

County Council – 15 December 2023

Item 10(b) – Notice of Motion from Cllr Duncton on Food Security

Briefing Note

Background

Currently, the County Council provides a blend of provision, dependant on the service required. The Council's catering services either directly or indirectly provided by the Council provide more than five million meals each year, mostly in schools and through meals on wheels.

West Sussex economic impact

The Council's catering services contribute significantly to the local economy by employing around 750 local people to deliver its in-house and commissioned services, across more than 200 sites throughout the county. Wherever possible local supply chain is incorporated into the offer. In the Council's directly provided Special School meals service all meat is sourced from Solent Butchers and fruit and vegetables from Munneries (East Wittering). Where local supply is not possible the Council encourages use of UK produce. These requirements are written into all our contracts. West Sussex is also a Fair-Trade County and the use of Fair-Trade produce is also encouraged in all catering services.

Plant-based meals

The Council is focused on ensuring that all its outlets that serve food, both in-house and sub-contracted, provide a balanced offer of meat, fish, and plant-based foods. The need for a balanced food offer is written into the Council's contractual, and or direct service arrangements, and is monitored by the Council as part of its contract management and operational service functions.

The Council is investigating opportunities surrounding the food it serves alongside its strategy to be carbon net zero by 2030. Our commissioned providers are working hard to contribute to these. This includes ensuring minimising food waste; that UK foods are used wherever possible to reduce food miles and support UK growers and that customers are better informed about the food on offer. One example is for school meals allowing parents to choose the meal and remove estimation and unnecessary food waste.

The Council has supported the work of the [Eat Them to Defeat Them](#) campaign aimed at encouraging children to eat more vegetables, as part of a balanced and healthy diet, and will again in 2024. We have also worked with schools via our service provider to highlight the importance of [bees](#) in pollinating our crops, and will do again in 2024.

Meat and fish-based meals

The Council catering service believes in providing all customers with choice. We conduct annual surveys of customers to understand what people want from the service. All new dishes need to pass through a customer tasting and development process, to ensure feedback is captured. Provision of plant-based foods and meat and fish is a requirement of contractual specifications. The [School Food Standards](#) 2014 stipulate that a portion of meat or poultry must be available on three or more

days each week on every school meal menu. Currently, all our school meal menus are based around the principle of a 'meat free Monday' and a 'fish only Friday', with Tuesday to Thursday featuring meat and poultry options. This has become very standard across the industry in support of encouraging a healthy and balanced sustainable diet.

Key contracts and services serving meals

Chartwells – approximately 180 schools provided with hot meals via the innovative Steamplcity model. This contract was let in 2016 and runs until end July 2026. [Video](#) giving an overview of the model. [Sample menu \(PDF, 291KB\)](#). Employs around 650 local people and serves around 23,000 meals each school day.

Easy Lunch – eight schools in the Horsham area without their own kitchens are provided with hot meals via a delivered hot meals model. This contract was let in 2016 and runs until end July 2026. Menus and company history are available on the company [website](#). This is a local (Horsham) run SME business we have worked with and developed since around 2010.

Health and Independent Living Support (HILS) - Took over the Meals on Wheels service October 2022, contract runs until October 2027, with a potential extension to 2029. Provides around 180,000 meals a year across the county to elderly and vulnerable clients, including safe and well checks, a preventative service as well as a meals service. Also provides meals to the Council's Day Centres. The service employs around 30 local staff, operating from local premises. Further information is available on their [website](#).

County Catering Services – Operating as in-house Council service providing meals for 11 maintained special needs schools, serving around 1,000 meals each school day, based within the Communities Directorate. A cook from scratch model, the service employs around 40 local staff. Recently awarded the LACA (School Meals People) Business of the Year 2022 award, and the Footprint Sustainability Public Sector 2023 award for its meal services. [Sample menu \(PDF, 2MB\)](#).

Summary

The Council has a key role to play in providing meals served in schools, day centres, children's homes and in its Meals on Wheels service. In many of these services there are national standards that must be adhered to, such as The School Food Standards, 2014 and The National Association of Care Catering standards for Meals on Wheels. The Council ensures that these are continually met and monitored for compliance. The standards ensure that a varied diet is catered for. Provision is also made for special diets for medical requirements, and for lifestyle and faith reasons. Every day there are two to three meal options for children in schools, across the 190-day academic year. Meals on Wheels residents, some of whom are on a 365-day service, are able to choose from five main meal options daily. We seek to ensure that all people, regardless of their individual circumstances or need, can access a safe, nutritious, and varied meals service.

Lee Harris

Director of Place Services