

Food for Life Catering Mark Case Study: Stirling Council Primary Schools Catering Service

Target audience & purpose

This case study provides an informative example to caterers in the public or private sector looking to make the food on their menu better for health, the environment, animal welfare and the local economy. More specifically it is useful for those interested in gaining the Soil Association's Food for Life Catering Mark (see box below).

BRONZE:

- No undesirable additives or hydrogenated fats
- 75% of dishes freshly prepared
- Meat is farm assured
- Eggs from cage free hens
- Menu is seasonal
- Training of catering staff
- No GM ingredients

SILVER - in addition to the Bronze criteria:

- Locally sourced items on the menu
- Certified organic **OR** Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) items on the menu
- Poultry, eggs and pork is Freedom Food assured **OR** 10% of ingredients certified organic or MSC
- No fish from Marine Conservation Society 'Fish to Avoid' list
- Information on display about provenance of foods
- At least one product is Fair Trade

GOLD - in addition to the Bronze and Silver criteria:

- 30% of ingredients certified organic **OR** MSC
- 50% of ingredients are locally sourced
- Meat, dairy products and eggs are certified organic
- Steps taken to increase up-take of non-meat dishes to promote a more sustainable diet

Context

In 2002 the Scottish Executive launched *Hungry for Success* which was designed to raise nutritional standards of school meals and encourage nutrition education in the classroomⁱ. This led to the passing of the *Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007* which sets nutritional standards and is now enforced in primary and secondary schools throughout Scotland.

The development of a food and drink policy for Scotlandⁱⁱ together with the introduction of *Curriculum for Excellence*ⁱⁱⁱ has extended the scope of food education in schools from an appreciation of nutrition and healthy choices, to an understanding of the whole food chain and the links between food, health, the environment and the economy. Sustainable food procurement in the public sector is a key aim of the food and drink policy, as evidenced by the Government paper *Catering for Change: Buying food sustainably in the public sector*^{iv}.

The Soil Association's Food for Life programme of work was launched in 2003 to improve the quality of school meals by introducing targets for food sourcing and food education. In Scotland the Food for Life programme of work is currently funded by the Scottish Government and includes catering services in the public and private sectors. The Food for Life Catering Mark has been developed to support caterers to achieve the Food for Life core targets of 75% fresh, 50% local and 30% organic.

Case study background

Stirling Council school catering services sit within the Council's Asset Properties and Facilities Management Services. Catering services are provided in 37 primary schools, six secondary schools, nine nurseries and two secondary support units. The local authority covers a geographical area with a mix of small and large schools in both rural and urban areas.

Of the 37 primary schools 23 have their own production kitchens. The remaining 14 schools without their own production kitchens source freshly prepared lunches from neighbouring schools with a production kitchen. In 2010/2011 Stirling Council served over 750,000 freshly prepared school meals. Almost 420,000 of these were primary school meals for which the Council is currently working towards the Food for Life Catering Mark Bronze award.

At a 'Low Carbon Stirling' seminar in January 2011 Stirling Council recognised the potential of Food for Life to reduce its carbon footprint; improve food education for children; add value and quality to its food offering in schools; and provide local employment opportunities which maintain a skilled workforce. Following the seminar a follow-up meeting between Stirling Council, Going Carbon Neutral Stirling and Soil Association Scotland allowed Stirling Council to contact Highland Council which has a Bronze Food for Life Catering Mark for its primary school menu. Stirling Council is now working towards a Bronze award for its primary school menu.

Food for Life fits with Stirling Council's current policy of providing freshly prepared school meals as opposed to following a convenience food model. The Service Manager at Stirling Council said: "working with the Soil Association we are committed to transforming food culture, reconnecting with children and young people, and informing them about where their food comes from."

The menu

The primary school menu is the same for each school and currently remains the same throughout the school year. The three-week menu cycle offers a choice of meals each day to ensure there is something to suit every taste. The 'red' choice offers a hot meal containing meat; the 'blue' choice offers a hot vegetarian meal or meal containing fish; and the 'green' choice offers a packed lunch style meal of a sandwich, toasted sandwich or wrap with a choice of fillings. The red and blue meals include a choice of soup or pudding. Where the soup contains meat there is an option of orange juice. The green meal includes home baking, fruit or yoghurt. In addition, a selection of breads and salads are available every day. All meals offer a choice of milk, water or pure fruit juice. The cost per child per day is £1.90.



Food supply

While working within EU legislation and national procurement guidelines, Stirling Council has a long history of making every effort to support local SMEs when going out to tender for food supplies. The catering service prefers to work with SMEs for traceability and accountability reasons.

The council finds that local SMEs are able to compete with larger, more centralised suppliers

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on quality, price, and willingness to deliver throughout the Stirling area. For example, when the tender went out for bread, a larger company based in the west of Scotland could offer a more competitive price, but would only deliver to the urban schools. A more local bakery won the contract due to their ability to deliver to all schools and their wider range of traditionally baked products.

In 2010 Stirling Council joined Scotland Excel, a centralised procurement agency. Through maintaining existing tenders the Council has been able to continue supporting local SMEs. However as existing tenders run out, and financial pressures within the council increase, there may be a move towards a greater use of Scotland Excel for procurement.

Achievements so far...

In order to gain the Food for Life Catering Mark Bronze award, Stirling Council has been looking at their primary school menu more closely. Important changes have been made, especially with regards to the supply of eggs, meat and poultry in order to conform to the Food for Life Bronze minimum standards of cage free eggs and farm assured meat and poultry.

In order to make the change to procuring only cage free eggs and farm assured meat and poultry, Stirling Council have had to work with their suppliers to ensure that they are providing the correct products. For example the Council now specifies to their meat supplier that they must only supply farm assured British pork as opposed to Danish pork which does not meet UK welfare standards.

Prior to an inspection Stirling Council will be working with Soil Association Scotland over the next few months to ensure all the Bronze criteria are being met.

Challenges

This section outlines the challenges faced by Stirling Council as they have been working towards the Food for Life Catering Mark.

Difficulty sourcing Scottish produced pork

Due to a number of key pork producers going out of business and a shortage of slaughtering facilities in Scotland, Stirling Council have found it difficult to source locally produced pork. Pork is currently sourced from England instead and the Council continues to work with their suppliers to procure as locally as possible.

Genetically modified oil The FFL Bronze standards do not permit use of genetically modified (GM) ingredients. Stirling Council has discovered that a lot of the oil used for the schools catering service is GM and is therefore working to ensure all GM oil is replaced with non GM oil.

Financial constraints Budget cuts in the public sector are resulting in the Council having to investigate ways to reduce costs. This may compromise the ability to provide freshly prepared and locally sourced school meals.

Food culture The schools meals service faces the ongoing challenge of trying to encourage healthy eating amongst its consumers but envisages that Food for Life will strengthen this endeavor.

Local authority contracts unattractive for smaller suppliers Stirling Council's experience of working with smaller suppliers is that they often do not tender for local authority contracts. This is in part due to the scale of the contracts, both in terms of the amount of produce required and the geographical spread of delivery. Some of the smaller producers feel they do not have the capacity to meet the demands of the contract. However, Stirling Council is working to solve this issue. For example suppliers of dry foods and non-food provisions to schools have taken on delivery of fruit and vegetables. This enables smaller fruit and vegetable producers with limited transportation capacity to get their produce out to schools.

Replication in other Local Authority schools catering services

Challenges – why may it be difficult to replicate Stirling’s approach in other local authorities?

Strong support for Food for Life The collaboration between Stirling Council and the local low carbon group Going Carbon Neutral Stirling provides a strong basis of support for FFL. Without these key individuals and relationships it would be much more of a challenge for a local authority to pursue the FFL Catering Mark.

Strong relationships with suppliers Stirling Council have developed strong, long term relationships with their suppliers which have facilitated the necessary changes in supply of eggs and meat. This may not be something which all local authorities can use to their advantage.

Geographical location Stirling Council is situated in the central belt of Scotland, which may be advantageous in terms of the Council tapping into supply chains.

Procurement team focus The procurement team in Stirling Council focuses strongly on a ‘price-quality balance’ taking into account sustainability and the local economy when making decisions on procurement.

Strengths - what makes Stirling’s approach a strong one for replication in other local authorities?

Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007 The legal requirements set out in this Act mean that all schools in Scotland already have a good baseline in relation to the Food for Life Bronze standards. For example the Act requires all school meal recipes to meet minimum nutritional standards, be standardised and recorded. This fits with the Food for Life Bronze requirement for all recipes to be recorded.

Maintained choice and value for money Stirling Council are managing to make the changes required for the FFL Bronze award

without compromising the wide choice and value for money of their menu. Choice and value for money are recognised as vital for maintaining and increasing school meal uptake. Primary school meal uptake in Stirling local authority has risen to from 36% to 40% in 2010/11, an overall increase of 11% on the previous year.

References

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- ⁱThe Scottish Government (2002) *Hungry for Success: A Whole School Approach to School Meals in Scotland*. The Scottish Government. Available at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/47032/0023961.pdf>
- ⁱⁱ The Scottish Government (2009) *Recipe for Success – Scotland’s National Food and Drink Policy*. The Scottish Government. Available at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/277346/0083283.pdf>
- ⁱⁱⁱ The Scottish Executive (2004) *A Curriculum for Excellence – The Curriculum Review Group*. The Scottish Executive. Available at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/26800/0023690.pdf>
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