

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR WALES

REPORT FROM THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

Report on Proposed Healthy Eating in Schools (Wales) Measure, 2008

Background:

1. Standing Order 14.2 states:

14.2 *The [Finance] Committee may also consider and, where it sees fit, report on:*

- (i) *financial information in explanatory memoranda accompanying proposed Assembly Measures;*

Consideration

2. The Committee considered the Healthy Eating in Schools (Wales) Measure, 2008 at its meeting on 12 June 2008.
3. The Proposed Measure was presented to the Committee by Jenny Randerson, AM the Member in charge of the Proposed Measure. The Committee also took evidence from the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) which was represented by:
 - Dr Chris Llewelyn, Director of Lifelong Learning, Leisure and Information,
 - Daisy Seabourne, Policy Officer, Lifelong Learning; and
 - Teresa Filipponi, Food in Schools Co-ordinator

Report

4. The table in the Annex gives a summary of the cost implications as a direct result of the Proposed Measure.
5. Jenny Randerson told the Committee¹ that the Proposed Measure aimed to work with the grain of the Government's 'Appetite for Life' programme which seeks to promote healthy eating in schools. The purpose of introducing legislation was to ensure that the very best practice occurs as a result of 'Appetite for Life' and is spread throughout Wales to every school.
6. Essentially, it was bringing the work already underway by the Government into a holistic policy². She said it allowed the Minister the flexibility to build on the pilot projects currently in place. For this reason there was no commencement date in the Proposed Measure³.

¹ Record of Proceedings, Finance Committee meeting 12 June 2008, paragraph 6

² Record of Proceedings, Finance Committee meeting 12 June 2008, paragraph 8

³ Record of Proceedings, Finance Committee meeting 12 June 2008, paragraphs 8, 11

7. Jenny Randerson emphasised⁴ that, whether or not the Proposed Measure was passed, the core cost will still be incurred by the Government under its 'Appetite for Life' policy. Consequently the costs arising directly from the Proposed Measure were minimal. They involved expenditure on:
 - 'reporting' which should be met from within existing resources;
 - 'promotion' which should build on existing work but might incur some marginal costs for the Government
 - inspections – estimated at between £100,000 and £250,000 per year; and
 - the provision of free drinking water which would also build on existing provision and was estimated at a one off cost of about £900,000.
8. She estimated that the overall additional costs would be around a couple of million pounds⁵.
9. The WLGA said⁶ it agreed with the principles and philosophy underpinning the Proposed Measure and had no profound objections to what it contained. However, in their view the 'Appetite for Life' process was the best way forward. They had concerns about the administrative and bureaucratic burden associated with the Proposed Measure and the potential for increased costs.

Conclusion

10. The Committee notes that the Proposed Measure does not seek to change the Government's policies in relation to healthy eating in schools but seeks to establish mechanisms to put them on a statutory footing. This, in the view of the promoters, will ensure they are delivered more effectively.
11. The Finance Committee sees no reason to disagree with the estimate of 'a couple of million pounds' for the cost of the administrative systems that would support the Proposed Measure.
12. The Committee notes that the costs arising from improvements in school nutritional levels will be the same as those to be incurred by the Government under its 'Appetite for Life' policy. If the Proposed Measure accelerates the speed with which these improvements occur then the timing of these costs might change. But the Committee notes also that the Proposed Measure provides the Minister with flexibility in the way it is implemented and its timing.

Angela Burns
Chair, Finance Committee

⁴ Record of Proceedings, Finance Committee meeting 12 June 2008, paragraph 14

⁵ Record of Proceedings, Finance Committee meeting 12 June 2008, paragraph 45

⁶ Record of Proceedings, Finance Committee meeting 12 June 2008, paragraph 58

Table 1: Summary of Cost Implications as a Direct Result of the Proposed Measure

| Description of the Duty | Impact |
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| Promotion of Healthy Eating in Schools (Section 1) | <p>Initially a significant level of promotional activity is already proposed by the Welsh Assembly Government as part of the <i>Appetite for Life Action Plan</i> and policies. These are already accommodated in current Welsh Assembly Government budgets.</p> <p>It is also expected that schools and local authorities will develop imaginative ways of promoting healthy eating that incur negligible costs or may result in savings.</p> |
| Duty on Welsh Ministers in regard of the curriculum (section 2) | Accommodated under current Welsh Assembly Government budgets. |
| Duty of governing bodies to report (section 4) | The duty on governing bodies is not intended to be onerous as it is included in current reporting structures. |
| Functions of the Chief Inspector of Schools (section 5) | An estimate of between £100,000 and £250,000 per annum has been provided by Estyn. The costs depend on the level of expert staff used during the inspection. |
| Reports by Welsh Ministers (section 6) | Depends on the format adopted by Welsh Ministers but it is not intended to be onerous and should be met from current Welsh Assembly Government budgets. |
| Requirement for a supply of free drinking water (section 8) | <p>Free water coolers were provided to 384 Communities First schools in Wales at a cost of £225,000. Theoretically, to provide water coolers to the other 1,500 schools in Wales would cost approximately £0.9 million but in practice some of these schools will already have accommodated the provision of free water. This is also a policy in <i>Appetite for Life</i>.</p> |
| Promotion of Meals in Schools and other educational establishments (Section 9) | <p>A significant level of activity is currently planned as part of the <i>Appetite for Life Action Plan</i> and will be funded by current budgets for example a commitment to promote and encourage the take up of school meals through a national and local marketing campaign</p> <p>The costs depend on the level of activity undertaken. This could range for example from distributing posters, sharing of good practice, guidance for schools to a national marketing campaign, or significant</p> |

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| | <p>refurbishment of dining rooms and kitchen facilities.</p> <p>A specific revenue grant of £1.3 million was made available by the Welsh Assembly Government to local authorities in January 2007 to purchase kitchen/ dining room utensils/ equipment for schools.</p> <p>Some promotional activity will incur negligible costs only or be funded by savings in other areas.</p> |
| Local Education Authorities to take reasonable steps to ensure take up of free school meals (section 9(2)) | The Welsh Assembly Government is currently undertaking research to identify these costs. |
| Local Education Authorities to protect the identity of pupils receiving free school meals (section 10) | <p>The Welsh Assembly Government has already agreed the costs of introducing an electronic system for determining eligibility for free school meals.</p> <p>The Welsh Assembly Government says that it will also consider and develop cashless systems and that this should be linked with the ongoing national citizen smartcard infrastructure work.</p> |