

Cabinet

31 July 2008



Ethical Food Procurement

Report of Lesley Davies, Acting Director of Corporate Services

[Cabinet Portfolio Member for Corporate Services, Councillor Michele Hodgson]

Purpose

- 1 The purpose of the report is to outline the proposed ethical procurement strategy for the purchase by the County Council of free range eggs.

Background

- 2 Eggs form part of the Council's grocery contract and as a minimum standard must have the "lion" quality mark on each egg, which indicates that the eggs have been produced to high standards of food safety.
- 3 Within the grocery contract eggs are supplied from both caged hens (battery) and uncaged hens (free range eggs).
- 4 The current annual spend on both types of eggs is collectively £25,000, the greater proportion of which are battery produced. The choice of which eggs are purchased is entirely down to Services and their own budgets for food.
- 5 Corporate Procurement are trying generally to raise production and processing standards within the Council's food supply chain and by sourcing eggs from farm assured schemes and animal welfare schemes such as Freedom Foods will allow this to happen.
- 6 Freedom Foods are RSPCA welfare standards, which are based on scientific research, veterinary advice and practical farming experience. It is broadly based on the following Five Freedoms as defined by the Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC):
 - Freedom from hunger and thirst
 - Freedom from discomfort
 - Freedom from pain, injury or disease
 - Freedom to express normal behaviour
 - Freedom from fear and distress.

- 7 The European Union passed the Laying Hen Directive (1999/74/EC) to phase out battery caged system for eggs by 2012. Liverpool County Council in January 2008 banned battery caged eggs from their schools and care homes, see Appendix 2.

Working in partnership with the Council's Suppliers

- 8 Working in partnership with the Council's grocery supplier, Brakes, the Council have negotiated a price for free range eggs, which is comparable to that of battery produced. This pricing, together with adoption of this purchasing initiative, will allow the Council to move from using battery eggs to free range thus delivering a product which is competitive in the market place and meets ethical purchasing objectives.
- 9 Service users have now agreed to focus their purchasing on the free range product.
- 10 Corporate Procurement will look to extend the free range policy to the Council's external catering supply chain.

Recommendations

- 11 In line with the Council's sustainable approach to food procurement, it is recommended that Cabinet support the ethical purchasing approach of buying eggs provided under free range conditions and the ongoing initiative to extend this to the Council's external catering supply chain.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Local Government Reorganisation

The District Councils have been consulted and there is only minimal requirement which will be included.

Finance

No impact.

Working in partnership with the Council's grocery supplier, Brakes, the Council have negotiated a price for free range eggs, which is comparable to that of battery produced.

Staffing

No impact.

Equality and Diversity

None.

Accommodation

None.

Crime and disorder

None.

Sustainability

There is growing public and political interest in the origin of the food we purchase as a Council and the environment and social issues associated with food production, transportation and processing. The idea of sustainable food procurement is to maintain economic development at a steady level without exhausting natural resources or causing ecological damage. It involves reducing the waste produced and energy used, recycling, and buying food both locally and seasonally. However it is also a complex mix of social and economic issues that sometimes can be in conflict with one another. Less intensive farming systems are not just better for animals, they often found to be more sustainable.

Human rights

None.

Localities and Rurality

A request had been received by a member of the public via Hilary Armstrong MP for the Council to commit to sourcing free range eggs. Details available if necessary.

Young people

None.

Consultation

Service Users have agreed to focus their purchasing on free range eggs.

Health

There are many health benefits from procuring sustainable food, which can improve the health of customers, school children, elderly people and employees.

More and more customers are requesting the availability of free range eggs and products made from free range eggs. Part of this awareness, is being driven by major supermarkets reducing and/or not supplying caged hen eggs and media campaigns.

Appendix 2: Article re Liverpool County Council

Battery farm eggs banned from schools and care homes

[Jan 12 2008](#) – Source: Liverpool Daily Post

EGGS from battery hens will be banned from dozens of Merseyside schools, care homes and canteens.

The move to free range eggs, which will affect all kitchens in council- owned buildings in Wirral, will cost taxpayers £5,000.

But council bosses believe the move is worth every penny if it means schoolchildren, elderly people and town hall workers are fed “cruelty-free” food.

Wirral council has become one of the first in the country to bow to pressure from TV chefs Jamie Oliver and Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall.

The pair have spent the past week on Channel 4 highlighting the way chickens are treated before their meat and eggs end up on people’s plates.

Council leader Steve Foulkes backed the idea, which was approved by councillors on Thursday, despite it costing more than using eggs from battery hens.

He said: “TV campaigns have highlighted the issue and I think the majority of people in Wirral will back us on this.

“Because of European regulations, the battery system for eggs is set to end in 2012 so we are going to pre-empt that and act now.

“In negotiating our next morning foods contract, we had already found a £25,000 saving on the previous one. This decision reduced that saving to £20,000, so effectively cost us £5,000.

“I am old enough to remember ‘going to work on an egg’, so it is good to be able to offer the same in a cruelty- free way at schools and canteens across Wirral.”

The council’s decision today won praise from animal welfare campaigners.

Annabel Davies, from the Compassion In World Farming group, said: “This is a fantastic move by Wirral council.

“We have been running a campaign for our supporters to petition their local authorities to go cage-free and it is great this council has been so quick off the mark.

“For children in schools, it will not only send an important message about cruelty, but will be healthier for them.”

“While it is a small financial commitment to go free range, you cannot put a price on the misery of a hen that lives for a year, unable to move in a space the size of a piece of A4 paper.”