

Minutes from the Cross-Party Group on School Food

Tuesday 14th February 2023, 12:00 – 13:30

Present:

Jenny Rathbone MS, Cardiff Central; **Peter Fox MS**, Monmouthshire; **Luke Fletcher MS**, S. Wales West; **Heledd Fychan MS**, South Wales Central.

In attendance: **Robbie Davison**, Can Cook/Well Fed; **Jen Griffiths** Flintshire CC; **Rhys James**, Caerphilly CC;; **Professor Simon Wright, Univ TSD and restaurant owner**; **Pearl Costello**, Food Cardiff/Food Sense Wales; **Professor Kevin Morgan & Becca Jablonski**, Cardiff University; **Judith Gregory**, Cardiff Education Catering; , **Libby Davies**, Farmers' Union of Wales; **Andrew Tuddenham**, Soil Association Cymru; **Gareth Thomas, Cara Mai Lewis** WLGA; **Edward Morgan**, Castell Howell Foods; **Mark Lawton & David Roberts**, Harlech Foods; **Steve Jones & Rob Lawton**, Newydd Catering; **Holly Tomlinson**, Landworkers Alliance; **Shea Buckland-Jones, Ruth Lawrence and Tessa Marshall**, WWF Cymru; **Gemma Roche-Clarke, Heledd Daniel**, Welsh Government; **Suan John**, Office of Cefin Campbell MS; **Alex Sims**, Office of Jenny Rathbone MS; **Charlotte Knight**, Office of Jayne Bryant MS.

Apologies: **Sian Gwenllian MS**; **Cefin Campbell MS**

Presentation Notes:

Robbie Davison (RJ), Director of the social enterprise Can Cook presented the Well Fed social partnership, involving Can Cook, Flintshire CC and Clwyd Alyn Housing Association. Presentation attached to the minutes.

Well Fed operates a cook-chill, part-prepare model in order to be able to supply 20,000 school meals per week (100,000 per week target this year), with a focus on eating quality and nutrition, with final preparation undertaken in the school. The model is due to be implemented in response to a shortfall of skilled school catering staff and rising cost of fresh food.

Key issues raised:

- Wholesalers are local but the produce may not be, particularly fruit and veg, sourced from Liverpool/Manchester wholesale markets; not all local suppliers meet the required specifications, eg beef – unavailable in North Wales, is sourced outside Wales.
- Investment from government is required to expand social food partnerships across Wales, to make the most of the roll-out of UPFSM
- Well Fed's environmental focus is principally on food miles, but the supply chain must enable Well Fed to operate at scale.
- The model provides control over standards – see discussion below.
- Social partnership model offers resilience against corporate takeover of the public food system.

Discussion

RJ and JG challenged the claim that standards are harder to secure in cook-on-site schools – these operations are tightly prescribed. The challenge here was about 'standardisation' not standards – the contention was that individual schools can standardise to the same consistency as meals produced at scale.

RD – the Well-Fed model controls the critical aspects of meal provision. School kitchens should be the most important part of the school, and the model is not looking to diminish this.

HT – Her experience of growing courgettes distributed by Castell Howell: the challenge for small producers is processing and cleaning at scale. Where should the investment come from? Supply chain could provide.

PF – the key to this is scale. Farmers need guaranteed markets e.g. public procurement. Food plans would support this shift.

JR – there is a big sustainability question around where Wales is going to source fruit and veg for free school meals. Where does eg Harlech source its veg?

ML - Harlech Foods don't supply fruit and veg and currently don't work with Well Fed.

KM – is the public-social partnership the best solution in response to resist corporate takeover of the public food system?

RD – look beyond social value to social impact. This only happens through public-social partnerships.

EM – if food plans require a volume of food to a particular standard, how would this work if Well Fed's budget is set in advance by the LA? Investment in the supply chain is needed to cover any shortfall - the risk with the model is that it relies upon the wholesalers to be viable.

SJ – Flintshire created a small central kitchen in 2020 for 22 schools, but their cook-hot model is logistically challenging. Conscious of the wider risk that social enterprise suppliers like Can Cook could be bought out by corporates, resulting in the extraction of public money to shareholders.

PF – the business models and investment needed to manage these risks will happen if food policy is brought together and put into law.

JR – bear in mind that difficult spending choices must be made in a future of diminishing budgets.

HT – horticulture was disadvantaged by area-based EU farm payment schemes with minimum hectares required. Supply chain investment could be supported by agriculture budgets under Sustainable Farming scheme.

LD: FUW supports payment capping to limit the amount provided to large enterprises

SW – Wales should be aspiring to equip every school with well trained cooks, and for government to set a long-term plan. Social partnerships are not the only answer, and the Well-Fed model is not solving all the challenges in the food system. Long term, we need targets to be set for Welsh production.

JR – challenge is to feed an increasing number of children with better quality food and limited budgets

RJ – Caerphilly are currently assessing costs of sourcing Welsh food (as a version of 'local'). Public Procurement standards contain 10% target for social value products. The problem is scale - Wales cannot supply the full range of foods required overnight.

KM – no one model can address the food system challenge; we need a plurality of approaches – an ecosystem of solutions – and we need to make the approaches work through partnerships.

Topic for next meeting: operational challenges

Concluding remarks from Chair:

- Thanked Robbie Davison and all present for their contributions to the discussion.