



All Party Parliamentary Group on School Food

Minutes of meeting of the School Food APPG

Thursday 8 September 2022, 2-4pm, Thatcher Room, Portcullis House

Present

Christian Wakeford MP (CW) - Vice Chair

Apologies

Sharon Hodgson MP (SH) – Chair

Nigel	Argyle	NA	Elygra / LACA
Myles	Bremner	MB	Bremner Consulting
Georgina	Burt	GB	CPAG
Geoff	Campion	GC	Chartwells
Brian	Cape	BP	SIPS
Laura	Chan	LC	Food for Life
Alice	Chicken	AC	DfE
Nick	Clegg	NC	Edwards and Ward
Linda	Cregan	LC	ISS
Barbara	Crowther	BC	Sustain
Alistair	Dale	AD	ISS
Louise	Davies	LD	Food Teachers Centre
Rodney	Dempster	RD	Edwards and Ward
Mark	Driver	MD	Minor, Weir and Willis
Maria	Dunbar	MDu	Leith School of Food and Wine
Kate	Evans	KE	Derbyshire County Council
Patricia	Fellows	PF	Consultant
Colette	Fox	CF	Proveg UK
Vickie	Hacking	VH	APSE
Laura	Hadley	LH	SIPS
Cherry	Hagger	CH	Allergy UK
Will	Hazell	WH	Sunday Telegraph
Ian	Henderson	IA	Ace Advice Ltd
Maria	Herron	MH	Office of Sharon Hodgson MP
Angus	Holford	AH	University of Essex

Helena	Houghton	HH	RACA AAS
Luca	Ingraggia	LI	Connect
Paul	Larson	PL	Surrey County Council
Meg	Longworth	ML	Chartwells
Zoe	McIntyre	ZM	Food Foundation
Olivia	Mills	OM	Chartwells
Amanda	Moody	AM	Surrey County Council
Caroline	Morgan	CM	Local Food Links
Miguel	Nunes	MN	Bidfood
Jason	O'Rourke	JOR	Washingborough Academy
Brad	Pearce	BP	LACA
Derek	Price	DP	Birmingham City Council
Alexia	Robinson	AR	British Food fortnight
Stephanie	Slater	SS	School Food Matters / Co-Chair School Food Plan Alliance
Danielle	Smith	DS	Aspens
Sean	Taylor	ST	School Food Matters
Rebecca	Thimmesch	RT	Magic Breakfast
Claudia	Toma	CT	Connect
Neil	Ward	NW	University of Surrey
Dale	Wild	DW	Birmingham City Council

1. Chair's Welcome

CW welcomed attendees to the Group and thanked the speakers for attending the meeting. He opened the meeting by commenting that the political situation was still unfolding with the new Prime Minister being elected. In addition, CW stated that the cost-of-living crisis was impacting on families and school food was more important than ever.

2. School Food Plan Alliance Update - Stephanie Slater (SS) and Sean Turner, Co-Chair, School Food Plan Alliance

SS provided an overview of the work that had been undertaken by the Alliance and in so doing, the key points raised were noted as follows:-

- (i) The Alliance had received a presentation from Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) who provided an overview of the latest data they had collated on the cost of the school day. The data provided further evidence regarding the number of children not being able to access a school meal and that the Free School Meals eligibility criteria was not adequate as it was resulting in many children in poverty being excluded from the provision.
- (ii) The University of Essex had attended to present the interim findings of research that had been conducted into the benefits of Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM) in terms of a child's weight, educational attainment and the impact on family income. The interim report findings were scheduled to be published on 19 September 2022.

- (iii) An officer from Hammersmith and Fulham Council provided details of a pilot that was been conducted in two secondary schools to extend free school meals to all children. He reported that as a result of the pilot there had been a significant increase in the uptake of meals, and it had resolved some of the issues of stigma and food insecurity.
- (iv) The Department of Education (DfE) attended the meeting and confirmed that the actions from the levelling up white paper were progressing.
- (v) The School Food Review Group continued to meet and were undertaking a review into the policy and funding of school meals. The Group brings together 35 organisations and aims to present a constructive argument Ministers and policy makers regarding the need to review school meals provision. They were currently building on the political support for extending the eligibility for Free School Meals by sending letters to the new ministers, having ongoing discussions with Civil Servants and had held a panel event at the Conservative Party Conference in Birmingham. In addition, there was an event scheduled to be held in Westminster on 8 November to present evidence on the reason for the government to continue to invest in Free School Meals and extend the eligibility criteria.

3. LACA Caterers survey – Brad Pearce (BP), National Vice-Chair LACA.

BP presented an overview of the findings of a survey regarding all aspects of service provision that LACA had conducted in the last week of May. The key points raised in the presentation were noted as follows: -

- (i) Responses had been received from across the school food sector and various schools across the country.
- (ii) 90% of respondents reported that they had experienced food shortages or substitutions and half the respondents confirmed that this had been worse in May than in January. The products most affected were chicken, bread and dairy.
- (iii) There had been an average price increase of 20-30%. This had resulted in 21% of respondents reporting that they had switched away from British meat with a further 27% considering doing this.
- (iv) 3% of respondents had increased the amount of processed food and 32% were considering doing so.
- (v) The vast majority of respondents said they could meet food standards but moving forward it was clear from the survey that there may have to be compromises in the future with 15% reporting this to be the case.
- (vi) There were 28 % of respondents reporting that they did not receive the full funding allocation for Universal Infant Free School Meals and 38% did not receive the full funding from Free School Meals.
- (vii) There had been a significant increase in Free School Meals uptake and a reduction in paid meals uptake.

- (viii) It was reported by 78% of respondents that there was a lack of skilled applicants applying for job vacancies an issue with and 55.5% of respondents anticipated this position to worsen.

In concluding BP commented that LACA called on government to equalise the funding between FSM and UIFSM as the meal being served was the same and funding needed to be increased in line with the rising costs. The funding should also be ringfenced for the school meal and all children on benefits should be entitled to a free school meal.

4. APPG on School Food – Cost of food survey – Vickie Hacking (VH), Principal Advisor APSE.

VH presented an overview of the findings of a survey regarding the impact of the cost of food on school food that was conducted in July and August on behalf of the APPG. The key points raised in the presentation were noted as follows: -

- (i) There were 180 responses from across the school food sector.
- (ii) Over 35% of respondents reported that food prices had risen by 10-20% in the last three months with 97.2% anticipating that the prices would continue to increase.
- (iii) To mitigate the impact, caterers were working with suppliers and reducing menu choices. Only 2.76% of respondents indicated that they would only be serving cold lunches.
- (iv) The top three other costs impacting the service were reported as delivery costs, staffing costs and utility costs.
- (v) The impact was being seen across the school day, with 53% of respondents reporting that children were arriving at school without breakfast, half of respondents were advising that there had been a decrease in the number of paid meals and 36% commented that there had been a decrease in the quality of packed lunches.
- (vi) Over 60% of respondents reported that there had been an increase or significant increase in dinner money debt.

In concluding, VH advised that 70% of respondents believed extending UIFSM to all primary aged children would alleviate the cost impact, 58% felt extending FSM eligibility to all children whose families were in receipt of benefits, and 57% advised that extending free breakfast provision would also assist.

It was also commented by VH, that the survey highlighted the commitment of catering staff to continue to provide hot and nutritious school meals despite the challenges and they were going to considerable efforts to do so, and this should be recognised and commended.

A discussion ensued regarding the presentations by BP and VH, the key points and questions raised were noted as follows: -

- (i) PF reported that a revised paper had been sent to government highlighting the disparity in funding and the cost of providing the school meal service. She also commented that catering staff should be praised as they are working harder than ever.
- (ii) In response to a question put by PF, CW advised that a letter would be sent to the new Education Secretary and the sector needed to be singing from the same hymn sheet, supporting asks with evidence and data.
- (iii) LD commented that the food cost increases were impacting the cost of food education with families struggling to afford the cost of ingredients to participate in cookery classes.
- (iv) In response to a question from MB, it was confirmed that details regarding the new Minister with responsibility for school food would be sought.
- (v) It was queried by MB if the three main stories in the press regarding school food, the call for the funding for school meals to go to the caterers, an extension of the eligibility criteria for school meals and the pressure currently on school budgets, were diluting the argument.
- (vi) SS in response to the comment from MB stated that as a Group we all needed to talk about all the challenges but also get the message out that there was still good food being served in schools.
- (vii) BP reported that due to the complicated funding arrangements for school meals in England and the rising prices caterers were getting very close to not being able to put food on the plate.
- (viii) In response to concern raised by CH with regard to three percent of children being diagnosed as having an allergy. There was not provision in the school food funding for alternative provision to be made for these children where a caterer was unable to provide a meal that met their needs. BP advised that he had experience of a school retaining the funding for a child with an allergy and provided a voucher in place of the meal. In addition, KE reported that it was dependent on the provider. However, at Derbyshire County Council there were 273 individual menus created to meet the child's need, and they provided for everyone for no extra charge.
- (ix) DW commented that there needed to be further work done to educate the budget holders and policy makers on the importance of a school meal and why the system needed to be funded adequately.
- (x) GC made the point that the funding mechanisms would take a long time to change but there needed to be a clear message to government that many children were falling through the cracks and going hungry.

5. British Food Fortnight – Alexia Robinson (AR), Founder, Love British Food.

AR introduced herself to the Group and provided an overview of British Food Fortnight. In so doing, the key points were noted as being: -

- (i) The campaign had brought together the most influential people from the school food sector and gave them a platform to inspire others.
- (ii) The group were looking to share knowledge and experience regarding things such as how to find suppliers.
- (iii) British Food Fortnight was an opportunity to share the message around British food and AR asked every local authority to take part in a small way.

6. National School Meals Week – Nigel Argyle, LACA

NA presented an overview of the activities that were scheduled to take place during National School Meals Week (NSMW). In so doing, the key points raised in the presentation were noted as follows: -

- (i) There were five themed events planned that focus on 'Together, we can make a difference.': -
 - Together, we make a difference launch – A fun NSMW 2022 launch day promoting your activities for the week.
 - Go green lunch – A Day to showcase plant-based menus and what you are doing to get children to engage and eat more.
 - Our local lunch – A roast dinner day showcasing the best of local British produce, reducing food miles.
 - Eat more, waste less – A Day to educate children on reducing food waste, recycling and composting. Can you create a low energy lunch?
 - VIP Day – Whether you are inviting a VIP or local MP for lunch or just saying thank you to your staff a day of celebrating. All school caterers re VIPs.

NA concluded by requesting the Group and their organisations to let everyone know what plans they had for the week and post them on social media channels. In addition, he reported that there were free resources available for people to access on the LACA website.

In response to the presentation ZM provided details of an event that the Food Foundation were holding on 8 November 2022 in NSMW at the Central Hall in Westminster to promote the superpowers of school meals.

7. Schools Bill and forthcoming policy on school food – Christian Wakeford MP (CW)

CW opened the discussion by commenting that to convince government evidence was required outlining the benefits of school meals, he also advised that Labour were currently looking at a costed model that was workable for school meals.

CW invited the Group to present their views and thoughts on the topic. A discussion ensued and the key points were noted as follows: -

BC reported that the current position in Scotland and Wales demonstrated that building a conscience worked. Children need to be put at the centre of the policy and there should be genuinely free education that would benefit generations to come. However, in England, school meals have become party political and there needed to be a move away from seeing the provision as political.

MD stated that all involved in school meals needed to be relentless in lobbying MPs with one united voice so that the asks could not be ignored.

CW concurred and advised that numerous written questions to MPs were a good tool to raise the asks.

AC reported that the DfE and Civil Servants were listening, but they needed evidence to put forward to Ministers.

CW closed the discussion and thanked everyone who had attended the meeting.

Meeting concluded at 16.00pm