

**NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL**

**ADULT AND CHILDREN'S  
SERVICES CABINET MEMBER**

**COMMUNITY MEALS SERVICE**

**1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT**

- 1.1 To inform the Cabinet Member of options to secure the future of the Community Meals Service
- 1.2 To recommend a preferred option for Cabinet Member to consider
- 1.3 If the recommended option is preferred, to seek approval for a tender exercise for an external provider with a contract value of £320K p.a.

**2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 2.1 The Community Meals Service currently provides a service to 287 individuals aged between 50 and 104. The service provides a hot meal to people who are unable to prepare or have a meal provided by any other means. The service can be provided on either a long or short-term basis. The Community Meals Service can also provide a sandwich at the same time as the hot meal to be eaten later for tea. The Community Meals Service tries to cater for all common dietary needs and supplies a range of meals to suit many cultural and religious preferences. When a meal is delivered, a well-being check is also carried out to highlight any potential problems, such as the house being too cold, to an appropriate person. Due to the issues outlined below and in light of an increasing focus on preventative services, it is necessary to carry out a review of potential options to secure the future of the service.
- 2.2 Meals are prepared in various council kitchens in day services and schools across North Lincolnshire and at a private sector care home, Rosecroft in Brigg.

To deliver meals to peoples' houses the Community Meals Service uses two providers:-

North Lincolnshire Council Transport (within the Infrastructure Directorate). This is funded by Adult Social Services to provide staffed vehicles weekdays and at weekends.

The WRVS is a voluntary sector partner that is funded to organise volunteers.

Not all areas of North Lincolnshire are covered by the service seven days a week. This is due to the distribution of volunteers and limited funding to pay for more from the Council's Transport Section.

The sandwich delivery element of the service is only available to people supplied by the Scunthorpe kitchen due to the location of the sandwich supplier.

- 2.3 The Community Meals Service has developed in recent years but the service in its current form is now close to capacity with little room for further development. The population of older people in North Lincolnshire is anticipated to increase by 26% by 2016, with those aged over 85 years increasing by over 50%. If the rate of referrals were to remain the same, then the Community Meals Service in its current form would be unable to meet the demand.
- 2.4 Although the charge to people using the service has increased over time, the service is still heavily subsidised by Adult Social Services. Currently the unit cost of the meal is £6.03. The users of the service contribute £3.40. In 2001/12 the gross budget for the meals service is £320,550
- 2.5 The current contracts with WRVS and Rosecroft have been extended pending the outcome of this review. However there are currently several organisations and council services involved with the preparation and delivery of the meals. Some areas have the WRVS delivering meals and in others, North Lincolnshire Council staff. This can lead to an uneven and fragmented service, with different people overseeing different parts of it. The fact that the service does not cover all parts of North Lincolnshire equally is an example of this fragmentation.

### **3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION**

- 3.1 Option 1 - Invest in developing the existing service.
- 3.2 Option 2 - Tender the service to one external provider.
- 3.3 Option 3 - Tender the service to several local providers.
- 3.4 Option 4 - Cessation of the service.

## 4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

### 4.1 Option 1 - Develop the existing service

To develop a personalised approach to the provision of meals and to offer a wider range of choice and control across the whole of North Lincolnshire the service would need considerable investment. Continuing with the current service would mean that the staff and volunteers who deliver the meals would continue to undertake the well-being checks and the links with the voluntary sector would be maintained. To offset any investment, a reduction in the subsidy of the meals would have to be considered, but this may price the service out of the reach of the most vulnerable.

### 4.2 Option 2 - Transfer the service to one external provider through a tendering process

The provider appointed would become responsible for both administration and operations on a day-to-day basis and so gives a more consistent service across North Lincolnshire. A quality control monitoring system would be in place under the terms of the contract to ensure a fair and equitable service across North Lincolnshire. The well-being checks would be incorporated into any contract with a clear pathway for issues and concerns to be passed on to the appropriate authority. The whole meals service may be at risk if a single external provider failed to fulfil the agreed contract for any reason. It is likely that under an external provider the cost of the meal to the client would have to be increased but still with a reduced contribution from North Lincolnshire Council. However, an external provider could offer the service at full cost to people who do not meet the council's eligibility criteria for meals.

### 4.3 Option 3 - Tender the service to several local external providers in localities

This option would encourage the strengthening of local communities and support local businesses. Each provider would be responsible for the administration and operation on a day-to-day basis in their locality. This option could lead to problems with covering the service should any of the providers have delivery problems, but this would only be a problem in a locality, not borough wide. To avoid further fragmentation of the service, tight controls within the contract would have to be in place to ensure a fair and equitable service across North Lincolnshire regardless of who the local provider was. The well-being checks could still be incorporated into any contract with a clear pathway for issues and concerns to be passed on to the appropriate authority. There would have to be a number of tenders if this option was chosen, with some risk of not being able to find organisations to deliver meals to the more rural areas without the payment of a rural premium price. This is

the preferred option, as it would aim to provide local, community based solutions for the provision of meals for vulnerable people.

#### 4.4 Option 4 - Cessation of the service

Providing a Community Meals Service is not a statutory obligation for councils. However, the main concern about ceasing the service would be that meals are provided to the most vulnerable members of the community. Without a meals service many would not have a hot meal regularly and as result their health and well-being would deteriorate. The community meals service is one of the cornerstones of prevention, helping to keep the most vulnerable people healthy and well. Without a community meals service more people are likely to move to live in residential homes or be at increased risk of hospitalisation.

### 5. **RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)**

#### 5.1 Financial implications

In 2011/12 the gross budget for the meals service is £320,550. Currently each meal costs on average £6.03 with people receiving the service making a contribution of £3.50. There is potential to further increase the level of customer contribution.

Option 1: Would require additional funding (detailed work has not been undertaken).

Options 2 and 3: Would be tendered on the basis that as a minimum the net costs would not exceed the current budget, there would be service improvements and a reduced unit cost per person served. There may be scope to reduce overall costs and Option 3 would have the added value of enabling local, community based provision.

Option 4: The expectation is that the majority of the existing costs could be saved however a proportion of the existing customers would require other council funding to compensate for the removal of the meals service. It is difficult to estimate the level of alternative costs.

#### 5.2 Staffing implications

Currently there are two permanent grade 4 Operational Support Clerks working 18.5hrs per week. Using the council's tendering and procurement procedure the staff posts could be protected through TUPE. Staff from the council's transport section will be affected and some may be included in the TUPE arrangements. Council staff employed in the kitchens where the meals are cooked in day centres

and schools could be affected as some of their hours are specifically for the Community Meals Service.

5.3 Property implications - None.

5.3 IT implications

Currently the Community Meals Service has direct links into the Adult Social Services database. Consideration will be given as to how IT could be used by an external provider to provide information to relevant departments within the council.

## 6. **OTHER IMPLICATIONS (STATUTORY, ENVIRONMENTAL, DIVERSITY, SECTION 17 - CRIME AND DISORDER, RISK AND OTHER)**

6.1 Statutory implications

There is no statutory obligation for the Local Authority to make financial contributions to "Meals on Wheels". Providing meals is a discretionary service as provided for in Section 45 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968 and Section 29, Schedule 9, Part II of the Health and Social Services and Social Security Adjudication Act 1983.

6.2 Environmental implications - none

6.3 Diversity implications – a Diversity Impact Assessment has been completed.

6.4 Section 17 – Crime and Disorder implications - none

6.5 Risk and other implications

There is a potential increase in risk to vulnerable adults in the community if there is no Community Meals Service. The Community Meals Service currently has a secondary role as a good neighbour and to provide a regular health and well-being check. Criteria for any proposed externally provided service will ensure that this aspect of the service is maintained.

## 7. **OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION**

7.1 Consultation has taken place with Adult Services Management Team and the Strategic Commissioning Team.

7.2 Infrastructure Services have not been consulted at this stage.

7.3 The Unions are in receipt of the Cabinet Member report. Once the Cabinet Member report has been approved and the preferred option identified then further consultation with the Unions and HR will commence.

7.4 No providers of existing services have been consulted on these proposals.

## 8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 It is requested that Cabinet Member consider the options outlined in this report.

8.2 It is recommended that Cabinet Member approve the preferred option 3, to tender the service several local external providers in localities. Each provider would be responsible for the day-to-day administration and operation of the service in a locality. Assessments and referrals of eligible people to the service will still be the responsibility of Adult Social Services. The contract specification will also include a clear outline of what is required including a seven day a week service across all localities in North Lincolnshire.

### SERVICE DIRECTOR ADULT SOCIAL SERVICES

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Date: 16 June 2011

**Background Papers used in the preparation of this report** None