

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY - COMMUNITY WELLBEING

19 FEBRUARY 2019

Title:

UPDATE ON THE COMMUNITY MEALS SERVICE

[Portfolio Holder: Cllr Jenny Else]

[Wards Affected: All]

Summary and purpose:

The previous Meals on Wheels Service, delivered by The Royal Voluntary Service, operating out of Brightwells Gostrey Centre in Farnham transitioned on 16 January 2017 to a freshly cooked nutritious meal service delivered through local organisations in the 4 key habitant areas of Waverley.

The purpose of this report is to provide an update to the committee on the new service, highlighting the key successes and challenges faced through the transition and the future direction of the service.

How this report relates to the Council's Corporate Priorities:

The new corporate strategy's 2018 – 2023 mission is to work closely with our local communities and partners to deliver excellent and affordable services. Whilst the provision of a community meals service is discretionary, it relates largely with Priority Theme 1 by focussing on the well-being of our communities, helping people to live healthily and independently, particularly as they age. The service is not just about food, it provides vital social contact for residents, helping them to maintain their independence and volunteering opportunities for people to deliver the meals.

Equality and Diversity Implications:

There are Equality and Diversity implications associated to this report as it discusses a service that is aimed at Waverley's most vulnerable residents. It is the responsibility of the individual service provider to have mechanisms in place to support clients who are having difficulty accessing the service.

Financial Implications:

The meals service has had a challenging financial journey towards become self sustaining. This journey is not yet complete. To date the service has been supported by the Council both financially and with significant officer resources to support the logistics. The service no longer receives funding from the Council and in turn the Council has no direct responsibility for providing or shaping the future of the service. The Council is currently one of the service providers and will therefore need to closely monitor the cost of delivery to ensure a break even position.

Legal Implications:

There are no direct legal implications associated with this report.

1. Introduction

It was agreed at the former Community Overview and Scrutiny on 19 January 2016 to carry out an in-depth review of the Meal on Wheels Service, then delivered by the Royal Voluntary Service (RVS) as a result of:

- a. Monitoring information provided by RVS demonstrating that there has been a steady decrease in the take up of the Meals on Wheels service from 2011;
- b. Consultation from the Ageing Well Strategy which highlighted the need to review the service as some residents expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of the meals;
- c. The RVS Meals on Wheels Service had operated in the same way for some years, and;
- d. Coincided with Surrey County Council, Adult Social Care directorate giving notice of their intention to withdraw their funding for 50% of the Meals on Wheels Service.

The findings of the review were presented to that Committee on 14 June 2016 with the proposal of developing a freshly cooked nutritious meal service delivered through 4 organisations -, Brightwells Gostrey (Farnham area), Haslewey (Haslemere area), Rowleys Centre for the Community (Cranleigh area) and Waverley Borough Council's staff restaurant (Godalming area).

The service provides a freshly cooked hot meal with dessert and optional afternoon tea 5 days a week. Frozen meals are available for weekends and bank holidays for clients if they don't have other arrangements.

The new meal service transitioned on 16 January 2017 and has been operating successfully for 2 years.

2. Funding and Sustainability of the Service

The previous Waverley Meals on Wheels service was delivered by the Royal Voluntary Service under an annual Service Level Agreement. Waverley Borough Council and Surrey County Council Adult Social Care directorate both contributed £30,000 towards the overall service delivery, totalling £60,000. Waverley also contributed staff time and premises costs for the service totalling a further £10,000. Funding for the service had remained the same since 2007.

In March 2016 the Council received notification from Surrey County Council's Adult Social Care Directorate regarding the actions it would need to take following the significant financial challenges it was facing as a result of reductions in its government grant. As a result, Surrey confirmed it would only guarantee funding for the Waverley Meals on Wheels Service for the first 6 months only for 2016/17. Surrey ceased funding altogether on 31 March 2017.

In light of the above, when developing the new model consideration was placed on the need to create a self-financing service with the increased financial challenges placed on borough and district budgets and likelihood that the council would not necessarily be in a position to continue to provide long term annual funding.

To support the transition of the service the Council provided:

- a. £40,000 capital funding to provide the necessary equipment to deliver the service,
- b. Start up funding of £4,000 to each service for 16 January to 31 March 2017; and,
- c. maintained the same level of funding, £30,000 for 2017/18 to support the first full financial year of the service overall.

Since the transition in 2016 a key objective for officers has been to work closely with the service providers to understand the costs and risks to providing a self-sustaining service and support them to develop a business model that will future proof the service in these challenging times.

Key areas to understand:

- a. Cost per meal – taking into account all overheads such as staff, volunteer expenses, kitchen depreciation, meal containers and ingredients.
 - i. Meal packaging is expensive; currently there is not a suitable alternative, and;
 - ii. Food ingredient costs have increased since the date of transition.
- b. VAT Implications – the council incurs VAT which means it loses 20% on each meal. Due to the success of Haslewey as a whole they will be registering for VAT and this will have a negative impact on their income from each meal.
- c. Constant promotion of the service to retain client numbers due to the high turnover – all the organisations need to meet a daily meal target in order to ensure the service is cost effective.
- d. Kitchen Facilities – Haslewey have reached capacity for the meal service as the size of their kitchen prohibits them to deliver more as well as delivering a daily café / lunch service. It is worth noting that Haslewey are keen to source capital funding to enhance their kitchen facilities and develop the service further.

An operational review workshop was held in December 2018 with the 4 providers where they shared and discussed key areas and challenges of the services. These are discussed in section 3 of this report. At this workshop the providers reviewed the current meal prices that have been in place since the date of transition (2 years). They discussed whether the meal prices needed to reflect what clients were paying in the local centres that provide services for vulnerable and older people. Currently the Community Meals Service prices are either less or the same as those provided by the centres and yet they do not have to incur the added costs of packaging and delivery. Now that the service is established and there is a clear understanding of the all the costs it was agreed between all partners to increase the meal price from 1 February 2019.

This price increase is a collective decision from all partners not a directive from the council. The partners were also keen that any price increase had to be the same across all 4 service providers so residents continue to pay the same price no matter where they live in the borough.

Current prices for the services from January 2017,
Freshly cooked 2 course main meal - £5.50
Weekend or Bank Holiday frozen meal - £5.00
Afternoon Tea - £3.25

Agreed price increases from 1 February 2019,
Freshly cooked 2 course main meal - £6.50

Weekend or Bank Holiday frozen meal - £6.00
Afternoon Tea - £3.25 (no increase)

Please note the prices include the costs to deliver the meal to the clients home.

Budgets and costs to deliver the service will continue to be monitored, particularly given increases in food costs. It will therefore be necessary for the organisations to review their prices going forward and it may come to the point in the future when the organisations may need to charge differing prices in order to sustain their own service.

3. Review of the New Community Meals Service

3.1 Numbers

The new meals service has been growing from strength to strength since the transition on 16 January 2017. On the day of transfer, every client received a meal. Meals are currently delivered to 152 people across Waverley; there is a high turnover of clients due to the nature of the service. Most clients only take up the service when they are at their most vulnerable and often before they require a higher need of care or sadly pass away. Clients need to meet an agreed universal eligibility criteria.

In a 12 month period (1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018) the new meal service delivered:

- 23,836 hot meals
- 1,366 frozen meals
- 2,184 teas

3.2 Volunteers

When working towards the day of transition a key concern was ensuring that as many of the existing RVS volunteers moved across to the new service to provide continuity to the clients. On the day of transition virtually all volunteers transferred which was a big success for the individual providers as they had to build the trust and confidence of this cohort of individuals. Only weeks after moving across the organisations were receiving positive feedback, such as;

- a. Haslewey volunteer - "I have been doing this for over 10 years and the service and meals are the best that they have ever been"
- b. Godalming volunteer – "the meals are so much nicer and it is working well, please pass on my compliments to the staff restaurant as they are doing such a good job"

3.3 Clients

It is important to remember that to the client this service is more than just a freshly cooked meal. It is a vital community service delivered by local community organisations and volunteers and not a statutory core service. The volunteer carries out an informal wellbeing check and look for signs of concern and for many it can be their only social contact.

- a. Haslewey client said the meals are quite small; when he was told they were larger than the appetite his response was, "but the new ones are so much nicer I would like more".
- b. Godalming client – volunteer noticed a client appeared unwell, their GP was contacted and the client admitted to hospital.
- c. Haslewey client – due to building a relationship with the centre the clients' son has arranged for his father to go to the centre one day a week to have his meal so he can get out and socialise.

One aim of the meals service being provided by the local community organisations was that clients would have the opportunity to access their services and support. Clients now have the opportunity to attend a centre for lunch and activities if they are able to. All Haslemere clients were invited to the Christmas Day Lunch at Haslewey in December 2018.

3.5 Promotion and Publicity

Promotion and publicity are key to providing an easy accessible sustainable service for the residents of Waverley. The individual organisations are responsible for their own promotion and publicity locally as each area has different organisations and medians to network with the local community. The organisations use the following mechanisms to promote their service:

- a. TV screens – in the local centres, GP surgeries, libraries etc.
- b. Social media – Next Door and Interests me (free private social network in your local community), Facebook, twitter
- c. Print media - Newspaper articles, local magazines, local papers, Round and About, Vantage Point
- d. Partnerships - Doctors, GP surgeries, community matrons, Frailty Forum, Frailty Coordinators, occupational therapists, hospital discharge teams, flu clinics, Older Person's Network
- e. The council promotes the service at every opportunity including Careline and sheltered housing accommodation.

4. Future of the Service

4.1 Demand versus Capacity

At the present time each of the providers has capacity to cater for up to 50 meals per day, 200 meals across Waverley. Within 2 years of transition meals are currently delivered to 152 people across Waverley; Haslewey has already reached capacity and now operates a waiting list and Brightwells Gostrey is on average providing 45 meals a day. As mentioned in section 3.1, Rowleys Centre for the Community and the staff restaurant still have some capacity, however, both have started a new promotional campaign.

The challenge will arise when all 4 reach capacity whilst the demand for the service continues to grow. With Waverley's demographics of an ageing population this is a likely scenario. To mitigate this issue:

- a. Officers have started to have 'conversations' with another organisation about the potential of becoming a provider in the future;
- b. Haslewey have started to look at extending their kitchen facilities which would enable to increase their capacity; and,
- c. Officers are working with the providers to review geographical areas, particularly in the more rural parts of the borough that are currently not serviced and where there is now a demand.

If the provider is operating at capacity and unable to support a client, they will operate a waiting list. People are advised to contact social services if there is a high priority need otherwise they can be offered alternative solutions such as Wiltshire Farm Foods until there is a space.

4.2 Retention and Recruitment of Volunteers

Volunteers play an integral role in the financial sustainability of this service. Without the volunteer delivering the meals on a daily basis it would increase the cost to the client, possibly making it unaffordable; require grant funding or pressure for the council make up the shortfall or the service cease to operate. A key focus for the service going forward is to recruit new volunteers as the existing cohort volunteers stand down.

4.3 Role of Waverley Borough Council

By working towards a self-sustaining service the new Community Meals Service no longer receives funding from the Council and in turn the Council has no direct responsibility for providing or shaping the future of the service, albeit it is currently one of the service providers. However, members and officers would like to continue to provide support to the service in an advisory and overview role, particularly at it is more than just a meal service as it reaches Waverley's most vulnerable residents and for many of the clients can be the only social contact they receive.

5. Conclusion

The in-depth review in 2016 highlighted that although the previous RVS Meals on Wheels Service was a discretionary service it met many of the then-corporate priorities of the Council, particularly Community Wellbeing, and therefore they were keen to see a new fit for purpose, sustainable service offer in Waverley.

The transition to the new service has largely been a huge success with the 4 providers taking complete ownership of each individual service. They have embraced all the challenges that they faced, delivering a freshly cooked meal hot meal; including sharing ideas on how to keep the meal hot when being transported, promoting the service, recruiting volunteers and managing the day to day operations.

The Community Meals Service is more than just a freshly cooked meal. It is a vital community service delivered by local community organisations and volunteers and not a statutory core service. It is a preventative service enabling some of Waverley's most vulnerable residents to remain independent in their homes for longer, thereby reducing the need for more costly interventions a key emphasis of health going forward.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Community Wellbeing Overview & Scrutiny Committee considers the findings of this report, and provides comment or feedback to officers.

Background Papers

There are no background papers (as defined by Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) relating to this report.

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