

Meeting:	Cabinet
Date:	18 January 2007
Subject:	Outcome of statutory consultations on proposed changes to the Meals on Wheels Service
Key Decision: (Executive-side only)	Yes
Responsible Officer:	Penny Furness-Smith, Director of Adult Community Care Services
Portfolio Holder:	Cllr Silver – Adult Community Care Services and Issues Facing People with Special Needs
Exempt:	No
Enclosures:	Appendix 1 – Analysis of Consultation Responses Appendix 2 – Partial Equalities Impact Assessment Appendix 3 – Evaluation of the Consultation Appendix 4 – Financial Summary

SECTION 1 – SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This report sets out the public response to the Statutory Consultations on the proposed changes to the Meals on Wheels Service. It also sets out options for Cabinet to consider in response to the consultation exercise.

Recommendations

Cabinet is requested to:

1. Agree the recommendations in section 2.4

Reason

Cabinet agreed at its meeting of 3rd August to a 12 week consultation exercise covering the service identified above and for the results of this consultation exercise to be reported back to Cabinet so that it could make a decision about the proposals concerning the future delivery of the service.

SECTION 2 - REPORT

1. Background

1.1. At its meeting on 3 August 2006 Cabinet considered further proposals to achieve financial savings during 2006/07. These proposals included the proposed merger of Anmer and Milmans Day Centres, proposed changes to Home Care Charges, and proposed changes to the Meals on Wheels Service.

1.2. This report deals with the responses to the consultation on proposed changes to the Meals on Wheels Service. Cabinet received a report on the outcome of the consultation on the proposed merger of Anmer and Milmans Day Centres, the proposed changes to Home Care Charges and the Proposed re-provision of services currently at Wiseworks at its Meeting on 14 December 2006.

2. Proposed changes to the Meals on Wheels Service

2.1. Number of Service Users affected by the Proposals

- 435 Service Users currently receive a hot meals service
- 81 Service Users currently receive a frozen meals service
- At present no Service Users receive a direct payment

2.2. Details of the proposal set out in the consultation

- To retain a hot meals service for those users who have been assessed as being unable to reheat a meal themselves.
- To offer a frozen meal service or the option for service users to use Direct Payments to purchase their own meals from a supplier of their choice.
- To introduce a fair charging system that has the same subsidy level for all types of meals provided by the Meals on Wheels Service.
- To ensure a cost effective Meals on Wheels Service is provided to individuals with special dietary requirements.

- *Full details of the consultation process are set out in Section 5 of this report and Appendix 1*

2.3. Summary of responses to the consultation

- A number of comments made in responses were common to all the consultations
 - The Council is targeting the most vulnerable members of the community.
 - The Council should reduce costs in other ways, e.g. by reducing high salaries or cutting staff number.
 - The Council should raise revenue by increasing Council tax
 - People should be informed about Direct Payments.

- The majority of respondents were either unhappy or very unhappy about the proposal although about a quarter of respondents stated that they 'did not mind'. 21% of the responses received were sent in response to the initial publicity surrounding the Cabinet decision and prior to the detailed consultation proposals being published. The main concerns were that
 - Some service users are not able to heat frozen meals because they are unable to operate a microwave/freezer, lack freezer space or do not have a microwave
 - There will be reduction of contact with other people/reduction of monitoring of health and well being carried out by drivers on an informal basis
 - The Council is targeting the most vulnerable members of the community, prices may be too high
 - The Council should reduce costs in other ways, e.g. by reducing high salaries or cutting down on road works

- *A summary of responses are set out in Appendix 1. In addition copies of the individual responses have been collated and placed in the Members Library*

2.4. Recommended Options for Consideration by Cabinet

- Cabinet is recommended to:
 - To retain a hot meals service only for those service users who are assessed as being unable to reheat a meal themselves.
 - To offer a frozen meal service or the option for service users to use Direct Payments to purchase their own meals from a supplier of their choice.
 - To apply a common subsidy of 44% of the total cost of production to both hot and frozen meals resulting in a charge of
 - £2.78 for frozen meals
 - £4.25 for hot meals
 - and for these charges to be reviewed annually
 - Agree, following implementation of proposals contained within this report (subject to Cabinet agreement), that a review of the Hot Asian Meals production kitchen be undertaken and for the outcome of this review to be reported back to Cabinet as soon as possible.

3. Resources, costs and risks associated with the proposals

3.1. The draft revenue budget approved by Cabinet on 14 December 2006 included a full-year saving of £350k for 2007/08, arising from the proposed changes to the subsidy for hot and frozen meals.

3.2. Appendix 4 provides a summary of the projected impact of the proposed changes, if agreed by Cabinet. This shows that if the volume of frozen meals is increased to 25%, 50% or 75% (from the current 11%) the projected saving that could be achieved would be £137k, £175k or £212k respectively. It is estimated that the projected total production costs will

be £100k less than the predicted cost shown in Appendix 4 because the demand for specialist meals has reduced – there is therefore a greater volume of standard meals being produced. There may therefore be additional savings accruing from reduced operating costs e.g. vehicle (fuel, insurance etc) and reduced staffing costs – these cannot be quantified at this stage. There may be further efficiency savings to be achieved e.g. moving to a pre-factored Asian meals service although this would result in closure of the Milap kitchen.

3.3. A shift away from a hot meals service will potentially incur one-off costs. A reduction in the number of vehicles required to deliver hot meals could result in a penalty for early surrender of the lease. This is estimated to be £5k per vehicle, with a total penalty of £60k if all 12 vehicles were to be returned. In addition there will be workforce implications which cannot be costed at this stage (see 5.1).

3.4. A four week period will be required to make contact with individuals and ascertain whether they would be able to move to a frozen meals service or switch to Direct Payments. Following this review a reassessment will be made of the likely savings for 2007/2008 and this sum included within the final budget to be agreed by full Council in February.

3.5. The Partial Equality Impact assessment recommends that a full Impact Assessment is undertaken as part of the implementation of any of the proposals.

4. Staffing/Workforce Considerations

4.1. There are approximately 35 posts (mostly part-time) who are engaged in the production and delivery of the Meals on Wheels Service. A shift away from the current working method will have implications for staff. This cannot be quantified at this stage and any matters arising from implementation of the proposals will be addressed through the Council's agreed procedures for managing organisational change.

5. Consultation

5.1. The Consultation on the proposed changes to the Meals on wheels Service followed the good practice set out in the Harrow Compact and the Cabinet Office Codes of Practice on Consultation. The Cabinet Office Code of Practice sets out 6 criteria:

- “Consult widely throughout the process, allowing a minimum of 12 weeks for written consultation at least once during the development of the policy.
- Be clear about what your proposals are, who may be affected, what questions are being asked and the timescale for responses.
- Ensure that your consultation is clear, concise and widely accessible.
- Give feedback regarding the responses received and how the consultation process influenced the policy.
- Monitor your department's effectiveness at consultation, including through the use of a designated consultation co-ordinator.

- Ensure your consultation follows better regulation best practice, including carrying out a Regulatory Impact Assessment if appropriate.”
 - *An evaluation of the consultation process is attached at Appendix 3*
- 5.2. The consultation lasted 12 weeks and ran from 29 September 2006 to 5 January 2007 (to take account of the Christmas break).
- 5.3. The consultation pack was sent to 516 service users (current and those who had received the service during the preceding 12 month period), 396 local organisations and the 63 Councillors. Freepost envelopes were provided to enable return of completed feedback sheets. The consultation pack was available in different community languages and in tape format. An addendum letter containing information about the proposed charges was sent out on 12th October.
- 5.4. Press adverts were placed in the Harrow Times, Harrow Leader and the Harrow Observer, announcing that the consultation was taking place and subsequent adverts also provided information about the public meetings held on 1, 2 and 8 November 2006 in different locations across Harrow.
- 5.5. Posters were placed in libraries, and on public notice boards, as well as in the civic centre. Copies were also sent to GP surgeries and directly to local organisations to place on their notice boards. Subsequent posters also provided information about the public meetings.
- 5.6. The Harrow Council website was used to advertise the consultation with links to the PDF documents of each proposal, as well as copies of the adverts, posters and information about the four public meetings.
- 5.7. In order to encourage feedback, potential respondents were able to choose from the following methods to express their views.
- By post using a freepost address (to send back feedback sheets)
 - Calling the dedicated telephone consultation line (feedback sheets were filled in by council staff)
 - Via email to the dedicated consultation email address
 - By taking part in the four public meetings
- 5.8. 272 individuals or organisations sent in a written or e-mailed response or communicated their views by the direct consultation line. Of these 56 (21%) were received before the public consultation commenced and resulted from the press coverage following the Cabinet meeting held in August. The proposals set out in the consultation document were amended in the light of this initial feedback. A further 81 individuals attended the four public meetings which encompassed all four consultations.

6. Equalities Impact

6.1. A Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken as part of the evaluation of the consultation process. This is attached as Appendix 2. As part of the implementation of the proposals set out in this report individual service users will be contacted to ascertain whether they would be able to move to a frozen meals service or switch to Direct Payments.

7. Key Performance Indicators

7.1. The following indicators will be impacted by any reduction in the number of service users:

- Help to Live at Home (all Care Groups) indicators

8. Corporate Priorities

8.1. This report addresses the Corporate Priority of Making Harrow Safe, Sound and Supportive.

9. Section 17 Crime and Disorder Act 1998 Considerations

9.1. This report deals throughout with the needs of a group of adults who are amongst the most vulnerable and at risk in Harrow.

SECTION 3 - STATUTORY OFFICER CLEARANCE

Chief Finance Officer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Name: Paula Foulds Date: 21 December 2006
Monitoring Officer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Name: Helen White Date: 9 January 2006

SECTION 4 - CONTACT DETAILS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

Contact:

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Background Papers:

1. Harrow Code of Practice on Consultation
2. Cabinet Office (Better Regulation Executive) – Code of Practice on Consultation

IF APPROPRIATE, does the report include the following considerations?

1.	Consultation	YES
2.	Corporate Priorities	YES
3.	Manifesto Pledge Reference Number	1