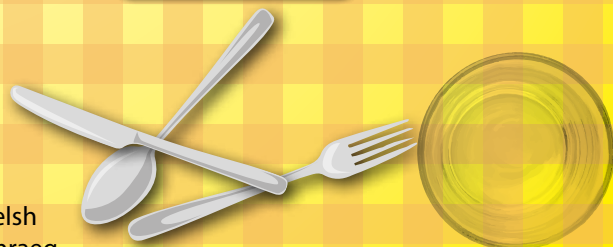
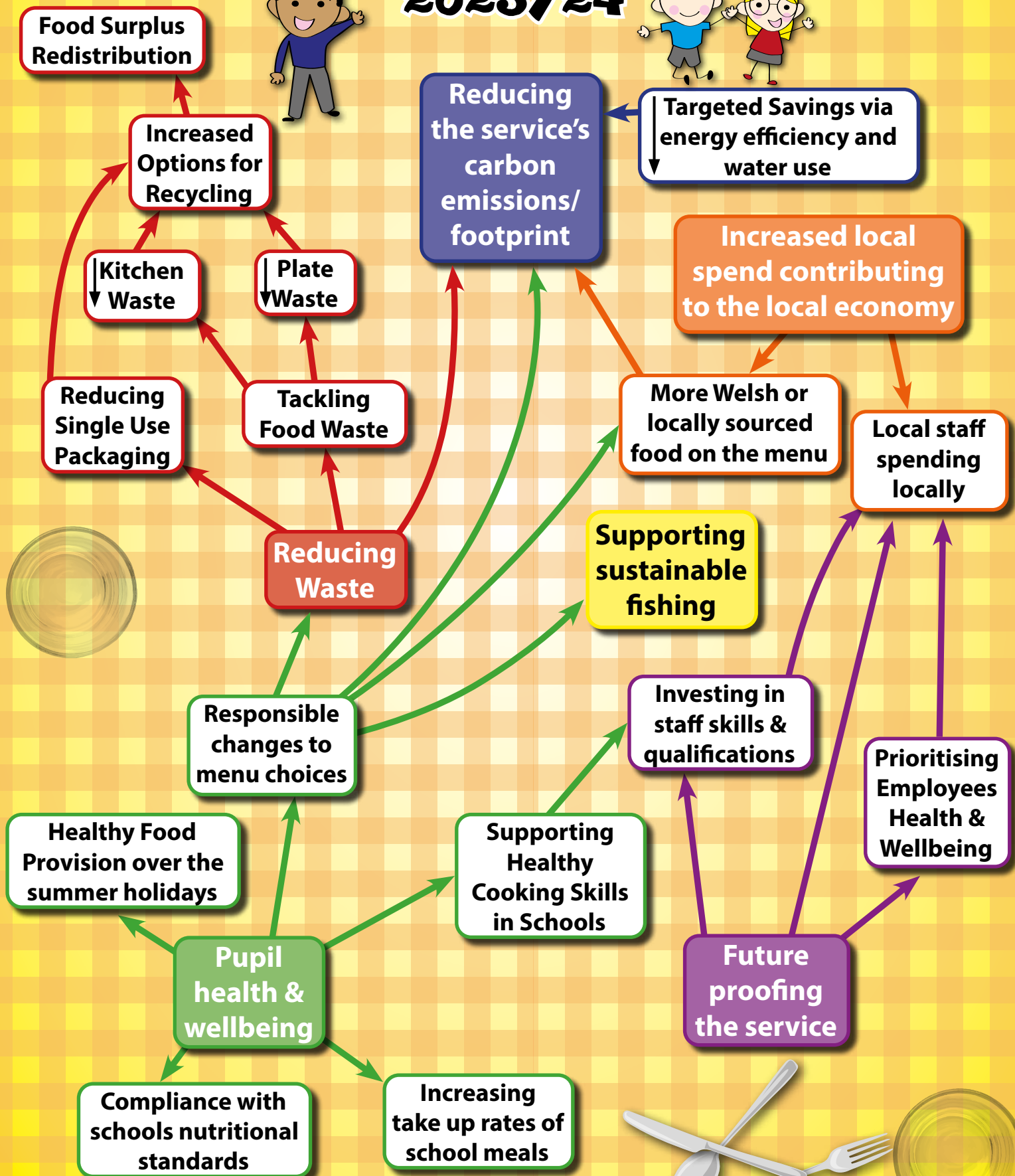
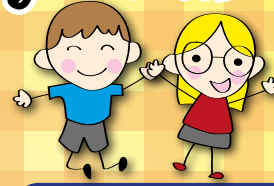


# TORFAEN SCHOOL MEALS

## Sustainability Journey Roadmap 2023/24



# Mapping out our Sustainability Journey 2023/24

## Transparency in Targets & Achievements

Decisions made today can have both positive, (or negative) long term effects for our pupils and the wider community. Sustainable School Catering is about meeting the needs of today's pupils without damaging opportunities for the future.

Sustainability in school catering is not going to be a quick fix. It is a HUGE topic. But we are resilient and focussed, and we are committed to the long term journey. However we do need to be transparent in what we are doing, with meaningful incremental (year by year) real and tangible targets and achievements. This is the map for 2023 and 2024 and we would welcome your suggestions for each year's targets.

You can follow this journey in our interactive "Sustainability Journey Map"



# Reducing the Service's carbon emissions

Did you know that the Council has declared a climate emergency? To respond to the climate emergency, the Council has committed to becoming carbon net zero by 2030. This means decarbonising our vehicles and how we travel, changing how we heat and power our buildings and reducing the carbon impact of the goods and services we buy.

Fortunately for us in school catering, a team of researchers working across 5 European countries have been working specifically on reducing carbon emissions in the school meals sector. We have been engaged with the UK professor in this team to ensure any changes we make are meaningful, not tokenistic. The research team have highlighted 2 key areas to target – food waste and responsible menu choices. These are shown to offer the biggest potential reductions in carbon emissions in school meals. However, we will also be targeting other areas – including seeking out opportunities to increase the amount of Welsh or local food on our menus. We will continue to follow closely the work of the European research team to ensure that changes we make have the most meaningful impact.



# Increased local spend contributing to the local economy

Increased local spending keeps money in the local community – also known as community wealth building. The impact of local sourcing/procurement of food as well as the employment of local catering staff spending in the local area can bring wide ranging benefits to economic and social wellbeing by the multiplier effect.

We need to consider both areas.





# Supporting Sustainable Fishing

## Our journey to date

We understand that seafood is one of the world's valuable resources. We know that all our frozen fish – fishcakes, fish fingers and battered fish is Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certified so we are confident that it comes from sustainable sources.

## Target/Goal/Action for 2023/2024

We also use tinned tuna in our schools. This is not marked as MSC certified. We will explore options to switch our tinned tuna to more sustainably sourced tuna with our suppliers.

## Progress/ Achievement so far in 2023/24

March 2023 - Discussions are continuing with both MSC and our wholesaler around suitable alternative tuna. Check back later for an update.....



# Future proofing the service

We must ensure that we attract and retain local talent. We think we can do this by focussing on 2 areas – investing in staff skills and qualifications and by prioritising staff health and wellbeing.

We must also ensure we maintain or increase the take up of school meals so the service is safe into the future.

We need to consider all these areas.



# Reducing Waste

There will always be an element of waste – this is a by product of catering, BUT reducing waste is important

- 1) for financial reasons – the less wastage our service produces, the more money we have to spend on quality food ingredients and menus
- 2) for the environment and our carbon footprint. Food production uses significant land, water and energy resources, and food waste is estimated to amount for 8-10% of man- made greenhouse gas emissions. The environmental need to reduce food waste is well documented.

This is a HUGE TOPIC





# Promoting Pupil Health & Wellbeing

There have been well documented concerns over the numbers of pupils who are overweight and obese. In addition, there is a worrying trend upwards in the number of pupils who come from households suffering from food poverty/food insecurity.

Poor diet is linked to health inequalities.

School Catering can, and does contribute to ensuring pupils have a healthy balanced diet and develop good eating habits for the longer term.





# Healthy Food Provision over the summer holidays

## Our journey to date

For many years now, Torfaen School Caterers have been teamed up with Torfaen Play in their Laugh, Learn + Get Active Camps run in the summer holidays. Serving a FREE healthy breakfast and FREE healthy lunch, this provision has mitigated the impact of food poverty in the local area. The scheme has also provided enhanced activities for local pupils in the long summers.

2017 2 schools 2730 meals served

2018 4 schools 2233 meals served

2019 5 schools 6294 meals served

2021 14 schools 32416 meals served

2022 14 schools 32746 meals served

## Target/Goal/Action for 2023/24

We think this is a pretty remarkable record. As our staff also need a break over the summer holidays we think we may have reached capacity for offering this service. We aim to maintain the same number of schools and pupils benefiting from our work in this area.

## Progress/Achievement so far 2023

March 2023 - Plans are well underway for another successful Summer programme – we already have 15 schools confirmed as running this year - check back here later for an update.....



# Increasing the rate of take up of school meals

## Our journey to date

Research carried out by University of Leeds did not paint a positive picture of the nutritional content of packed lunches versus school meals, with less than 2% of packed lunches meeting school meals standards. And with recorded worsening levels of Vitamin C, Vitamin A and zinc over the years. We need more pupils to take up the offer of school meals.

We can only do this if we LISTEN TO OUR CUSTOMERS

We regularly request feedback from our pupils on menu choices and direct pupil quotes for each dish are highlighted on our website next to the dishes. We met with Garnteg Pupil School Council, pictured, to get their honest feedback.



## Target/Goal/Action for 2023/24

We will explore additional avenues for pupil feedback including through our Waste Warriors project in addition to regular pupil surveys. We will also look at the wider food culture in schools – after the roll out of Universal Primary Free School Meals (and anticipated wider uptake), we will re-evaluate if whether the time allowed for lunchbreaks is sufficient for all pupils to access a healthy lunch. And is the dining area a relaxed environment with free drinking water accessible to all?

## Progress/Achievement so far in 2023/24

March 2023 - Feedback is already coming through from pupils participating in our Waste Warriors Competition. We have also been working closely with Nesta, the UK's social innovation agency to assist them in designing a study to understand issues with non-take up from pupils' perspective with a view to improving this.





# Supporting Healthy Cooking Skills in Schools

## Our journey to date

Our dietitian has had some past success running After School Cooking Clubs in Coed Eva and Blenheim Road, with Coed Eva Cooks reaching the final of the national Young Baking Team of the Year Competition in 2017. But she can't be everywhere. She has, however, been supporting those schools running After School Cooking Clubs, most recently in Padre Pio primary.



## Target/Goal/ Action for 2023/24

Schools Eco Committees invited to engage in the "Waste Warriors" project (see plate waste) are in for a chance to win a full days healthy cooking session for 16 pupils. It is hoped that this prize will fuel interest in this area, and we will continue to offer support to any primary school looking to offer After School Cooking Clubs (with parent participation if this is preferred).



We are also planning to link up with some of the good work already going on with school allotments and hope to tie in some cooking lessons using vegetables home grown by the pupils.

## Progress/Achievement so far in 2023/24

March 2023 – schools are signing up for Waste Warriors and a chance to win a full days healthy cooking session.....updates to follow...





# Responsible Changes to Menu Choices

## Our journey to date

We have always offered a full hot vegetarian menu and a full hot pescatarian menu on request. In dishes that do not contain meat we use iron rich plant foods such as spinach and Vitamin C rich ingredients such as peppers and peas alongside to maximise iron absorption. Where milk alternatives are required for those following a plant-based menu or for those who have an allergy/intolerance to cow's milk, we only use alternatives that are fortified with the same level of calcium as cow's milk.



## Target/Goal/Action for 2023/24

From Easter 2023 at least half our menu choices will be vegetarian – no need to fully commit to a separate Vegetarian menu, pupils can opt in and out. We will also increase plant-based options in our Comprehensives.

We know that production of palm oil can increase the risk of destruction to tropical rainforest and the drainage of peatland. This in turn can negatively impact biodiversity, climate change and the land rights of local peoples. For this reason, many suppliers have already committed to only using 100% sustainably sourced palm oil by 2015. We will be checking in on progress with all our suppliers who use palm oil as an ingredient in their products.



## Progress/Achievement so far in 2023/24

March 2023 - We know that not all meat alternatives are equally friendly to the environment- we are only looking to offer products made with soya from the EU growing in existing, established agricultural areas, and are in discussions with a UK supplier of plant-based protein (pea based) as an alternative protein source in our meat free dishes. Both are options that could be used in recipes to enable the meat content to be reduced in dishes. The 1st of 3 plant based tasting days has already taken place at Ysgol Gyfun Gwynllw, with pupils giving the tasters a big thumbs up! March 2023 – A trial of a Healthy Pasta Bar is ongoing at Ysgol Panteg. It is hoped that if choices are popular, it could be a more responsible alternative to the current salad bar which is reported to be generating unnecessary plate waste with some foods left uneaten.



# Compliance with Nutritional Standards

## Our journey to date

Nutritionally poor diets are the biggest cause of premature death and disability in the UK.

For 15 years now, Torfaen School Catering have employed a dietitian to ensure compliance with Welsh Healthy Eating in Schools Regs. We are rated as having Gold Standard menus.

What you can already see in our schools -

Fruit daily, Vegetables and/or salad daily, Fruit based desserts at least twice each week, Fish each week, Oily fish at least twice in 3 weeks, Meat cuts at least twice a week in our primary schools and three times each week in secondary schools, No added salt, Removal of all confectionery, such as chocolate bars, cereal bars and sweets; and also crisps, Limited potato and potato products cooked in fat or oil (not more than twice each week), Limited deep fried or flash fried food (not more than twice each week), Restricted processed meat products, Fruit tuck shops in our primary schools, Free milk for all nursery and infant pupils, Free healthy breakfast in the majority of our primary schools, Promotion of milk and water as best for dental health



## Target/Goal/Action for 2023/24

It has been many years since the Welsh school nutritional standards have been revised. We know that recommendations for both sugar (lowered) and fibre (increased) are yet to be reflected in the Regs. We will look at ways to reduce sugar and increase fibre further whilst we wait for the Regs to catch up with the science.

## Progress/Achievement so far in 2023/24

March 2023 - A successful trial of a reduced sugar fruit juice (1/3 less sugar!) was given a big thumbs up at Cwmffrwdoer Primary. We are now in discussions with the manufacturer and supplier regarding a roll out of this across our schools in an attempt to improve the sugar content of our menus.



# Targeted savings in energy use and reduced water use

## Our journey to date

Research would indicate that transport of school meals (where schools do not have sufficient cooking space) has a lesser impact on carbon emissions than food waste and responsible menu choices. That said, as there are now electric charging points in the main office car park, this would allow us to consider changing our transport van from diesel to electric powered and this would reduce our emissions.

We have no readily available information about the energy efficiency and water consumption of our major electrical equipment in our school kitchens.

Recipes have not yet been considered for energy saving reductions within safe cooking parameters.



## Target/Goal/Action for 2023/24

- 1) We will investigate funding sources to replace the old diesel transport van with an electric van.
- 2) We will engage with the Energy + Carbon Reduction Team in the council to survey the water and energy efficiency ratings of dishwashers and combi ovens across our sites and take their advice with regards to both future purchasing decisions and preventative maintenance to ensure efficiencies.
- 3) We will actively seek out changes to our cooking patterns/recipes to reduce safe cooking times and make savings in our energy consumption

## Progress/Achievement so far in 2023

- 1) March 2023 – our electric van is on order, and we await its arrival!
- 2) March 2023 – Torfaen's Energy + Carbon Reduction Team are meeting with us regarding the survey
- 3) February 2023 – Frozen turkey joint used on Wednesdays in schools swapped to fresh turkey joint reducing safe cooking time (and energy consumption) by an hour per school.





# Reducing Plate Waste

## Our journey to date

There are reports feeding back to Catering management of huge amounts of food waste being generated at school dining hall level. Without recorded measurement and associated direct action to address this, it is unlikely to change or improve.

Worryingly, the data from researchers in the EU project (Strength2Food European project, strength2food.eu) would indicate that an average 30% of what is served to pupils in school meals ends up as plate waste in the bin.

## Target/Goal/Action for 2023

We need to be paying as much attention to what ends up in the bin as we do ensuring the nutritional value of what is served up. We need to actively monitoring plate waste, show real reductions in this and investigate the reasons behind the plate waste.

Many of our schools have pupil led "Eco Committees" or similar. It is hoped to involve pupils in weighing and monitoring plate waste in the dining hall reporting back (mini audit) to caterers as to what the main components are that are being binned and why (areas for improvement? Portion sizes? Recipes?).



## Progress/Achievement so far in 2023

March 2023 –The "Waste Warriors" project is well underway. We had a successful bid for funding accepted to purchase 33 sets of large parcel scales to weigh and monitor food waste. Our schools are signing up to take part in a pupil – led competition to reduce plate waste in the dining halls, with a chance for the winning team to win a full days Healthy Cooking lesson for 16 pupils. More to follow.....



# Disposal of food waste

## Our journey to date

As caterers, we need to make responsible decisions about how we dispose of things. When food goes to landfill it creates large carbon emissions which is very bad for the environment. From November 2022 our kitchens have been collecting food waste in special bins. This is collected and taken to a recycling plant. It is recycled using a process called ANAEROBIC DIGESTION. If you would like an overview of the process, click on the link to a video filmed at the facility in Hertfordshire. The site is pretty much the same as the South Wales site that processes our school food waste, as is the process. Severn Trent Green Power - North London AD - YouTube



## Target/Goal/Action for 2023/24

The collection of food waste for recycling is part of a pilot project – we need to make the case to retain this service.

## Progress/Achievement so far in 2023/24

Check back at a later date to see if we are successful in retaining this service.



# Increased options for Recycling

## Our journey to date

We have been thoroughly inspired by our catering staff at Ysgol Panteg (see photo) who have been collecting the stretchy plastic in the school kitchen there and taking it with them on their own supermarket shop to be recycled along with their stretchy plastic from home. We can do better in our school kitchens.

Our cardboard has been recycled in the Highway transport kitchen for many years now.

Our food waste is already being recycled – see separate tab



## Target/Goal/Action for 2023/24

We are committed to getting the stretchy plastic collection points up and running and our kitchens stretchy plastic feeding into this.

We are also looking for a responsible way to dispose of fabric (old staff uniforms) in both our Catering and Cleaning teams.

We will continue to look for other options to increase recycling from our kitchens, including wider cardboard recycling.



## Progress/Achievement so far in 2023/24

March 2023 – Plans are well underway for a new service which will directly collect stretchy plastic from our school kitchens for recycling, along with encouraging school children to bring stretchy plastic into school from home for recycling.....watch this space!

March 2023 – We have a uniform recycling scheme up and running!





# Reducing single use products & packaging

## Our journey to date

We had already begun to identify single use products and packaging in our school kitchens that were unnecessary. Our Comprehensives have led in this area – with Ysgol Gyfun Gwynllyw offering a discount to those bringing their own reusable cups. BUT during the pandemic there was fear of transmission and there was some return to single use containers.

Did you know we have been going through 88,400 sachets of ketchup annually in our schools? That is a lot of single use plastic sachets going to landfill!

This year (2023) there will be change in legislation (ban on single use plastics) focussing us further in this important area.

## Target/Goal/Action for 2023

We have identified 5 areas we are going to target this year

- 1) Plastic tuck bags that fruit is served in (46,636 bags used annually in 33 primaries)
- 2) Plastic Ice cream spoons
- 3) Friday menu “take away boxes” (Annual numbers used 22,500 at a cost of £2754)
- 4) Plastic sachets of ketchup (Annual numbers 78,400 at a cost of £997.03)
- 5) Fruit + Veg – exploring crates for delivery with no plastic wrapping



## Progress/Achievement so far in 2023

March 2023 – cooks have been advised that single use cutlery will no longer be able to be ordered. We are meeting with the council's experts to choose the best eco alternative to single use plastic takeaway containers in our Comprehensives. There is such a wide range of alternatives on offer, and we need to get this right. We have instigated a ban/block on ordering of ketchup sachets. Instead we will be using refillable containers – see pictures.



# Reducing Kitchen Waste

## Our journey to date

Measures are already in place to try and reduce kitchen waste – for many years our primary pupils have had to pre-order their meal choice. This avoids the cook guessing numbers for each choice or overestimating to ensure all pupils get their 1st choice.

Whilst we operate strict stock rotation as part of our food safety procedures, sometimes we find that we cannot use up all of an opened package before it has to be disposed of.

## Target/Goal/ Action for 2023

We will survey our cooks to find out about foods arriving with excessive packaging or in wholesale sizes that are too large, resulting in food going to waste before it can be used within safe timescales. We will work with our suppliers to substitute foods/brands in these cases to ensure waste is reduced.

## Progress/ Achievement so far in 2023

Work ongoing.....check back at a later date for progress.....



# Food Surplus Redistribution

## Our journey to date

We operate strict stock rotation as part of our food safety procedures, and we do not overstock our kitchens. Occasionally there will be free school milk left over from the morning and our cooks ensure that this is offered to pupils at lunchtimes rather than wasted.

At the end of term there is little food leftover as our cooks communicate with each other to ensure that any surplus in one school kitchen is transported safely and in a timely manner to be used up at another school before the kitchen closes for the holidays.

After this, if there is any food left at the end of term this is donated to be used at Torfaen Playschemes.

## Target/Goal/Action for 2023/24

We will continue to operate as above and ensure that nothing goes to waste.

## Progress/ Achievement so far in 2023/24

Check back at a later date to see how this is progressing.....





# More Welsh or locally sourced food on the menu

## Our journey to date

Buying more food locally will reduce food miles travelled – so it is good for reducing both the service's and the council's carbon footprint. We have been serving some locally produced foods on our menus for some time, including Welsh Cheddar and Welsh sausages, although we have been a little shy in promoting this.

## Target/Goal/Action for 2023/24

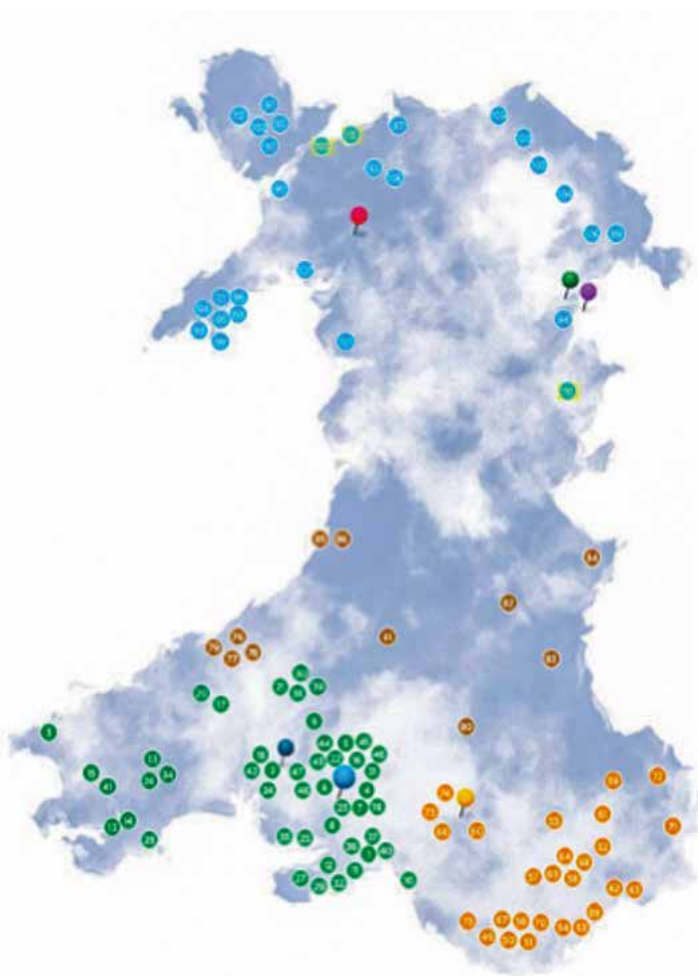
We need to work with internal and external partners to pinpoint opportunities to increase the amount of Welsh or local foods on our menu.

We need to highlight Welsh produce on our menus in schools.

## Progress/Achievement so far in 2023/24

Ongoing - We are actively engaged with the Torfaen Food Partnership Group. The group aims to map out and increase local food sourcing opportunities. We are chasing the limited opportunities there are already mapped in the Torfaen areas and are widening our search outwards.

Are you a local supplier or producer who might like to see your food/ingredients being used on our school menus? Please speak to us directly about the pathways to supplying school meals.  
Email [tracy.james@torfaen.gov.uk](mailto:tracy.james@torfaen.gov.uk)



# Local Staff Spending Locally

## Local authority providing meals cooked at school level

Our School Catering Services employ around 200 local staff. Economists are in agreement that where local staff are employed locally, this can have a huge impact on whether money stays local and supports local. We firmly believe that this mode of school catering is best for pupils and best for the local business ecosystem.

There have been tools developed to track the school meals budget in terms of local spend on both supplies and staff, and a corresponding analysis of how much of that budget stays in the local area. This is a relatively new area and something we will be following closely and considering going forward. But for 2023/24 we will be prioritising attracting and retaining local talent to ensure we are serving our pupils the best quality meals.



# Prioritising Staff Health & Wellbeing

## Our journey to date

Our staff are paid the Foundation living wage or above.

Most staff health and wellbeing initiatives are organised on a council-wide basis and are highlighted on the intranet. These include 238, yes 238 online courses from alcohol awareness to effective communication skills to dealing with a relationship breakdown. In addition, there is an active menopause campaign with monthly café and a counselling service accessible through Occupational Health.

We also have a history of celebrating the success of our teams and showcasing where our team members have gone the extra mile. Staff will always need to know they are valued and appreciated. The photo shows some of our caterers winning a national innovation award for their work with Autistic pupils.



## Pledges for 2023/2024

On surveying staff we have found that there is an ongoing niggle with back pain as a result of pot washing in deep sinks. This is a concern specific to our staff.

We will actively seek to obtain direct access physio for our staff and promote the staff discounts at local gyms available to Torfaen employees.

We will continue to recognise and celebrate the outstanding work of our staff via our Comms team and the wider Catering world.



## Progress/Achievement so far in 2023

January 2023 - Kirsty Milns, our Projects, Systems and Data Manager had her work on streamlining the free school meals application process recognised – it landed her as a finalist in the APSE catering category of the Soft Facilities Management Innovation Awards 2023. A great piece of work and a very worthy finalist!

March 2023 – with approximately 200 female staff, eco-friendly sanitary supplies made available via a Welsh Government grant have been distributed amongst our staff in an effort to alleviate period poverty whilst encouraging the use of reusable/washable alternatives.





# Investing in Staff Skills & Qualifications

## Our journey to date

We pride ourselves in investing in skills and qualifications for staff – our cooks are qualified in Supervising Food Safety level 3, and many at Level 4. Our Catering assistants are trained in Level 2 Food Safety. We have over 60 members of staff holding the Level 3 qualification in Allergen Management in Catering. And In recent years ALL our staff have received training in Autism Awareness (see photo). But we have not formally mapped these training opportunities to be able to look for, and ask our staff where they think the gaps are.



## Target/Goal/ Action for 2023/24

We will map out current training opportunities so we all staff can opt in to upskill and ASK OUR STAFF what training/ qualifications they would benefit from being invested in.

## Progress/ Achievement so far in 2023/24

March 2023 – 6 Catering Staff are piloting NVQ Level 2 in Kitchen Services and there are plans to roll out the level 2+ and 3 to the wider workforce if this proves worthwhile.

