

Food for Good Charter - public services catering

BARGAINING BRIEFING

Introduction

UNISON Scotland has updated its Food for Good Charter. It sets out key ways in which food in schools and hospitals, nurseries, care homes, prisons and other public services should be fresh, local, healthy and sustainable, taking account of local and global social justice factors. This briefing looks at the impact of cuts, based on a members' survey, and at food sourcing, in a Freedom of Information request to councils and health boards. These show the need for our Charter.

Background

Quality food is widely recognised as essential for good health. Meals not only normally taste better, but are more nutritious when ingredients are fresh and freshly prepared. Food in Scottish schools and hospitals has to meet nutritional standards (statutory in schools, should be in hospitals) but food policy needs to be far wider. It affects a range of budget areas and must be cross cutting, recognising the preventive spending role of delicious, fresh, locally sourced food that contributes to health, to tackling obesity, to children's ability to learn, to local economies and to meeting climate change targets.

But public services catering standards are under pressure as 'austerity' cuts bite, with more deep cuts on the way. When child poverty is predicted to increase significantly, food poverty and food bank use is soaring and family budgets are hit by falling incomes and rising food and energy bills, we should not be cutting food standards, and certainly not for the most vulnerable in society, whether school children in poverty, patients in hospital or elderly people in care homes. To do so is also very much a false economy. Compulsory Competitive Tendering policies in the 1980s showed the folly of going for the cheapest possible products and slashing staff terms and conditions. People understand that cheap food is often unhealthy and very poor value, full of salt, fat, sugar and additives. Food safety is under threat too with cuts to environmental health. The horsemeat scandal this year showed the importance of protecting funding for environmental health and meat hygiene services. Scotland's new Food Standards body must provide independent checks on meat and must be properly resourced.

Cuts are widespread with deeper cuts to come

UNISON surveyed members working in catering and found that 54% say there have been major or severe cuts in the last 3-4 years; 39% say minimal cuts have been made. A total of 49% expect further major or even severe cuts to their service, with another 32% foreseeing some new minimal cuts. Top concerns are increased workload, reduced staffing and the impact of cuts on the service. Many believe service levels are only being maintained because staff are working beyond the call of duty, under high pressure, with heavy workloads. But they fear further cuts would cause real problems. While most are not worried at this stage about food safety/public health issues, because this is prioritised, a range of current concerns came up, with some saying food quality has gone down due to cost-cutting and that pressures on staff have inevitable consequences. One member said: "Food budget is cut and we don't provide a good enough portion and the quality of food has been downgraded for price." Another said: "The reduced number of staff affects cleaning the kitchen and maintenance of equipment." Other comments included: "Poorer quality, fewer choices", "Lots of complaints with food quality and amount.", "Staff shortages. Cover no longer provided, putting increased pressure on staff to work to very tight deadlines. This

KEY POINTS:

- **UNISON's Food for Good Charter has key proposals for public services catering**
- **Sustainable food procurement should be an objective across public services but cuts are threatening standards**
- **Survey found half of catering members said their service has had major/severe cuts and they expect more**
- **Procurement should promote use of sustainable food, ethical and fairly traded products, tackle tax dodging and support employment standards and the Scottish Living Wage**



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is where accidents happen as staff are rushing about trying to do more than their own jobs.” Pressures will increase for more centralisation and more cook chill/cook freeze. These may have a place in some provision based on circumstances, but local kitchens, not just re-heating facilities, are best.

FOI

We asked Scottish councils and health boards what proportion of food is sourced locally, from Scotland, from the rest of the UK, elsewhere in Europe, or further afield. Answers were complex and related to which food products, seasons etc. Many councils use Scotland Excel for most food purchasing, while health boards use NHS National Procurement. One council, Midlothian, which uses Scotland Excel, summarised sourcing as 50% from Scotland, 40% from the rest of the UK and 10% from elsewhere. Many responses said that most butcher meat, milk, and bread/bakery products, as well as half fruit/veg products and fresh fruit/veg are from Scotland, but some (e.g. Glasgow city council) said they didn't know. UNISON calls for a target of 50-60% of produce of Scottish origin. We also asked what proportions they used of free range eggs (13 councils said 0%, 11 said 100% - there is no reason why all couldn't be 100%) or free range chicken or organic food. Very few councils bought organic and health boards bought virtually none. Only one, Scottish Borders, bought free range chicken, although several bought from farm assurance schemes such as Red Tractor and Freedom Food. Health boards largely stated that NHS policy is for pasteurised chicken and eggs. However, the NHS, as a big purchaser, could ask for liquid eggs sourced from free range. Most councils have mains fed water coolers in schools and very often in other council property (e.g. Dundee throughout), although Renfrewshire and Moray don't have any. Health boards also use them, but not always throughout their estate, although switches from bottled water coolers are proposed/planned. NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde has just one to every 10 bottled water coolers.

We support the type of good practice exemplified in East Ayrshire council's pioneering school meals and schemes such as Soil Association Scotland's Food for Life programme. A number of councils (and NHS Lothian) have won or are aiming for FFL bronze, silver or gold Catering Marks. Examples from these initiatives show that it is perfectly possible to provide fresh, local, healthy and sustainable food, including organic, at reasonable cost. The FFL Partnership says research shows for every £1 investment in a silver menu, the social, economic and environmental return is £3, mostly in new local jobs. Clearly it would be good to see this type of approach used widely across local government and the NHS.

A 2013 analysis of 31 councils' Scottish Climate Change Declaration reports found scarce mentions of food/food procurement (except Edinburgh's Sustainable Food City), even by East Ayrshire where lots has been done. This lack of visibility/priority, if not always action, shows it needs to be an explicit objective.

Procurement

Food is different from other procurement. Among many good recommendations in the 2009 Walking the Talk report by Robin Gourlay, we agree in particular that the 'whole life' cost of food should be recognised, with "the balance between price and quality, and sustainable development, including costs attributable to health and climate change" acknowledged by purchaser and provider and factored into the business proposition. (Obesity costs the NHS £5bn annually across the UK. Diet contributes to 1/3 of cancers.) UNISON campaigns with the STUC, Stop Climate Chaos Scotland and others for ethical sustainable procurement, with key asks. A 2013 survey of councils about progress on their climate change public bodies' duties found most don't currently report emissions associated with procurement.

Action for branches

Campaign to protect key services, using UNISON's and the STUC's arguments that [There is A Better Way](#). Promote the Food for Good Charter and UNISON's procurement campaigning, along with Just Transition and green workplace policies. Push employers to make Sustainable Food Procurement an explicit objective. Keep the Bargaining & Campaigns team updated on developments.

Further info

Food for Good Charter

www.unison-scotland.org.uk/foodforgood/2013FoodforGoodCharter.pdf

Cuts in food safety and environmental health

http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/briefings/b031_BargainingBrief_CutsinFoodSafety+EnvironmentalHealth_Feb2013.pdf

Lessons from the horsemeat scandal

<http://unisondave.blogspot.co.uk/2013/07/lessons-from-horsemeat-scandal.html>

UNISON response to Procurement Reform Bill consultation

http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/response/ProcurementReformBill_Response_Nov2012.pdf

Joint campaigning with STUC, SCCS etc. on Procurement Reform Bill

<http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/publicworks/procurement-10asks-finalOct2013.pdf>

Soil Association Scotland Food for Life incl details of the Catering Mark

<http://www.soilassociation.org/foodforlifescotland>

Walking the Talk. Getting Government Right. Procurement report by Robin Gourlay 2009

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/291749/0089895.pdf>



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