

Education, Children and Families Committee

10.00a.m. Tuesday 9 October 2018

Towerbank Primary School – On-Site Cooking of School Meals

Item number	7.2
Report number	
Executive/routine	Executive
Wards	All
Council Commitments	

Executive Summary

This report addresses a [motion](#) to the Education, Children and Families Committee, on 14 August 2018.

Towerbank Primary School – On-Site Cooking of School Meals

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 That Committee:
 - 1.1.1 Notes the content of this report;
 - 1.1.2 Notes the capital and revenue expenditure for actioning the contents of this report, potentially for a further 40 schools; and
 - 1.1.3 Notes the current challenges with regards to school meal demand and transport and the intention to incrementally open more production kitchens; as and when financially viable to do so.

2. Background

- 2.1 On 13 December 2017, the Education, Children and Families Committee considered an annual report providing an update on school meals, which highlighted a number of emerging challenges principally due to school meal uptake continuing to increase and the preparations required for accommodating meals for early years expansion. A further updated report was provided to Committee on the 22 May 2018, detailing additional evidence on the expansion and pressures on the service, including that of transported meals.
- 2.2 On 14 August 2018, the Education, Children and Families Committee, on 14 August 2018, that stated “Committee notes Towerbank Primary school is one of the largest primary schools in the City of Edinburgh’s school estate, with a roll of over 600. Situated on a very limited site, it recently had a large extension added which allowed more pupils to eat school lunches at once, but did not include an on-site kitchen/preparation function.
- 2.3 Committee notes that Towerbank Parent Council have been working with council staff to make any improvements they can to the quality of school meals. They are concerned about the level of waste and the number of pupils rejecting school meals that are often overcooked or under-heated given the limitations of delivering food ‘ready to serve’. They are therefore interested to see if there is capacity at Towerbank to pilot increasing the amount of food that is cooked on-site.
- 2.4 Committee calls for a report in one cycle looking at the feasibility of a hybrid model of food production at Towerbank, whereby dishes are still largely prepared off-site but are cooked/assembled on site to improve quality and uptake of school meals.

- 2.5 The report should cover:
- Physical resource requirements (an examination of different models/methods e.g. oven, grills, microwave);
 - Staff resource requirements to include training requirements for current employees;
 - Costs; and
 - Potential timescale for implementation.
- 2.6 The purpose of this report is to address the above motion.

3. Main Report

- 3.1 Towerbank PS a current role of 630 pupils, one of the largest in the school estate. It is currently a dining centre with meals produced off site and transported in daily. The school received considerable investment in dining facilities to accommodate the increase in meals as a result of the free 1-3's and currently caters for a daily average of 300 pupils (Monday – Thursday).
- 3.2 The catering services principal objective, is to deliver high quality, hot meals to the 90+ schools under its responsibility, which is typically 18,500 meals per day Monday to Thursday. The service is delivered from 54 production kitchens across the school estate. Therefore, kitchen staff play a significant role in preparing and transporting hot and cold food to the other 41 primary schools and 28 nurseries, which don't have cooking facilities.
- 3.3 The production kitchens use Reiber boxes to keep the food at a safe temperature during transport and leave the cooking of meals as late as possible, to ensure the food is as fresh as it can possibly be. The Catering Management Team have worked to minimise transport runs to ensure food is not being held too long and all kitchen staff receive training on the use of transport boxes including packing techniques. Over time, advice from Reiber has been adapted on transporting meals to ensure that kitchens fill boxes correctly so that food is kept at the correct temperature, and specific serving methods are adopted, to enhance food quality and nutrition. In summary, the key to keeping the food as fresh as possible, is the production kitchen cooks adapting cooking techniques to ensure meals are as fresh and as high quality as possible taking into account transportation requirements. This approach changes daily depending on the menu for any given day, e.g., the requirements for transporting breaded or coated fish is different to soup or stews
- 3.4 The main challenges around this method of delivery are:
- Transport runs are often combined so the drivers' complete multi-drops. This minimises the number of vehicles being used and is less costly than using 2 or 3 delivery drivers. However, in theory, this impacts on meal quality due to the transport time of multi-drops and meals being prepared early to accommodate transport time. In the case of Towerbank, following feedback from the school, the service no longer uses multi-drop delivery to ensure the

food is as fresh as possible and is sent directly from the production kitchen approximately 30 minutes before lunch service.

- School kitchen facilities – many of the current production kitchens have been adapted to accommodate transporting meals. Much of the equipment is dated and is only capable of producing a set number of meals. In some kitchens, this results in food being cooked in batches and being held longer prior to transporting. In the case of Towerbank, the meals are transported from Portobello High. Portobello is one of the most modern kitchens in CEC's estate which combines steam combination cooking technology (only featured in new build schools) to enhance food freshness and for holding foods for transport.
- Rising Roles across the estate have led to many kitchens transporting circa 300 meals to primary schools. This has increased the amount of vans the service have had to contract to deliver the meals. This is set to increase over the summer term 18/19 with an additional 21 Early Years settings launching a meal service to accommodate 1140.

3.5 The former production kitchens were closed several years ago as part of a budget saving exercise and, in many of these schools, the former space has since been adopted into school usage. As referred to in previous reports, the service is currently carrying out a feasibility exercise into opening more kitchens but this is principally to address demand and running cost related issues, for example, subject to funding it is proposed to establish production kitchens at Ratho and Queensferry Primary Schools, which can be achieved with limited investment due to their former kitchens still being in situ.

Towerbank

3.6 In the case of Towerbank, the school does not have an existing kitchen. If this had been the case services such as ventilation, 3phase power supply and gas services would have been present reducing the overall cost of the any project. The school's current access/egress makes transporting deliveries to any kitchen extremely problematic. There is no delivery entrance located on site and currently lunches coming to the school require a van to drive through the playground, supervised by the janitor to ensure pupil safety. In 2017, a feasibility study was carried out to consider the opening of a side entrance for the delivery of meals but this was deemed unfeasible due to cost and the gradient of ramp was not suitable.

3.7 There is currently only one delivery and collection made to school, when the transported meals are dropped off, prior to lunch service, and collected at the end of service. Without addressing the access issues, opening a production kitchen or hybrid model may see up to 6 deliveries per day, significantly affecting playground safety.

3.8 The costs of re-opening a side entrance and ramp into the school is expected at £15,000. This would be essential if multiple deliveries would be made to the school.

Full Production Kitchen Option

- 3.9 From discussions with parents at Towerbank, the most favourable option would be to open an on-site production kitchen, in the current footprint of the servery area. Whilst it is acknowledged that there would be space to add some additional facilities, a full production kitchen to appropriate specification including staff changing, welfare and goods in space would not feasibly fit in the existing space. A survey by an independent catering contractor has been completed that considered plans, to Council specification, for a production kitchen that could accommodate 300 meals per day. The contractor advised the best solution would be to bolt on a kitchen facility to the rear of the school and convert the current servery space to incorporate staff welfare and storage. The costs for the additional facilities, gas, ventilation and 3phase to site were estimated at £245k (subject to planning permission). This would allow for kitchen facilities to be established, however issues with deliveries, described above, would still cause a challenge.
- 3.10 In addition to the capital cost, an average production kitchen would cost £16,000 in recurring revenue costs to run over a dining centre. This is mostly due to additional staffing and service costs.
- 3.11 Of the 41 dining centres in the estate it is estimated that 27 of these are similar in design to Towerbank. If conversions were made to all centres an estimated capital cost of £6.6m would be required along with an additional £430,000 increase to revenue catering budgets.

Hybrid Kitchen Model

- 3.12 A second proposal was considered being the possibility of a semi production kitchen. This model would entail the main dish being cooked in the production kitchen and side dishes such as, vegetables, chips and baked potatoes being cooked on site. Again, the advice of catering specialist was sought to attend the site and survey the feasibility of this.
- 3.13 The specialist advised that there was enough space with reconfiguration of the servery counter to put in basic facilities. The service specified 2x combi ovens, refrigerated storage and freezer space.
- 3.14 The catering specialist advised that due to drainage and lack of 3 phase electricity supply only 1 oven could be provided. It was also noted that work to upgrade the aged power supply and the addition of extra ventilation would be required.
- 3.15 The additional power supply is likely to cost in the region of £5,000. Ventilation and drainage works are likely to be in the region of £4,000. Even with these works the Council could only add 1 of the 2 ovens which would result in not all the items being specified cooked on site.
- 3.16 Access would still be an issue. Further, as the kitchen would be operational the servery doors would have to be repaired and/or a shutter installed for fire safety legislation. An additional cook would be required, starting at 9am – 2pm 16-hour contract which would add an £8,000 to the revenue budget.

- 3.17 In summary, for the hybrid model it is estimated costs would be approximately £23,000 (capital) and £8,000 in ongoing revenue costs.
- 3.18 A simple extrapolation the above costs across the estate would equate to £1m (capital) and £328,000 (revenue)
- 3.19 While facilitating baked potatoes and vegetables cooked at Towerbank would relieve some of the service delivery pressures at Portobello, there would be no saving in the cost of transport as meals would be transported from the production kitchen. Leaving financial implications aside, this model is the least economical.

Summary

- 3.20 The service is continually looking to improve service delivery across the estate. The expansion of 1140 and rising roles demand has led to the re-opening of 2 kitchens which were closed in 2008. As all the services to these kitchens were in place minimal associated costs are likely to be incurred. From this model the department hope to trail new cooking technology for smaller spaces.
- 3.21 The new area management team having been placing a strong focus on quality, especially quality of transported meals. Field supervisors are now far more visible in dining centres.
- 3.22 Training courses for staff in cooking for transport are being phased in through the new SVQ model. It is hoped that this will aid cooks in finishing and packing dishes to ensure the best quality product.
- 3.23 As new schools are built across the estate, they have all been specified with a production kitchen. This should aid existing dining centres as current production kitchens will be reducing the number of send-outs resulting in a greater focus on quality.

4. Financial impact

- 4.1 The capital and revenue costs associated with each model are summarised below:

Capital Costs	Hybrid Model	Full Production Kitchen
Towerbank	£38,000 (to include ramp)	£245,000
Whole Estate	£1,000,000	£6,600,000

Revenue Costs	Hybrid Model	Full Production Kitchen
Towerbank	£8,000	£16,000
Whole Estate	£328,000	£430,000

5. Risk, policy, compliance, and governance impact

5.1 None identified.

6. Equalities impact

6.1 There are no negative equality or human rights impacts arising from this report.

7. Sustainability impact

8.1 There are no sustainability matters arising from this report.

8. Consultation and engagement

8.1 Consideration was given to the Towerbank Parent Group's report at the time of writing this report.

9. Background reading/external references

9.1 Report to Education, Children and Families Committee, 13 December 2016 – [Schools Meals Update](#)

9.2 Report to Education, Children and Families Committee, 12 December 2017 – [Schools Meals Update](#)

9.3 Report to Education, Children and Families Committee dated 22 May 2018 - Edinburgh Catering Services – [Update on Schools Meals and the Use of Plastic in Schools](#), 22 May 2018

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10. Appendices

10.1 None.