

## EDUCATION, YOUTH & CULTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

<b>Date of Meeting</b>	Thursday 28 <sup>th</sup> November 2024
<b>Report Subject</b>	Newydd Catering – school meal provision
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Cabinet Member for Education, Welsh Language, Culture and Leisure
<b>Report Author</b>	Chief Officer (Education & Youth)
<b>Type of Report</b>	Operational

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NEWydd Catering & Cleaning have played a key role, along with Council colleagues across numerous departments, in ensuring all schools in Flintshire were able to provide Universal Primary Free School Meals ahead of the target date from Welsh Government of September 2024. Working in partnership with the Council, NEWydd ensured that all pupils in the Primary sector were able to access this provision by April 2024.

To further promote the uptake of schools meals and in order to meet the initiative's key element of providing all pupils in Primary Education with a healthy and varied diet, NEWydd also launched their 'Refresh menus' in September 2023. These provided pupils with access to a fresh salad bar, freshly baked bread, a yoghurt and fresh fruit dessert bar daily.

Much work has been undertaken in Flintshire secondary schools in reviewing the existing food provision in line with the Welsh Government Healthy Eating Regulations following the Covid-19 pandemic. Working in partnership with the Health Promoting Schools Team, four learner voice workshops were held in 2023 and 2024 with representatives from all Flintshire secondary schools attending. Children and young people's voice has driven this area of work in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

This report has been developed in order to update the Committee on the service provided to Flintshire schools, including information on pupil engagement and suggestions made by children and young people during the Learner Voice workshops, outlining how these have influenced service delivery.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1	Members of the Committee are updated in regard to level of pupil engagement in relation to school meal provision.
2.	Members are satisfied with the progress made by NEWydd to provide a school meals service that will maximise the positive impact the Welsh Government UPFSM initiative on pupil wellbeing and development.
3.	That Members of the Committee formulate their conclusions and recommendations based on the information in the report and the discussion at the meeting.

## REPORT DETAILS

<b>1.00</b>	<b>EXPLAINING THE ROLE OUT OF UPFSM, CHANGES TO THE PRIMARY SCHOOL MENU AND CONSULTATIONS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS</b>
1.01	<p><b>Universal Primary Free School Meals</b></p> <p>As part of a Co-operation Agreement, Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru announced plans in early 2022 and provided funding for all primary school children to be able to have a free school meal by 2024.</p> <p>Welsh Government's commitment to Universal Primary Free School Meals (UPFSM) was in response to the escalating costs of living and aimed to help tackle child poverty, whilst ensuring no child goes hungry in school by providing all pupils with a healthy and varied school meals menu.</p>
1.02	<p>Implementation of UPFSM was phased with a target of all primary aged pupils able to access this by September 2023. Locally, in Flintshire, rollout was completed ahead of target, as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• September 2022 – Reception aged children offered UPFSM</li><li>• April 2023 – Years 1 and Year 2 aged children offered UPFSM</li><li>• September 2023 – Year 3 and Year 4 aged children offered UPFSM</li><li>• April 2024 – Year 5 and Year 6 aged children offered UPFSM ensuring all primary aged children were now able to access the service</li></ul>
1.03	<p>To oversee implementation of UPFSM in Flintshire, a small cross-portfolio Project Team was created to work on the rollout with representatives from Education and Youth; Finance; Housing and Assets (Benefits); and Capital Programme and Assets. NEWydd Catering and Cleaning were a key part of this Project Team as the Council's main school catering supplier.</p> <p>So successful was the implementation of the initiative in Flintshire that this team were presented with a '<b>Recognition of Excellence</b>' award from Welsh Government at the LACA Wales Regional Awards event in October 2023.</p>

1.04	<p>The implementation of UPFSM, although a positive initiative for Welsh children, has brought with it operational challenges for schools and catering providers to deliver.</p> <p>The improvements to infrastructure delivered through this initiative have helped significantly but there was also a need to change the delivery model to meet the new demand for meals.</p> <p>NEWydd had already created their Central Kitchen service to mitigate employment and menu standardisation issues in the smaller schools but further changes to the offer to ensure the demand for meals could be met, and the quality of meals could be maintained, were also required.</p>
1.05	<p>NEWydd recognised that in order to be able to provide the healthy and varied diet that the initiative intended it would need to make changes to the offer. Reducing the number of daily choices across schools whilst introducing more fresh produce and ‘home cooked’ meals would be key to the success of the offer.</p> <p>Following a failed pilot in conjunction with another local supplier the NEWydd Management team consulted with their team of experienced and talented cooks to find a solution. From here the ‘Refresh’ menu offer was created.</p>
1.06	<p><b>Refresh</b></p> <p>‘Refresh’ was designed to encourage everyone to take a fresh new look at school meals in Flintshire.</p> <p>A return to fresh, homecooked meals that children will eat and enjoy, the offer now consists of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A combination of freshly cooked popular and innovative hot dishes</li> <li>• 3 daily choices to cater for all tastes and dietary needs</li> <li>• A fresh daily salad bar to compliment the main offer</li> <li>• A fresh fruit &amp; yoghurt bar</li> <li>• Freshly baked bread and desserts back on the menu</li> </ul>
1.07	<p><b>Food in schools Conference – October 2023</b></p> <p>To launch the new ‘Refresh’ menu NEWydd held a conference to which all primary school Headteachers or their representatives were invited to sample the offer and understand the benefits this would bring to their pupils. This event was held at Ysgol Gwynedd in Flint and was well attended by both schools and members of this Committee.</p> <p>Along with the new offer it was also highlighted to all in attendance that the Local Authority Trading Company (LATC) model which created NEWydd to provide these services to all Flintshire schools, will only be successful as a collective. If the larger schools, who subsidise the smaller schools, continue to tender their provision out to the highest bidder the model will become more expensive and increase the financial strain on the Council.</p>

1.08	<p>In addition to the improved food offer via the Refresh menu, NEWydd are also offering a number of ‘added value’ initiatives for schools to access. A brief description of some of the options schools might like to introduce or offer to their school community are given below.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eat Smart, Save Better – Parent/Pupil cookery lessons delivered in conjunction with Public Health Wales dieticians</li> <li>• Refresh Community Luncheon club</li> <li>• Refresh gardening club – Grow your lunch</li> <li>• Refresh Hydration Station – for events such as Sports Day</li> <li>• Eco Warrior Competition – Food Waste reduction</li> </ul> <p>Each of these will be provided by fully trained and experienced professionals who will support the schools to implement and promote the chosen initiative to maximise the added value this can bring.</p>
1.09	<p>Performance information for the school meals service is good but not quite yet reaching the targets NEWydd have set themselves for the current year.</p> <p>In Primary Schools, the introduction of Refresh has had a positive impact on Uptake with 68.8% of pupils now taking schools meals. Of those eligible to UPFSM the figure is slightly lower with 67.4% of pupils taking the offer with those traditionally Eligible for Free School Meals (eFSM) performing slightly better at 69.8% against eligibility.</p> <p>Research completed by the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) indicates that Flintshire is within the second quartile for uptake across Wales. This research has also indicated that the uptake of UPFSM is lower in areas of deprivation than it is in more affluent areas. This is something that appears to be confirmed in Flintshire.</p>
1.10	<p>Appendix 4 attached is an example of a survey completed with parents of pupils at Ysgol Y Waun, part of the Hafod Federation. The data shows that a high proportion of customers are happy with the new Refresh offer whilst also providing valuable information for NEWydd to use to improve the service offer.</p> <p>NEWydd have supported other schools in assessing the offer as well as completing regular ‘in person’ surveys with pupils during the lunchtime service. NEWydd are also working on plans to hold another Primary School Food Conference where discussion on the menus as well as the added value option will be progressed.</p>
1.11	<p><b>Secondary Schools</b></p> <p>The School Health Research Network (SHRN) data from the Flintshire secondary schools 2021 county report identified a decline in pupils eating fruit and vegetables and a rise in drinking more energy drinks and soft drinks (post Covid-19). The report was published in Spring 2022. Please see Appendix 1 for data comparison.</p> <p>In Autumn term 2022, a review of the school meal provision in line with the Healthy Eating in Schools Wales Regulations was conducted in order to</p>

	<p>check compliance. This was following feedback from schools at the County Health and Wellbeing Forum.</p> <p>Taking a 'Whole System Approach to Eating Well &amp; Being Active in Schools' was also identified as a local and regional priority for the Healthy Promoting Schools Team and as such, a series of secondary pupil food and drink workshops were coordinated: February 2023 / June 2023 / December 2023 / November 2024. All workshops were planned and delivered in partnership with representatives from Newydd.</p>
1.12	<p>At the first workshop in February 2023, up to four pupils were invited from each secondary school including the secondary special school, Maes Hyfryd and the pupil referral unit, Plas Derwen, to share feedback on the provision at their schools via a presentation. The workshop was held at Hawarden High School and all 13 schools were present. Prior to attending, pupils were asked to complete a questionnaire to ascertain the views of other learners regarding food and drink provision in their school. SHRN data on food, energy drinks, water consumption for their individual schools and at a county level was shared and discussed. NEWydd provided a selection of new lunchtime meals and new packaging that pupils in attendance had the opportunity try and give feedback. Please refer to Appendix 2.</p> <p>The most common areas for improvement highlighted by young people included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Menus needed to be clear including Vegetarian / Gluten Free options</li> <li>• Meal pricing should be clearly visible</li> <li>• A standard food offer across all secondary schools</li> <li>• Identified the need for more hydration stations.</li> </ul>
1.14	<p>The second workshop was held in June 2023 at Castell Alun High School. The same pupils that had met in February were invited to return to discuss progress made in their schools since the initial meeting and to give their feedback on the planned new menu for September 2023 and consider different menu designs and pricing signage. 24 learners from 9 secondary schools attended.</p> <p>A drinks supplier was present for taste testing and NEWydd provided further opportunities for taste testing of morning break options. Learners presented their feedback and further discussions were facilitated regarding and policy development.</p>
1.15	<p>To complement the new menu from September 2023 a 'theme day' would be coordinated each month across all schools (previously they had occurred on different dates in different schools). A competition was arranged to encourage learners to design a menu of their choice for the theme the school was allocated at the workshop, consisting of a main meal, side option and dessert using the Eat Well Guide as a basis for the meal. Learners were encouraged to promote the competition back in school.</p> <p>The winning menu for each theme was allocated a month and recreated across all secondary schools from September 2023. The winners received a</p>

	<p>gift voucher and a free meal for themselves and four friends on the day of their theme day.</p>
<p>1.16</p>	<p>In December 2023, a third learner voice event was held in collaboration with colleagues from NEWydd with 35 learners from 10 secondary schools in attendance.</p> <p>The purpose of the workshop was for learners to feedback on the new menu offer introduced September 2023 and highlight any relevant developments to food and drink provision more generally in their school and to identify priorities going forward. A template questionnaire was provided for learners to gather feedback from their peers prior to attending. Learners had the opportunity to try the winning dishes from the theme day menu design competition and were consulted on the updated model food and fitness policy.</p> <p>At the end of the workshop, both young people and staff were asked to provide "one word" feedback summarising their experience. 19 positive responses were received, with the most common being <i>"useful," "informative," "enjoyable," "interesting," and "brilliant."</i></p> <p>By comparing responses of learners that had completed the food and drink surveys in June 2023 with the responses in December 2023 it was evident that there has been improvements made to the provision (e.g. 84% of learners feel that there are now more healthier breakfast options available in their schools in comparison to 18% in June 2023) There was also greater awareness among learners about different options available (e.g. 72% of learners feel they are now more aware that there are options for vegetarians and vegans in comparison with 27% in June).</p>
<p>1.17</p>	<p>A fourth workshop was held in November 2024 which was attended by 35 learners from 10 schools. Learners came back together to provide an update on food and drink provision in their schools and share what changes had occurred over the last 12-18months.</p> <p>As a result of facilitating engagement opportunities between NEWydd and young people, there is now:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New standard Morning Break menu that meets Welsh Government guidelines</li> <li>• New standard Lunchtime menu that meets Welsh Government guidelines</li> <li>• Clear rebranded menu design that can be shared with pupils, staff &amp; parents across different mediums.</li> <li>• Clear standard pricing across our range of products.</li> <li>• A selection of Meal Deals to meet learners' budgets.</li> <li>• Introduction of 'Subway' style sandwich offer – where possible</li> <li>• Standardised theme days on a monthly basis.</li> </ul> <p>Alongside the changes made by NEWydd, a more focused audit relating to water provision was conducted with school business managers to identify how many water coolers were functioning in each school in line with the number of pupils on roll. Subsequently 17 mains-operated water coolers at</p>

	8 secondary schools were installed in Spring 2024. A water provision policy template for primary and secondary schools was developed, to reflect the importance of adequate water provision in schools.
1.18	<p>Progress has been captured in different ways. Please refer to examples in Appendix 3. Learners also completed a sentence starter activity as a means of evaluating the workshop. Feedback included:</p> <p><b>One thing I have learned today is:</b> kids have rights too (16%)  <b>One thing I have learned today is:</b> our concerns are considered (10%)  <b>The thing I have enjoyed the most about the workshop was:</b> lunch / tasting new recipe ideas (61%)  <b>The thing I have enjoyed the most about the workshop was:</b> everything (35%)  <b>As a result of today's workshop, when I get back to school, I am going to:</b> share my knowledge from today's event and changes planned (42%)  <b>As a result of today's workshop, when I get back to school, I am going to:</b> eat healthy (10%)</p>
1.19	<p>The focus on learner voice influencing menu design and provision has led to input with Welsh Government, who are currently working to revise the Healthy Eating Regulations. Within the Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales 2022 to 2024 Delivery Plan, the Welsh Government have committed to 'reviewing the regulations on school food nutrition in line with the latest nutritional standards and guidelines and update current standards'.</p> <p>As a result, the Senior Universal Free School Meals Implementation Manager from the Welsh Government attended the learner workshop this month to engage with young people regarding the proposals for the revised regulations ahead of a public consultation in 2025 and roll out in 2026.</p>
1.20	Although there has been good progress made to date, it was highlighted by young people at the workshop again that school lunch breaks are generally not long enough as they have been shortened in recent years and many schools do not have enough space for pupils to sit and eat a meal at lunchtimes. These issues contribute to pupils not eating a balanced meal.
1.21	<p>Next steps for Newydd following the November workshop are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To introduce a new 4 weekly menu which will provide greater variety of 'main' meals</li> <li>• Begin to provide new food innovations or concepts such as 'theatre' chef or Jacket Station across the school week to improve interest and uptake</li> <li>• Ensure all signage and pricing is clearly available to all customers at all schools</li> <li>• Introduce the Eco warriors competition designed to help reduce food waste</li> </ul>

<b>2.00</b>	<b>RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS</b>
2.01	Welsh Government have committed to fully funding UPFSM Policy with a number of grant funding streams being made available.
2.02	<p><b>Revenue Funding – Meal Unit Rate</b></p> <p>Following a review of Welsh Government funding for the UPFSM Policy they raised the meal unit price to £3.20, in January 2024. They also committed to provide backdated funding to this level to cover all UPFSMs provided since April 2023. This figure remains the same for 2024/2025.</p> <p>Indications show that this figure does not cover all local service delivery costs, i.e. catering supplier costs, utilities, etc. and work to ensure a fair and accountable split of this funding element is being developed.</p>
2.03	<p><b>Local Authority Education Grant – UPFSM Delivery</b></p> <p>The Council has been allocated capital grant funding, totalling £3,029,201 to support the procurement of equipment and works to enable UPFSM rollout.</p>
2.04	<p>This funding has enabled infrastructure works to be completed all kitchens to enable the extra cooking capacity that is required to provide the increased number of meals demanded. Schools have been very supportive in this allowing for temporary changes to the menu for the works to be completed.</p> <p>NEWydd have transported hot meals from other local kitchens or provided a reduced menu for 2 days in order to support the improvements required.</p>
2.05	A small number of schools remain in need of infrastructure works and these have been scheduled for the summer holidays in order to remove any impact on the ability to provide meals on a school day.
2.06	<p>This funding has also been used to improve the seating arrangements in schools by upgrading the equipment making seating more effective, increasing the number of available seats and providing seating solutions which are easier to move and maintain.</p> <p>The capital funding has also enabled the purchase of all light equipment required to deliver the increased meal numbers. These items range from crockery and cutlery through to cooking trays, pans and other kitchen utensils.</p>

<b>3.00</b>	<b>IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT</b>
3.01	<p><b>Procurement</b></p> <p>The equipment and works required in kitchens and dining rooms to enable UPFSM delivery was initially identified as circa £1.6m.</p>



	<p>This did have a significant impact on procurement, which was further compounded by the fact that the Council did not originally have established supplier relationships with many suppliers given that school catering is not delivered by the Council in-house.</p> <p>Work to resolve this was swift and with the assistance of NEWydd and their suppliers of catering equipment, along with the Corporate Procurement team direct award contracts were established in order to meet the very tight deadlines set.</p>
3.02	<p><b>Applying for eFSM</b></p> <p>Whilst UPFSM will be available to all primary aged children from 2024, those who remain eligible for eFSM (eligibility tested) still need to apply. Application does enable parents to access other grant funding, but this is limited.</p>
3.03	<p>eFSM application is also used for funding allocations to the Council and schools. For 2022/23 eFSM application data has been roughly calculated as providing a total of circa £10m grant funding, broken down as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• £6.1m in the Education element of the Revenue Support Grant (RSG);</li> <li>• £3.1m in the Pupil Development Grant (PDG) Schools grant; and</li> <li>• £619.5k for the PDG Access grant.</li> </ul>
3.04	<p>There are concerns that the universal eligibility of UPFSM will see a marked reduction in the number of parents applying for eFSM, which could potentially have a significant financial impact on both schools and the Council.</p>
3.05	<p>Local communications have continued to reiterate the need for parents to apply for eFSM and this will need to be an ongoing to ensure those who are eligible for eFSM continue to apply in future years.</p>

<b>4.00</b>	<b>CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT</b>
4.01	<p>Consultation and engagement with secondary learners undertaken over the course of 4 workshops held:</p> <p>February 2023 / June 2023 / December 2023 / November 2024.</p> <p>Newydd Parent Survey - Hafod Federation</p>

<b>5.00</b>	<b>APPENDICES</b>
5.01	Appendix 1 – School Health Research Network (SHRN) Data Appendix 2 – Food tasting feedback Appendix 3 – Examples of progress Appendix 4 – Parent survey

<b>6.00</b>	<b>LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS</b>
6.01	<p>Healthy eating in maintained schools: statutory guidance June 2014 <a href="https://www.gov.wales/healthy-eating-maintained-schools-statutory-guidance">https://www.gov.wales/healthy-eating-maintained-schools-statutory-guidance</a></p> <p>Healthy eating in schools briefing for head teachers and governing bodies July 2022 <a href="https://www.wlga.wales/SharedFiles/Download.aspx?pageid=62&amp;mid=665&amp;fileid=1308">https://www.wlga.wales/SharedFiles/Download.aspx?pageid=62&amp;mid=665&amp;fileid=1308</a></p> <p>Health eating in schools' governor training February 2024 <a href="https://www.wlga.wales/SharedFiles/Download.aspx?pageid=62&amp;mid=665&amp;fileid=4188">https://www.wlga.wales/SharedFiles/Download.aspx?pageid=62&amp;mid=665&amp;fileid=4188</a></p> <p>School Health Research Network (SHRN) <a href="https://www.shrn.org.uk/">https://www.shrn.org.uk/</a></p>

<b>7.00</b>	<b>CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS</b>
7.01	<p><b>Contact Officer:</b> Steve W Jones, Managing Director, Newydd Catering and Cleaning <b>Telephone:</b> 01352 704039 <b>E-mail:</b> <a href="mailto:steve.w.jones@newydd.wales">steve.w.jones@newydd.wales</a></p> <p><b>Contact Officer:</b> Claire Sinnott, Learning Advisor – Health, Wellbeing &amp; Safeguarding <b>Telephone:</b> 01352 704054 <b>E-mail:</b> <a href="mailto:Claire.h.sinnott@flintshire.gov.uk">Claire.h.sinnott@flintshire.gov.uk</a></p>

<b>8.00</b>	<b>GLOSSARY OF TERMS</b>
8.01	<p><b>Public Health Wales (PHW):</b> Public Health Wales is the national public health agency in Wales and exists to protect and improve health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities for people in Wales.</p> <p><b>School Health Research Network (SHRN):</b> The School Health Research Network is a network of schools in Wales who have joined together with researchers, the Welsh Government and other organisations to support young people's health.</p>