



Briefing 14/24 July 2014

Beyond the School Gate: Improving food choices in the school community

To: All Chief Executives, Main Contacts and APSE Contacts in Scotland

For information only to England, Northern Ireland and Wales

Key Issues

"The Beyond the School Gate guidance provides practical advice on how we can work together to positively influence the food environment outside of schools to better support children and young people, and also the wider community, to make healthier choices." – Michael Matheson, Minister for Public Health

This report offers guidance on:-

- Stay on site and alternative outlet provision in schools
- Marketing, promotions and incentives
- Support and guidance for caterers and retailers
- Regulation: Environmental Health, licensing and planning

1.0 Introduction

Following on from the publication of the 'Better Eating, Better Learning: A new context for school food' report in March 2014, the complementary Beyond The School Gate guidance shows what local authorities, schools, retailers, caterers and other partners can do to influence the food environment around schools.

The importance of the food environment in influencing the diet of children and young people should not be underestimated, as there is typically a wide availability of foods high in fat, salt and sugar (HFSS) for sale in outlets nearby schools at low prices that young people perceive to be of good value while often unaware of the long-term effect that the regular consumption of HFSS foods can have on their health (eating habits are the second major cause of poor health in Scotland); unlike schools, the foods available in these outlets are not required to meet nutritional standards set out in The Nutritional Requirements for Food and Drink in Schools (Scotland) Regulations 2008. With 63% of secondary school pupils occasionally purchasing food and/or drink from these outlets and 22% of children and young people having never used school food facilities, it's clear that the continuing problem of the diet of children and young people in Scotland can only be tackled by dealing with the problem food environments surrounding our schools.

This guidance document offers a range of solutions that include how to encourage pupils to stay on site, how to provide incentives for healthier choices, the resources available to caterers and retailers, guidance on the licensing of street traders, and the role of planning and environmental health, as well a self-evaluation tool to allow partners to review their current approach and consider what actions they will take to improve. The full report can be accessed by [clicking here](#).

APSE has already published two related briefings this year – 14/01 entitled ‘Scottish Government free school meals P1-P3 pupils’ which can be accessed by [clicking here](#) and the aforementioned 14/17 ‘Better Eating, Better Learning’ briefing which can be accessed by [clicking here](#). These can also be found in the Briefings section of the APSE website.

2.0 Stay On Site, Marketing and Regulations

Stay on site and alternative outlet provision in schools

The first approach to minimising the effects of the food environment is to encourage pupils to stay on site. Councils have achieved this through increasing on-site lunchtime activities (e.g. sport, music and art), making changes to the dining experience inside schools and setting up alternative school food outlets such as mobile food vans within the school grounds that comply with nutritional regulations. These changes are designed to increase the food delivery options available to children and young people, to reduce the amount of time spent queuing and to offer children and young people something to do with their friends at lunchtime. The evaluation of a recent pilot project found children and young people, school staff and parents/carers had reacted positively to the stay on site incentives. These changes also provided many other non-nutritional positive impacts such as reduced peer pressure and bullying, reduced lateness and truancy, reduced child safety risks and more opportunities for children and young people to socialise.

Marketing, promotions and incentives

Local level

The second approach is centred on marketing, promotions and further incentives. Since meal price, available foods, meal deals and special offers were highlighted as the key factors for children and young people deciding where to eat lunch in a recent YoungScot survey, it's clear that the right marketing, promotions, labelling and positioning of products could have a positive impact on the uptake of healthier meal choices. Healthier options awareness campaigns, clear labelling of the calories, fat, sugar and salt content in food/drink, the prominent positioning of fruit and vegetables at till points and promotions that offer better value for money for choosing a healthy option are just a few of the local level approaches worth considering to implement. Rewards and incentives are another way to increase and maintain a high uptake of healthy school meals; examples from the guidance include competitions for those who buy school meals, donations to charities related to school meal purchases and loyalty schemes, such as the Young Scot Rewards programme and others like it, that provide the opportunity to trade in points for rewards like shopping vouchers, discounted driving lessons and tickets to cultural/sporting events.

National level

At a national level, the public sector, retailers, manufacturers and caterers are being called upon to take voluntary action to assist the Scottish population in making healthier food decisions through front of pack nutritional labelling and the recently released Supporting Healthy Choices voluntary framework that sets out commitments for retailers, manufacturers, caterers and the public sector to incentivise healthy eating.

Support and guidance for caterers and retailers

The third approach concerns the support and guidance available for caterers and retailers.

For caterers, support is available in the form of the Healthy Living Award delivered by NHS Health Scotland; the award recipient must ensure cooking methods and ingredients keep fat, salt and sugar to a minimum; that water, fruit, vegetables and low fat dairy products are always available; and that the caterer generally conforms to various conditions based upon a healthy diet and has appropriate sales promotions and marketing that encourages healthy eating. Further support for caterers can be found in [Annex C](#) and on the Scottish Government website [here](#).

For retailers, support is available from the Healthy Living Programme (HLP). The programme offers retailers a choice of free stands and materials to promote healthy products as well as training for store staff. The HLP offers the opportunity to target the premises in the food environment around schools, and the opportunity to increase the range of healthy options available in stores and maximise sales of fruit and vegetables (on average sales increase by over 20% after joining the HLP). Further support for retailers is available through [SGF Living Programme guidance](#).

Food Hygiene and Food and Health training for retailers and caterers is available through the Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland (REHIS) in 160 centres across Scotland. While food businesses are required to provide employees with food hygiene training, local authorities are being asked to consider whether similar training could be a licensing condition for mobile food traders.

Further guidance for retailers and caterers can be found in the recently published 'Supporting Healthy Choices: A framework for voluntary action' which can be accessed by [clicking here](#).

Regulation: Environmental Health, licensing and planning

Environmental health

The guidance proposes an extension of powers for Environmental Health (EH) to become a more vocal promoter of healthier options within its current role as a regulator of food hygiene and food standards and as a provider of public information on those topics. While businesses are already required to meet basic standards for providing safe food through the Food Hygiene Information Scheme and can receive the Eat Safe Award for achieving standards beyond those required by law, the role of EH could be expanded to incorporate an advice-based approach to inspections that signposts information on schemes like the Healthy Living Award while encouraging businesses to reduce the fat, sugar and salt in their foods, as well as display nutritional information on packaged foods and, on a wider scale, taking part in local action and getting involved in school planning to ensure that kitchen and dining facilities are fit for purpose.

Licensing

The licensing section of the guidance gives an overview of how 14 of the 32 local authorities have introduced conditions and restrictions on street trading licenses in the surrounding area of schools; under The Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 schedule 1 paragraph 5, local authorities have this power, although some may not wish to use it to implement exclusion zones. The guidance outlines the process from start to finish from developing the proposals, determining the extent of the problem for schools/health, considering the length of enforcement period (only during lunch periods? Term-time only?), consulting with all interested parties and making subsequent amendments, identifying the intended/unintended benefits and consequences of the restriction, making sure alternative methods of achieving the same objective have been considered fully, performing an impact assessment on children and young people as well as the livelihood of local street traders through to implementing the policy (to be imposed at renewal or through a notification and hearing procedure?), enforcing the policy and continually evaluating its impact. There are a plethora of variables that must be considered during the licensing process.

Planning

The section on planning identifies the opportunities local authorities have to influence the food environment around schools through the established planning system. With the review of a local Development Plan for an area being carried out every 5 years, planning authorities will re-evaluate the current state of an area and make decisions about future development with regards to the objectives of a wide range of stakeholders, thus health is only one of many matters a proposed policy will be designed to address. It is important to note here that while a planning authority seeks to deliver long-term benefits for local people, it does not seek to control their lifestyle choices; so while there is increasing pressure for local authorities to place restrictions upon street traders and food outlets as a way to limit the availability of HFSS

foods, from a planning perspective having permission for two food outlets in an area is not necessarily considered twice as bad for the health of children and young people as only having one food outlet.

When producing a Development Plan, a Development Plan Scheme and Participation Statement will be produced that identifies the stages of the review process as well as information as to when and how interested parties can get involved; this is important, as a planning authority will be most able to take account of new ideas in the early stages of the project. Once the proposed plan has been made public, formal comments can be submitted which local authorities must take notice of before adopting their local Development Plan. At this point, the planning authority would consider how well applications fit with the policies outlined in their Development Plan and would consider any relevant planning issues (e.g. national policy) before deciding whether to approve or reject it, this is not dependent on applications being in line with the Development Plan.

3.0 APSE Comment

APSE welcomes this publication which alongside the recent Better Eating, Better Learning report represents a real rethink of the approach to school food that now extends beyond the gates of our schools. The commitment to providing positive incentives for maintaining a balanced and nutritional diet is necessary not only to expose children to the clear benefits of healthy eating, but also to future-proof our public services from the considerable strain of preventable diet-related illnesses such as coronary heart disease, certain cancers, strokes, osteoporosis and diabetes.

APSE recognises that this pro-active spirit of involvement in new working areas such as regulation and planning will help to positively shape our food environments, not only for children and young people, but for our entire local communities. APSE appreciates the many intended benefits this guidance will bring to our local authorities and the many unintended benefits such as improved child safety and reduced littering which our public servants in areas like roads and street cleansing will no doubt appreciate.

APSE appreciates the efforts of our membership such as Glasgow City Council for providing food huts inside school gates that comply with nutritional requirements and Dumfries & Galloway Council with their successful cafe style rebranding of their lunch rooms for demonstrating how to effectively put into practice these ways of encouraging children and young people to stay on site during lunchtime and to eat a healthy meal. Other local authorities have introduced prepayment cards that allow parents to top up pupils lunch money online; this is an effective way to increase the numbers that stay-on-site as the cards can only be used to purchase food from school premises.

APSE recognises the continued dedication of the Scottish government to the promotion of healthy eating and the prevention of obesity in the country, including the recent launch of the Supporting Healthy Choices voluntary framework which invites the food and drink industry and other partners to sign up to various commitments they will work towards in the next year to create a healthier food environment for everyone, and the upcoming Take Life On healthy eating social marketing campaign which is expected to launch in January 2015.

The debate on Better Eating, Better Learning and the Beyond The School Gate guidance will continue at the next APSE Soft FM Advisory Group meeting on 16 September 2014. If you would like to attend the meeting, please call the APSE Scotland office at 01698 459051.

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