

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 21 September 2006

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director – Health & Community

SUBJECT: Healthy Eating

WARD(S) Borough-wide

1.0 **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to present the findings of the Healthy Eating Topic Team and to seek adoption of and action upon its recommendations.

2.0 **RECOMMENDATION**

- i) That the recommendations be agreed and that progress with implementing this plan and its impact be monitored periodically by the Health PPB.

3.0 **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

CONTEXT

3.1 The decision to examine this Topic as a joint scrutiny team was prompted by a number of important factors:

- increasing concern about diet and obesity and its actual and potential impact on health (e.g. the expected diabetes ‘epidemic’)
- the ever-strengthening evidence on how important healthy eating is in preventing ill health (alongside taking exercise, stopping smoking etc.)
- improving health is Halton Borough Council’s top priority and one of the Halton Partnership’s 5 strategic priorities, so the issue of healthy eating is tightly aligned to the Borough’s key objectives.
- Moreover, the Topic Team took the view that the Council and key partners cannot ignore the need to promote something so fundamental to human health and wellbeing as healthy eating
- To quote the Annual Report of Halton’s Director of Public Health

“Scientists estimate that a quarter of deaths from heart disease and a third of deaths from cancer could be prevented by changing the food we eat... Besides preventing heart disease and cancer, healthier eating will control weight, preventing diabetes, arthritis and

mobility problems”

YET

“In Halton (only) 1 in 10 men eat the recommended five daily pieces of fruit or vegetables. Women do slightly better, with 3 out of 20

With the need and scope for more healthy eating so obvious and the evidence of the associated benefits well recognised, the Topic Team did not spend much time rehearsing this already well-trodden ground. Its attention focussed instead on

- Identifying the main issues and barriers to healthy eating in Halton
- Exploring how these might be overcome and what to prioritise and developing a set of sound recommendations for improvement in the prioritised areas, based on the evidence gathered

3.2 The Healthy Eating Topic Team was jointly chaired by Councillors A Gerrard (from Health PPB) and E Jones (from Life Chances PPB) to reflect importance of this issue to both boards. The team comprised Councillors Gerrard, Jones, Horabin, Inch, Swift, Parker, lead officer Peter Barron (Operational Director, Older People), and supported by Alex Villiers (Chief Scrutiny Advisor) and Diane Lloyd, and met between November 2004 and October 2005 on 7 occasions.

3.3 Early in the process, and not unexpectedly, the Topic Team recognised that the subject of Healthy Eating was very large and that it would be necessary to focus on agreed priorities. Drawing on evidence and advice from experts consulted by the Team it was decided to concentrate on children and their families, and as a special case to include young people about to set up their own home for the first time. There were several reasons for this choice, but chief amongst them were that these groups, and the unique opportunity for sustained contact provided by the school years, were deemed to offer most scope for influencing life-long eating habits for the better. Although the main focus was on children the Topic Team also considered adults

WITNESSES

- Ella Coakley – Marketing & Health Promotions Officer School Meals Service
- Chris Patino – Head of Service, Catering, Cleansing and Stadium
- Kim Ellor – School Meals Manager
- Paula Thorpe – Health Living Centre – HLC
- Anna Nygaard – Healthy Living Centre Programme Manager
- Jessica Williams – Chief Sure Start Dietician

- Pauline Sinnott – Community Development Officer
- Daniel Seddon – Director of Public Health
- Ifeoma Omyia – Specialist Registrar in Public Health
- Pam Worrall – Healthy Schools Standard
- Anu Brown – 5-a-Day Nutrition Coordinator [Food Health Advisor]
- Graeme Crewe – Food Co-op Project/Development Manager

3.4 Although the findings of this report can be expected to have an impact on long term health, such obesity and the incidence of diabetes, these are not directly addressed here. Similarly, recent research has identified that some 40% of older people may be malnourished and that besides the effects of this on their health and wellbeing, it is estimated to be costing the country £2.8 billion p.a. to deal with the consequences (e.g. in terms of ill health and hospitalisation). The Health PPB is encouraged to look seriously at these issues as possible subjects for future Topic work.

4.0 **APPROACH TAKEN**

4.1 The Topic Team gathered evidence from desk research, from reporters or witnesses at Enquiry Panel sessions and from supplementary meetings with people involved in promoting healthy eating.

4.2 This evidence was assembled and analysed according to 6 key themes:

- Policy and Co-ordination
- Performance Standards
- Finance and resources
- Communication and participation
- School Meals Service
- Nutrition and its effects on learning

4.3 A set of recommendations was then developed from the findings and these are contained in Appendix 1. A copy of the full report is available from the Council's Chief Scrutiny Officer.

4.4 Although there was a very significant amount of information made available to the panel it became clear that there is no one overview or perspective on the current state of healthy eating in Halton. Many agencies, individuals and groups are involved in work to improve the diet of the borough, particularly in relation to young people. However no one group appears to have the whole picture. That has meant that what should have been fairly easy questions to formulate answers too often proved more complex, which is why a recommendation to form a Food Partnership Group was identified.

5.0 REVIEW CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Considerable evidence was provided to and considered by the Health Scrutiny Topic Team. Overall the Topic Team were impressed with the commitment of those who are working in services around food within Halton Borough. The food available to children within our schools has improved markedly over the last few years with increases in the use of fresh ingredients and decreases in processed ingredients. The Halton Healthy Schools Standard has clearly supported progress. Many schemes and initiatives have been and are being undertaken to improve healthy eating within the Borough, through the HFP, SureStart and Healthy Living Programme to name but a few.

5.2 In the absence of a clear understanding of what is the best pattern of services locally against which to commission it was difficult for the topic team to make informed decisions. Policy changes quickly and the need to strategic leadership and co-ordination was evident. The principal recommendation of this Committee was that this stating of a clear baseline, assessing Halton's position against it and what should be commissioned and de-commissioned should be undertaken by a food partnership group.

5.3 The resources available to staff within the system were raised in a number of submissions and there is clearly heavy reliance on short term funding. However without effective mapping we are not convinced that the overall level of resource is insufficient. In fact if existing resources are in future deployed without overlap the topic team were convinced that many of the actions identified could be met within existing pool of resources.

6.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The recommendations are intended to influence policy and result in a number of improvements, including:

- Improvement in the health and development of children in Halton.
- Reduction in a range of barriers to learning intended, amongst other things, to improve behaviour, concentration and ability to access learning and school achievement, and particularly amongst children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and with special educational needs.
- Greater expertise and capacity to support schools and other relevant establishments in managing and ameliorating the barriers outlined in the report.
- Executive Board decision feedback to Health PPB
- Widen the agenda to impact upon parents and adults.

7.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Adoption and implementation of the recommendations set out in the report is likely to have direct cost implications, although further work by the proposed strategic group is needed to consider existing resource deployment. However, the recommendations are largely preventative and well grounded in research, and it is anticipated that their implementation will avoid the requirement to fund much more costly support and remedial measures that would otherwise be needed for numbers of children in the Borough. In short, the recommendations should at least be self-financing if 'savings' that accrue are recycled.

8.0 RISK ANALYSIS

8.1 The Council is quite routinely fielding the risks and costs associated with situations/individuals where things 'go wrong' and where barriers to learning contribute to one or more problems [e.g. learning, emotional and/or behavioural difficulties, exclusion from school] that require intervention/support on the part of the Council or other public services. The service budgets involved tend to be demand driven and can be significant in terms of both size and volatility. Most of the recommendations in this report can be seen as 'risk control measures' in respect of these existing risks facing the Council.

8.2 With respect to the risks associated with the recommendations themselves, the often complex and multi-faceted nature of the problems arising from barriers to learning, plus other e.g. family/social factors, mean that there can be no guarantees that the recommendations will 'cure' the problems experienced or completely remove the barriers to learning identified. The Topic Team has, however, taken a number of steps to control risks:

- Recommendations are largely founded on research evidence and good practice, or else reflect the advice of expert witnesses or Topic Team members
- The recommendations are not big ticket items in themselves but have the potential to impact positively on some fairly major Council budgets. The financial downside is therefore limited.
- It is also recommended that the implementation and impact of the actions proposed is systematically monitored and evaluated so that success or failure of measures taken can be readily identified and appropriate follow-up action taken promptly. These will be reported to the Health Policy and Performance Board.

9.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

9.1 The nature of the recommendations is such that the greatest

benefits are likely to accrue to those who are most disadvantaged by barriers to learning and at greatest risk of exclusion/alienation, school failure etc. In consequence, the net effect of the recommendations should be to promote equality of opportunity and improve the life chances of some of Halton's most disadvantaged people.

10.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Healthy Eating Health Policy & Performance Board February 2006	Runcorn Town Hall	Peter Barron Operational Director Older People/PSD Services

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM HEALTHY EATING SCRUTINY REPORT

Policy and Co-ordination

1. A new strategic food partnership to be developed to improve co-ordination of thinking and activity in relation to healthy eating across all age groups.
2. The partnership will need to establish a clear set of coherent and mutually supporting policies in relation to healthy eating that, amongst other things:
 - Identify and address any significant gaps in coverage for high need areas/groups
 - Ensures consistency and continuity through various key transitional stages (e.g. from SureStart to school) so that the benefits of good work on:
 - healthy eating are not lost but are sustained and developed.
 - Ensure initiatives are evaluated and that evidence influences policy.
 - Value for money
3. A senior lead officer and/or lead member to be identified as a lead for healthy eating [suggest operational director level] and chairs the strategic healthy eating group
4. Officer support to the strategic group should be identified from corporate policy team to support lead member/officer.
5. The strategic food group needs to operate within a clear governance framework so that it is able to influence and advise partner agencies. The two lead agencies would be from within the Council and the Primary Care Trust.
6. The operational implementation of strategy should be separated out from the strategic role. A separate operational group should be formed and report to the strategic group to agreed standards.

Performance Standards

1. A clear performance framework is needed for the new groups, based on agreeing measurable outcomes and clear, SMART targets so the current position and changes in it can be monitored.
2. The Halton Health Schools Standard – Healthy Eating theme should be updated (and reviewed annually) to include current evidence and

good practice.

3. Within the new HSS clear definitions of the exact meaning of terms is needed.
4. A consistent approach to changing eating behaviour is needed and should form part of the work programme of the strategic group.
5. The need for and role of the food co-operative needs to be evaluated
6. Standards for food need to refer not only to quality of ingredients but also the eating environment and the presentation of food. Minimum standards in terms of proper meal times (to support proper digestion), 'sit down' meals with laid tables are also required. Teachers should also be encouraged to eat with the children.
7. Leadership and policy setting need to develop ways of more closely involving parents, schools, councillors and governors to achieve an overall agreed approach that best serves future interests of children.
8. Schools need to evaluate the dining space available and consider within school priorities capital bid submissions / development bids to improve the facilities.
9. Greater evaluation and evidence of impact is needed for food initiatives. This evidence needs to be considered by the strategic body leading food policy.
10. A healthy aging strategy should be developed for Halton Borough that incorporates food and nutrition as a key dimension.

Finance and Resources

1. A system wide financial strategy should be developed
2. Additional funds that are passported through to SMS must go to improving the food 'on the plate'.
3. Future investment of NRF should be based on some match from funding organisations.
4. The strategic group are to undertake that mapping to feed back to the healthy eating scrutiny group in 6/9 months.
5. In order for mapping to make changes the Partnership should also establish the current funding and resource baseline for Halton.

Communication and Participation

1. A marketing and information strategy should be developed identifying the groups who need to be reached, the information they need to have and effective ways of disseminating that information.
2. The marketing and information strategy needs to be owned by stakeholders and the strategic body that leads food strategy.

School Meals Service

1. The SMS should continue to provide meals for schools. However it should be properly commissioned and accountable to strategic food partnership and schools for delivering an agreed menu. An annual business case should be presented to the strategic group.
2. The mission of the SMS should be 'to promote the health of children'.

Nutrition and its effects on learning

1. A number of primary schools should be invited to volunteer to pilot the nutritional recommendations which are designed to improve concentration and behaviour, and the impact of these measures on behaviour, health, pupil achievement etc. should be properly evaluated.
2. Subject to the outcome and learning from the pilots, the recommended practice should be shared/rolled out across primary schools in the Borough where they are not already in place.
3. So far as is practicable and with the support of parents and governors, schools should adopt a robust approach to eliminating 'junk' and highly processed ingredients / products from food and drink consumed at school (e.g. items from vending machines, tuck shops and from packed lunches such as sugary drinks, biscuits/cake, crisps, reconstituted protein and other products high in preservatives and additives).
4. Schools should support and implement emerging Government proposals for pupils to be weighed and measured annually, and advice on diet, exercise etc. should be offered where appropriate and shared with parents.
5. A nutritious breakfast should be made available for children where this is not provided at home (i.e. breakfast clubs).
6. Water should be readily available for children at school and they should be encouraged to drink enough to remain properly hydrated throughout the day.

7. Pupils' intake of Omega 3 fatty acids should be enhanced to recommended levels either through approved supplements or otherwise through changes to the diet.
8. Pupils' intake of iron (in combination with vitamin C to enable effective absorption) should be enhanced to recommended levels either through approved supplements or otherwise via an iron-fortified diet.
9. A healthy mid-morning/break time snack should be made available for primary school children (typically wholemeal bread/toast, milk and fruit).
10. Plan to promote take up of the Healthy Start initiative when it reaches Halton.