from passing on any steep price hikes to parents. To do so would run the risk of driving away the paying parents which caterers rely on to sustain the school meals service"**.

The new standards announced by Government will commence from September 2006 and are in addition to new nutrient based standards introduced from September 2008 & 2009.

In a series of briefings and responses to Government APSE has been urging authorities to consider ways of making school meals remain affordable whilst increasing take-up of free school meals. Many measures in the new regulations, both interim and long term, will have cost implications for local authority caterers such as the provision of bread on a daily basis as well as a move to fresh cooked meals and staff retraining needs.

APSE has also welcomed the Government's response to concerns raised on the impact of catering provision in PFI schools. Mr O'Brien stated **"I particularly welcome the recognition of the difficulties PFI contracts can create when soft FM services such as catering and cleaning are wrapped into long term contracts. The moves to ensure that contracts within PFI arrangements are regularly reviewed is a step in the right direction. However, there is no reason for councils to be including catering services in BSF and PFI contracts in the first place"**.

APSE has consistently argued that removing local authority input into vital front line services like school meals can fetter the ability of councils to react to wider policy developments such as the legitimate role that local councils have in the fight against obesity.

ENDS

Notes to Editors

- 1. APSE is the Association for Public Service Excellence.**
- 2. APSE is a local authority organisation dedicated to quality public services.**
- 3. APSE currently has over 300 local authority members in Northern Ireland, Scotland, England, and Wales.**
- 4. For further details or to arrange interviews with Paul O'Brien contact Mark Roden on 0161 772 180 or Mo Baines on 07971 843515 for a verbal briefing / update.**