



SCHOOL MEALS REVIEW PANEL – WELL INTENTIONED BUT THE NUMBERS JUST DON'T ADD UP

The School Meals Review Panel (SMRP) has produced detailed and very well intentioned recommendations for school meals. The regulatory framework is already changing with a timetable to implement nutrient based standards set to be in place for primary schools by September 2008 and for secondary schools for September 2009. The need to do something is overwhelming with diet related health problems estimated to cost the NHS some £4 billion annually.

Conservative estimates suggest that one third of girls and one fifth of boys will be obese by 2010 and many more will be overweight. It is of no surprise at all to any of our members involved in producing, wholesaling or delivering frozen school meals and ingredients that insufficient funds are available for local authorities to provide nutritious school meals. SMRP estimate that around £160 million per annum needs to be invested in the service to meet their recommendations of which over £100 million per annum is for the additional costs of food on the plate and will bring ingredients into line with the nutrient recommendations. The government so far has provided transitional funding of just less than £50 million per annum – only half of what is needed. SMRP state that this could lead to steep price increases for parents and could even call into question the viability of the school meals service in some areas with low income families, who need the most help, being hardest hit.

It is bizarre when one part of government stands a bill of £4 billion a year due to poor diet yet the education part, which has the biggest impact for the current and future generations has insufficient funds, at present, to put in place what is being recommended. We call upon government to back its own recommendations by providing adequate funding to restore the school meals service to where it should always have been.

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