

**LONDON BOROUGH OF WALTHAM FOREST**

**WALTHAM FOREST CATERING**

# **SCHOOL MEALS STRATEGY**



**August 2009**

# **Waltham Forest Catering School Meals Strategy**

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## 1. Foreword

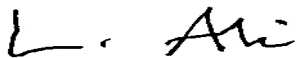
'I am delighted to introduce the Waltham Forest Catering School Meals Strategy, which clearly demonstrates a commitment to the future of school meals in the borough.

Over the past few years we have seen a huge level of interest in school meals, which has raised their profile and moved them towards the forefront of the education agenda.

Waltham Forest Catering has been working hard with schools and its partners to respond to the Government's priority to transform school food and drink, by building on existing good practice and implementing the new standards for school food.

Now the foundations of this transformation are in place there is a need to re-focus with a vision for the future of school meals to ensure we are meeting the needs of the children and young people in this borough and increasing the number of them benefiting from having a tasty and nutritious school lunch. The new National Indicator for Take Up of School Meals – NI 52, for which all schools will be required to provide data for from 2009, will help us monitor our progress in encouraging more children and young people to choose healthy school meals.

Educating and enabling children to eat healthily is high on our agenda in Waltham Forest and it is key to ensuring we are meeting our commitments to Every Child Matters as well as tackling childhood obesity. This strategy brings together activities of partner organisations to ensure we have a co-ordinated approach to improving the health of the borough's children and young people through increasing the take-up of school meals, and in doing so will help us achieve our targets set out in the Children and Young People's Plan.'



**Councillor Liaquat Ali,  
Cabinet Member for Children &  
Young People**



## **2. Introduction**

Waltham Forest Catering, the council's in-house catering service, is the main provider of school meals in Waltham Forest. The service has been in operation since 1990 and currently provides a lunchtime service to 60 primary, special and nursery schools, and 6 secondary schools in the authority. Waltham Forest Catering also provides a service to 2 Pupil Referral Units and 2 Children's Centres.

Schools have the opportunity to choose their own catering providers, which currently include Waltham Forest Catering (84% of schools), private sector providers (12% of schools) or operating an in-house service (4% of schools). Support on school food is provided to all schools in the borough by VT Education and Skill's Food in Schools programme.

In 2005 the Government announced the transformation of school food, which included the introduction of new statutory guidance for school meals and food and drinks served at other times of the school day. This was accompanied by £220 million of transitional funding over a three-year period.

In Waltham Forest this funding was used to ensure that the infrastructure for the delivery of healthier school meals was in place and that healthier food and eating was promoted in schools.

In April 2008 a further £240 million of Government funding was allocated to local authorities. This new grant, the School Lunch Grant, provides funding until March 2011 and is to help manage the direct costs of providing a school lunch. A funding formula was applied to the grant to ensure its fair distribution amongst all schools in the borough. Those with private catering arrangements have been devolved their share and the remaining funding has been pooled for the benefit of all schools catered for by Waltham Forest Catering, who are mainly using this grant to help keep down the cost of school meals and in particular, the price of a paid meal. The grant provides assistance with meeting increased food and labour costs required to meet new nutritional standards and to purchase items of equipment required to support a modern, fresh cook service.

Waltham Forest Catering and the schools it provides for have invested a great deal of time, effort and commitment into ensuring the food they are providing is in line with the standards required by the government. They now want to build on this by further enhancing the service and addressing the issue of school meal take-up.

Increasing the take-up of school meals is vital to ensuring the future sustainability of Waltham Forest Catering and affordability to the consumer, whilst at the same time providing an important source of nutrition to benefit the growth, development and learning of children and young people, enabling them to be healthy and fully achieve their educational and economic potential.

The overarching aims of this strategy are to:

- **Increase the take up of school meals in Waltham Forest**
- **Ensure the future sustainability of Waltham Forest Catering**
- **Provide a culture in which Waltham Forest Catering can continually improve**
- **Generate a commitment to annually reporting data required for NI 52**

In addition, the strategy will also focus on involving and inspiring children, parents and carers to influence their attitude to school meals and ensuring that consideration of school meals becomes central to related policy making.

The School Meals Strategy will support the delivery of the following key strategies and programmes:

- i. The Children and Young People Plan, in particular priority outcomes on being healthy.
- ii. *Our Place in London*<sup>1</sup>: Waltham Forest Sustainable Community Strategy, in particular priority outcomes on tackling childhood obesity
- iii. Waltham Forest Child Poverty Strategy<sup>2</sup>
- iv. Waltham Forest Healthy Schools Programme
- v. Local Area Agreements, which school meals contribute to.

Details of how this School Meals Strategy contributes to the above can be found in Appendix 8.2.

### **3. School Meal Take-up and its Impacts**

#### **3.1 School meal take-up in Waltham Forest**

The Government has included school meal take up as an indicator of healthy eating amongst children of school age (National Indicator Set: NI 52 – take up of school lunches). From April 2009, Local Authorities will be required to provide information not only for their own catering or contracted services but for all schools across the authority. In Waltham Forest this information will be collated by the Children and Young People Service directorate.

The number of pupils choosing school meals in Waltham Forest has decreased significantly over the past four years, with particular impact in secondary schools, where school meal take-up has in recent years been at an all time low.

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<sup>1</sup> Our Place in London: Waltham Forest Sustainable Community Strategy, May 2008  
[http://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/waltham\\_forest\\_sustainable\\_community\\_strategy\\_2008.pdf](http://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/waltham_forest_sustainable_community_strategy_2008.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Waltham Forest Child Poverty Strategy 2009-2020, May 2009  
<http://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/child-poverty-strategy.pdf>

In 2008/09 the overall meal take-up in schools catered for by Waltham Forest Catering was 46% for primary/nursery schools, 62% for special schools and 43% for secondary schools<sup>3</sup>. Although this is above the levels of take-up nationally (43.9% in primary schools, 36% in secondary schools<sup>4</sup>), when compared with meal take-up figures in the borough from previous years, Waltham Forest has suffered a greater decline than that seen across the rest of England (see Figure 1).

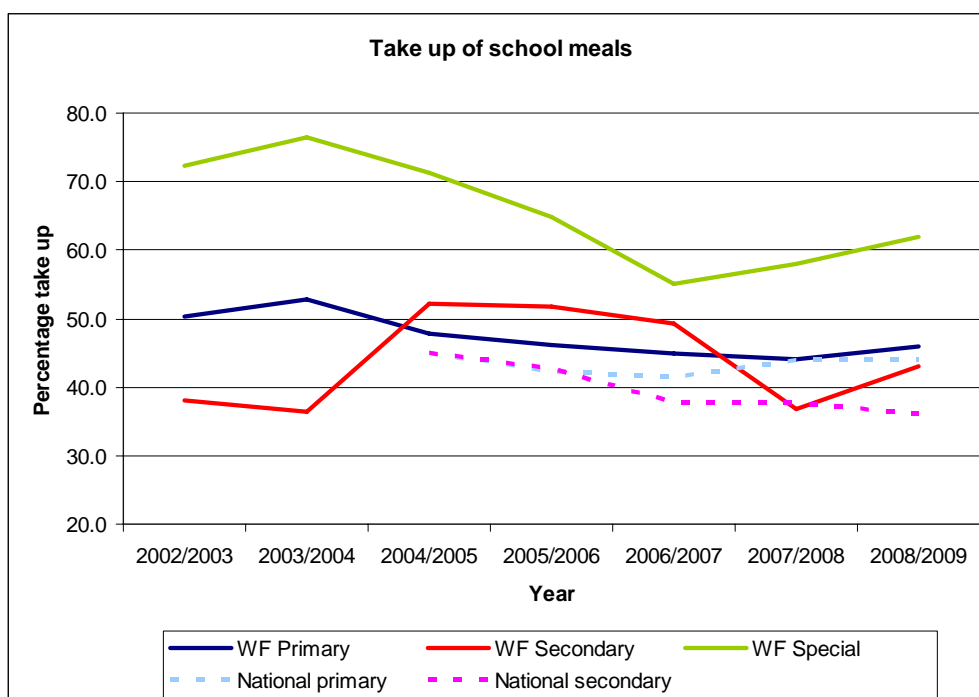


Figure 1: Take up of school meals in schools catered for by Waltham Forest Catering compared with national data

The latest figures indicate that there is a slight reversal in this trend across all school types. It is significant that this follows the introduction of a targeted marketing campaign. It is vital that this positive turn is capitalised on and schools and Waltham Forest Catering do not become complacent.

Waltham Forest also has a significantly higher eligibility for free school meals (FSME) compared with the national level (24.8%<sup>5</sup>, compared with 14.3% for England<sup>6</sup>). Yet only 80.5% of primary pupils, and less than three-quarters of secondary pupils, take up this entitlement<sup>7</sup> (see Figure 2).

<sup>3</sup> Waltham Forest Catering, Meal take-up figures, 2008/09

<sup>4</sup> Nelson M, Nicholas J, Wood L, Lever E, Porter N (2009) Statistical Release: National Indicator 52, Take up of school lunches in England 2008-2009 School Food Trust.

<sup>5</sup> 2009 PLASC census data (FSME as a percentage total of all pupils), VT Education and Skills

<sup>6</sup> DCSF: Schools, Pupils and Their Characteristics: January 2009 (January 2008 data used)

<sup>7</sup> Waltham Forest Catering, Meal take-up figures, 2008/09

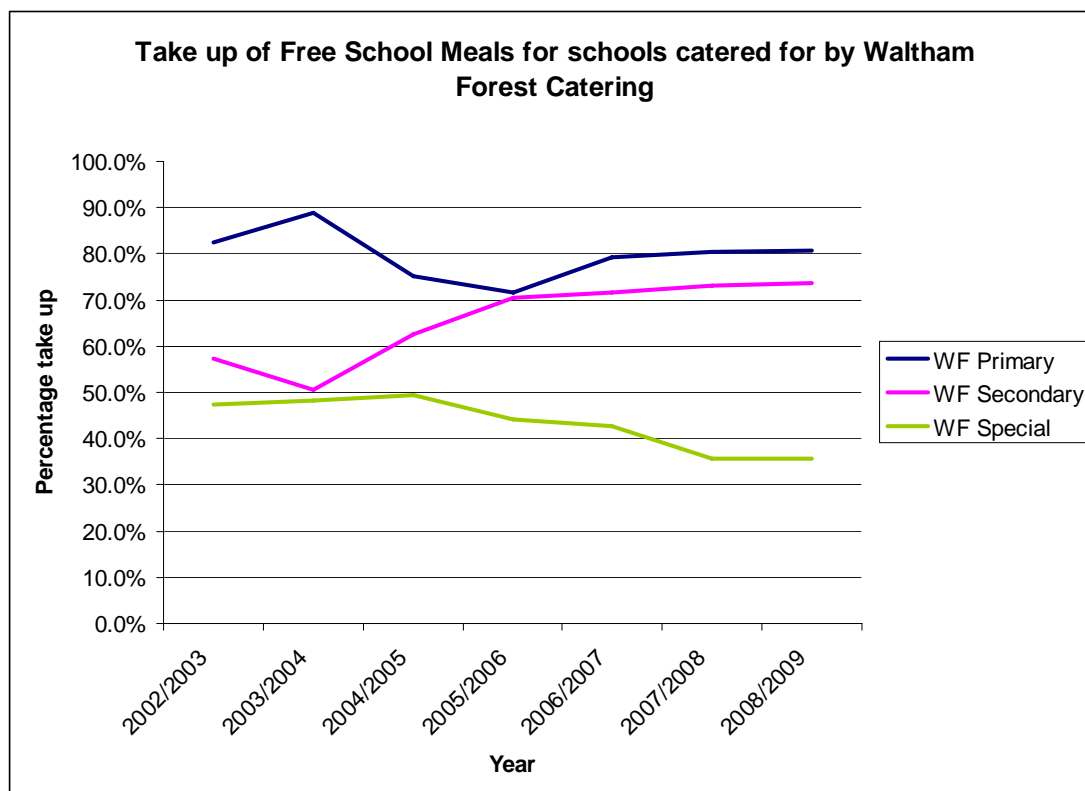


Figure 2: Take up of free school meals in schools catered for by Waltham Forest Catering

### 3.2 School meals and health

Children’s eating habits are determined early in life and educating them to make healthy, balanced food choices when they are young ensures that they are more likely to have preferences for healthier foods as they grow older. School meals can be an excellent way of instilling these healthy eating preferences, as well as providing opportunities for children to try new foods.

Many studies highlight the poor eating habits of British children, which are amongst the worst in Europe. We know that obesity is the most serious and growing health challenge facing children and there is now mounting evidence on the health benefits that school meals can bring<sup>8</sup>.

There is a higher prevalence of obesity amongst children in Waltham Forest than in the rest of England, with 10.4% of reception year and 22.8% of Year 6 pupils being obese<sup>9</sup> (compared with 9.6% and 18.3% nationally, respectively). Although the prevalence of obesity in Waltham Forest has decreased from the previous year, we still have the thirteenth highest level in England.

In response to the national increase in obesity, the government has produced a number of policy documents, service frameworks and toolkits over the last few years. These have included the Choosing Health White Paper (2005) and subsequent delivery plans; the National Service Framework for Children,

<sup>8</sup> Evaluation of the Eat Well Do Well Programme: University of Hull, 2008

<sup>9</sup> National Child Measurement Programme 2007/08

Young People and Maternity Services (2006), NICE guidance for prevention of obesity (2006) and Lightening the Load: Tackling Overweight and Obesity (2007). In January 2008 the DH and DCSF published Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives, and more recently the child health strategy: Healthy Lives, Brighter Futures (2009) and the social marketing programme Change4Life.

All of the above make reference to the role schools can play in tackling obesity through promoting healthy eating and physical activity; and acknowledge the importance of healthier school meals in addressing these concerns. But although caterers can provide good quality, healthy food, unless pupils choose to eat it these benefits cannot be realised. It is therefore vital that schools take a proactive role in promoting and encouraging their pupils to choose school meals.

There is a national target to reduce the rate of increase of obesity among children under 11-years by 2011<sup>10</sup>, which is supported by the government's Public Service Agreement 12 'Improve the health and wellbeing of children and young people'. This focuses on 5 key areas, including National Indicator 55: obesity among primary school-aged children in reception year and National Indicator 56: obesity among primary school-aged children in Year 6.

The Local Authority has selected National Indicator 56 as one of its key performance indicators in the Local Area Agreement<sup>11</sup>.

### **3.3 School meals and learning**

An average school lunch should provide approximately one third of a child's Dietary Reference Values (DRV's) for nutrients<sup>12</sup>; and sadly for some children, may be their only nutritious, cooked meal of the day.

The wider educational benefits of improved school food in terms of readiness to learn, pupil mood, behaviour, and thus learning and attainment, are of key interest. There is now evidence which points towards the benefits school meals can have upon learning. A recent study in Hull found that children who ate healthy school meals instead of packed lunches scored higher marks in school tests, were less disruptive and concentrated longer in the classroom<sup>13</sup>; and a systematic observational study by the School Food Trust demonstrated a link between readiness to learn and healthier school meals<sup>14</sup>.

Educational attainment has significant implications for achieving economic well-being in later life, and thus reducing the risk of poverty. Analysis of exam results in Waltham Forest from 2007 showed that pupils eligible for free school meals did not perform as well as their peers at all key stages<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Choosing Health: making healthier choices easier, Department of Health, 2005

<sup>11</sup> Waltham Forest Local Area Agreement 2008-2011

<sup>12</sup> 'A guide to introducing the Government's food-based and nutrient-based standards for school lunches.' School Food Trust, December 2007

<sup>13</sup> Evaluation of the Eat Well Do Well Programme: University of Hull, 2008

<sup>14</sup> School lunch, behaviour and mood: systematic observation of classroom behaviour following a school dining room intervention by R Golley, E Baines, P Bassett, L Wood, M Nelson, January 2008

<sup>15</sup> Child Poverty Strategy 2009-2020, London Borough of Waltham Forest, 2009

Although the impacts of poverty on educational outcomes is highly complex, there could be particular benefits of healthy school meals for this group of pupils, which is why there is a commitment from this borough to promoting the take-up of school meals.

The council is also committed to improving the process by which families apply for free school meals and is currently working with the London Borough of Waltham Forest's Revenue and Benefits team to investigate the potential to administer free school meal entitlement through the Housing Benefit system, thus reducing the number of claim applications families must make.

## **4. School Meals in Waltham Forest**

### **4.1 Where are we now?**

Waltham Forest Catering produce freshly cooked meals on site using good quality ingredients. Where schools do not have a kitchen, hot meals are prepared in a host school kitchen and then transported to the school.

A team of approximately 350 catering staff are employed in providing the service, producing over 2.2 million school meals a year. Waltham Forest Catering school meals service has an annual turnover circa. £4.5 million. The service forms part of the Children and Young People directorate.

A school meals website<sup>16</sup> provides useful consumer information, including core menus.

Waltham Forest Catering's achievements over the last year have included:

- Developing and implementing primary school menus which are fully compliant with the DCSF nutritional standards for school meals
- Launching the 'Lunch Bunch' marketing campaign, aimed at increasing the take-up of school meals by primary pupils
- Conducting a school meals survey to establish and monitor customers views
- Establishing a primary, special and nursery sector School Meals Consultation Group to improve partnership working with schools
- Being one of three Local Authorities selected to work in partnership with the School Food Trust on a range of funded marketing initiatives during the Spring term of 2009
- Holding a school meal stakeholder event to help inform future strategy and actions
- Achieved a breakeven financial position

### **4.2 Kitchen, servery and dining facilities**

In 2007 Waltham Forest Catering commissioned a school kitchen equipment survey to assess the catering equipment and ventilation / extraction systems

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<sup>16</sup> Waltham Forest Catering website [Hhttp://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/schoolmealsH](http://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/schoolmealsH)

in each of the schools within its catering contract<sup>17</sup>. The survey found that 59% of school kitchens had equipment which was classed as either 'poor operation, but serviceable' or 'unserviceable', and 62% of kitchens had extraction and ventilation systems categorised as 'in need of updating ASAP / immediately.'

The responsibility for kitchen maintenance and upgrading was devolved to schools in 2000. New regulations mean that any improvement in heavy kitchen equipment often requires subsequent upgrading of ventilation systems that can increase costs significantly. Funding these improvements often presents a considerable problem for schools.

In 2007/8, £60,000 from the Targeted School Meals Grant was allocated on a match-funding basis to support six primary schools in the borough which were identified in the survey as in need of immediate upgrading.

The governments' Building Schools for the Future initiative (BSF) and Primary Capital Programme (PCP) offer a fantastic opportunity to influence the kitchen and dining facilities in our schools, ensuring they are fit for purpose and meet the needs of customers. The quality of these facilities has a major impact on determining whether pupils chose to eat school meals, particularly in secondary schools, as highlighted by the OFSTED report 'Food in Schools: Encouraging healthier eating'<sup>18</sup>. Likewise, although many schools have catering equipment that is serviceable, it is old and in need of replacement with more modern alternatives to improve the quality, presentation and image of school meals.

There are currently 9 schools in Waltham Forest that do not have on-site kitchens and are catered for at nearby schools. BSF, PCP and other programmes need to ensure that the school meal catering needs of these schools are considered in the building planning process of any 'host' school to ensure continuity of service.

## **5. Working in Partnership**

There are a number of stakeholders and organisations in the borough who have an interest in, and/or influence on, school meals. Waltham Forest Catering is keen to work together to ensure a co-ordinated approach in respect of school meals, enabling them to play their part in contributing to improving the health of the borough's children and young people. Figure 3 shows who and what has an impact on school meals and to what extent.

### **Food in Schools Programme**

Established in 2006, the Food in Schools Programme sits within VT Education and Skills' Change for Children Team, which also hosts Waltham Forest's Healthy Schools Programme. The aim of the programme is to work with all schools in the borough to ensure healthier food is provided and promoted as part of a whole school approach. Activities of the programme include

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<sup>17</sup> First in Service School Kitchen Equipment Survey, 2007

<sup>18</sup> 'Food in Schools: Encouraging healthier eating' OFSTED, 2007

providing expert advice to schools on food and nutrition, offering training opportunities for school staff, working with parents and pupils to promote healthy eating and the benefits of school meals, supporting schools with meeting the standards for food and drinks served across the whole school day and working with schools to develop food policies.

### **Healthy Schools**

Waltham Forest has a highly successful Healthy Schools programme, of which 100% of schools in the borough are now participating and 70% have achieved Healthy School status. Provision of school meals which meet the Government standards for school food is part of the criteria for the award.

### **Primary/Special/Nursery School Meals consultation group**

In 2008, the Primary/Special/Nursery School Meals consultation group was established to facilitate formal communications between schools and Waltham Forest Catering on matters relating to service provision. This has provided a good forum for discussions on service development initiatives, marketing and financial performance. The group meets on a termly basis and has Headteacher representatives from nine schools across the borough.

### **School Food Trust**

In the Winter term of 2008 the London Borough of Waltham Forest were delighted to be selected as only one of three Local Authorities in England to work in partnership with the School Food Trust to test a number of marketing pilots in primary and secondary schools across the borough. These pilots were concluded in May 2009. Additionally, the borough was selected as one of 15 Local Authorities to benefit from a School Food Trust targeted support initiative. This includes working with the School Food Trust on an action plan to increase School Meal Take up (NI52).

### **Let's Get Cooking**

The School Food Trust's 'Let's Get Cooking' programme begins in Waltham Forest in September 2009. Let's Get Cooking is a 5-year, £20 million programme, supported by the BIG Lottery Fund, to set up a network of 5,000 cooking clubs across England.

The aim of the programme is to set up 3,000 new cooking clubs, who will receive funding for cooking equipment, club running costs, training for adult helpers and a range of resources; and 2,000 associate clubs which are for schools who already have an existing cooking club. They also receive resources, support and a smaller amount of funding.

Waltham Forest has been allocated 12 cooking club places (2 secondary and 10 primary). Let's Get Cooking will be co-ordinated by VT Education and Skills Food in Schools Programme.



## 6. Priorities

Five key priorities for achieving the aims of this strategy have been identified and developed through an examination of the evidence base and a series of facilitated focus groups and workshops with partners and stakeholders:

- Increase the number of pupils choosing school meals
- Ensure the future sustainability of Waltham Forest School Catering
- Involve and inspire children, parents and carers to influence their attitude towards school meals
- Ensure consideration of school meals becomes central to related policy making
- Achieving excellence as a service

The sections below present the priorities for action along with what is already planned and happening.

### 6.1 Increase the number of pupils choosing to have school meals

#### *Why this matters?*

As this strategy has set out, school meals have many benefits for children and young people, be it as a good source of nutrition, a way of ensuring their optimal learning capacity or simply as an enjoyable social experience to eat lunch with their friends.

In view of the decline in take-up of school meals experienced both locally and nationally, it is now essential that partners work together to reverse this trend and ensure the future viability and sustainability of Waltham Forest Catering.

Take-up of school meals is influenced not only by the food served, but more significantly, by the dining room environment and lunchtime experience. In 2007 OFSTED produced a report which examined some of the barriers to school meal take-up<sup>19</sup>. The report concluded that the quality of the dining hall was a key factor in determining whether pupils chose to eat a school meal. Pupils wanted:

- efficient routines to minimise queuing and prevent overcrowding
- the opportunity to eat with friends who brought packed lunches
- eating areas that were attractively decorated with vibrant displays, including information on how to eat healthily
- well presented food - making it attractive to pupils
- clearly displayed menus so that everybody can see what was available and had enough time to make a considered choice about what to eat

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<sup>19</sup> 'Food in Schools: Encouraging healthier eating' OFSTED, 2007

- pay-in-advance schemes to remove the complication of money changing hands and to enable queues to move quickly.

Many of these factors also contribute to the take up of free school meals by those eligible. It is known that the potential stigma of free school meals and the lunchtime experience can prevent take up of entitlement. Arrangements such as cashless payments systems and allowing pupils to sit with friends regardless of the type of lunch they have can make sure those in receipt of free school meals are not easily identifiable.

It is also important that school kitchens and serveries are designed and equipped to enable catering staff to produce and serve high volumes of good quality food from fresh ingredients.

### ***What's already happening?***

In the autumn term of 2008 Waltham Forest was selected as one of three local authorities in England, to work in partnership with the School Food Trust piloting a range of marketing activities. The pilots tested a variety of marketing techniques in 24 schools across the borough (primary and secondary) to identify the short, medium and long term impacts on school food take up. Pupil and parent surveys were also conducted pre and post pilot

The pilots provided a great opportunity for pupils to try school meals and to test the capacity within schools to provide more school meals than are served at present.

In December 2007, the council, together with Waltham Forest Catering, launched the 'Lunch Bunch' school meals campaign aimed at the primary sector. The aims of the campaign were to raise awareness of the good quality school meals provided in our schools, involve the children in fun activities and ultimately increase school meal take up and ensure the future financial viability of the Waltham Forest Catering. The 'Lunch Bunch' slogan is an on-going feature of Waltham Forest Catering communications with primary sector children and parents. Activities included: 'Lunch Bunch' character drawing competition, school based event involving Leader of the Council, wfm (Waltham Forest magazine) articles, parent/pupil school meals survey, menu cards and nutritional information provided to parents and improved website information.

The governments' Building Schools for the Future initiative (BSF) and Primary Capital Programme (PCP) offer a fantastic opportunity to influence the kitchen and dining facilities in our schools, ensuring they are fit for purpose and meet the needs of customers.

Six schools in the borough already have cashless payment systems for purchasing school meals. Three of these secondary schools have undergone re-building/ remodelling under the BSF initiative and work on a further thirteen secondary schools is planned. As part of the BSF programme, a cashless catering solution linked with the Council's existing OneCard scheme

(Smartcard scheme) was implemented for each of these schools. Some of the benefits realised are:

1. Improved turnover through shorter queues
2. Increased school meal take up
3. Reduced cash handling
4. Removal of free school meal stigma
5. Reduced incidence of pupils leaving school premises

The implementation of a cashless catering system is part of the core ICT Managed Service package for all other secondary schools included in BSF programme.

The Primary Capital Programme pilots have also recently commenced in Waltham Forest and will offer opportunities to improve kitchen and dining facilities in two primary schools.

Following the results from a school catering equipment survey commissioned by Waltham Forest Catering in 2007, £60,000 from the Targeted School Meals Grant was allocated on a match-funding basis to upgrade kitchen facilities in six of the borough's primary schools which were identified in the report as being immediate priorities for remedial work. Fourteen other schools also received small pieces of new catering equipment to aid the preparation of freshly cooked meals. However, a number of school kitchens are still in urgent need of upgrading. With this in mind Waltham Forest Catering, together with the council's School Organisation, Partnership and Development Unit, submitted a bid to the DCSF in spring 2009 for Targeted Capital Funding for Kitchens, to enable the match-funded refurbishment of kitchen and dining facilities in a further sixteen schools. The borough was successful in securing half of the funding originally applied for, due to the high demand on the fund. The original bid is now being reviewed to prioritise projects, taking into account factors such as need, current provision and value for money, with the intention of rolling out projects from Summer 2010.

The Food in Schools Programme has also worked with secondary schools on improving the dining experience. During 2008 school councils were invited to take part in a project to review their current dining experience. Funding from the Targeted School Meals Grant was provided to each school to enable them to tackle some of the issues, which they felt could be contributing to reduce meal take-up.

The main issues the students raised were:

- Queuing – both time spent and organisation of queues
- Inadequate length of lunchtime
- Appearance of dining area
- Dining room too crowded and too noisy
- Inadequate space to eat

School councils used their funding towards purchasing outdoor picnic tables, refurbishing the dining hall, developing Grab-bag style serveries and audio-

visual equipment. Schools have reported improvements in the ambience of the dining room and the number of pupils purchasing food.

The present system for applying for free school meals can be problematic for parents, as applications have to be made in person at only one access point in the borough and families must re-apply for this benefit every year. As a means of simplifying this process, improving accessibility and increasing the number of families taking up their entitlement, the Local Authority is currently working with the council's Revenue and Benefits team to investigate administering free school meal entitlement through the Housing Benefit system, thereby making it automatic for anyone who lives in the borough and claims housing benefit, to also receive authorisation entitling them to free school meals.

There are a large number of hot-food takeaway outlets in Waltham Forest, the majority of which serve high fat/sugar foods. Their competitive pricing and location near schools and residential areas ensures they are highly frequented by children and young people both before and after school, as well as during lunchtime periods. A recent study found that for every secondary school in the borough there were thirty-eight fast-food takeaways. Many secondary schools have introduced closed-gate policies at lunchtimes, although the issue of accessing takeaway outlets on the journey to and from school remains. A study by JT Winkler and S Sinclair reported that 80% of pupils bought a food or drink item on the way to/from school at least once a week<sup>20</sup>. Concerned with the health of its residents, the council has pioneered new planning regulations and introduced restrictions on applications for new hot food takeaway businesses which seek to a) prevent high concentrations and clusters of takeaways, and b) prevent them locating near schools, youth facilities, parks and residential areas.

## **6.2 Ensure the future sustainability of Waltham Forest Catering**

### ***Why this matters?***

84% of schools in Waltham Forest have chosen to be catered for by Waltham Forest Catering. This service is highly valued and schools appreciate the importance of working collectively for the benefit of all schools. By doing so, participating schools benefit equally from economics of scale, helping to keep the cost and the selling price of a school meal down.

The council is supportive of maintaining an in-house school meals service provided that there is sufficient demand from schools for the service to be financially viable. It is therefore vital that a viable customer base is maintained. A core Service Level Agreement (SLA) is negotiated periodically with participating schools, the current one expires on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010.

The BSF and Primary Capital Programme present exciting opportunities for schools, but at the same time present the potential for these schools to decide

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<sup>20</sup> Sinclair S, Winkler JT, The school fringe: what pupils buy and eat from shops surrounding secondary schools. July 2008

on alternative catering provision, particularly where differing catering arrangements exist within combining schools.

Effective local authority-led catering services add value to boroughs by contributing to key child / health focussed strategies, supporting school events, raising the profile of school meals with parents across the authority, leading on school meals improvement initiatives and also provide a valuable source of professional advice and data to councillors, council officers, schools, etc.

***What is already happening?***

As discussed in Priority 1, Waltham Forest Catering is already working with schools and partners on a range of initiatives to increase school meal take-up and to ensure that pupils and their families that currently take school meals continue to do so.

Consultation has take place through the Primary/Secondary/Nursery School Meals Consultation Group on a core SLA for the next 4 years 2010/11-2013/14. Based on Waltham Forest Catering’s performance in transforming the service over the past two years to meet the new nutritional standards and achieving a financial breakeven position, it is envisaged that schools will have confidence to commit to the school meals service for a further 4 year contract, which will add stability to the service, providing the environment to continually improve.

Major provisions and service contracts have been re-tendered, ensuring that value for money is achieved. Where appropriate Waltham Forest Catering has joined with other Local Authorities to ensure that economies are achieved through combined procurement.

Through stringent control of service costs, efficient procurement and targeted use of the School Lunch Grant, Waltham Forest Catering have been able hold the selling price of paid meals for the past 3 years.

By undertaking benchmarking exercises Waltham Forest Catering also ensures that the prices of school meals and ingredients costs are competitive when compared with London counterparts<sup>21</sup> – see table 1.

School type	Area	Price per meal	Ingredient cost
Primary	Waltham Forest Catering	£1.70	£0.54
	London - Outer	£1.74	£0.60
	London - Inner	£1.61	£0.66
			As a percentage of total service expenditure

<sup>21</sup> Data extracted from Nicholas J, Wood L, Morgan C, Lever E, Russell S and Nelson M (2008) Third annual survey of take up of school meals in England. London. School Food Trust.

<b>Secondary</b>	Waltham Forest Catering	£1.75	44.0%
	London - Outer	£1.80	34.5%
	London - Inner	£1.82	37.1%

Table 1: Cost of a two-course meal and ingredients in 2007/08 in primary and secondary schools

### **6.3 Involve and inspire children, parents and carers to influence their attitudes towards school meals**

#### ***Why this matters?***

Children, young people and their parents / carers are the key customers of school meals, and as such there is a need to support them to make informed choices about school lunches, and for them to feel confident about the food that is provided. It is important to continue listening to their needs and responding to their views and suggestions.

Historically, school meals have not always been viewed positively by the public, but with the transformation to good quality, nutritious food there is a constant need to work with schools, pupils and families to influence attitudes and help them recognise the benefits of choosing school meals.

#### ***What is already happening?***

In 2008 Waltham Forest Catering, in conjunction with the council's Community Engagement Unit, carried out a School Meals Survey<sup>22</sup> to identify parental and pupil views on school meals. The survey found that in primary schools the decision about school meals tends to be taken either by the parent (41%) or jointly with the child (41%). In secondary schools, the young person has more say with young people making the decision 32% of the time and jointly with their parents 39% of the time. Overall, 81% of parents were at least 'fairly satisfied' with school meals, although satisfaction was significantly higher amongst primary school respondents. Areas respondents reported to be least satisfied with were:

- value for money
- menu selection
- portion size

When asked about factors which would encourage school meal take-up, the most commonly cited responses were better tasting food, more affordable meals and less queuing. The findings of the survey identified a number of issues to action / continue focus on, that could help further enhance levels of satisfaction with school meals and support an increased take-up. These have been included in the action plan.

74% of parents were keen to try a school meal, and it is generally accepted that this is an effective way of improving parental perceptions of school food. Parent sessions with opportunities to try tasters of menu items are frequently provided in schools, usually as part of a larger school event, eg. parents

<sup>22</sup> School Meals Survey, Waltham Forest Catering June 2008

evenings, and were also a key aspect of the School Food Trust Marketing pilots conducted in 2009.

The SFT carried out pupil and parent surveys as part of the marketing pilots<sup>23</sup>. Key findings identified that when parents of primary pupils were asked pre activity what were the factors that most affected their choice of eating arrangements, a huge 76% said that 'quality of food' was the most important factor. The second most important factor was 'my child's preference' then followed by 'range of menu choices'. The factor that was the least important to their choice of eating arrangements was 'whether they will eat a main meal in the evening' with 39% followed by 'convenience' and then 'cost'. When asked if they were satisfied with the overall quality of food offered at their child's school, 50% said they were 'not sure' and 49% said 'yes' and 9% said 'no'. Post activity results dramatically increased with 65% parents responding 'yes'. 33% of parents were 'not sure' and only 2% said 'no'.

When secondary pupils were asked pre activity what were the factors that most affected their choice of eating arrangements 42% said that 'quality of food' was most important, closely followed by 'taste', these two factors were also the most important post activity. The least important factor pre activity was 'whether I eat a main meal in the evening' with 59%, this factor was also the least important post trial with 65%. When asked how they would describe school lunches 47% said 'ok', this decreased to 41% post activity. 26% pre activity responded 'neither good nor bad', this increased to 31% post activity.

Pre activity, the top reason for secondary pupils never having a school lunch was 'quality of food' at 37% closely followed by 'cost' at 34% and 'how long it takes' at 31%. Post activity the top reason was still 'quality of food' with 32%, followed by 'taste' at 28% and 'how long it takes' with 22%. When asked "what would you do to improve school lunches?" 50% of pupil's pre activity said they would 'improve choice or food quality or portion size'. 37% said they would 'increase the length of the lunch break'.

The majority of schools in the borough have active school councils, which provide pupils with the opportunity to raise their views and ideas about school life, as seen from their perspective. School meals are a frequent topic for discussion and some schools have now established specific working groups of young people whose focus it is to work with the school and its caterer to improve school food. Pupil consultation is also a key element of the Healthy Schools Programme.

Articles and advertorials on school meals regularly feature in Waltham Forest News, the council's fortnightly magazine which is sent to over 100,000 households in the borough, and Waltham Forest Catering has a page on the London Borough of Waltham Forest website which contains general information on school meals along with core menus.

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<sup>23</sup> SFT Report - Locally-led marketing project: - Outcomes of Phase 2

Copies of the menu are also sent out to all parents on a termly basis, and along with the Food in Schools Programme, the service regularly attends parent's evenings and school events to provide information on school meals.

#### **6.4 Ensure consideration of school meals becomes central to related policy making**

##### ***Why this matters?***

The benefits of school meals extend far beyond provision and there are many opportunities and initiatives in the borough that have been identified which can have a positive impact on school meal take-up.

Working collectively with Waltham Forest NHS, ONELCS (Outer North East London Community Services), London Borough of Waltham Forest and VT Education and Skills to support the achievement of relevant objectives will assist in helping partners understand how school meals can contribute to improving the health of children in the borough.

The move towards a position where the school meals service is seen as being a key part of the jigsaw at the planning and strategic stages is vital to its long term success.

##### ***What is already happening?***

Waltham Forest Catering has worked closely with the borough's Food in Schools Programme since its creation in 2005, to bring about sustainable improvements to school food and the lunchtime experience.

Meeting the Government standards for school lunches, consulting with parents and pupils on school food and creating welcoming eating environments are criteria the catering service has helped schools achieve for the Healthy Eating theme of the National Healthy Schools programme.

Waltham Forest Catering is part of the Waltham Forest Childhood Obesity Task Group, whose remit is to co-ordinate and support the development of a childhood obesity strategy and related services in Waltham Forest. A key outcome of the group will be the development of a Childhood Obesity Strategy for the borough.

Data collected on school meal take-up is included in the CYPP under National Indicator 52.

Waltham Forest Catering have also contributed to the boroughs Poverty Strategy by committing to promoting school meals to increase their take-up, in particular free school meals. This will be achieved by taking part in the School Food Trust's marketing pilots in February to May 2009, implementing actions identified through the School Food Trust's tailored support package and continuing Waltham Forest Catering's successful School Meals campaign.

## **6.5 Work towards achieving excellence as a service**

### ***Why this matters?***

School meal take-up is the single most important factor affecting the future sustainability of the school meals service. It is also an extremely important contributing factor in reducing childhood obesity and improving educational attainment potential. Outside impacts have had a hugely significant affect on pupils and parents perception of school meals. In the period from 2005, there has been an average reduction of meal numbers in the region of 5%, with secondary schools worst affected. Introducing the new nutritional standards have in themselves presented a challenge to reversing this trend, though in the last year there are signs that school meal take up may be beginning to increase once more.

Now that new nutritional standards are implemented into primary, special and nursery menus, and are on target to be implemented into secondary menus from September 2009, Waltham Forest Catering aims to steer service development towards achieving excellence.

The service aims to do this by providing value for money, investing in staff development, maintaining a commitment to achieving the Government standards for school lunches, ensuring the quality and availability of food throughout service, helping to realise upgrading of kitchen, servery and dining facilities, improving the dining experience and prioritising our commitment to good customer care and delivering a child/young people-friendly service.

### ***What is already happening?***

Waltham Forest Catering is acutely aware that the service they provide must represent value for money to customers, particularly children and young people, their parents / carers, head teachers and school governing bodies.

The future of the service relies solely on three factors:

1. Children and young people eat and enjoy the meals served and choose to take them, with a sustained increase in meal take-up
2. Young people in secondary schools and parents across all sectors feel that the cost of a school meal is good value
3. Sufficient schools wish to use Waltham Forest Catering as their school meals provider

The 'face' of Waltham Forest Catering is our catering staff. Well-trained, customer focused and professionally supported staff are critical to delivering a consistent, good quality service. In order to achieve this the service:

- Inducts all new starters and provides staff with an on-going development opportunity through an appraisal scheme
- Trains cooks on the nutritional content of food to improve knowledge and enable participation in menu planning to meet new Government nutritional standards for school meals
- Provides a trainee cook programme to facilitate career progression and continuity of skilled cooks to prepare healthy, appetising, well presented meals

- Conducts regular meetings and practical workshops with cooks, cascaded to site based staff, to build a confident and motivated team, including an annual Cooks Conference
- Holds school lunch themed days to tempt and enthuse pupils which compliment curriculum activities

Qualified, professional management and support staff lead and support site-based catering teams. Waltham Forest Catering has:

- Enabled the price of a paid school meal to be held for the past three years, £1.70 in primary sector schools and £1.75 in secondary schools, a critical factor to achieving increased meal take-up.
- Established a marketing programme and brand, in conjunction with the council's corporate communications team, aimed at increasing school meal take-up. Increases will impact on achieving future economies of scale, which in turn will help to keep the cost of a school meal down.
- Together with Children and Young People's finance, established new payment arrangements for school meals, including a transparent subsidy for paid school meals.
- Nutritionally analysed school lunch menus to ensure compliance with the Government's standards for school meals.
- Made successful bids to the School Food Trust to partner with them on the funded marketing pilot and targeted school meals support initiative, both of which are aimed at increasing school meal take-up.
- Conducted annual audits of each school kitchen and service. On-going random checks support the formal audit.
- Been independently audited through the Food in Schools programme, which confirmed compliance of primary school menus with the new nutritional standards.
- Conducted on and off-site practical cookery training and coaching.
- Conducted a customer satisfaction survey in March 2008 to establish a benchmark for improvement.
- Partnered with other Local Authorities on procuring provisions and services, increasing economies of scale and contributing to keeping down the cost of school meals.
- Procured socially responsible products as appropriate to business needs, i.e. Fair Trade bananas, tea and coffee, supporting the council's status as a Fair Trade Council and fish and fish products that meet the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) standards for maintaining sustainable supplies.

## **7. Action Plan**

The action plan for 2009/10 – 2010/11 sets out the new activity that Waltham Forest Catering and its partners will progress over the next year

## 8. Appendices

### 8.1 Weblinks to references used in the School Meals Strategy

1. Our Place in London: Waltham Forest Sustainable Community Strategy, May 2008  
[http://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/waltham\\_forest\\_sustainable\\_community\\_strategy\\_2008.pdf](http://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/waltham_forest_sustainable_community_strategy_2008.pdf)
2. Waltham Forest Child Poverty Strategy 2009-2020, May 2009  
<http://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/child-poverty-strategy.pdf>
3. Waltham Forest Catering, Meal take-up figures, 2008/09 – provided by WFC
4. Nicholas J, Wood L, Morgan C, Lever E, Russell S and Nelson M (2008) Third annual survey of take up of school meals in England. London. School Food Trust.  
[http://www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk/UploadDocs/Library/Documents/third\\_annual\\_survey\\_of\\_take\\_up\\_final.pdf](http://www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk/UploadDocs/Library/Documents/third_annual_survey_of_take_up_final.pdf)
5. 2009 PLASC census data (FSME as a percentage total of all pupils), VT Education and Skills
6. DCSF: Schools, Pupils and Their Characteristics: January 2009 (January 2008 data used) <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000843/index.shtml>
7. Waltham Forest Catering, Meal take-up figures, 2008/09 – provided by WFC
8. Evaluation of the Eat Well Do Well Programme: University of Hull, 2008  
<http://www.hull.ac.uk/ifl-research/finalreport.pdf>
9. National Child Measurement Programme 2007/08  
<http://www.ncmp.ic.nhs.uk/newresults.aspx>
10. Choosing Health: making healthier choices easier, Department of Health, 2005  
[http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/Browsable/DH\\_4097491](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/Browsable/DH_4097491)
11. Waltham Forest Local Area Agreement 2008-2011  
<http://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/laa-full-list.pdf>
12. 'A guide to introducing the Government's food-based and nutrient-based standards for school lunches.' School Food Trust, December 2007  
[http://www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk/UploadDocs/Library/Documents/sft\\_nutrition\\_guide\\_aug08.pdf](http://www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk/UploadDocs/Library/Documents/sft_nutrition_guide_aug08.pdf)
13. Evaluation of the Eat Well Do Well Programme: University of Hull, 2008  
<http://www.hull.ac.uk/ifl-research/finalreport.pdf>
14. School lunch, behaviour and mood: systematic observation of classroom behaviour following a school dining room intervention by R Golley, E

- Baines, P Bassett, L Wood, M Nelson, January 2008  
<http://www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk/UploadDocs/Library/Documents/sl&b3findings.pdf>
15. Child Poverty Strategy 2009-2020, London Borough of Waltham Forest, 2009 <http://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/child-poverty-strategy.pdf>
  16. Waltham Forest Catering school meals website  
<http://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/schoolmeals>
  17. First in Service School Kitchen Equipment Survey, 2007 – provided by WFC
  18. 'Food in Schools: Encouraging healthier eating' OFSTED, 2007  
<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Publications-and-research/Browse-all-by/Education/Curriculum/Food-technology/Food-in-schools-encouraging-healthier-eating>
  19. 'Food in Schools: Encouraging healthier eating' OFSTED, 2007  
<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Publications-and-research/Browse-all-by/Education/Curriculum/Food-technology/Food-in-schools-encouraging-healthier-eating>
  20. Sinclair S, Winkler JT, The school fringe: what pupils buy and eat from shops surrounding secondary schools. July 2008  
<http://cmis.sandwell.gov.uk/CMISWebPublic/Binary.ashx?Document=29072>
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[http://www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk/UploadDocs/Library/Documents/third\\_annual\\_survey\\_of\\_take\\_up\\_final.pdf](http://www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk/UploadDocs/Library/Documents/third_annual_survey_of_take_up_final.pdf)
  22. School Meals Survey, Waltham Forest Catering June 2008 – provided by WFC
  23. School Food Trust Report - Locally-led marketing project: - Outcomes of Phase 2 – provided by SFT
  24. The Children and Young People's Plan – Review of outcomes in 2008/09 and outcomes plan for 2009/10
  25. Our Place in London: Waltham Forest Sustainable Community Strategy, May 2008  
[http://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/waltham\\_forest\\_sustainable\\_community\\_strategy\\_2008.pdf](http://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/waltham_forest_sustainable_community_strategy_2008.pdf)
  26. Waltham Forest Child Poverty Strategy 2009-2020, May 2009  
<http://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/child-poverty-strategy.pdf>
  27. Healthy Schools website [www.healthyschools.gov.uk](http://www.healthyschools.gov.uk)
  28. Waltham Forest Local Area Agreement 2008/11  
<http://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/laa-full-list.pdf>

## 8.2 How the School Meals Strategy contributes to related strategies in Waltham Forest

This School Meals Strategy will support the delivery of the following key strategies and programmes:

### 1. The Children and Young Peoples' Plan, in particular priority outcomes on being healthy.<sup>24</sup>

Priority / Objective	Indicator Ref.	Indicator Description	Outcomes / Targets			Lead Agency
			2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	
<b>Priority 1: Increase the number of children and young people who are healthy</b>						
<b>Objective 1.3: Reduce obesity levels in children and young people</b>	Objective 1.31	Children who are overweight	29%	12.7%	No target set	Waltham Forest PCT; ONEL community services
	NI 55	Obesity among primary school age children in Reception year	12.2%	10.4%	10.0%	Waltham Forest PCT; ONEL community services
	NI 56	Obesity among primary school age children in Year 6	23.1%	22.8%	22.2%	Waltham Forest PCT; ONEL community services
	NI 52a	Take up of school lunches – primary schools	N/A	46.5%	No target set	CYP Resources
	NI 52b	Take up of school lunches – secondary schools	N/A	43.4%	No target set	CYP Resources

<sup>24</sup> The Children and Young People's Plan – Review of outcomes in 2008/09 and outcomes for 2009/10, April 2009

<b>Objective 4.2: Support schools in ensuring the well-being of children and young people</b>	Objective 4.21	Schools accredited as Healthy Schools	62%	66%	75%	VTE&S
	Objective 4.22	Schools participating in Healthy Schools standard	98%	100%	100%	VTE&S
<b>Priority 8: Help children to achieve their potential in all stages of their education</b>						
<b>Objective 8.3: Children enjoy learning and succeed in key stage 2 and make good progress</b>	NI 102a	Key stage 2 - Gap between pupils eligible for FSM and their peers	18.3%	14.2%	17.8%	VTE&S
<b>Objective 8.4: Children enjoy learning and succeed in key stage 4 and make good progress</b>	NI 102b	Key stage 4 - Gap between pupils eligible for FSM and their peers	17.6%	19.1%	16.5%	VTE&S

**2. *Our Place in London*<sup>25</sup>: Waltham Forest Sustainable Community Strategy, in particular priority outcomes on tackling childhood obesity**

Priority	Commitment	Lead Officer / Agency
<b>Priority: Create wealth and opportunity for residents</b>		
<b>Ensure residents are fit and healthy for work</b>	24. Tackle childhood obesity by focussing on diet and exercise	Healthier Communities Partnership Board

<sup>25</sup> Our Place in London: Waltham Forest Sustainable Community Strategy, May 2008  
[http://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/waltham\\_forest\\_sustainable\\_community\\_strategy\\_2008.pdf](http://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/waltham_forest_sustainable_community_strategy_2008.pdf)

### 3. Waltham Forest Child Poverty Strategy<sup>26</sup>

Priority Outcome	Actions / Milestones	Lead Officer / Agency	Deadline for Completion
<p><b>Getting young people off to the best possible start in their education - raise aspirations and close the educational attainment gap whilst raising standards for all</b></p>	<p><b>3.5 Promote school meals take-up across Waltham Forest.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set up the pilot national Schools Food Trust (SFT) campaign</li> <li>• Prepare to set up a school meals campaign for after the SFT trial</li> <li>• Deliver the SFT campaign</li> <li>• Evaluate the SFT campaign, and mainstream the learning from this</li> <li>• Deliver Waltham Forest's School Meals campaign.</li> </ul>	<p>Head of Corporate Communications</p> <p>Head of Corporate Communications</p> <p>Head of Corporate Communications Head of Corporate Communications</p> <p>Head of Corporate Communications</p>	<p>January 2009</p> <p>August 2009</p> <p>April 2009 May 2009</p> <p>May 2009</p>

<sup>26</sup> Waltham Forest Child Poverty Strategy 2009-2020, May 2009 <http://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/child-poverty-strategy.pdf>

#### 4. Waltham Forest Healthy Schools Programme<sup>27</sup>

Priority Outcome	Criteria	Minimum evidence required
<b>Healthy Eating Theme</b>	<p><b>2.7 School Lunch Standards</b>            Has a school lunch service that meets or exceeds current DCSF standards for school lunches</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school lunch service meets or exceeds the current DCSF standards for school lunches</li> <li>• The named member of the SLT, the governing body and Head Caterer agree that the DCSF standards for school lunch are being met and review this regularly (at least termly)</li> <li>• Healthy options are promoted</li> <li>• The caterer can say how minority ethnic and medical/allergy needs have been considered/incorporated in menu planning</li> <li>• There is appropriate guidance (promoting healthier options) given to children and young people who have packed lunches and their parents/carers</li> </ul>

<sup>27</sup> [www.healthyschools.gov.uk](http://www.healthyschools.gov.uk)

## 5. Local Area Agreements<sup>28</sup>

Sustainable Community Strategy Priority	Indicator Ref.	Indicator Description	Baseline	LAA Improvement Targets			Lead Agency
				2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	
<b>Create more wealthy and opportunity for residents:</b> ensure residents are fit and healthy for work	NI 56	Obesity in primary school children in Year 6	23.3% (2006/07)	22.00%	22.80%	22.80%	Waltham Forest NHS

<sup>28</sup> Waltham Forest Local Area Agreement 2008/11, April 2009