

Welsh Food Alliance

Volume I

Issue 3

Summer 2001

A New Public Health Service in Wales

In our previous issue we considered how to enable the impressive health gains that have been achieved in Scandinavia to be emulated here. It would be characterised by good public health policy, the co-ordination of food policy with agricultural and environmental policy, and public participation in its development.

The abolition of Welsh Health Authorities provides an excellent opportunity to provide public health with an injection of new thinking about how it can best be organised to fulfil its preventive role. Here we examine the future of Public Health, of which food is an important part.

With the launch of the Welsh NHS Plan, the National Assembly for Wales (NAFW) has now published an implementation framework 'Improving Health in Wales - a plan for the NHS with its partners'. Decisions about future structures are to be taken by June 2001.

'Medical Officer of Health'

Over decades prior to 1974 local government through its 'Medical Officer of Health' had the responsibility of preserving and caring for citizen's health. Affairs were so organised to make certain that public health had a major part to play across a range of local government functions.

Since 1974 we have lost this with public health being subsumed within the NHS, which is essentially an illness service. Now that Health Authorities are to be re-organised we need to decide who should have responsibility for this function. In line with recent legislation local government appears to be an obvious solution.

NAFW 'Health Improvement Programmes' could then become a key dimension within the local authority corporate planning process, with resource

allocation rightly driven by an evidence base that is currently lacking.

Another way

Another way would be for local public health units to be answerable directly to the NAFW, but with the remit and authority to advise and shape local policy and strategic development.

In addition to their Community Development functions, they could have a role as the agents for Health Impact Assessment which would be a statutory requirement of the policy development processes for both local authorities and Local Health Groups. They could also act as the Local Health Alliance managers.

The present problem with Local Health Alliances although ostensibly multi-agency is that they are far from independent as each 'partner' is inevitably burdened by their own agency's agendas and constraints.

Whilst many of these services have become very 'clinical' despite their community or preventive pretensions, do we need to examine opportunities for different inter-sectoral structures if we are to achieve best value?

The 'old' local authority based Public Health included many services such as health visiting, district nursing, community dental services, and environmental health. It now includes trading standards, food security and other issues of public health concern that are advantageous to the wider community.

Public Participation

Of course the appropriate location of public health in Wales will not guarantee its efficacy. Firstly, there needs to exist adequate opportunities for public participation in, what is, after all, a crucial public service. Secondly, there needs to be clarity about the justifiability (including

evidence base) of policies that are adopted and implemented.

Whatever the system it will be essential to make a distinction between statutory corporate strategy and the process of community planning whereby local communities are enabled to respond to their members needs and by doing so engage in public policy development.

England has a separate Public Health Minister. Should we not also have such a separate function in Wales with the authority and a support structure, that will measure up to the scale of its public health challenge?

These are some of the Alliances' thoughts about the potential for a revitalised Welsh public health service. We join with PHA Cymru in an open public meeting to discuss these issues on May 9th (see Diary).

You are also welcome to a further opportunity to consider a 'Children's Nutrition Action Plan for Wales', and the development of 'Community Nutrition Services' on June 29th which will be fed into the Wales NHS Plan (see Diary).

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Food Policies For Wales

Food and nutrition policies are very much in the news these days. Food policies across Europe have been the focus of much media concern, not just over agriculture and food supply policies, and BSE and dioxin in our diet, but in a quieter way there has been mounting concern over Europe's rates of heart disease and cancer, and rising incidence of obesity.

The European Regional Office of the World Health Organisation has launched a four year Food and Nutrition Action Plan that proposes intervention at critical points in the life cycle as an important preventive measure, combined with an inter sectoral approach that includes caterers and food retailers as part of a sustainable plan to address these issues.

The English Department of Health has issued a series of policy documents on public health policy which include food, diet and nutrition concerns. Recently the Prime Minister has spoken of the need for a radical review of agriculture. A Food Standards Agency new Strategic Framework on Nutrition was discussed and agreed at a recent UK Board meeting.

What do our political parties have to say and what distinctive choices will they give the Welsh electorate in the forthcoming general election? As a non-party political organisation the views we obtained are as follows.

Welsh Conservative Party

Unfortunately information was unavailable as we went to press. We may be able to make this available shortly on our web site.

Stephen Bartley Wales Green Party

Everyone should have the right to a balanced, healthy diet. The Green Party believes that food production should be healthy and humane with priority given to local production for local needs. For this to happen we support a Ministry for Food with powers to ensure food quality.

As well as short term nutritional concerns we believe strongly in prevention in terms of health matters. We would introduce an immediate ban on chemical additives in food likely to be eaten by young children. We would also progressively reduce levels of pesticides, drug and hormone residues in food with a view to their eventual elimination.

This would be supported with moves towards healthier standards and organically grown produce in co-operation with the Soil Association.

Account should be taken of the ethical and political considerations of importing food from countries where the local people do not have enough to eat.

Greens would establish a Health Education Council, its first priority to be publicise the dangers of an unhealthy diet, and how to avoid them by returning to eating natural whole foods.

Fundamental Green Policy also supports a more vegetarian/ Vegan diet that would increase nutritional benefits in the long terms and move away from an environmentally damaging industrial agriculture that makes profit at the expense of animal welfare.

In conclusion, Greens would give food policy the level of importance that it needs in government, providing adequate funding for research into food, health and disease, and the benefits for Welsh consumers.

Jenny Willott: a Liberal Democratic Parliamentary candidate

Liberal Democrats' commitment to sustainable development puts them at the forefront of moves to improve nutrition in the UK. Our commitments include:

- Replacing MAFF, which has failed to protect our food supply. A Department of Rural Affairs would enable 'joined-up' thinking in agricultural and environmental issues. Its Cabinet Minister would have clout in the fight for CAP reform.
- Demanding that CAP reform prioritise sustainable agriculture. At Westminster a Lib Dem Private Member's Bill is presently pushing for better targets for organic conversion - by 2010 30% of UK farmland to be organic and 20% of food consumed to be organic.
- Encouraging local produce, including measures to save small

abattoirs and promote farmers' markets.

- Improving nutritional standards in prisons (to reduce recidivism), in hospitals and in schools. Our policy in Wales on Free School Milk and fruit tuck shops is one example of this.
- Increasing the status of Public Health, by moving it from its present lowly position in the Department of Health and putting it into the Cabinet Office with a full Ministerial position, making it easier to set up wide cross-department initiatives involving Education, Social Services, Benefits, etc.
- Working within the Assembly to look at the teaching of nutrition in schools.

Wales is losing out at Westminster. Communication between Parliament and the Assembly is poor. Welsh funding, especially given its health problems, is too low and needs reform. Liberal Democrat MPs will demand a fairer deal for Wales.

Martyn Jones MP is the Chairman of the Commons Welsh Affairs Committee

Since the last election the new Labour government has delivered on its manifesto promise to set-up a Foods Standards Agency. By separating the interests of the producer from the consumer, Labour has ensured that in future it will be impossible for food 'scarces' such as BSE to re-occur.

However a great deal remains to be done should Labour be elected for a second term in office. Our next step in government must ensure that food quality (as opposed to food standards) is given a higher profile. Following BSE and more recently FMD, the issue of food quality has now come into sharp political focus. This must drive EU CAP reform.

While the quality of food is an important issue for society as a whole, it is an essential component in redressing health inequalities – an issue addressed recently in the Welsh Affairs Committee's report into Social Exclusion.

Improved food quality can contribute significantly to improving health by tackling underlying causes of ill health. Decent nutrition for mothers, babies and children is a pre-requisite to delivering such change.

Labour must ensure that eradicating food

poverty – in terms of access, affordability and accessibility – is a central to its approach. Via 'Health Improvement Programmes' and education we must ensure that all consumers are enabled to make informed consumer choices.

From a Welsh perspective (as on many health, agriculture, consumer empowerment, environment, and social policy matters), it is essential that Westminster, and the National Assembly must act in unison to drive change forward.

Dr Dai Lloyd AM Plaid Cymru-the Party of Wales Health & Social Services spokesperson

We strongly believe in the importance of a comprehensive food, health and environment strategy at all levels of government.

The promotion of a healthy lifestyle should begin at an early age, to encourage children to continue making good decisions throughout their lives. Nutrient based school meal standards are required, with practical food skilling and exercise within the curriculum. 95% of children's TV adverts are for foods high in sugar, fat, or salt and should be banned.

Improving health is strongly related to food supply and a wholesome diet. We need access to information about nutritious eating, more importantly, people need to be able to afford and access locally produced food.

Food strategy should also ensure that EU policies and programmes are devised to make certain all food is free from harmful chemicals and bacteria. The precautionary principle should apply, that begins at the farm (with animal food) and continues throughout the food chain.

Food labelling rules must be tightened to enable informed decisions about the origin and quality of food. This must entail labelling meat from outside the UK and Wales, and ensure organic products are properly marketed.

We support efforts by the UK Food Standards Agency to protect public health. However, it is essential to have a unique Wales-based solutions to food policy. We suggest an institution be devised which is totally inter-connected with the National Assembly of Wales functions, and is accountable for supporting and developing our overall public health objectives.

News In Brief

Codex

A team of seven Alliance members commented upon a highly technical wide ranging Codex international food standards consultation organised by UK FSA. WFA was one of six UK NGOs to directly respond. The time scale was very tight and we attended a subsequent UK National Codex Co-ordinating Committee. We advocated that health rights, and preventive health should have equal consideration alongside scientific knowledge, and the precautionary principle. The role of 'Food Policy Councils' and Youth Food Assemblies could enable public participation in this important international trade standard setting process. Interestingly devolved UK administrations were not consulted. An Alliance Teachers 'Codex Food, Health and Environment Symposium' takes place on July 18th 2001 at the National Assembly for Wales (see Diary dates).

Ecology Poll

Findings of a recent Ecology magazine poll make for interesting reading. 72% of those sampled by ICM research do not believe government when it assures them that something is safe. 66% think that government should spend more on organic agriculture – currently 2% of the total budget is allocated for this purpose. 73% would like to remove big decision-making from government with national referendums. 45% believe there should be a ban on importing and testing GM crops (Guardian: 14th & 18th April 2001).

Assembly School Meals Consultation

Following a 6th January 2001 Alliance meeting we argued for nutrient based standards, and monitoring of this key child anti-poverty measure. A NAFW statutory instrument based upon food groups, mirroring the English position, comes into effect in September 2001. Welsh local authorities are still awaiting feedback from the NAFW consultation. Will any guidance be offered? If so will it mirror the guidelines issued in England last year? Does the NAFW have a preferred method of evaluation? Is the NAFW party to discussions between DFEE and the UK FSA, and will this inform NAFW Public Health strategy? (See Diary dates : 29 June 2001).

Future Alliance/ PHAC Public consultations: Children's Nutrition Action Plan

A recent Alliance paper presented to NAFW's Health and Social Services Minister on March 1st 2001 raised the question of a 'nutrition strategy for mothers, babies and children'. A UK draft Children's Nutrition Action Plan has been issued prior to public consultation. Topics covered are: Nutrition for babies and pre school children, Nutrition in school age children, and Food manufacturing, retailing and marketing. This may be found at our web site shortly.

Community Nutrition Services

An Alliance paper 'Keeping people out of hospital' being prepared for submission to the NHS Plan asks: could we reduce the pressure on hospital beds and the size of waiting lists by seriously considering the need for a comprehensive community nutrition service? Some hospitals report that 25% of total hospital costs are caused by readmission. Shortly we aim to consider how new nutritional standards could affect the future provision of school meals and hospital catering services in Wales.

Children's Nutrition Action Plan & Community Nutrition Services Conference

On the 29th June 2001 the Alliance and PHA Cymru convene an interactive day conference in Newport. We aim to consider possible interventions or targets in a Welsh context and to make recommendations to the NAFW. Members £30. Non members £60. Includes lunch and refreshments. Some bursaries are available to Alliance members. Intended participants: Members and staff of Health Authorities and NHS Trusts, Local Health Groups, Public and Voluntary organisations, local councillors, local government staff, Community Health Council members and staff, academics and researchers. To book send a cheque made payable to the WFA or an official order to the WFA's secretary.

Wales Youth Food Assembly

As part of the Alliances unique Youth Food Assembly programme, and in response to the NHS Wales Plan, young people will be exploring targets and

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interventions identified by the 'Children's Nutrition Action Plan' and making recommendations to the NAFW. Jane Hutt AM, the NAFW Health and Social Services Secretary has agreed to being part of the Assembly. Youth Food Assembly sponsors include the Co-operative Group (CWS) Ltd (see Diary dates).

Childhood Nutrition

Children's food is a key element of food policies for several good reasons. What children eat not only affects their own health at the time, but will make a significant difference to their later health outlook. For instance, around the age of four, children who are overweight are increasingly likely to be overweight or obese as adults. And before they reach their teens, children show the first signs of cardiovascular disease in the tissues of their arterial walls. Girls are laying down the nutritional base for their later pregnancies, which in turn will affect the foetus and long-term health of their own children. Nutrition in childhood during the present decade is therefore of importance for public health and the costs to our health service for several decades to come.

Acknowledgements

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Dates for your diary

- May 2** UK Food Standards Agency, ACW meeting Cardiff
- 9 Wales NHS Plan 'The Future of Public Health in Wales'. WFA and PHA Cymru members meeting at 6.30pm, 216 Stow Hill, Newport (Junction 27, M4)
- 21 Women's Food and Farming Union (WFU) Glamorgan Branch Open meeting at the Cortell Park Golf Club, Bonvilston, Vale of Glamorgan (off A48) starting at 8 p.m. Details from Charlotte Edwards on 01656 890712.
- 24 UK Food Standards Agency, ACW stakeholder meeting Cardiff.
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- June 1** UK Public Health Alliance, 'Public Health Through Partnership' Conference, All Nations Centre, Cardiff. Good cross-section of UK Speakers. Includes Jane Hutt AM. Details from (01633) 266781 phac@hospitalitywales.demon.co.uk
- 3 Riverside Market on Fitzhamon Embankment, Cardiff. Details from Cultural Concerns
Tel: 029 2022 7982; CulturalConcerns@onetel.net.uk
www.CulturalConcerns.org.uk
- 5-6 UK Food Standards Agency, ACW open meeting in Mid Wales. Venue to be confirmed. Details from 029 20678911
- 12 WFA members meeting at 6.30pm, 216 Stow Hill, Newport (Junction 27, M4)
- 23 British Nutrition Foundation, National Nutrition Education Conference, Bristol. Cost £60. Details from 020 7404 6504
- 24 WFU Glamorgan Branch. For details of time and venue: see above.
- 29 WFA/PHAC NHS Wales Plan consultation on a 'Children's Nutrition Strategy', and 'Community Nutrition Services' in Wales (see page 3)
phac@hospitalitywales.demon.co.uk or (01633) 266781
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- July 3** UK Food Standards Agency, ACW meeting Cardiff.
- 13 Celtic Food & Drink Festival, Oval Basin, Cardiff. 2 p.m. - 9 p.m
- 18 Wales Youth Food Assembly, National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff.
Details from Jean Sullivan, 3 Roberts Close, Rogerstone, Newport, NP10 OBA (01633) 663114.
- 18 Codex Food, Health, Environment Teachers Symposium, National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff. Details: Jean Sullivan or, at wyfa@hospitalitywales.demon.co.uk
- 23 WFU Glamorgan Branch. For details of time and venue: see above.
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- Sept 4** UK Food Standards Agency, ACW open meeting Cardiff.
Details from 029 20678911

Welsh Food Alliance

Membership Application



Cynghrair Bwyd Cymru

Name: _____ Tel. no: _____

Email: _____ Fax no: _____

Address: _____

Please let us know if you wish to contribute in specific ways

Send to the Hon. Secretary, 39 Neath Road, Hafod, Swansea SA1 2ES
with £5 for individual membership or £40 for corporate membership.