



CABINET – 9TH FEBRUARY 2024

REVIEW OF THE WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH TO FOOD AND NUTRITION PROGRAMME – OUTCOME OF ENGAGEMENT AND PROPOSED NEW MODEL

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH

PART A

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to advise the Cabinet of the outcome of the engagement exercise on the proposed delivery model of the Whole School Approach to Food and Nutrition (WSAF&N) Programme. The report seeks approval to decommission the existing service and implement a new support model providing targeted support to primary schools with the greatest need.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that:
 - a) The feedback from the engagement exercise on the proposed delivery model for the Whole School Approach to Food and Nutrition Programme in Leicestershire primary schools be noted;
 - b) The new model for the Whole School Approach to Food and Nutrition Programme, to include targeted support for schools most in need and a universal offer for all primary schools in the County, be approved.

Reasons for Recommendation

3. The current contract for the provision of the WSAF&N Programme ends on 31 May 2024.
4. The Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2023/24 – 2026/27 included a requirement for savings via a review of the WSAF&N.
5. The proposed new model is based on a review of need, the County Council's responsibilities, and the responses to the engagement exercise.

Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)

6. An engagement exercise took place from 4 October 2023 to 21 November 2023 to seek views on the proposed new model and make appropriate variations where required.
7. The Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the proposal as part of the engagement process at its meeting on 1 November 2023 and its comments are set out in Part B of this report.
8. The existing contract for the service ends on 31 May 2024. Subject to approval by the Cabinet, the process of procuring a provider to deliver the new service model will begin as soon as practicable, with a view to it being in place from 1 June 2024.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

9. The proposal is informed by the Healthy Weight Strategy for Leicestershire – supporting settings to prevent obesity and increase healthy weight in adults, children and families.
10. The proposal is aligned with the following policy frameworks:
 - a. Public Health Strategy “Delivering good health and prevention services 2022-2027
 - b. The Leicestershire Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2032 “Staying Healthy, Safe and Well”, and
 - c. the County Council’s Strategic Plan 2022-26, in particular the outcomes of
 - i. Keeping people safe and well: ensuring that people are safe and protected from harm, live in a healthy environment and have the opportunities and support they need to live active, independent and fulfilling lives.
 - ii. Improved opportunities: ensuring that all children and young people get the best start for life and have the opportunities they need to fulfil their potential, regardless of their circumstances
11. The Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023/24 – 2026/27 (agreed by the Council on 22 February 2023) included a target of saving £150,000 by 2024/25 through a review of the WSAF&N Programme.

Resource Implications

12. The proposal will achieve the agreed MTFS savings requirement of £150,000 per annum (savings reference PH9 SR).
13. The new support model for the WSAF&N Programme will cost £70,000 per annum and funding for this has been identified from the food and nutrition budget of the Public Health Grant for 2024/25 and 2025/26.
14. The Director of Corporate Resources and the Director of Law and Governance have been consulted on the content of this report.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

15. None.

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PART B

Background

16. The WSAF&N Programme, known locally by schools as the food for life programme is provided for the Council by Soil Association. The contract value is £150,000 per annum and ends on 31 May 2024.
17. The current offer provides face-to-face and online support and training to all primary schools in Leicestershire to achieve the food for life bronze, silver, and gold award packages. These awards are centred around four areas of development:
 - Food Quality
 - Food Leadership and Food Culture
 - Food Education
 - Community and partnerships.
18. The aim of the Programme is to:
 - adopt a supportive healthy food culture, from sourcing fresh sustainable food to creating opportunities for social contact through food
 - build confidence in children and their families in developing good food choices and maintaining a healthier lifestyle.
 - reflect food nutrition and healthy eating in everyday life in a school setting
 - reach out beyond the school gates into the community with activities such as gardening becoming part of the school curriculum.
19. The WSAF&N Programme contributes towards the public health priority of reducing obesity in children through education on food and nutrition, as well as contributing to the County Council's statutory responsibility to improve the health of people living in Leicestershire.
20. The Healthy Weight Strategy for Leicestershire includes a priority to support settings to prevent obesity and increase healthy weight. The WSAF&N Programme also contributes towards this.
21. The 2023 Annual Report of the Director of Public Health highlighted the importance of lifestyle behaviours on keeping people healthy, with a recommendation for the Council's Public Health Department to do further work locally on diet and nutrition.
22. Of a total of 231 primary schools in the County, less than half (103 schools) are currently signed up to the Programme with:
 - 76 having achieved or working towards the bronze award
 - 22 having achieved or working towards the silver award
 - 5 having achieved or working towards the gold award.
23. Of the 20 schools with the highest levels of obesity (identified through the National Child Measurement Programme), only 50% (10 schools) are signed up to the programme.

Proposals

24. Based on a review of existing service provision, review of need, the Council's responsibilities, and the requirement for savings, it is proposed to decommission the existing service and commission a new service which will provide targeted face-to-face support to those primary schools with the highest levels of obesity, alongside access to a universal offer (online support and access to training) for all other primary schools in the County.
25. By decommissioning the existing service, the MTFs savings target of £150,000 will be realised. Provision of the new support model will be funded through the existing food and nutrition budget of the Public Health Grant.

Engagement

26. The engagement exercise took place from 4th October 2023 to 21st November 2023 to seek views on the proposed model. The engagement comprised an online survey with supporting information and an interactive social pinpoint site. All primary schools were sent an initial letter and follow up reminder emails to encourage responses to the survey. As part of the supporting information, an email address was provided to enable schools to ask questions about the proposals.
27. In addition, an online information session was held with the current provider - the Soil Association - and feedback was sought from the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee and members of the Children and Family Partnership, made up of senior leaders from key agencies across Leicestershire that work with children, young people, and their families.
28. The survey asked for views on:
 - Awareness of the current Programme
 - Impact of the proposal on schools
 - How much of a priority the Programme is for schools
 - Alternative suggestions to the Council's proposal.

Feedback from the engagement

29. Detailed feedback is attached to this report as Appendix A and a summary is given below.
30. Of the 231 primary schools in the County, 17 responded to the survey. Of those, 3 schools submitted two responses each with different answers, and therefore, a total of 20 responses were received.
31. Schools were asked to indicate if they were currently participating in the Programme: 2 indicated that they were working towards bronze level award, 4 were working towards silver level award, and 5 were working towards a gold level award. 1 school responded stating that they did not know which level of award their school was working towards and 5 did not respond to this question.
32. A total of 19 (95%) respondents indicated that they had heard of the Programme.

33. When asked about the impact of WSAF&N on their school, 14 responses were received, all of which indicated that it has had a positive impact on their school particularly with regards to making healthier choices and improving parental engagement.
34. When asked whether the Programme was a high priority for the school, 20 responses were received. Of these, 75% indicated that WSAF&N was a high priority with reasons for this including supporting children to make healthy choices, supporting the curriculum, and taking a preventative approach to obesity and malnutrition.
35. Regarding the proposed new service model, 20 responses were received, 50% of which agreed with the proposal, 35% disagreed, and 15% neither agreed nor disagreed. In supporting the proposal, schools acknowledged the need to prioritise schools with highest need. Where schools disagreed with the proposal, the main concern was the loss of face-to-face support and the subsequent impact this might have on their capacity to deliver the Programme.
36. Respondents were asked to provide alternative suggestions as to how the Programme could be delivered. Although no specific proposals were made by schools, key comments are described below:
- A desire to keeping the model as it is.
 - Benefits of the Programme can be seen already.
 - The online platform is welcomed.
 - Face-to-face support is beneficial in supporting schools to work through the programme.
 - Concerns of the risk that the initiative will fizzle out if the Programme was lost.
37. The Children and Families Partnership group acknowledged the benefit of targeted support for schools with the greatest need but raised concerns that the focus was on obesity levels rather than deprivation.
38. The incumbent provider, the Soil Association, acknowledged the benefit of targeted support focused on schools with high levels of obesity and the benefit to schools of an online offer which enables schools to work at their own pace. However, the provider raised concerns that loss of face-to-face support could result in schools disengaging from or deprioritising the Programme and suggested a flexible offer with schools creating a network to support each other. This is incorporated within the new model.

Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

39. The Committee considered the new service model as part of the engagement process at its meeting on 1 November 2023. Members noted the need for savings to be made via a review of the WSAF&N. There was concern that some primary schools which had been working closely with the current provider would no longer receive the same support. However, members noted that the new model would target some of the most vulnerable children in the County.
40. The Committee supported the proposals.

Proposed New Service Model

41. It is proposed to decommission the existing service and provide targeted support to the primary schools with the highest levels of obesity, with access to a universal offer for all other primary schools. The content of the WSAF&N Programme will remain unchanged, and all primary schools will continue to have access to an online portal, telephone support, and training to enable them to work towards all award levels. The main change is that face-to-face support will be targeted towards schools with the highest levels of obesity and will focus on achievement of the bronze level award. Enrolled schools can continue with silver and gold awards should they wish to via the online portal without any additional cost. The new model will better align with the requirements outlined in the Council's Healthy Weight Strategy and the recommendations in the 2023 Annual Report of the Director of Public Health.
42. Decommissioning the existing delivery model will enable the Public Health Department to make the necessary £150,000 saving. The new model will be funded for the next 2 years via the Department's food and nutrition budget.
43. A detailed risk assessment has been undertaken as part of the review of WSAF&N Programme. There is a risk that schools not eligible for face-to-face support may disengage from the Programme, however all primary schools will continue to have access to an online portal, telephone support, and training to enable them to work towards all award levels. Ongoing activity under the new service model will be monitored through contract management meetings with the provider.

Implementation of the New Service Model

44. The existing contract ends on 31 May 2024. Subject to approval by the Cabinet, the process of procuring a provider to deliver the new service model will begin as soon as practicable, with a view to the new model being in place from 1 June 2024.

Equality Implications

45. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been undertaken to assist the Council in meeting its Public Sector Equality Duty to:
 - Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share protected characteristics and those who do not; and
 - Foster good relations between people who share protected characteristics and those who do not.
46. The EIA is attached to this report as Appendix B. It concluded that the proposal would have a neutral impact on children and young people as a service will continue to be offered to all primary schools in the County. The proposal will have a positive impact on children in most deprived areas where levels of obesity are highest.

Human Rights Implications

47. There are no human rights implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

Background Papers

Report to the Cabinet - Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023/24 - 2026/27 - 22 February 2023 <https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=134&MId=6913>

Report to the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 1 November 2023
<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CId=1045&Year=0>

Appendices

Appendix A – Summary report: Engagement on proposed changes to the Whole School Approach to Food and Nutrition programme in Leicestershire

Appendix B – Equality Impact Assessment