



Essex County Council

AGENDA ITEM 6

| | |
|--|--|
| Report to Cabinet | Forward Plan reference number: FP/264/10/15 |
| Date of Meeting: 16 February 2016 | County Divisions affected by the decision: All Divisions |
| Title of report: Long term options for Meals on Wheels service | |
| Report by Cllr Dick Madden - Cabinet Member for Adults and Children | |
| Responsible Director: Helen Taylor, Director for Integrated Commissioning & Vulnerable People | |
| Enquiries to Louise Hall, Head of Commissioning Vulnerable People; louise.hall@essex.gov.uk , 07585 307867 | |

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to seek agreement from Cabinet on the future of the Meals on Wheels service in Essex. The current contract for the Meals on Wheels service expires on 30 September 2016 and cannot be extended beyond this date.
- 1.2 In 2015 the Council carried out a successful pilot exercise under which a significant number of service users have been transferred to alternative provision. We enabled service users to choose the right provider for them. More details about the pilot are set out in later in the report.
- 1.3 This report sets out options and asks the Cabinet to decide on the future of the service.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. Agree that with effect from 1 October 2016 the council will support residents who require a hot meal by operating an accredited list of providers in Essex in place of a commissioned Meals on Wheels service.
- 2.2. Assess all service users of the current Meals on Wheels service and ensure that they are provided with an equivalent service via community alternatives or domiciliary care.

- 2.3. Agree that the Director for Integrated Commissioning and Vulnerable People is authorised to create and operate the accredited list of providers.

3. Proposal – Options considered

- 3.1. With the completion of the pilot and the expiry of the current contract in September 2016, the Council needs to decide on the future of the meals service. The following three options are presented for consideration.

OPTION 1

- 3.2. ECC ceases to commission a meals service provider after the current contract with Sodexo expires.
- 3.3. ECC maintains a list of options and providers available to those interested in a meals service on the ECC 'Living Well' website, but provides no assurance as to the quality of service from the providers listed. ECC provides support to vulnerable adults to identify providers able to meet their needs.
- 3.4. Over the next three years, this option will deliver estimated savings of £434,528. There is considerable reputational risk with this option, as ECC will cease provision without offering a reasonable alternative service, although ECC would be required to ensure that residents social care needs are being met.

OPTION 2

- 3.5. ECC commissions a single provider to deliver a countywide service.
- 3.6. The cost per meal would be likely to increase significantly, due to increased costs of provision, decreasing consumer market and the removal of ECC's subsidy. A commissioned meals service would be provided to eligible residents regardless of other, more preferable local community providers. The existence of a commissioned service reduces demand for other providers, making it difficult to diversify the marketplace.
- 3.7. Over the next three years, this option would deliver estimated savings of £608,905, if the Council passes on the full cost of the service to service users. The cost to the Council of the service would rise if the Council maintained the current level of charges. There is considerable risk with this option as meal costs are likely to increase and the service may well become unviable. Further, individual choice would be restricted, due to a single provider.

OPTION 3

- 3.8. ECC transitions all those receiving a Meals on Wheels service to a more flexible and personally-tailored meals service, with local community provision wherever possible.

- 3.9. ECC establishes an accredited list of providers in Essex accessible to all residents requiring support with meals. Vulnerable adults would be supported in selecting a provider to meet their needs.
- 3.10. ECC establishes minimum standards for providers to be accredited, in order for them to receive referrals from the Council. This will assure adults who are unable to prepare their own meals of a quality meals service.
- 3.11. Over the next three years, this option will deliver estimated savings of £427,778. There is minimal risk with this option, as ECC has successfully demonstrated transitioning meals service recipients to new arrangements in the 2015 pilot.

The recommended option: OPTION 3

- 3.12. The Meals on Wheels service has operated under the following principles:
- Meeting nutritional needs of the most vulnerable;
 - Increasing choice and control;
 - Increasing independence; and
 - Preventing social isolation.
- 3.13. The Care Act 2014 promotes a personalised approach to care and encourages the use of local community resources to support service users.
- 3.14. This recommended option satisfies both the principles of the traditional Meals on Wheels service and the Care Act.
- 3.15. ECC will ensure that the needs of all service users continue to be met. Every service user will be contacted and ECC will help them to make arrangements for an alternative provision. For individuals able to access meals in their community, alternative options are likely to help to reduce instances of social isolation and loneliness.
- 3.16. If no other suitable provision can be put in place then the Council will arrange provision via domiciliary care services. There are sufficient resources available to work with service users to identify alternative provision. This work is expected to begin in the spring to allow all service users to make the transition before the expiry of the contract.
- 3.17. The pilot and similar activities conducted by other local authorities has demonstrated that the Essex market is in a position to be able to support the needs of service users currently accessing the community meals service. In order to implement this decision ECC would undertake an initial phase of working with the market to accredit suppliers and establishing which suppliers are able to operate in which areas.
- 3.18. During the pilot it became clear that staff assisting service users did need to ensure that provision was appropriate. An informal assessment of the appropriateness of the provider was made, but without an accreditation

system it will be difficult to ensure that the Council keeps up to date with market intelligence about the standards operated by providers.

- 3.19. By moving to an accredited list the council can still look to ensure minimum standards are in place for providers offering an alternative provision. Minimum accreditation standards for providers can help reassure residents that the service they are receiving is of good quality.
- 3.20. Establishing an accredited list also presents an opportunity to work in partnership with Trading Standards to set minimum standards for providers, and provides further support to some of Essex's most vulnerable residents.

4. Background

2015 pilot: Alternatives to Meals on Wheels

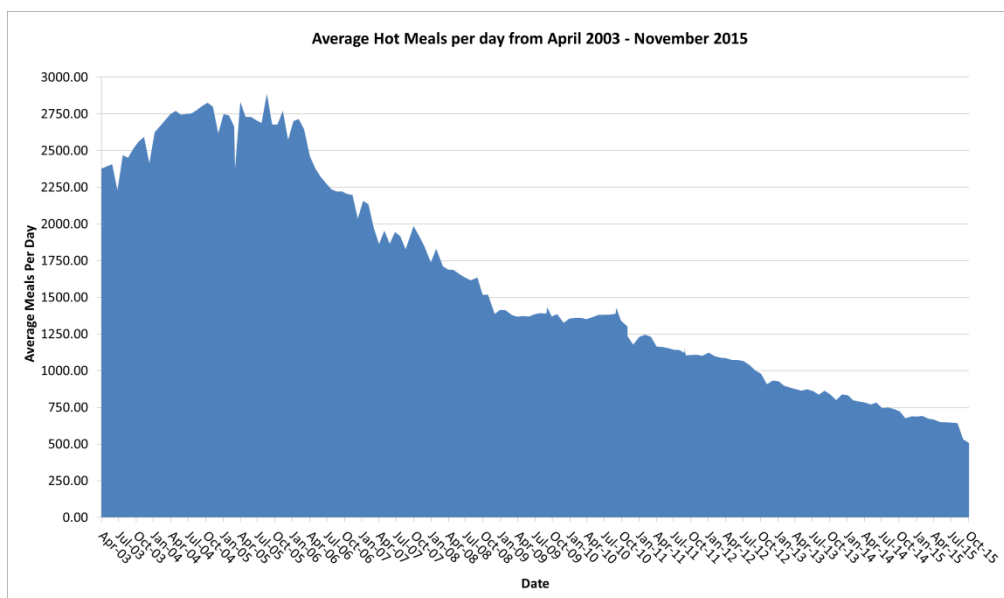
- 4.1. In September 2015 the Council entered into a one year contract with Sodexo to operate a Meals on Wheels service but for a reduced geographical area. This resulted in the closure of their Colchester depot with meals delivered out of their alternative depots in Basildon and Enfield; and that 143 people would no longer receive a meals service from Sodexo.
- 4.2. This allowed ECC to test alternative options for meals recipients, using those 143 people affected. Between July and September 2015 those affected were supported by the Council's Engagement Team, officers from Commissioning Delivery, social workers, Community Agents and ECL to identify an alternative provision.
- 4.3. A number of service users were able to access local hot meal delivery providers to replace the service they received from Sodexo with, some having an increased choice in the number of providers who could support them and an improved range of choice of meals and a number of different ways in which it could be provided.
- 4.4. In some cases service users were unable to prepare their own meals and couldn't access a local provider. For these service users a package of care was provided to encompass a visit by a domiciliary carer who could heat a previously delivered frozen meal for them.
- 4.5. The table below shows the alternative provision put in place:

| Alternative Provision | Number of Service Users |
|---|--------------------------------|
| Domiciliary care package | 7 |
| Alternative hot meal provider | 89 |
| Frozen meals or alternative provider | 24 |
| Support from family | 7 |
| Preparing their own meals | 7 |
| Support from carers | 6 |
| No service required e.g. In residential reablement, hospital etc. | 3 |

- 4.6. At the end of this period ECC was able to identify an alternative provision for all of the 143 affected service users. The pilot was a success, with many residents welcoming the flexibility given by their new service.

Changing demand for Meals on Wheels in Essex

- 4.7. The number of meals being delivered via the Council's commissioned service has declined significantly over the last 10 years:



- 4.8. Residents' changing demands and expectations is seen as a significant contributory factor in the declining numbers of people in receipt of the community meals service. On-going work such as the reablement service, community mobilisation, community agents and the widening availability of alternatives such as online shopping is likely to see this trend continue with over 60% of people referred to the meals service in the last financial year exiting the service within 12 months.
- 4.9. For many individuals the current Meals on Wheels service is doing nothing to address their social isolation or reducing independence as the drive to deliver a financially viable service reduces the contact time with service users. The current contract simply requires meals to be delivered. They are not required to signpost people to other services or help people to access community based solutions.
- 4.10. In November 2015 an average of 507 meals were delivered each day and there were 690 residents accessing the service. Those accessing this service are all individuals who were originally assessed as being unable to prepare their own meals, although many may not have been re-assessed since they first received the service.

5. Policy context and Outcomes Framework

- 5.1. The delivery of this service aligns to the corporate outcome 'People in Essex can live independently and exercise choice and control over their lives' and to the aim in A Vision for Essex 2013-17 to protect vulnerable people and it also helps spend taxpayers money wisely.
- 5.2. The recommended option in this report also aligns to the corporate outcome 'Sustainable economic growth for Essex communities and businesses'.
- 5.3. The delivery of this service also aligns to the following outcome indicator: Proportion of people who live independently.
- 5.4. The commissioning activity for the Meals service has been considered in line with the following principles:
 - Promotion of independence and safeguarding
 - Prevention
 - Prioritisation of resources
 - Transitional protection.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1. A financial appraisal has been undertaken on the three options being considered. The results of this appraisal are set out in the Table 1 below.

| | Annual Budget | 2016/17 - Expected Cost | 2016/17 - Increase / (Decrease) in Cost Against Budget | 2017/18 - Expected Cost | 2017/18 - Increase / (Decrease) in Cost Against Budget | 2018/19 - Expected Cost | 2018/19 - Increase / (Decrease) in Cost Against Budget | Total - Increase / (Decrease) in Cost Against Budget |
|--|---------------|----------------------------|--|----------------------------|--|----------------------------|--|--|
| Option 1 | | | | | | | | |
| From 1/10/16 an unaccredited list of providers published | £290,443 | £298,796 | £8,353 | £67,916 | (£222,527) | £70,089 | (£220,354) | (£434,528) |
| Option 2 | | | | | | | | |
| From 1/10/16 a new Countywide Commissioned Service is in place without the provision of an ECC subsidy | £290,443 | £262,424 | (£28,019) | £0 | (£290,443) | £0 | (£290,443) | (£608,905) |
| Option 3 | | | | | | | | |
| From 1/10/16 an accredited list of providers maintained | £290,443 | £304,046 | £13,603 | £69,416 | (£221,027) | £70,089 | (£220,354) | (£427,778) |

- 6.2. The MTRS currently has a net annual budget of £290,443 built in each year for the Meals on Wheels subsidy from 2016/17 to 2018/19. All three options will deliver a saving on the current annual budget over the three year period considered. Option 2 gives rise to the largest saving (£608,905).
- 6.3. The recommended option – option 3 – gives rise to an additional cost above the 2016/17 budget of £13,603. This shortfall will be met from general balances should sufficient headroom not be identified within service budgets. The underspend of £221,027 and £220,354 in 2017/18 and 2018/19 respectively against the forecast contained within the Medium Term Resourcing Strategy will be ring-fenced as savings but not released until the

transition phase of the project is complete and it is confirmed that sufficient capacity exists within the market to make the model sustainable. The application of the savings will be subject to a formal decision at that future point in time.

- 6.4. The financial appraisal makes no assumption on the level of subsidy to be applied beyond 1st October 2016. Any subsidy would need to be funded from the savings identified above.

7. Legal Implications

- 7.1 The Council is not required to provide a community meals service, but it is required to ensure that eligible social care needs are being met. The Council has successfully moved to the recommended model across a significant part of Essex and the new services appear to have been generally well received and the Council has not received significant complaints.
- 7.2 When operating an accreditation system it will be important to ensure that:
- The system operates in a way that is fair to providers and consumers;
 - The system is transparent and as objective as possible; and
 - Service users are not told by ECC staff that they have to use an accredited provider.
- 7.3 The Care Act 2014 requires the Council to have regard to the need to have a sustainable range of high quality of providers. The removal of a commissioned service in favour of accredited suppliers will be of significant benefit and will allow most service users to choose an option which best suits their needs.

8. Staffing and other resource implications

- 8.1. The transition will involve significant resources but the end result will be a better range of services available to Essex residents. There will be a resource saving by no longer commissioning a community meals service.
- 8.2. Development of local community solutions may provide both paid and volunteering opportunities.

9. Equality and Diversity implications

- 8.1 Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 creates the public sector equality duty which requires that when ECC makes decisions it must have regard to the need to:
- (a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour prohibited by the Act
 - (b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

- (c) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.
- 8.2 The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, gender and sexual orientation.
- 8.3 The equality impact assessment indicates that the proposals in this report will not have a disproportionately adverse impact on any people with a particular characteristic.

10. List of Appendices

(available at www.essex.gov.uk if not circulated with this report)

- 10.1. Equality Impact Assessment

11. List of Background Papers

- 11.1. Community Meals Service Pilot - Findings and Recommendations

(Any request for any background papers listed here should be made to the person named at the front of the report who will be able to help with any enquiries)