



Minutes of meeting of the School Food APPG

Tuesday 13 March 2025, 2-4pm – The Wilson Room, Portcullis House.

Present

Sharon Hodgson MP (SH) – Chair

Lord Wasserman – LW

Adam	Browne	AB	Oasis Community Learning
Alistair	Dave	AD	ISS
Alistaire	Turner	AT	Leiths Education
Anita	Brown	ABR	LACA
Bethan	Cowell	BC	National Farmers Union
C	Jary	CJ	Impact Food
Caroline	Morgan	CM	Local Food Links
Chef	Russ	CR	Pokesdown Community School
Claire	King	CK	Nutrition Advisory Team
Claire	Theobald	CT	British Nutritional Foundation
Darren	Gadd	DG	ISS
Ed	Roberts	ER	Sodexo
Eleanor	Toms	ET	Chefs in Schools
Frances	Thivet	FT	Sodexo
Francis	Meek	FM	British Nutritional Foundation
Gary	McCulloch	GM	University College London
Heather	Ellis	HE	Sheffield University
Heidi	Olli	HO	WFP
Jane	Lockie	JL	TastEd
Jennifer	Cox	JC	British Poultry Council
Jenny	Paxman	JP	The School of Artisan Food
John	Figgins	JF	West Sussex County Council
Laura	Hamilton	LH	University of Hertfordshire
Lauren	Moore	LM	Shire Services - Shropshire Council

Louise	Davies	LD	Food Teachers Centre
Luke	Hall	Lha	Sharon Hodgson MPs office
Marion	Winspur	M W	Sodexo
Myles	Bremner	MB	Bremner and Co
Olivia	Haverson	OH	Chartwells
Orla	Condon	OC	British Nutritional Foundation
Owen	Mooney	OM	Department for Education
Rosie	Osbourne	RO	Bremner and Co
Sarah	Cunningham	SC	The Healthy Food Company
Stacey	McMaster	SM	Oral Health Foundation
Stephanie	Slater	SS	School Food Matters
Susan	Vuli	SV	Shire Services - Shropshire Council
Suzanne	Gomersall	SG	Nottingham Trent University
Tatiana	Campos	TC	Proveg UK
Tracey	Smith	TS	Sodexo
Vickie	Hacking	VH	APSE

1. Chair's Welcome

SH welcomed attendees to the Group on this the 10th Annual International School Meals Day and thanked the speakers for attending the meeting. She advised that she had just meet with representatives of the World Food Programme, and that over one hundred countries had signed up to the coalition for school meals and the UK still had not signed up to the coalition.

2. Updates for the group from the Chair, Sharon Hodgson MP

a. Actions from the meeting held on the 19 December 2024.

SH confirmed that she was still in talks with the treasury regarding the funding for school meals and had meet with Daren Jones, and during the meeting she had highlighted the fact the funding was inadequate and outlined the impact this was having. Following the meeting Daren Jones confirmed that he would raise the issues with the Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury.

There was a Private Members Bill was being table on Friday regarding auto-enrolment and SH thanked Child Poverty Action Group for giving evidence at the Child Poverty Select Committee that was being used to support the need for the Bill.

There had been an amendment raised to the Free School Meals (automatic registration of eligible children) Bill for to include school food monitoring and this was being heard next week.

A consultation had been launched regarding OFSTED that would close on 24 April 2025, and the APPG would be responding to highlight the importance of monitoring school food as a part of the inspection process.

SH reported on the recent announcements regarding government policy and summarise the key issues from the virtual meeting. The key points raised were noted as follows:

- It had been announced that £2.3 billion had been allocated as core funding for schools.
- £13 million pounds had been allocated to fund breakfast club pilots. The schools that were selected to take part in the pilots would form part of a test and learn phase, prior to the full roll out and further funding being allocated.
- Although a slight increase had been announced in the funding for free school meals, this falls short of the £3.00 plus that the sector is calling for.
- Dinner money debt had been highlighted in a report published by Child Poverty Action Group
- The Childrens Wellbeing and Schools Bill had been launched but there were several omissions relating to school meals, including School Food Standards, future funding commitments, the Healthy Start scheme and a commitment to auto-enrolment for those children eligible for Free School Meals. Therefore, a letter was being sent to the Education Secretary to highlight these issues and outline the reasons these should be included in the Bill.
- Peter Lamb MP had introduced a Private Members Bill - Free School Meals (Automatic Registration of Eligible Children) Bill 2024-26 and SH would be meeting with him in the New Year to discuss how the APPG can support the Bill.
- There was still a push to get Ofsted to include School Food Standards as part of their inspection regime.
- The number of children presenting with allergies was being highlighted as an issue in schools and was a barrier from children accessing school meals.

3. School Food Alliance Update – Stephanie Slater (SS)

SS provided an update from the meeting of the School Food Alliance that was held on the morning Thursday 13 March 2025 and in so doing the key points were noted as follows:

- Professor Morgan from Cardiff University presented an overview of his recent book 'Servicing the public,' and highlighted his finding from his research into public sector catering.
- Bite Back presented details of a new campaign that they had launched highlighting how big business was using sponsorship in schools to promote their companies and the concerns around the sponsorship.

- The University of Birmingham provided an overview of new research that is being undertaken with School Food Matters looking at the food provision in secondary schools.

In response to the update the following questions and comments were raised: -

JF advised that he had been receiving reports from schools that they had not received any guidance or support from the DfE regarding how the breakfast clubs would be run. In response to SS advised that there had been peer to peer groups set up for schools in the pilot to support each other.

4. Update from LACA – The School Food People – Anita Brown (ABR)

AB provided an update regarding the work that LACA had been undertaking and in so doing the key points were noted as follows: -

- During her time as Chair of LACA, she had been focusing on campaigning to raise the funding received from the UK Government for school meals as the gap between the cost of providing the meal and the funding had been increasing significantly which was making it unviable to provide school meals. In addition, there was a disparity in the funding across the UK with England being the lowest.
- At the House of Commons Annual Lunch last year, a graph illustrating the difference between funding and the cost of providing the meal was circulated to attendees which included MPs to highlight the campaign.
- An event was held at the Welsh Senedd on 12 March 2025 to highlight what a modern school meal looked like, emphasising the benefits to pupils and families.
- In addition, the event was to thank the Welsh Government for supporting school meals and outlined that there was still more that needed to be achieved.
- National School Meals Week (NSMW) 2024 focused on health, wellbeing and mindfulness and this theme would be continued for the NSMW in 2025.
- There was evidence to show that school meals uptake had increased after NSMW, and the week also provided the opportunity to highlight the school meals provision and what was on offer.
- David Baddiel had supported NSMW in 2024 after being contacted following the publication of his book *Small Fry*. ABr confirmed that he had pledged his continuing support going forward.
- On the Wednesday of NSMW, there had been an apprenticeship launch which was held at the LACA's School Food Ambassadors restaurant in Folkestone.
- The NSMW event concluded on Friday with prizes being awarded to publicise the importance of school meals.
- The House of Commons Annual Lunch had been scheduled for Tuesday 29 April with the aim of showcasing school meals to the decision makers, it acted as a platform to discuss the challenges and issues including the funding gap.

The event also provided the opportunity for engagement with MP's and to set up follow up meetings.

ABr concluded by thanking SH and the APPG for supporting LACAs funding campaign, NSMW and the House of Commons lunch.

(A) School Meals Service: Past, Present and Future Project – Heather Ellis (HE) and Gary McCulloch (GM)

GM presented an overview of the Past, Present and Future Project and in so doing the key points were noted as follows: -

- There had not been a full comprehensive history of school meals compiled.
- The current policies relating to school meals had a weak historic memory.
- England had never had a universal free provision.
- The main objections to a universal provision in the past had come from the Treasury due to the belief that the cost would not be directly linked to outcomes.
- There were some really important comparisons with school meal provision internationally.

HE presented on the aspect of the project that she had been leading on and in so doing the key points were noted as follows: -

- HE advised that she had led on the oral history strand of the project.
- Historical oral recordings had been analysed and over one hundred archived historical records had been located.
- Dinner ladies and the catering staff had been the most fascinating from the oral histories.
- The oral records highlighted that the experiences recorded were not taken into consideration when drafting school meals policy.

GM summarised by providing an overview of the recommendations following the project, outlined the next steps and he confirmed that the report from the project would be launched at a conference being held on 19 June 2025.

In response to the presentation the following questions and comments were raised: -

- SH commented that the reasons presented for providing school meals 120 years ago remain the same today.
- LW advised that the messages coming out of the project needed to be promoted to the wider public and not just focused on policy makers.

(B) Chef Russ, Pokesdown Community School

CR presented an overview of his award submission for the APPG Excellence in School Food Award, and in so doing the key points were noted as follows: -

- CR advised that his father had several health issues including type two diabetes and died five years ago.

- During the pandemic he was not able to work in the restaurant, so he volunteered and helped feed the homeless in Cape Town.
- Both situations caused him to re-evaluate his life, and he moved back to the UK and found a job as a school chef.
- The space allocated for the kitchen was a store cupboard and the kitchen equipment was bought from a scrapyard.
- The kitchen served meals from scratch and the uptake in the first year was 120 meals.
- There was some push back from parents but following some tweaks to the service and promotional activity, such as providing samples at the school gates, the resistance from parents was overcome.
- After three years of running the service, he won a Jamie Oliver award and had set up an Instagram page to promote the school meals service at the school.
- CR also reported that he had won the individual category at the APPG Excellence in school food awards and had received mentions in Parliament.
- In addition to providing a school meal the service also provides food education activities such as a SEND cooking class and an after-school club.
- To maintain the service fundraising activities are undertaken which include selling bread prepared in the kitchen to parents and bake sales.
- The vegetables for the meals are provided by a local parent.

CR concluded by saying that Chefs in Schools provided him with the opportunity to get the role in the school and make a difference to the children and community. However, there needs to be more funding and auto-enrolment needed to be implemented to ensure that children were well educated about food and do not fall into the trap his father did regarding a poor diet.

In response to the presentation the following questions and comments were raised: -

- In response to a question from SH it was confirmed that there was a total of 410 children in the school and currently there are 370 children receiving school meals which was cooked by two chefs.
- AB commented that the work the CR had undertaken since starting at the school was inspiring and had a positive impact on children and that Chef Russ should be commended for his work.
- SH queried at how CR job satisfaction was now compared with his time working in a restaurant. CR stated that there was no comparison, and he is very satisfied with his current role.

(C) Susan Vuli, General Manager of Shire Services

SV provided an overview of Shire Services and in so doing the key points were noted as follows: -

- The local authority did not provide a subsidy to the school meals service.
- Schools were reporting that they were unable to afford the management fee associated with the service. Therefore, were opting for other providers.
- Local authorities were not operating in the sector on a level playing field due to the additional costs associated with the Local Government Pension Scheme and the recent pay rises agreed with unions.

- Due the challenges regarding funding and other financial constraints there was no money available for investing back into the service.
- There had been a need to reduce staff and staff hours to assist with balancing the books which had resulted in the conversations with the children being reduced.
- SV advised that with these challenges, the only option was to focus on ensuring the children's experience.
- The service had put on several events and suppliers had been approached to fund these.
- Competitions had been introduced to promote school meals, a character called Sammy goes into schools, gardening clubs and come dine with me with the parents and children had all been introduced to improve the children's experience of school meals.
- The service provides come dine with me experience, where parents and carers were invited to have a lunch.

SV concluded by reported that the funding that local authority caterers receive for the school meals service does not cover the cost of providing the provision and without adequate funding, local authority caterers will cease to provide school meals.

In response to the update the following questions and comments were raised: -

- JF commented the school meals budget were used to plug the gaps in the school's budget due to the funding not being ringfenced.
- AB reported that Local Authority funding had been significantly reduced over the last decade and as such there was no money to deliver the school meals service.

(D) Sodexo and Oasis Community Learning Multi Academy Trust

AB overview of the Oasis Community Learning and the Lord Mayors of London Free School Meals policy and in so doing the key points were noted as follows: -

- Sodexo were wanting to focus was on experience and wellbeing and wanted to see positives outcomes from the school meals service.
- TS provided an overview of how the partnership between Sodexo and the Trust worked including the shared values and making a positive social impact.
- AB outlined the profile of Oasis and confirmed that the organisation was ethos driven.
- Oasis had opted to work in areas of high deprivation, and there was an average of 45% Free School Meal entitlement in the areas where the schools were situated as they believed the trust could make the most impact.
- The Mayor of London's roll out of free school meals had been welcomed.
- There had been 14% increase in uptake since the introduction of the policy.
- There had been a positive impact on the frontline teams which had been working collaboratively.
- There had also been a positive impact on the behaviour of children in the afternoons, and they were more focused on learning.
- As part of the role out children had been given a voice in the food they eat and were encouraged to eat new foods.

In concluding it was reported that the differential in funding between the Mayor of London's policy and the government made a real difference to children and that food was an

important part of the school day. However, the funding was not enough and could very quickly go from the service being able to provide a positive experience, a become just a transactional service.

In response to the presentation SH commented that it was good to see the difference that the extra funding was making and what could be achieved.

5. AOB

There was no AOB raised.

Meeting concluded at 16.00pm