

Calderdale MBC

Wards Affected All

Cabinet 8th August 2022



‘School Food’ – A Detailed Review by the Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Board

Report of the Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Board

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report presents the detailed review on ‘school food’ undertaken by the Children and Young People’s Scrutiny from November 2021 – June 2022. The report can be found at *Appendix 1* and is submitted to Cabinet for consideration.

2. Need for a decision

- 2.1 *Under Rule 15 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules at Part 4 of the Constitution, Cabinet is required to consider reports from Scrutiny Boards.*

3. Recommendation

- 3.1 Cabinet is asked to consider the recommendations as set out in the Scrutiny Review report, attached at Appendix 1 in its wider context, but are also included here:
- 3.2 **Recommendation 1 - Public Health:** We recommend that the Council’s Public Health service identify the funding and resource allocation to develop a ‘core offer’ around health, nutrition, and wellbeing that addresses local need. This should be acknowledged as a partnership collaboration, with ownership of the outcomes for children and young people being shared. The Public Health offer should be done in co-production with the relevant services, schools/academies, children, and young people. The work should reflect the strategic objectives within the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, to enable full partnership engagement, participation across all services and demonstrate identifiable, measurable outcomes for our children and young people.
- 3.3 **Recommendation 2 – Collaboration:** We recommend that the Calderdale’s schools and academies work together to explore the opportunities of shared resources and options for school meal provision moving forward. There are some fantastic examples of good practice in Calderdale, and we feel this can only be strengthened by sharing this more widely. We feel that local businesses and schools could work together better to ensure schools have access to locally sourced, affordable produce, that not only reduces food miles but enables children and young people to make informed choices about their meals.
- 3.4 **Recommendation 3 – Outcomes:** We acknowledge the information the electronic Health Needs Assessment (eHNA) captures, and we recommend that the Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Board continue to review this

annually for the purposes of children and young people's health and wellbeing. In addition, any measurable data/outcomes from the core offer as part of Healthy Schools, should be available to the Scrutiny Board for scrutiny and assurance purposes.

- 3.5 **Recommendation 4 – Inter-generational Opportunities and Community Engagement/Support:** We recommend that the Council's Adult Services and Wellbeing, Green Spaces and Street Scene Service (Public Services) and Education and Inclusion Service (Children and Young People's Services) work together to re-establish the inter-generational links between schools, care homes and/or allotment owners to share experience and knowledge. There is more work to be done in sharing this information with schools, and also in schools engaging with local community groups to further enable learning, address areas within the curriculum, and ensure that older people, children and young people benefit from the health and wellbeing opportunities that are to be had in working together. This work can be supported by various service areas within the Council, and the Voluntary Sector, but should be re-established and shared throughout the school cluster groups.

4. Background and/or details

- 4.1 The Review Group comprised of: Councillor Diana Tremayne, Councillor Dot Foster, Councillor Sarah Courtney (former Deputy Chair of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Board), and Councillor Colin Raistrick (former Councillor and Chair of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Board).
- 4.2 We undertook this appreciative enquiry through two 'scrutiny in a day' sessions, with additional focused groups and visits to some Calderdale schools and academies. The Council's Public Health service supported the enquiry by engaging schools through two surveys, which helped inform our findings.
- 4.3 The work commenced in November 2021. It was acknowledged that the initial remit was vast and in order to focus this appreciative enquiry, Members focused on the following issues: school food (lunch time provision) and the health outcomes for children and young people, examples of holiday and out of school provision, learning from other areas and pilot schemes, climate implications and plant-based options, public health support and inter-generational opportunities.
- 4.4 On 6th July 2022, the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Board endorsed the report, its findings and recommendations, and recommended this be submitted to Cabinet at the next available meeting, for consideration.

5. Options considered

- 5.1 Not applicable.

6. Financial implications

- 6.1 There are no financial implications to be considered other than those already allocated in the Children and Young People's and Public Health Directorates in order to support Calderdale schools and academies within the Healthy Schools agenda.

7. Legal Implications

- 7.1 Not applicable.

8. Human Resources and Organisation Development Implications

- 8.1 Not applicable.

9. Consultation

- 9.1 As part of any Detailed Review undertaken by Scrutiny, we aim to engage as many relevant services, organisations and partners as possible as part of our evidence-gathering processes. All of this work has been summarised in the main report and its findings, at *Appendix 1*.
- 9.2 We acknowledge there were some gaps within this review – particularly school meal providers and parent governors – purely due to timescales, which we have referenced in the main report. At its meeting on the 6th July 2022, the Children and Young People's (CYP) Scrutiny Board welcomed any additional

comments/input into this work at any time during the 2022/23 municipal year, and this would be shared with the CYP and Public Health Directorates.

- 9.3 We endorse the Public Health aims through the Healthy Schools work to ensure this work is **co-produced** with schools and academies, is **inclusive** for all, encompasses a **sustainable approach**, and **promotes a whole-school approach** in tackling health inequalities and improving outcomes.

10. Environment, Health and Economic Implications

- 10.1 Public Health have been consulted and engaged in all aspects of this detailed review. Much of this work will be underpinned by the Calderdale Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-27.

- 10.2 As a review group, we feel there is more work to be done with schools and academies in tackling the climate emergency in relation to food, and this is referenced within the main report, at *Appendix 1*.

11. Equality and Diversity

- 11.1 Calderdale Council has identified reducing inequalities as a strategic priority, and we are assured that schools/academies and the Council's CYP and Public Health Directorates remain committed and work in partnership to achieve this. We hope that we have reflected the consideration to equality and diversity within the scrutiny review report.

12. Summary and Recommendations

- 12.1 Cabinet is asked to consider the report findings and implementing the recommendations which are set out in *Section 3 – Recommendations* within this report, and also in the attached scrutiny review report at *Appendix 1*.

For further information on this report, contact:

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The documents used in the preparation of this report are:

1. Appendix 1 – Detailed Review on 'School Food' (**attached**)
2. Programme of Scrutiny in a Day and Focus Group sessions, and other supporting documentation (available on request)

The documents are available for inspection at:

Scrutiny@calderdale.gov.uk or Halifax Town Hall, HX1 1UJ (in writing)

APPENDIX 1

School Food – A Scrutiny Detailed Review

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE’S SCRUTINY BOARD

INTRODUCTION

The Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Board decided to undertake a review of food in schools, including school meals, education around nutrition and impacts on climate. Although the local authority does not have decision-making powers over school or academy choices in meal providers, it does take seriously the need for good health and nutrition in children and young people in Calderdale. We realise this is a massive agenda, so for this review - we have initially focused on ‘school food’.

There were some themes throughout this appreciative enquiry one being the significant pressures on schools to deliver good quality, nutritious and affordable school meals. We learned how some of the pressures go well beyond the cooking, facilitating and delivery of food to children and young people in schools. We feel this work has started at a good point in time. The recent [White Paper on ‘Levelling Up’](#), as well as national food standards working together and emphasis on the school day, have all come at a pivotal moment which helps us shine a light on some positive work that can be further developed and shared throughout Calderdale schools and academies.

We started our review thinking that food in schools is important in so many ways:

- Children learn better if they are well fed, so the provision of good quality, nutritious lunches is important.
- We know some children arrive at school hungry. So, we were interested in what strategies schools have in place to address this.
- Some children get well fed during term time because of getting a free school meal but can go hungry in holidays. So, we wanted to know what the Council, the voluntary sector and other agencies are doing about this.
- We wanted to know what opportunities children have to learn about food at school and to grow food at school (and eat it).
- Every service has to think about the consequences for the climate of the way that service is organised. So, we are interested in; schools providing more plant-based meals; food in schools being sourced locally so reducing “food miles”; and how children learn about the impact of food on climate.

We would like to thank all of those people who have been involved in this piece of work, for their hard work and support in our enquiries, for allowing us to visit school settings at a particularly challenging time and for sharing some great examples of how we can continue and develop some of this work throughout all areas of Calderdale.

Councillor Diana Tremayne (Chair)

Councillor Dot Foster

Councillor Sarah Courtney

Councillor Colin Raistrick

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following this detailed review, Members of the Review Group have drawn the conclusions outlined in this report, and the summary of recommendations are listed below:

RECOMMENDATION 1: Public Health

We recommend that the Council's Public Health service identify the funding and resource allocation to develop a 'core offer' around health, nutrition, and wellbeing that addresses local need. This should be acknowledged as a partnership collaboration, with ownership of the outcomes for children and young people being shared. The Public Health offer should be done in co-production with the relevant services, schools/academies, children, and young people. The work should reflect the strategic objectives within the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, to enable full partnership engagement, participation across all services and demonstrate identifiable, measurable outcomes for our children and young people.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Collaboration

We recommend that the Calderdale's schools and academies work together to explore the opportunities of shared resources and options for school meal provision moving forward. There are some fantastic examples of good practice in Calderdale, and we feel this can only be strengthened by sharing this more widely. We feel that local businesses and schools could work together better to ensure schools have access to locally sourced, affordable produce, that not only reduces food miles but enables children and young people to make informed choices about their meals.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Outcomes

We acknowledge the information the electronic Health Needs Assessment (eHNA) captures, and we recommend that the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Board continue to review this annually for the purposes of children and young people's health and wellbeing. In addition, any measurable data/outcomes from the core offer as part of Healthy Schools, should be available to the Scrutiny Board for scrutiny and assurance purposes.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Inter-generational Opportunities and Community Engagement/Support

We recommend that the Council's Adult Services and Wellbeing, Green Spaces and Street Scene Service (Public Services) and Education and Inclusion Service (Children and Young People's Services) work together to re-establish the inter-generational links between schools, care homes and/or allotment owners to share experience and knowledge. There is more work to be done in sharing this information with schools, and also in schools engaging with local community groups to further enable learning, address areas within the curriculum, and ensure that older people, children and young people benefit from the health and wellbeing opportunities that are to be had in working together. This work can be supported by various service areas within the Council, and the Voluntary Sector, but should be re-established and shared throughout the school cluster groups.

FINDINGS

To carry out this scrutiny review, we used an ‘appreciative enquiry’ approach through a number of different methods, with the view that positive work and learning opportunities could be shared across a number of different schools/academies, and organisations involved in food in schools. Our initial ‘scrutiny in a day’ session involved the Council’s Public Health and Education and Inclusion Teams, as well as two Headteachers and school representatives. The Cabinet Members for Public Health (PH) and Inequalities, Climate Change and Environment, and Children and Young People’s Services (CYPS) were all involved. In addition, we held focus groups with Council Services including CYPS, PH, Green Spaces and Street Scene (Public Services) and Adult Services and Wellbeing.

The second ‘scrutiny in a day’ session allowed us to learn from a partner local authority (Leeds City Council), who are operating a very different model to Calderdale. We also learned more about the ‘Healthy Holidays’ programme delivered by Calderdale Council and discussed in more detail what further developments and support mechanisms might be implemented in Calderdale to enable short, and longer-term planning around nutrition, climate and wider health and wellbeing.

We accept there are a few gaps in some of this work – such as engagement of school meal providers (external organisations) and meeting with parent governors, which could have been explored further, however we felt the importance of this enquiry was to ‘shine a light’ on some of the good work that is being undertaken throughout the borough, and use some of this to inform, develop and expand the wider provision. We have visited some schools and academies which has given us a great insight into some of the work that is taking place, and we welcomed the feedback which has been gathered through the survey Public Health have undertaken as part of this work.

We acknowledge that ‘school meals’ are a small part of this picture, but for many families this is a crucial part of the school day, and a vital part of children and young people’s day, which became more evident through the Covid-19 pandemic. It is clear that many of our questions cannot be resolved overnight as there are extensive challenges and pressures across the system. It is, however, a positive time to re-imagine and re-start some of the work already being done, especially in terms of the Council’s support to schools, and the opportunities for schools and academies to work collectively – and there are already some real strengths and opportunities which can be built upon.

This work also needs to be right for Calderdale. What we mean by this is ensuring it is designed alongside Calderdale schools and Calderdale families. Whilst we fully appreciate learning from other areas, we acknowledge that Calderdale is distinctive, and for our schools especially, our topography provides a challenge for early years settings, schools and academies that provide a very different picture to some of our neighbouring authorities.

From the evidence-gathering we undertook, it felt to us that, since the pandemic, there is more willingness to co-operate, work collaboratively and co-produce amongst organisations and tapping into the community. It feels like an ideal time to build on this in relation to food and the cost-of-living crisis.

Schools and Academies in Calderdale

In highlighting some of the challenges for schools, this has given us perspective on the strengths, as well as opportunities to share learning across the piece. It is important to note that this is fundamentally about children and young people receiving the right, nutritious food to enable them in 'starting well' and 'developing well' (see [Calderdale's Wellbeing Strategy](#)), and in receiving a positive education that enables them to be informed about nutrition, food and climate change beyond their school years.



We have heard that there are lots of examples of good and innovative work taking place in early years settings around food, including mealtimes, growing and learning, cooking and eating together. The focus of this work has purely been schools and academies (primary and secondary) for the purposes of capacity and resource.

At each of our sessions we heard about the challenges faced by schools. This is not just as simple as the pressures in providing nutritious and good quality food, but goes well beyond to staffing, cooking facilities, the cost of meals and produce, time allocation, parental and child choice, and so much more. The key significant challenge across Calderdale is that school meals are not provided centrally (as the service ceased some years ago) and the provision for facilitating school-based meals is inconsistent due to the settings and buildings our schools operate within, for example, some do not have the space for kitchens or in-house catering provision.

The Children and Young People's Scrutiny Board have heard first-hand about the impacts that climate change is having on young people. A report in February 2022 from the Youth Council reflected the anxieties that young people have due to their increased concern about the world we live in, and the passionate call for action that has been so well-represented across the country and, indeed, globally. For some children and young people, there are examples of poor or non-existent plant-based options in schools and academies, as well as the concerns over waste and food miles.

The Covid-19 pandemic has enabled a focus on school meals, which has also been highlighted nationally, particularly in terms of families who are in additional need of support and access to food. Schools have carried out extensive work, especially throughout the pandemic, to enable

families to access breakfast clubs, holiday schemes, access to food provision and providing meals during the lockdown periods.

In addition to the provision of school meals, education about food and nutrition is a key part of the curriculum and we understand that this is picked up through Science and Design Technology (DT) in schools/academies, however it is fair to say that this is a varied picture from school to school.

We felt that time was an issue throughout our enquiry. The commitments of school timetables and pressure of delivery of lessons is evident. For some Calderdale schools/academies, there are challenges with capacity in feeding young people in school canteens etc. For other settings, behaviour management can be a factor in managing school mealtimes effectively. Whilst socialising is an important factor of the school day, lessons properly take priority, which means that any development of strategies or additional support provision needs to be done with education in mind, and work should be undertaken with students to ensure there is no disconnect between the two. We learned from secondary students how the school day does not allow for a long enough lunchtime, dictating how students choose to take their meals into school rather than eating some of the meal choices provided by schools/academies. In addition, some of the food we saw was very much 'on the go' quickly prepared meals, which might not always be the most filling or nutritious for school-age children.

In addition to the pressures that we have seen locally, it is clear that national implications have changed this review whilst we were undertaking it – for example, post-pandemic pressures and requirements on schools, cost inflation in terms of demand and supply of produce and contracts, delivery issues and recruitment and retention of staff. The recent White Paper, ['Opportunity for all: Strong schools with great teachers for your child'](#) also outlines some of the significant changes to school hours and lunches, which will continue to impact some of this work as it progresses. We are keen to see schools, academies, Calderdale Council and other partner organisations work collectively as this policy is put into practice to ensure that it benefits our children, young people (and their families) in the most positive ways.

The Children and Young People's Scrutiny Board have heard first-hand about the positive working relationships between the Council and schools and academies, which have been strengthened in the last two years of addressing the pandemic, with all parties working together more closely and collaboratively and so, enabling the Council to support schools through its public health and outcomes-based data. We are confident that this work will be another example of this good practice, and the strengthened relationships can in-turn only benefit children and young people through all aspects of food, health and nutrition.

We feel that the recommendations we have made need to be created in partnership with settings, schools, and academies to achieve the best for Calderdale's children and young people. This work needs a holistic approach with an opportunity to celebrate what is working well and support areas where there is more to be done.

In our initial session, we spoke with a couple of Headteachers/school representatives about how their school settings operate. In some primary settings in particular, there is no or limited kitchen provision. In some cases, there is also limited control over what is served. For others there are good options in terms of vegetarian, halal and varied menus. However, there are some issues around allergies which need to be managed between school and parents that can be complicated – often with little say over out-sourced provision, resulting in families opting to provide packed lunches for their children. Covid-19 has impacted schools in many ways, with some primary schools having missed the 'family model' which encourages younger and older children to eat together and bringing parents/grandparents into school on themed days to encourage the take-up of school meals. During the midst of the pandemic, 'bubbles' created significant pressures within primary and secondary phases, and it is positive to see the return to normal mealtimes for staff in schools. One of the secondary schools we visited had to resort to 3 separate serving spaces, whereas prior to the pandemic there were 2, some of the time, which impacted significantly on staffing and cost. In addition, we

anticipate the cost-of-living crisis to impact both school meal providers and families who currently provide lunches for their children, and this is not something that should go unnoticed when developing recommendations or learning out of this review.

Terminology and allowing children and young people to make choices is fundamental to any work around school food being a success. There are many factors that encourage good health, nutrition, exercise, and body positivity – and we feel that schools should (and already do) play a key part in this role.

Some schools/academies (with the provision to self-cater) provide fruit and salad bars which have often been well-received and used in most cases. In terms of the curriculum, we heard from Primary schools who used [‘Phunky Foods’](#) – a ‘healthy lifestyle curriculum activities’ resource. There are a lot of materials that are accessible not just to schools, but also to families which has encouraged more engagement and interest in cooking meals and eating together. Across all key stages, there has been a change in terminology from ‘baking’ to ‘cooking’ in technology classes, which helps to promote healthier and more varied choices in educating children and young people in nutrition and a balanced diet. This encourages children and young people to learn and prepare meals such as soups, salads, some baking and healthier variations of ‘fun’ meals.

We were particularly surprised to hear how some schools have the added challenge of chasing parents for unpaid school meals. This debt collection has occasionally resulted in court proceedings, as well as placing additional pressures on schools in terms of administration, finance, and moral values - in continuing to provide meals for children despite the fact that their parents have not paid for the meals. The view of one school was that in some cases this was often parents who “will not pay, rather than those who do not pay”.

We heard that there has been changes to legislation in ‘growing your own’. This has proved problematic for some schools in terms of buying and maintaining raised beds, greenhouses and other allotment-type provision for children to access and study. This has made a previously fun and engaging task more challenging for schools/academies in terms of monitoring and meeting standards; meaning some schools simply do not have the additional time or capacity to carry out these tasks, or in some cases – the site in which to offer this type of learning due to land restrictions. Calderdale Council’s Green Spaces and Street Scene service remain committed to the inspection of maintained allotments and were involved in the inter-generational aspect of this review.

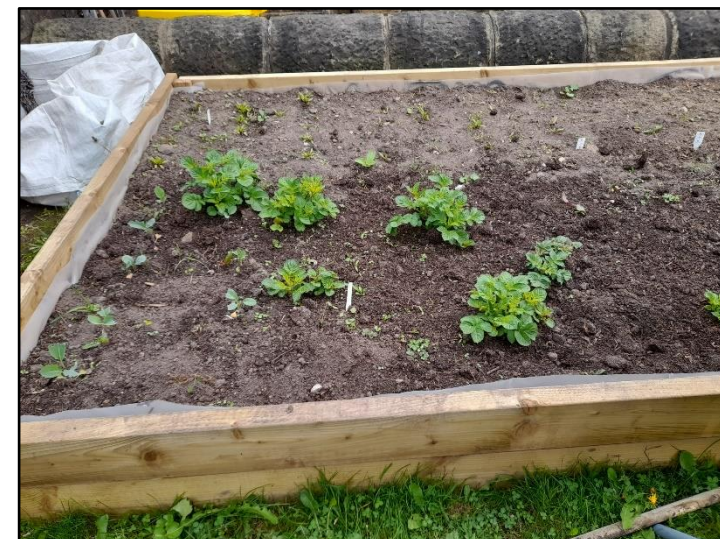
In some academies (operating across primaries and secondaries) there are substantial differences. Secondary offers a much more ‘grab and go’ format for school lunches, with many primaries emphasising the need to sit, eat and socialise as part of the structured school day. In some schools, vegan options are now available, and promoted a few times a week as the main options. Some schools are able to offer additional provision such as community-based cooking and growing provision, community kitchens and support for shopping/being able to access food, and we have seen first-hand examples of this working successfully. We feel there are real opportunities for schools and academies to work in their cluster groups to be able to share and access this provision more widely, so that it is not such a varied picture from school to school, and we would endorse more collaborative partnership-working where the opportunities may arise.

As with many areas, the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the food inequality issue in Calderdale, so for some schools and academies, ensuring families were able to access food or shopping was essential. There are some fantastic examples of work in certain areas, and it would be great if some of these schemes and methods could be rolled out wider to the communities, and schools in particular. For example, for some schools in Central Halifax there are already well-established partnerships between organisations such as Halifax Opportunities Trust (The Outback) that enable families to access community-based cooking and growing provision, but it would be great to replicate this offer and share out wider to other schools and academies.

Inter-generational opportunities and partnership working

There have been some really good initiatives around 'growing your own' ingredients and using them in community kitchens, as well as allowing families to use surplus produce. In some areas we saw some first-hand experiences of good partnership working and signposting to other services, however we feel this could be further developed and extended to other school/academies, especially where there is access to allotments and education in food. For example, partnering local primary schools with secondary academies etc.

We heard from schools that whilst supporting families is essential in some areas, there is also a need to break the dependency cycle and encourage families to learn and support themselves, for example: accessing community provision, cooking skills, enabling families to make affordable choices etc. And some schools/academies have made a real success out of this both during and post-pandemic. There have been real benefits in bringing students, families and staff together to cook and eat as part of a wider community kitchen, and these instances should be celebrated and shared more widely.



"The smells were incredible, the atmosphere in the kitchen was brilliant: busy, purposeful, and the volunteers and staff were having fun and really enjoying their work. A wonderful model of community action."

- Councillors Visit to Community Kitchen

Calderdale has a strong allotment society, and we are keen to further explore how we capitalise on this for the benefit of children, young people and their families. There should be opportunities for all schools, academies, and early years settings across Calderdale to access provision, learn and try 'growing their own' produce, however we acknowledge that the current position in terms of demand for allotments is significantly high, and the service are looking to maximise the use of raised beds or other options wherever possible. Calderdale Council's Green Spaces

and Street Scene service remain committed to the self-maintenance, development and inspection of allotments and raised bed provision, and welcome thoughts from schools/academies on how this can be better supported where there is appetite for this work.



There are real opportunities and obvious benefits in cross-generational working with adults and children or young people. Where schools do not own their allotments, we feel there should be capacity to bring together experienced allotment owners and students so they can share experiences and support one another in growing and eating food. Not only does this assist with education and nutrition, but also promotes the need for locally sourced and locally-grown produce in addressing the climate emergency we are committed to as a Council, (and continue to encourage our partners to engage with). We heard about some fantastic work between schools and care home settings in Calderdale pre-pandemic, which had real health and wellbeing benefits for young children and older people. We heard from the Council's Adult Services and Wellbeing Directorate, as well as Children and Young People's Education and Inclusion Teams and there is scope to re-establish those links already made prior to the pandemic, as well as opportunity to share this more widely to schools/academies who had either not previously engaged or had the opportunity to take up this offer. For obvious reasons (post-pandemic) this will take some careful planning, but it is already starting to take place with enquiries between the care

home and school settings beginning again.

As mentioned previously in this report, we heard that some of the guidance around allotment maintenance and legislation in growing fruits and vegetables puts additional pressure on staff, which has steered some primaries away from owning their own. The Green Spaces and Street Scene service advised that there is a need to inspect cultivation sites, and potentially room to establish links with experienced allotment owners/users which might help to address some issues such as the general maintenance of schools having their own plot, those on waiting lists, etc.

In addition to the use and engagement of allotments, there are other community groups such as Incredible Edible, The Paddock who provide similar experiences. We feel that schools and academies could be better connected to these green spaces across Calderdale, which would not only support children and young people in their learning such as PSHE and Science, support their wellbeing, mental and physical health, but also allow students to give something back to their local communities. We need to consider how we connect schools and the voluntary sector better – in order to share intelligence, not just within the local community, but school-to-school, within the 'school cluster' groups and for families.

As with all of this work, we feel the best way to continue and improve these initiatives, is to work closely with schools to ensure it fits into the school programme, but also to address some learning and generational gaps within families. We need to consider how we do this in more detail, but engagement and addressing gaps is fundamental.

"In one of the schools, we saw lots of wider community engagement. They have regular forum-type meetings which connect Councillors, Police, Primary Schools, parents and others, and a big open event each Summer."

- Councillors Visit to Secondary School

Climate Change and plant-based options

Schools need to be better connected within the area they operate ('cluster groups'). There should be opportunities to discuss the school meal 'offer' collectively, and in doing so, reduce the dependency on out-sourced provision that frequently increases cost, food miles, delivery and waste. There are great examples of schools who produce quality and nutritious meals for children and young people on-site, and who might be able to offer this more widely. This would mean better inter-school support. This would mean locally sourced produce, from locally sourced businesses, at affordable and competitive prices for our schools, and our young people.

There should be opportunities for children and young people to engage in the decision-making process of where school meals come from and what choices they have on a wide range of meals, including: vegetarian/vegan/plant-based options wherever possible. This should not be seen as an 'add-on' to existing schools offer, but part of the everyday commissioning and food choices organisations make for the next generation, who are so actively committed to climate change.

We heard how there might be more opportunities for match or partnership-funding, and this is something that Cabinet might wish to consider in more detail, as well as opportunities to utilise local businesses and support the local economy. There are fantastic examples to learn from throughout Calderdale from local community and voluntary organisations such as Incredible Edible, The Outback, and pilot schemes in schools'; as well as considering economies of scale, cooking seasonally, and growing and supplying locally.

There are elements of this work that will help to address some of the Cabinet's priorities such as reducing inequalities, building strong and resilient towns, and addressing the climate emergency, but we feel there is more to be done at 'ground level' to show how this work is making a difference, especially for the next generation – and this cannot be done in isolation. It requires all partners and organisations to make a collective effort in addressing real change.

Public Health

We heard from Public Health about the range of support that has been made available to schools previously, and what the 'core offer' might look like moving forward. There is real opportunity to 'reset' some of this work post-pandemic in terms of the public health offer and a need to identify what would be most useful to schools and in driving health and wellbeing improvement for children and young people.

We heard how some schools/academies in Calderdale previously had the option to participate in the 'Food4Life' scheme, however, some felt they were unable to engage with this scheme as just accessing the 'Bronze Award Level' was a significant challenge for those settings who were reliant on the out-sourcing or transport-in of their school meals. In addition, schools and academies have control over the food they provide, and the ways they deliver the curriculum. Public Health remain committed to providing a 'core offer' to schools that is focused around the health outcomes for children and young people, which are clearly outlined in the [Council's Wellbeing Strategy](#), which has been shared widely with partners across Calderdale. We heard how in some cases, it is not necessarily about having the choices with nutrition or healthy meals, but sometimes in behaviours, and there is more work to be done in understanding these and what underpins these to be able to better support people.

As part of our enquiry, the Public Health Service helped us to carry out a survey with schools/academies looking at the 'mapping' of school meal providers (for example, schools who provide lunches for other schools), as well as some shared experiences. Some of the challenges raised, such as the rising cost in food, space to support school mealtimes, socialising and time constraints, were repeat issues we experienced throughout our enquiry. Some areas, such as staff being knowledgeable about climate/environmental impacts of food, and considering environmentally-friendly menu options, were just some of the areas that had not previously been considered, but this enquiry had helped to highlight as issues.

Health promotion has always been a key part of the core Public Health offer, and we heard from the service who were keen to not just engage organisations, but also children and young people to ensure this work is educational and fun-led, to ensure maximum engagement. The 'core offer' from Public Health needs to be co-produced with schools, and 'in tune' with the needs of Calderdale children, young people and their families. Throughout our findings, we emphasised the need for things to be developed in partnership with early years setting, schools and academies to enable everyone to achieve their best for children and young people; and a holistic approach to this – with opportunities to celebrate what is working well and support for areas where there is more work to be done – is fundamental to its success.

This offer of support is not currently a conversation with schools/academies, but one that needs to be done soon. The provision and nutrition of school meals can be part of the wider conversations around this, including the school day and increased hours of delivery (national guidance) and, there are some aspirational opportunities in terms of the formal offer of support that could be delivered through the Council's Public Health Team that would be distinctive and relevant to Calderdale and the needs and outcomes of the children and young people in our care.

We heard that there is a small allocation of funding which will be used to support schools, and how this is done is yet to be determined – we propose that a dedicated or lead officer, and utilising the learning from some pilot schemes, which could subsequently be rolled out more widely, would be beneficial. This role and service would not only help to shape the needs and support for schools/academies, connect them to work more locally and collaboratively, but most importantly – improve the health and learning outcomes for Calderdale children and young people, with measurable data to evidence this.

It is crucial that we introduce the improved Public Health offer to schools at the right time, with a tiered approach (to meet the different needs of different schools) and measures in place to address and meet local needs, whilst not overwhelming schools with their already extensive

demands. The support Public Health provide needs to compliment the schools' assurance schemes so that their outcomes are measurable against both Ofsted Inspections and other relevant frameworks, so that this works for Health and Education services. The electronic-Health Needs Assessment (eHNA) and other measurable health data will also support in maintaining good outcomes for children and young people and evidencing this in a way that provides a clear and accurate picture of where we are at.

"There is a real opportunity in coming out of the pandemic and through the 'levelling up' agenda. The time is now!"

We heard how there would be real benefits in bringing together School Cooks and Caterers as a networking opportunity more regularly, which we feel is a great idea, promoting collaboration and sharing of best practice – this would build upon what already exists and makes this more sustainable as a Calderdale model, however, we are concerned that this will exclude those schools/academies who do not have their own 'in-house' provision, and this needs to be considered further.

Although much of the work that is done is dependent on initiatives outside school, such as educating families and healthy living, there are other elements that schools can support families with such as cooking healthy meals on a budget etc. We also need to consider some of the smaller or system-change impacts we can have as a Council, for example: Planning Services and schools/academies have been working together to ensure they are not located in close proximity to takeaways, or not permitting students to leave school during the day etc. There are many factors that require collaborative work to enable this, and much of the Public Health offer is underpinned by Calderdale's Health and Wellbeing Strategy, which has been developed with partners and should continue to be seen as a collective responsibility.

In addition to the core offer from Public Health, there are opportunities to evaluate some pilot schemes and focused pieces of work, to get more schools/academies on-board and where positive work has made a significant contribution and impact - share the best practice and maximise the use of resources that come out of this. We feel that some of this work can be used to inform future services and pilots, and we feel it is appropriate to ask Public Health and Children and Young People's Services to determine the funding, resource and service that might be allocated for this co-production with education settings to commence.

Learning from other areas

As part of our work, we heard from Leeds City Council – whose model is very different to that in Calderdale. The majority of school meals are prepared 'in-house' by the Council's Catering Team and there is lots of communication between schools and the Council's Public Health service around nutritional choices for school menus, education and engagement of schools and families. The service is fortunate in that it has retained much of its resource, whereas other local authorities had to cut these services some time ago, but it is clear that this service is hugely valued in Leeds, and this provides the Council with influence over many of its schools throughout the city. It is fair to say that engagement amongst schools is good, with academies being less, although more are coming on-board due to the offer.

There are some fantastic examples of marketing and communication. We heard first-hand from a Scrutiny Councillor and Food Champion of the extensive work that has been undertaken with schools and businesses within the city around sustainability, climate and health. It is clear that Leeds is passionate about this service they provide, and they are beginning to see the positive impacts of this.

The Leeds model is something Calderdale's Public Health service have previously explored in more detail; however, we are mindful that Calderdale is starting from a different position in terms of the limited resources and structure. It was felt that this is too big for Calderdale to adopt, and what many Calderdale schools have asked for, is a 'halfway house' where there is perhaps a standard offer around healthy schools, with co-production between Public Health services and schools. That said, some of the lessons learned from Leeds in terms of different methods of engagement and support, and data collection or outcomes, significantly supported the findings of our appreciative enquiry.

Provision out of school times

Calderdale has a well-established 'Healthy Holidays' programme which has been operating for some time. This work has been undertaken for a number of years in Calderdale and feels to be in a very positive place. There are restrictions around some of the funding, for example, not being allowed to use some of the funding for half terms etc. but there is fantastic support and opportunities, and the healthy meal provision is extremely positive.

There is a mixed picture in terms of engagement. Part of this has been the impact of the pandemic, with some issues for schools who would have previously engaged but have not recently. The service has gained some feedback on this, and there are issues around recruitment and retention as well as feedback from School Leaders of morale being at an all-time low and asking people to take on more work on top of their roles not being possible currently. There are very positive relationships between the service and schools who are making the most of 'Healthy Holidays' provision for their children and families, and we heard some of the experiences and feedback of parents and carers.



We learned that there is currently a lack of provision for those children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities, and equality of access, due to find suitable provision and familiar adults who are able to support the medical needs for some children. Officers have met with families (through the 'Healthy Holidays' Steering Group) to better understand the needs for children and young people and what can be done to address this. There is ongoing work around the provision and harder to reach groups who are in need of support, and we are keen to hear the final outcomes of this work.

We discussed free school meals at length, and we feel that Calderdale is good at ensuring take-up and promoting this within Council services.



We acknowledge that there is a need to support families now how might not meet the eligibility criteria for free school meals but might need to access additional activities and support. There is more work to be done between schools and Council services to address this need, especially as the extent of the cost-of-living crisis unfolds.

There are great examples where schools are able to 'tap in' to the wider community or be the main 'hub' or provision of community kitchens. This kind of resource has been hugely valued by families throughout the pandemic, but also continue as a real strength and opportunity to bring staff, children and young people and members of the wider community together out of school times.

In summary...

We feel this work has helped to shine a light on some of the key issues we have highlighted within this report. Whilst we feel to have only 'scratched the surface' on some of the specific detail and it has highlighted to us the complication involved in 'school food', it is clear there are some real strengths and opportunities that can be shared, learned from and developed further to benefit children and young people.

There are important aspects of this work that can be influenced by organisations and developed more widely by schools and academies working more collaboratively together, especially within 'cluster groups' wherever possible, to mitigate the cost and resource implications that are being faced. The commitment, and partnership-working with the Council and other organisations, we hope, will support the education of health, wellbeing and promote sustainability more widely.

In an ideal world, being able to locally source, cost-effective and nutritionally balanced produce, with a reduction in food miles, and more varied meal choices for children and young people in school settings, would be the ultimate goal - however we acknowledge the significant challenges

that schools/academies are facing at this time. We trust that the Council will work with schools and academies to develop a co-produced public health offer, in addition to accessing the available support from the community and voluntary sector. Where we are able to support in 'joining up' these services as a Council, we should maximise these opportunities.

And finally, we are assured that schools and academies in Calderdale remain committed to the health, wellbeing and development of children and young people (both during the school day and outside of school hours) and will work collaboratively within the initiatives that will come from these recommendations, and Calderdale's Wellbeing Strategy, which underpins all of the work we do.

"One of these [photos] shows the freshly made (delicious) lunch made in the Primary kitchen. The other [photos] are of the volunteers in the 'Community Kitchen', preparing around 300 meals for collection by parents and staff, (pay as you feel) that afternoon. Most of the food had been donated, which (I think they said) would have cost around £50 to make."

- Councillor Visit to Community Kitchen and Primary School

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