

Joint Committee

Date 25th November 2010

Title: Worcestershire Food Choices Project - improving healthy options in food outlets across the County

Recommendation

To receive this report as an item for information and to consider the potential to secure future funding opportunities.

Contribution to Priorities/ Recommendations

This project directly contributes to both the WRS priority to protect public health (tackle smoking, obesity and alcohol abuse) and the former Worcestershire Local Area Agreement, Health and Well-being targets a) to support and improve the leading of healthy lifestyles and well-being of adults, children and young people and b) to reduce levels of inequality within the community. It is considered that the project is still relevant despite the abolition of the LAAs by the Local Government Secretary Eric Pickles in October 2010

Introduction/Summary Background

Food eaten outside the home makes up an increasing proportion of our daily diet, with the average person now eating one in six meals a week away from home¹. Men consume about a quarter of their calories when eating out, and women around a fifth. The choices made when eating out go a long way to contributing to a balanced diet. Research has also shown that in areas of deprivation there is a prevalence of people eating less than 1 portion of fruit and vegetables per day despite the 5 a day recommendation.

By working in partnership with Worcestershire PCT Public Health, WRS has secured funding to the value of £50,000 to deliver on a nutrition project in food outlets across the County in an attempt to influence food choices by stimulating supply and demand of healthier options.

Report

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has recently worked with large manufacturers, retailers and caterers to improve the nutritional value of foods they offer, focusing on the key nutrients of public health concern i.e. to increase the consumption of fruit and vegetables and reduce the population's salt, sugar, saturated fat and energy intake. Small local outlets also have a significant role to play in improving consumers' access to healthier options.

By building on these previous projects, three localised nutritional initiatives are planned to be executed in 36 pilot premises across Worcestershire. The project consists of

three work streams 1) to increase the quality and range of fruit and vegetables at independent convenience stores located in low income areas and 2) change cooking methods and ingredients at i) mobile caterers operating in lay-bys, truck stops or industrial estates used by sedentary truckers and ii) workplace canteens serving a high percentage of routine and manual workers.

The key questions/hypothesis to be explored is whether business can change how they prepare and / or sell products to make the healthier choice the easy choice without adversely affecting bottom line (and at best improving bottom line) and at the same time ensuring the customer is satisfied with their purchase. Any learning will subsequently be shared with similar local food outlets.

This is the first externally funded project for WRS however with the forthcoming Public Health White Paper expected to strengthen the role of Public Health within Local Government, there is the potential for WRS to secure future funding by being part of the Total Place agenda; delivering on health and well being projects on behalf of or alongside partner organisations. WRS is well placed to make such a contribution due to its established relationship with local business and the underpinning public health philosophy of Environmental Health and Trading Standards disciplines.

Financial Implications

Delivery of the project is reliant on the funding from Worcestershire PCT to the value of £50,000. A significant proportion of these monies will be used for backfilling routine inspection work of existing officers thereby releasing them to work on this project. The project plan has assessed the risks and has identified control measures.

Sustainability

The experience gained from delivering this project will increase the skills set of the workforce and add to the portfolio of successful and sustainable services on offer by WRS thus increasing the potential to attract additional health and wellbeing funding opportunities.

Contact Points

Mr Steve Jorden, Head of Worcestershire Regulatory Services
Anita Fletcher, WRS, Worcester City

Background Papers

PROJECT PLAN for Worcestershire Food Choices Project - improving healthy options in food outlets across the County.

Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives -A Cross Government Strategy for England

¹Healthier Eating / Healthy Catering www.food.gov.uk

