

# Welsh Food Alliance

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## Public Involvement in Policy Making

On 19th March 2003, a Welsh NGO manifesto was launched by twenty organisations at the National Assembly for Wales. Within this WFA highlighted public participation in food and health policy making. Given the inadequacy of voluntary sector infra-structure in influencing policies made at a higher level, a broader and deeper consultation process is needed, that is properly resourced, to provide a link between consumers and experts, whether from government or industry.

We require a mechanism for promoting public involvement. WFA call this a '**Food and Health Policy Council**' that could work in

conjunction with the recently launched Welsh Health and Well Being Council. Following WFA recommendations published in March 2001, the Wales Assembly Government should:

- Establish a Working Group on the creation of an 'arms length from government' Food and Health Policy Council for Wales to engage with key stakeholders in the development of nutrition as a key determinant in better health, and in reducing health inequalities
- Support public participation in the development of the new Welsh Health and Well Being Council, and local health, social care and well being strategies and partnerships.

## Richard Commission

The Commission is established to consider and report on the powers, and the electoral arrangements, of the National Assembly for Wales. Questions focus upon the relationship between Cardiff and London. In evidence WFA state, it is Europe, which is becoming increasingly significant in determining domestic food legislation, which the Assembly is required to directly implement.

Are the powers vested in the National Assembly being used creatively and effectively to address health inequalities in Wales? For example, in contrast

with Scotland, the Education (Nutritional Standards for School Lunches) (Wales) Regulations 2001 mirror the English equivalent regulating 'food groups'.

We can improve the quality of secondary legislation by ensuring we make the best possible use of external expertise. WFA proposed that National Assembly Subject Committees sit in a select committee mode, in the style of the Westminster Parliament, to consider proposed secondary legislation. As necessary the National Assembly should invite external experts to appear before the committee to make representations, and to be cross examined on their evidence. This would be particularly helpful where regulations span more than one National Assembly Subject Committee.

### Get InTouch...

Contact Hilda Smith  
Tel: 0845 3304926  
Fax: 01633 266781.  
Email HildaSmith at:  
wfa@hospitalitywales.demon.co.uk  
www.hospitalitywales.demon.co.uk

## Public Health Forum 18-20 March 2003

**We welcome UK Public Health Alliance conference delegates to Wales, and the 11th Public Health Forum, in Cardiff, from 18-20 March 2003.**

In December 1937 a Pelican special based on the famous P.E.P report 'Britain's Health' promoted ideas for a preventive service: better nutrition; emphasis on primary care; the importance attached to the repeated overlap of 'health' with economics, poverty, housing, transport and agriculture. In fact the very issues that the Black Report (1980) reiterated forty years later, and that we see repeated in the Wales Assembly Government (WAG) 'Well Being in Wales' framework, agreed by the Cabinet last October. We have known the answers that will develop prevention as a major plank in health care, and give us healthier communities and enable children to grow into healthy adults. At last in Wales we can make certain that words turn into action.

## Welsh Food Alliance

The WFA is a non-profit making knowledge based policy development and promotion network comprising members in Wales and Europe. It brings together multi-disciplinary expertise to link all aspects of food policy in an integrated way, which is disseminated in its quarterly newsletter. We aim to provide a new perspective on food policy founded on the principle of informed public participation in the policy development process. WFA uses an extensive network of contacts to help stimulate positive action at all levels of government. This has been a four year project aiming to influence the National Assembly in giving food and nutrition higher priority within public health policy. We have organised many conferences at either no or low cost and responded to over 80 consultations.

*We hope this has made a difference.*

# Better Food - Better Health - Better Wales

## Food, Health and Families

- 23 January 2003

A packed WFA meeting heard Dr Elizabeth Dowler, the UK expert, speak on Food, Health and Poverty. This was followed by an 'Any Questions' session with Members of the National Assembly for Wales at Cardiff University Regeneration Institute. Dr Dowler examined: What is food poverty, the causes, and how it affects families and children. Managing on a low income. What is happening to address food poverty? Ensuring people have enough money for food. Improving physical and economic access to food. Supporting community food initiatives and local projects. Protecting mothers and babies.

Factors promoting and enabling **good food for children**, included:

- *guidelines, legislation and monitoring* of food advertising and promotion to children, to empower them to make appropriate, mature choices about food
- improved entitlement and access to free *school meals* to all recipients of tax credits; ultimately, possibly, to all children
- protection of *school budgets* for food provision
- *improved quality* of school meals, whether free or purchased, and monitoring of such quality both by school inspection and by parents
- support for the *whole school approach* to food policy, in relation to food provision, vending machines, sponsorship deals, and drinking water

## 'Any Questions Panel'

Our 'Any Questions' Panel, chaired by Professor Kevin Morgan, comprised Jane Hutt AM, Kirsty Williams AM, Dr Dai Lloyd AM, and Matthew Wootton, Green Party. The overriding feature of the panel's answers was that there was tremendous consensus and certainly no dissent between members. This will be important in advancing cross cutting action in support of our public health agenda in Wales. But as one Assembly Member

stated our constituents are not pressing us on preventive measures, but on hospital waiting times.

## What questions were asked?

- **Food and advice, including:** how would you provide access to healthy foods for the children of Wales, the importance of school meals for low income families, the English fruit scheme, what preventative public health measures are the parties going to implement, promotion of tap water?
- **Legislative issues:** whether secondary legislation in Wales could substitute for a UK Food Poverty Eradication Bill; and how the implementation of joint strategies between agriculture and health could ensure a common aim and purpose?
- **Public Participation:** this must involve everyone. How do we extend public participation at national policy and local project levels to make food and well being a reality? Should the government monitoring group, to oversee the impact of the nutrition strategy, meet in public and combine with public participation?
- **Hygiene & Safety:** how will the Public Health Laboratory Service be saved; and what will be done to improve the shocking incidence in antibiotic resistance (MRSA) due to (a) lax hygiene in hospitals and (b) misuse of antibiotics in farming and (c) over-prescription of antibiotics by doctors?
- **Other topics:** diabetes is like an iceberg on top of an iceberg, with hidden but increasing numbers of people waiting to be diagnosed: how can we address the root causes of this increase? How do subsidies to farmers in the UK affect farmers in third world countries?

Shortly we will put a note of this session, kindly provided by Celtic Dimensions, on our web site. As one Assembly Member stated we need

more events like this to engage with people on public health issues. With your support we hope to build on this approach.

Improving School Lunch Standards  
Dr G Briwnant Jones, the WFA chair, chaired this 27th February 2003 meeting in Cardiff University, Council Chamber. Speakers included Arnold Frew, author of the Sodexo 'School Meals and Lifestyle Survey 2002' survey report, Jane Landon, Associate Director, National Heart Forum, and Professor Kevin Morgan. Wide ranging information was made available at a lively meeting.

- The issue for Wales is that school meal standards are only as good as the food actually consumed. The importance of monitoring is that if standards are found to be unacceptable, then action will be required to address identified problems.
- Evidence from a recent Which? survey confirm that 'food group' legislation has failed to change patterns of pupil food consumption. Jane Landon said *the English Minister had promised to review the 'food group' regulations if they were found to be wanting.*
- Arnold Frew, drawing from Sodexo national survey data, identified pupils' enormous purchasing power and questioned whether this was sufficiently well considered and directed.
- Dr Jones stated that the increase in vending machines gave contradictory messages between what was taught in the classroom and the provision within the school generally.
- Kevin Morgan spoke on his current work on re-localising the food chain and public procurement to improve public health.
- Pupils need to be influenced from the earliest possible age through to secondary education, they need to participate in finding solutions and be supported through the use of information technology to make good choices.

## Consultations

### 'Targeting Poor Health'

Several important developments have occurred that impact upon Welsh food policy. Professor Townsend proposed a 'Dual Strategy' to promote actions to address health inequalities in other policy areas. WFA responded to Professor Townsend's draft report on resource allocation and health inequalities. We asked why no reference had been made to food access, and food standards, as social inclusion issues. Food and nutrition is now an important aspect of the 'Well Being in Wales' framework, agreed by the WAG Cabinet last October.

At a March 2003 NHS briefing meeting WFA again raised the issue of improved nutrient quality and uptake of school meals. Professor Townsend, referring to his work on the Black Committee (1980), agreed that this was an important illustration. Most discussion concerned how best to allocate a relatively small amount of money, but he stated this was an opportunity for new local Health Boards (LHB's) to consider how other resources could be more effectively used to reduce long term health inequalities. One representative raised the possibility of LHB's developing agreed positions on specific issues.

*WFA suggest that LHBs could support co-ordinated action to improve public health, strengthen food law enforcement, and social care provision, such as quality school meals, 'meals on wheels' and hospital catering? Analysing the quality of publicly procured raw ingredients in manufactured food products, and the nutrient quality of public catering, would be cost effective, and build upon existing work undertaken by Trading Standards Officers - but on an all Wales basis.*

## Local Health Boards

LHB's are an important innovation, and are co-terminus with 22 Welsh local authorities. 'Food and Well Being' (See page 4) asks LHB's, and others, to specify actions to improve nutrition. Arising from WFA's September 2002 letter to LHBs, we suggest co-ordinated action across LHB's to support performance evaluation of the impact of local and NHS region nutrition strategy, within the next 5 year activity cycle of inspection and audit bodies, by:

### Monitoring

(1) *Work with inspection and audit bodies, Local Authorities, schools, NHS Trusts, and consumer and public health groups to monitor:*

- (i) Nutrient quality of food ingredients, in 'food group' based school menus,
- (ii) Nutrient quality of food provided to 'cared for' children and young people,
- (iii) Nutrient quality, and extent of social care provision, in 'meals and wheels', luncheon clubs, nursing and residential homes, and
- (iv) Nutrient quality of food provided by NHS Trusts, and Colleges.

### FoodAccess

- (2) Establish the *evidence base and best methods* for promoting and supporting (i) *food access*, in terms of the private sector food economy, for vulnerable population groups, through incentives given to healthy retailing by local authorities, within the existing legislative framework regarding planning, and business support schemes;
- (ii) Support *sustainable local food projects* as an opportunity to enable people who are unimportant as consumers, to become important active citizens.

### Best Practice

- (3) Share relevant information and best practice; and provide the *guidance on who initiates joint working at the local level.*

## Health Social Care and Well Being Regulations (2003)

These regulations spell out factors to be used by LHB's in preparing local Health Social Care and Well Being plans, alongside forthcoming local authority Community Plans. Arising from the WFA initiated Welsh consultation on the Private Members Food Poverty Eradication Bill (2002), it was proposed that they be amended to focus upon "*food standards, safety, access and nutritional inequality*" as key factors in preparing local plans.

The actual regulations now specify that plans cover *health promotion and education, health protection, nutrition, and food safety*. Since health protection does not have a legal definition it is difficult to see how this can be enforced. The test of whether, for example, food access is taken seriously is whether there is clear statutory sector responsibility. In addition to published guidelines WFA have written to WAG officials with suggestions for a 'Nutrition checklist'.

### 'Well Being in Wales'

The Health Minister's Foreword to 'Food and Well Being' states that the Assembly's recent 'Well Being in Wales' consultation document makes "explicit the links between health and well being and other policy areas, and sets our proposals for further action to reduce health inequalities". A 'Well Being' Action Plan, due in March, has now been delayed with more detailed discussions taking place between government departments. The key point is that that the 'Well Being' framework is still at an early phase in evolving action to improve (a) the nutrient quality of food procured by the public sector, and (b) health related social care services such as school meals, 'meals on wheels' and luncheon clubs. How can Local Health Boards, and Community Health Councils, promote and sustain essential public participation?

Community nutrition services WFA submitted evidence in 2001-2003 to policy consultations on Primary Care, Older People, 'Well Being', Nutrition, Health and Social Care, requesting community nutrition services to enable older people to remain independent in their own homes. In 2001, the Wales NHS Director commissioned a thorough 'review of capacity in the Health Service'. This has now reported - 'A Question of Balance' (2002). It states "urgent action is needed to address the problems of medical beds running at impossibly high levels of occupancy. Patients being treated in inappropriate settings and not being able to remain in their own homes." *No reference was made to the importance of community nutrition services for integrating health and social care.* We highlighted this in responses to the 2002 NHS catering guidelines, and an Audit Commission report. This evidence has been sent to NHS Wales. Will Health Social Care and Well Being Regulations - planning guidance (currently being printed) provide impetus, or do we await action from the current Welsh Wanless Health and Social Care Review?

### Manager Training

Hazard Analysis of Critical Control Point Systems (HACCPs) originated with the USA space programme, to ensure zero tolerance of foodborne illness. This involves industry putting in place systems to identify 'points' critical to controlling food safety. WFA have written to the WAG proposing (a) a revision of recently agreed UK National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) standards, to require HACCPs, as an essential aspect of supervisory training; (b) a derogation from the EU Food Hygiene Directive of 2/3 years for small businesses - to maximise use of EU structural funds in Wales, and minimise cost implications for consumers, and (c) that 'Healthy eating' aspect of catering be strengthened in manager and craft training NVQ occupational standards. We have advocated manager training, leading to food business managers being in control of systems. This is now central to European food law reform.

English Organic Action Plan Twelve senior Whitehall public procurement officials, and non-governmental organisations, were brought together in a recent government seminar hosted by Michael Meacher MP, Minister of State, DEFRA. Professor Kevin Morgan gave a presentation on Public Procurement of Organic Food ([www.cardiff.ac.uk/cplan/ri](http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/cplan/ri)). Other speakers were Lizzie Vann (Organex) and Clive Peckham (East Anglia Food Links). DEFRA is taking the lead on promoting a sustainable public procurement policy in Whitehall and a report is expected this summer. Will improved specification of nutritional quality for pupils, 'meals on wheels' and NHS catering be part of any future report?

### Right to Food Access

Government strategy gives much attention to action at the community level. The Department of Health (England) are promoting food co-ops. In one English '5 a day' fruit and vegetable pilot area *the food co-op was ineffective, and expensive*. It is essential that incentives be given to healthy retailing, by local authorities, using existing legislative framework regarding planning, and business support schemes. Other benefits of food co-ops like building social capital skills, confidence, etc, could be delivered with cooking skills and food growing projects. Bearing in mind that in Wales resources are unavailable to match the Scottish Executives long term support for the Scottish Community Diet Project, *a rights based approach to food access would lead to local authority action to support decent local shops, and public transport improvements*.

### Eat healthy message failing in schools

This was the verdict of a Consumers Association magazine Which? survey. Pupils consume too much fatty food and soft sugary drink, and have hardly any fruit and vegetables. Cheap meat products, such as chicken nuggets, and meat pasties, with little nutrient value are popular. The Welsh media refer to the Government's national fruit scheme, and state school meal

standards are to be evaluated. Wales does not have a national fruit scheme, but instead has invested resources in developing over 250 fruit tuck shops; and the government has already evaluated school meal 'food group standards'. Pupils have been educated to eat healthily, although they may not all apply this when selecting meals. Can we have a UK media campaign to encourage adults/ society at large to re-inforce this and to apply more healthy eating habits?

### Healthy Public Procurement?

Will the WAG/ Welsh Development Agency widen current research to (a) give greater understanding to food producers about the health giving properties of food supplied, and (b) demonstrate how local sourcing will improve the nutrient quality of food?

We have a shortage of NHS dieticians. Having worked jointly to produce all Wales catering standards, can we use resources more effectively by NHS Trusts working co-operatively to produce nutritious cost effective menus for hospital patients?

### Let Us Watch Scotland

Measures, backed by an additional £63.5 million from the Scottish Budget 2003-2006, will help improve child health, learning, and tackle child poverty, including: new *nutrient standards for school meals*; larger portions of more nutritious food at no further cost to parents; fresh, chilled drinking water available free in school dining rooms; and improved facilities in dining halls. 'Hungry for Success' can be found at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/pages/news/2003/02/SEED191.aspx>

### Food & Well Being

In February 2003 the Health and Social Services Minister publicly launched the Food and Well Being - reducing inequalities through nutrition strategy for Wales. Copies from (02920) 678953.

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