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**Y Gweinidog dros Blant, Addysg, Dysgu Gydol Oes a Sgiliau
Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills**



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Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

Eich cyf/Your ref
Ein cyf/Our ref

Kirsty Williams AM
Chair
Proposed Healthy Eating in Schools Measure Committee
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

28 May 2008

**INVITATION TO GIVE ORAL EVIDENCE TO THE PROPOSED HEALTHY EATING IN
SCHOOLS MEASURE COMMITTEE – TUESDAY, 3 JUNE 2008.**

Dear Kirsty,

Thank you for your invitation of 13 May 2008, and for the opportunity to submit written evidence to the Committee prior to giving oral evidence on 3 June 2008.

Before addressing the 5 key questions posed by the Committee, I thought it would be helpful if I first provided you with a brief overview of the Welsh Assembly Government's approach to improving the food and drink our children consume in school.

A balanced diet is essential for our children and young people if they are able to develop and grow into healthy adults. With this in mind, on the 22 November 2007 I launched the *Appetite for Life Action Plan* which sets out the strategic direction and actions required to improve the nutritional standards of food and drink provided throughout the school day. This Action Plan is an intrinsic part of the Welsh Assembly Government's five year implementation plan "Food and Fitness: Promoting Healthy Eating and Physical Activity for Children and Young People in Wales". It sets out some of the ways in which we are helping to support parents, children and young people in their efforts to eat well, stay fit and achieve the highest standard of health possible.

Appetite for Life was subject to widespread consultation, which included children and young people. The responses received (533 in total) together with information from other parts of the UK provide an important insight into how we should continue to take forward this important agenda. What is clear from this work is that improving the quality and nutritional value of the food on offer is not enough; we have to work with children and young people to ensure they actually consume the healthier options on offer. Planning ahead and involving all the key stakeholders is critical to facilitating change. If this isn't managed properly, pupils particularly those in secondary schools, will not choose to consume healthy and nutritious food during the school day. Evidence shows that introducing change rapidly without testing increases the risk of failing; this also reinforces the need for a whole school approach.

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Taking all of this into account, a 2 year action research project involving 4 local authorities (Ceredigion, Merthyr, Torfaen and Wrexham) will run from September 2008. This approach is inclusive and interactive and involves learning by doing. It will produce valuable evidence about what works and more than that, it will be beneficial to all involved. Participants in the project will develop and test the guidelines for implementing the food and nutritional standards proposed in the Appetite for Life Action Plan and learn lessons to inform wider application across all maintained schools in Wales.

Preparatory work for September is already well underway. The contract for the project is currently out to tender and will be awarded during July. My officials have already met with the 4 local authorities involved in the project to discuss how to take it forward, determining what and how to collect baseline data and to gain more information about the schools including developing a better picture of the 4 local authorities' current approach to school meals. Four regional workshops involving all 22 local authorities have also recently taken place to gather information to help produce this draft guidance. Separate meetings with Head Teacher Cluster Groups are also underway.

We know that critical to the successful transition to healthier school meals is the establishment and development of a robust, responsive and collaborative infrastructure at a local level. To support this we have already made available funding for:

- The appointment of an Appetite for Life Coordinator (employed by the WLGA since April 2007- see below);
- Nutritional software to enable caterers to plan, share and analyse menus (training currently being rolled out since December 2007);
- Equipment to improve existing school kitchen/dining room facilities (January 2007)
- Training for school caterers in healthy eating and practical cookery skills available (January 2007-December 2008);
- On-line Free School Meals Electronic Eligibility Checking System operational from 17 March 2008.

In addition, funding has also been made available via a specific grant scheme to support, across all authorities, those schools not involved in the action research project who wish to progress to the new more stringent standards proposed in Appetite for Life. The focus will be on supporting a whole school approach to improving food and nutrition in schools.

Teresa Filippini, our Appetite for Life Co-ordinator, is already providing practical support to local authorities, caterers and schools on implementing the Appetite for Life agenda. She is also working with key stakeholders to develop and implement a marketing and communication strategy to support its delivery at both local and national level. To assist this work she has established 4 regional groups. One Local Authority from each of these groups is involved in the Action Research Project. These 4 regional groups will be used to disseminate the learning as it arises. It is also the intention that stakeholder workshops will take place throughout the lifetime of the project to facilitate learning and sharing of information as it arises, beyond those authorities/schools involved in the project, rather than waiting for interim reporting dates.

What we are looking to achieve longer term is a sustainable service delivering healthy school meals with an increase in take-up. To do that, we need to encourage the service to stimulate demand alongside action to increase the supply of healthy food and build capacity in the system to cope with the required changes. To successfully change the eating habits of our children and young people will take time and commitment; we need to take stakeholders with us through persuasion, participation and partnership. That is why Appetite for Life has been so warmly welcomed by stakeholders.

1. Is there a need for an Assembly Measure to promote healthy eating in schools in view of existing initiatives within this policy area?

Appetite for Life brings together and promotes the raft of policies we already have in place to support healthy eating in schools including the primary school free breakfast initiative, fruit tuck shops, water coolers, the Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes (WNHSS).

The **WNHSS** was launched in September 1999 to encourage the development of local healthy school schemes within a national framework. These schemes in turn support the development of health-promoting schools in their areas.

The Welsh Assembly Government accredits local schemes as part of WNHSS. All 22 local schemes have been accredited. Currently 1576 maintained schools are actively involved in local healthy school schemes (84%). One of the key actions in the Food and Fitness 5 year implementation plan is to extend the Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes to three-quarters of maintained schools by March 2008 and to all of them by March 2010.

Funding to date has enabled local healthy school schemes to employ co-ordinators to work directly with schools to help them identify their own health improvement needs within the national framework, and then implement required actions. The co-ordinators work in a local health and education partnership. Co-ordinators provide direct intensive support to schools for the first 3 years of their involvement, and lesser support for the next 6 years. Support needs beyond this period will be considered following the outcome of the current review exercise.

It is intended that schools be assessed for a 'Lifetime' or 'platinum' award at the end of the sixth phase of their involvement. Clear criteria and indicators are being developed showing expectations of schools within each of 7 health topic areas. These criteria and indicators demonstrate a whole school approach to food and fitness which takes into account the majority of the issues raised by the proposed Measure. It is anticipated that as schools progress towards Phase 6 these items will be included without recourse to legislation (and we have evidence from local healthy school co-ordinators that this is the case).

At present 1323 schools have achieved Phase 1; 907 Phase 2; 568 Phase 3; 137 Phase 4 and 43 Phase 5 of their local healthy school scheme.

A recent report by the Audit Commission showed that 97% of school in Wales rated Local Authorities promotion of healthy lifestyles, including healthy eating and drinking, for children and young people, as satisfactory or better. In particular, secondary schools in Pembrokeshire awarded the service provided to them the highest score in England and Wales, with many schools giving top marks.

An initial pilot scheme in 3 Pembrokeshire schools investigated the feasibility of selling healthier options from **vending machines** in secondary schools. The machines were controlled by in-school caterers who filled the machines with freshly prepared items agreed with a pupil panel. The pilot programme showed that vending machines could make an important contribution to the school meals service, as the machines offer a valuable additional service point for items. The pilot programme also demonstrated that it is possible for schools to make a profit from incorporating healthy vending into their whole-school food provision. Guidance, *Think Healthy Vending*, has subsequently been distributed to secondary schools and catering contractors in Wales via local healthy school co-ordinators and contains advice learnt from the pilot project.

Over 54% of our primary schools are signed up to participate in the **free breakfast initiative**. Cardiff Institute for Society, Health and Ethics (CISHE), Cardiff University, were commissioned to undertake an independent evaluation of the Primary School Free Breakfast initiative on our behalf. The evaluation recognises that this initiative represents a potentially effective approach for addressing dietary behaviour in the long term - given that many of the intrinsic rewards and habitual behaviours associated with consumption develop at this age. It is also worth noting that it is seen as effective in promoting positive attitudes to breakfasts which represent important mediating targets for dietary interventions aimed at children.

The Welsh Assembly Government **Water Coolers** scheme ran between January and March 2004 and provided coolers to over 300 schools in Communities First areas. As part of the scheme, the Assembly agreed to cover the maintenance costs for the first year, until 31 March 2005, with on-going maintenance costs being the responsibility of the school. Guidance on the benefits of water consumption, *Think Water*, produced in partnership with Dwr Cymru Welsh Water, was initially made available to schools receiving water coolers in 2004. This guidance has since been updated and distributed to all schools in Wales.

Approximately 900 schools in the Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes currently have at least one water cooler provided for use by pupils.

The Children's National Service Framework (NSF) stated that all places where children are seen should have water available free of charge. This is reinforced in Appetite for Life with the requirement that such water provision should be physically divorced from the school toilets. Funding provided as Food and Fitness grants to local healthy school schemes has been used in some instances to increase the number of water coolers. Local authorities could also use the Appetite for Life Grant funding to install water coolers in schools.

The Assembly Government has encouraged the running of **fruit tuck shops**, on a cost-recovery basis, as part of the Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes. This has been shown to be a sustainable way of providing fruit in school. It is also a good way of involving pupils in decision-making as they are usually actively involved in running the tuck shop, including making decisions about what is sold. Fruit tuck shops are currently being run in over 1000 schools involved in the WNHSS in Wales.

The encouragement of fruit tuck shops was supported by guidance on Fruit tuck shops in primary schools, which was produced in partnership with the Food Standards Agency Wales in 2000 and reprinted in 2006. A recent publication, based on research in Wales, and incorporated into our guidance, suggests that fruit tuck shops have a greater impact when reinforced by school policies restricting the types of food that students can bring into schools.

Primary schools were provided with leaflets on **packed lunches** – *Healthier lunchboxes, healthier children* - for the parents of their pupils in Summer 2007. These were distributed via the schools to families of all 3-11 year-olds in Wales. This was undertaken in light of evidence suggesting that children's lunchboxes are high in saturated fats, sugars, and in particular sodium, and have a low inclusion of fruit and vegetables. These leaflets are being reissued in summer 2008.

Guidance, *Healthier lunchboxes, ideas for Primary Schools*, was issued to primary schools in autumn 2007 and shows ways of introducing issues about packed lunches into the curriculum and as part of a wider whole school approach.

2. Do you support the key provisions set out in the proposed Measure,

- **the duty on Welsh Ministers, governing bodies, head teachers and local education authorities to promote healthy eating in schools;**

As part of the revised Design and Technology Order in the new school curriculum to be implemented from September 2008, food will become a compulsory material in the programmes of study for both Key Stages 2 and 3.

Pupils will have opportunities to practise, safely and hygienically, a broad range of practical food preparation and cooking tasks and to consider current healthy eating messages and nutritional needs. This information was sent to schools in Wales in January 2008.

It is the responsibility of schools to plan and deliver broad, balanced curriculum to meet the specific needs of all learners.

Guidance is being prepared on 'Food and Fitness' in order to help schools plan and provide effective education on this important aspect of health and well being. This will be sent to all schools alongside the "In Perspective" case studies booklet.

The new Foundation Phase curriculum for 3 – 7 year olds to be implemented from September 2008 has, as one of its seven areas of learning *Personal and Social Development, Well-being and Cultural Diversity*. This will provide children with the opportunity to develop their understanding that exercise and hygiene and the right types of food and drink are important for healthy bodies. The physical development area of learning includes a section on health, fitness and safety.

The Welsh Assembly Government's Cooking Bus visits primary schools in Communities first areas to provide practical cooking sessions for pupils. A teacher training session is also provided, and cooking utensils are provided, in order to assist teachers in implementing practical cooking sessions following the Cooking Bus visit.

Many schools already consider food and fitness activities as part of their healthy school work. The Welsh Assembly Government has provided *Developing a Whole School Food and Fitness Policy* guidance to all schools in Wales to support schools in developing and implementing a coherent approach to food and fitness policies. Although not a duty, the issue of reporting to governing bodies and parents on school food and fitness actions has been addressed within the document.

All schools are encouraged to have whole-school food and fitness policies in place by September 2008. The guidance recognises that as part of developing and implementing a whole school approach a number of key issues need to be considered including: the school's ethos; the curriculum; the environment; links with the wider community; implementation; and monitoring. All are important if a school is to successfully develop and implement a whole school approach. The length of lunchtime, involvement of lunchtime supervisors, and keeping parents informed all contribute to the overall impact of the school's food policy.

Funding has been made available under the Better Schools Fund, to support schools in developing initiatives under Appetite for Life that contribute towards the development of a whole school food and fitness policy.

In considering how to develop and implement whole school food and fitness policies, schools are being encouraged to be proactive in consulting regularly with the school council, and have regard to any views and recommendations expressed. Where pupils are

engaged in the process, changes are more likely to be owned, accepted and sustainable. School councils can work with senior management to find creative ways of overcoming challenges.

The content of the school council website is being revisited and discussions are underway regarding the inclusion of a section on food and fitness. In addition, a Handbook for School Governors is being developed setting out how they can work effectively with school councils.

- **healthy eating should be part of the inspection regime and includes reporting requirements on Welsh Ministers, the Chief Inspector of Education and training in Wales and governing bodies;**

Since April 2007, Estyn inspectors have been required as part of their inspections to comment in Key Question 4 on whether a school has arrangements that encourage and enable learners to be healthy. Inspectors consider whether the school has appropriate arrangements that encourage and enable learners to be healthy.

Estyn recently published a report on 6 May 2008 on Food and Fitness in schools - a report on how well schools in Wales support children and young people to be healthy and active. This report was published in response to a request from the Welsh Assembly Government in the 2007-2008 Estyn remit to identify how well primary and secondary schools are doing in Wales in improving pupils' health with an emphasis on physical activity and healthy eating.

There were 11 recommendations outlined in the report. The Welsh Assembly Government welcomes Estyn's report and we are pleased that it highlights the good work being carried out in schools across Wales.

The report reinforces the need for a whole school approach to improving food and fitness and that partnership working with schools is key to the success of improving both the food our children consume and increasing the amount of physical activity they participate in.

- **power of Welsh Ministers to specify nutritional standards, including the requirement to specify maximum levels of salt, sugar and artificial additives in food and drink provided for pupils on school premises;**

As I stated in my speech in the debate on the Member Proposed Measure in Plenary on Wednesday 19 September 2007, we already have the necessary powers to introduce more stringent standards not just for school lunches but also minimum standards for the provision of food and drink available across the whole of the school day; we do not need a measure.

Under current legislation (*The Education (Nutritional Standards for School Lunches) (Wales) Regulations 2001*), Local Authorities are already required to operate minimum standards of school meals. Guidance has been issued which advises LEAs, schools and caterers on the ways of meeting or exceeding the standards set in the regulations.

Section 114A of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (as inserted by section 86 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006) provides Welsh Ministers with the power to make Regulations prescribing the requirements to be complied with in relation to any food and drink (other than food or drink brought by persons for their own consumption) provided on school premises in maintained schools in Wales; and provided at a place other than school premises by a LEA/Governing Body.

The regulation making power contained in section 114A allows Welsh Ministers to specify:- nutritional standards or requirements; require the availability of free drinking water; and prohibit the provision of specified descriptions of food or drink.

The food standards within the Appetite for Life Action plan specify that schools should aim to meet the FSA's voluntary target nutrient specifications (TNS) for manufactured products used in school meals, which were developed to help caterers meet nutrient-based standards for school lunches. The specifications also set maximum levels for total fat, saturated fat, total sugars and salt, and minimum levels of protein for a range of products.

It is an established principle of nutritional guidance that lunch should provide approximately 30% of daily nutrient requirements. However, the Appetite for Life consultation recommended targets for the nutrient content of school meals based on those set out by the *Caroline Walker Trust (CWT) Nutritional Guidelines for School Meals*. These recommend that a school meal should provide 40% of the reference nutrient intake so as to make good some of the nutrient deficiencies identified in the 4-18 year old population.

Following extensive discussions, and reflecting on lessons learnt from other parts of the UK, the Food in School Working Group concluded that new standards should require school lunches to provide a minimum of 35% of the requirement for each vitamin and mineral listed, based on the needs of those with the highest requirement in the relevant (primary or secondary) school aged population - "the greatest need principle". As this minimum standard exceeds 30% contribution from lunch, it will make a positive difference to the nutritional intake of school children, and should be practical for caterers to deliver in terms of devising menus that children will actually eat.

- **encouraging take up of school meals and protection of identity of those who receive them; and**

We have introduced an electronic system for Local Authorities, to streamline the process for Free School Meals eligibility checking, the system will provide a national checking system which will reduce bureaucracy for schools, parents and Local Authorities; encourage take-up of entitlement by removing the perceived stigma of the application process; and reduce the scope for fraud and error.

Part of the Appetite for Life Coordinator's role is to work with Local Authorities and schools to develop and implement a marketing and communications strategy to address such issues as take-up of school meals.

We are in the process of commissioning a literature review of work undertaken on take-up of free school meal entitlement. Following this work we will consider the need to commission a specific piece of research aimed at identifying reasons affecting take-up of free school meal entitlement. This information will help inform the development of appropriate strategies to increase take-up of free school meals entitlement.

It is important that we fully understand the reasons why children do not take up their entitlement before developing and introducing strategies to overcome them.

- **the duty on local education authorities to ensure availability of drinking water for pupils.**

Under Regulation 22(1) of the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 there is already a requirement that a school shall have a wholesome supply of water for domestic purposes including a supply of drinking water. Appetite for Life proposes that water should be provided free of charge at a number of sites throughout the school (physically divorced from the toilets) and throughout the school day; it also recommends that schools consider this as part of their whole school food and fitness policy.

3. What are the practical implications of putting these provisions in place?

There is clearly a need to ensure that we are contributing to the well being of our children and young people but we also need to be careful not to impose bureaucratic processes and additional workload on our schools. We need to recognise that food provided at school, although important forms only part of children and young people's diets. At the same time, school provides an ideal environment to convey positive messages on healthy eating and to support then through appropriate behaviours.

We are already aware from learning lessons from our extensive consultation exercise, other parts of the UK that in order to win hearts and minds we need to take stakeholders with us through persuasion and participation. That is why in Wales, through our Action Research Project we want to work with stakeholders to fully understand the practical implications of implementing Appetite for Life. This will no doubt vary from one school to another depending on a number of factors including their starting point; physical environment – both the kitchen and the dining room; length of the lunchtime; off-site policy; access to other food outlets; food brought into the school ie packed lunches. There is also a need to change the perception of school meals and that is why our Appetite for Life Coordinator is working with stakeholders to develop and implement a marketing and communications strategy.

4. Are there further provisions that you would like to see added to the proposed Assembly Measure?

Not at this stage, I will await the Committee's report. The Action Research Project will give us more information on the practical implications associated with implementing Appetite for Life and I will not wish to pre-empt the results of this.

5. Do you think the proposed Assembly Measure will achieve its overall purpose and aim, i.e. to enable a holistic, comprehensive 'made in Wales' policy on nutrition in schools to be developed and implemented?

Appetite for Life is our holistic, comprehensive 'made in Wales' policy on nutrition in schools. Whilst the proposed Measure would bring together existing legislation and provide for several of the actions in Appetite for Life to be given a statutory basis it may not be necessary to deliver this agenda across schools in Wales. I will be closely following the work of the Healthy Eating in Schools Measure Committee and await with interest the outcome of this work as it is important in informing how we continue to take forward Appetite for Life.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a written statement, which I hope the Committee will find most helpful in their consideration on the general principles of this Measure.

Jane Hutt