

Health and Social Services Committee
HSS-22-02 (p.4)

Date: 4 December 2002

Venue: Committee Room 2, National Assembly for Wales

Title: Nutrition Strategy for Wales

Purpose

1. A paper for the Committee to note, the nutrition strategy action plan.

Summary/Recommendations

2. The nutrition strategy action plan takes a crosscutting approach to tackling food poverty and improving nutrition among the whole population of Wales. The aim is to achieve an improvement in the health of the UK population by encouraging and facilitating the adoption by the population of a healthy, balanced diet.

Timing

3. Not urgent. It is proposed that the final nutrition strategy joint plan of action will be published early in the New Year.

Background

4. Improving the health of the population of Wales and reducing inequalities by tackling the underlying causes of ill health is at the top of the Welsh Assembly Government's agenda. Relatively high rates of chronic disease in Wales such as coronary heart disease and cancer and a life expectancy two or three years less than the best in Europe, have prompted closer attention to diet as one of the underlying determinants of ill-health.
5. A healthy balanced diet plays an important role in the maintenance of good health, and contributes to a reduced risk of developing heart disease and certain cancers. In Wales, the balance of the diet falls short of government recommendations that were set to reduce the risks of these diseases. Improvements in diet are urgently needed, especially among disadvantaged groups
6. The Assembly's Plan for the NHS in Wales stresses the need for more action to prevent ill health and includes a commitment to produce a follow up to Better Health Better Wales as the vehicle for

implementing action to reduce inequalities in health through other policy areas.

7. Well Being in Wales (HSS-19-02 (p2)) was published for consultation on 24 September 2002. It reinforces the Assembly Government's integrated approach to policies and programmes and provides an overarching framework for crosscutting action to address priorities. Well Being in Wales makes more explicit the links between health and well being and other policy areas, and sets out proposals for more action to reduce inequalities in health, including action on nutrition at the community level.

Food Standards Agency Wales

8. The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has a major role to play in enabling, motivating and informing people about their diet. One of the FSA's key priorities is to secure long term improvements in the diet of the people of UK.

9. In March 2001 the UK Board agreed a strategic framework within which Agency activity on nutrition would be developed.

10. The Welsh Executive of the FSA is committed to working with the Welsh Assembly Government to achieve long term improvements in the diet and nutrition of the Welsh population, and a reduction in inequalities by enabling and encouraging the disadvantaged to improve their diets.

Nutrition strategy for Wales

11. Since March 2001 FSA Wales has been leading on the preparation of a nutrition strategy for Wales, overseen by a nutrition strategy steering group including representatives of the Welsh Assembly Government. The aim of the strategy and action plan is to lead to a reduction in the incidence of diet - related ill health through the promotion of a healthier diet for the whole population of Wales, particularly those in vulnerable groups.

Priority groups

12. While the strategy is intended to improve the diet of all people in Wales, it is acknowledged that certain groups need to be prioritised due to their poor diet and health. Through a series of workshops, stakeholders have largely endorsed the selection of low income and vulnerable consumers, and children and young people as the highest priority groups; and the potential benefits of also targeting middle-aged men, and women of child-bearing age.

13. The low income and vulnerable group includes elderly people in need and black and minority ethnic groups. Black and ethnic minority groups in general experience poorer socio-economic conditions than the white majority, and this is reflected in higher rates of premature death and higher rates of illness. Studies also suggest that particular ethnic group populations experience higher levels of ill health in relation to specific health conditions. Of particular note are coronary heart disease, some cancers and

diabetes.

14. The action plan contains specific action to target the needs of these groups. For example the action plan includes a number of initiatives directed at children and young people:

- Develop and encourage innovative approaches to increase fruit and vegetable intake in schools.
- Encourage the provision of breakfasts in schools.
- Continue school fruit tuck shops on a cost-recovery basis.
- Encourage and facilitate the teaching of nutrition and cooking skills in schools; ensure full consideration of these in the next curriculum review.

15. Feedback from the workshops indicated that to achieve dietary change, a combination of information and training, local and national initiatives, and policies were required. These form the basis of the nine strategy recommendations.

Consultation process

16. Consultation with stakeholders was a key component in the development of an effective strategy and in addition to holding five consultative workshops around Wales between October 2001 and April 2002 written comments on the consultation document were sought between July and August from around 1300 interested parties. Over 80 responses were received. These came from a broad range of interested parties including the voluntary sector, local government, health sector, academia, and individuals. Most supported the concept and detail of the strategy. Some concerns were expressed about whether the programme is over ambitious, and there were questions about the factual accuracy of certain aspects of the underlying scientific evidence (and where appropriate corrections are being made).

17. The final document will reflect a joint FSA Wales /Assembly programme of action, making explicit its contribution to Well Being in Wales and to one of the Assembly's key strategic aims of tackling social disadvantage and reducing inequalities. Many factors that contribute to inequalities are inherent in the problems being addressed by other Assembly policy areas.

Tackling Food Poverty

18. Addressing food poverty and promoting food equality will be the underpinning theme of the joint FSA Wales/ Welsh Assembly Government nutrition action plan. Food poverty has been defined as the inability to afford, or have reasonable access to food, which provides a healthy diet.

19. The draft nutrition strategy and the joint FSA Wales/Assembly action plan identifies the potential of nutrition as a key element of the Health, Social Care and Well-being strategies, and addresses how best

to assist LHB's/LA's in drawing up the nutrition elements of the strategy.

20. The action plan will recognise that improving physical and economic access to food and supporting community food initiatives and local community projects are important considerations in tackling food poverty. By way of illustration:

- Develop a public education campaign to promote healthy eating to the public with specific action aimed at the elderly and people from ethnic groups and other vulnerable groups.
- Disseminate information to key players on the impact of community initiatives on access to a healthy balanced diet.
- Work with primary producers and others to facilitate developments aimed at improving food access including setting up of food co-ops.

21. The draft action plan was endorsed by the Cabinet on 28th October. A statement was made by the Minister for Health and Social Services, at the plenary session on 30 October.

Cross-cutting themes

22. It is recognised that the Welsh Assembly Government is keen to tackle nutrition in Wales as a cross-cutting policy issue and Well Being in Wales reflects this. The development of the nutrition strategy and action plan will contribute to the Assembly's health improvement objectives and its wider inequalities agenda.

23. Some good progress has already been made in integrating health into other policies and programmes e.g. Communities First, the Objective 1 programme and Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes. Nutrition is also reflected in other strategies, frameworks and programmes e.g. Children's First framework, breastfeeding strategy, welfare food scheme and 'When I'm 64...and more', the Older Person's Strategy.

24. The Assembly's Agriculture and Rural Development Department is also working to promote an integrated approach to local food issues.

25. The changes being made to the NHS structure in Wales and the setting up of the National Public Health Service will create new opportunities for promoting nutrition.

Compliance

26. The Ministry of Health Act 1919 covers action conducive to the health of people. The National Health Service Act 1977 covers services related to health. Powers for both have been delegated to the

Minister for Health and Social Services and staff under the Transfer of Functions Order 1999. The Government of Wales Act 1998 provides the Assembly with the power to do anything to facilitate, or conducive or incidental to, the exercise of any of its functions (Section 40). Expenditure is covered by Section 85(2). There are no issues of regularity or propriety. The action plan will be delivered using existing FSA Wales and Health Promotion Programmes Budget Expenditure.

Action for subject committee

27. Note paper

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