

OPTION: COMMUNITY MEALS

BUDGET SAVING: £75k increased income based on full cost recovery and £125k reduced expenditure based on a smaller contract which reflects anticipated demand

DESCRIPTION OF OPTION

Community Meals, or 'meals on wheels', have been a traditional part of adult social services for many years. It involves hot meals being delivered to a number of vulnerable residents every day. At the moment, people receiving community meals pay £2.68 per meal. The cost to the Council is £3.47 per meal.

The proposal is that the Council could increase the charges so the price paid covers the current cost, which would work out at 79p per meal, and replace the current contract with a smaller contract reflecting anticipated demands for the service.

RATIONALE FOR SAVINGS

The Community Meals service is currently delivered by an independent sector provider under a contract which expires in June 2013. Since the contract was awarded in 2008 there has been a significant fall in demand for the service from 2,600 meals per week to 1,900 meals per week and this trend is continuing.

The development of personalisation and introduction of personal budgets and direct payments has undoubtedly had an impact in this area as individuals are making personal choices regarding their nutrition and food provision.

Currently the Council charges £2.68 per meal and this is a subsidised rate. The full cost of providing the meal is estimated to be £3.47 based on the original contract for 2,600 meals.

The fall in demand means that it is unlikely that the Council will need to have in place a large contract for community meals. The current subsidy is therefore no longer appropriate and it is proposed that the current contract is replaced with a smaller contract which reflects anticipated demand for the hot meals service over the next 3 years.

There is no choice provided for dietary requirements within the current service, people simply get what they are given. The service does not tend to cater for any special dietary requirements such as vegetarianism, or any religious considerations. There are now lots of alternative providers of ready meals that can offer much greater choice to people at a reasonable cost to the individual.

Consideration was given to ceasing to provide a hot meal service, however it was felt inappropriate at this time and there will continue to be a small demand for this service as a cost effective alternative to providing additional domiciliary support at meal times.

IMPACT

The assessment of need of an individual who is eligible under Fair Access to Care must take account of their need for nutrition and meal provision and this will be included in their support plan. Adult Social Care will ensure that the range of available choices is discussed with the individual and a suitable arrangement put in place.

MITIGATION

There is now greater choice for people available to access affordable meals, including supermarkets who deliver ready meals to the door and specialist companies who deliver affordable frozen meals that meet all dietary requirements, such as Wiltshire Farm Foods. No subsidy is provided for these alternatives to the home delivered hot meal service. There are also at least 40 luncheon clubs in the Wirral, 9 of which receive a grant payment from the Council.

The Council will ensure that comprehensive information is available to the public on the range of providers of this service.