

<b>Title of Report:</b>	<b>What's on the Children's Menu - Research into Children's Meals Served in Restaurants in Northern Ireland</b>
<b>Committee Report Submitted To:</b>	<b>Environmental Services Committee</b>
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>14<sup>th</sup> May 2024</b>
<b>For Decision or For Information</b>	<b>For Information</b>
<b>To be discussed In Committee</b>	<b>NO</b>

<b>Linkage to Council Strategy (2021-25)</b>	
Strategic Theme	Healthy and Engaged Communities
Outcome	To provide information on research into children's meals served in Northern Ireland restaurants
Lead Officer	Head of Health & Built Environment

<b>Budgetary Considerations</b>	
Cost of Proposal	N/A
Included in Current Year Estimates	<b>N/A</b>
Capital/Revenue	N/A
Code	N/A
Staffing Costs	N/A

<b>Legal Considerations</b>	
Input of Legal Services Required	NO
Legal Opinion Obtained	NO

<b>Screening Requirements</b>	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	Yes/No N/A	Date:
	EQIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No N/A	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	Yes/No N/A	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	Yes/No N/A	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	Yes/No N/A	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No N/A	Date:

## **1.0 Purpose of Report**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise Members of the recent publication of the report 'What's on the Children's Menu?'. This report details research into children's meals served in restaurants in Northern Ireland which Council's Environmental Health Department contributed to.

## **2.0 Background**

2.1 Families and children enjoy eating out regularly as a way of socialising and celebrating as well as for convenience. Food eaten in places like restaurants, fast food outlets and cafés, known collectively as the out of home food sector, tends to come in bigger portions and be higher in energy, fat, salt and sugar and lower in fruit and vegetables than meals prepared at home.

2.2. In Northern Ireland, children are eating too much saturated fat, sugar and salt and not enough fruit, vegetables, oily fish and fibre. This is having a harmful impact on their growth and development and increases the risk of excess weight gain and tooth decay.

2.3 It is estimated that around a quarter of the calories eaten by UK consumers now comes from food from the out of home sector, therefore food businesses such as restaurants, fast food outlets and cafés have more influence over consumers diets.

2.4 To understand more about the food available to children when eating out, Council's Environmental Health Department, along with other local councils and the Food Standards Agency (FSA), conducted research to:-

- Gather information on children's menus and identify barriers and opportunities to making them healthier.
- Investigate the range of foods available to children in restaurants in Northern Ireland.
- Determine the portion size and nutritional content of popular children's meals served in restaurants in Northern Ireland.

## **3.0 Approach**

3.1 Environmental Health Officers surveyed restaurant owners/managers and obtained children's menus from at least ten restaurants or hotels in their local council area between May and August 2022. The survey was conducted in person or by phone.

3.2 Survey responses and menus were analysed by the FSA and results used to identify the most popular children's meals for sampling and nutritional analysis.

3.3 Environmental Health Officers collected a minimum of eight samples (two samples of each of the most popular children's meals) from local restaurants or hotels between January and March 2023.

#### **4.0 Main Research Findings**

4.1 Children's menus were limited in terms of choice and there were few healthy options. The most popular children's meals were reported to be coated fried chicken & chips, sausages & chips, burger & chips and a pasta dish.

4.2 Chips were offered with 72% of children's meals, while vegetables were only available with 24% of meals.

4.3 The coated fried chicken & chips, sausages & chips and burger & chips meals were generally high in total fat, saturated fat and salt -

- 43% of meals contained more than half the average daily energy recommendation for 5-year-olds.
- 66% of meals contained more than half the average daily total fat recommendation for 5-year-olds.
- 47% of meals contained more than half the average daily maximum saturated fat recommendation for 5-year-olds.
- 70% of meals contained more than half the daily maximum amount of salt recommended for 5-year-olds.

4.4 While views on providing healthier options were mixed, most restaurant owners/managers saw the out of home/food service sector as having a role in improving children's diets.

4.5 The full report can be found at:  
<https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/What%27s%20on%20the%20children%27s%20menu.pdf>

#### **5.0 Next Steps**

5.1 The FSA has developed 'Healthier catering tips for children's menus' which can be found at: <https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/healthier-catering-tips-for-childrens-menus> . The guidance provides tips for businesses to improve the nutritional quality of children's meals.

5.2 The Environmental Health Department and FSA will also consider how businesses can be further supported to improve the nutritional quality of food available on children's menus.

#### **6.0 Recommendation**

**It is recommended** that the report be noted.