

Adult Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 11 April 2012

Community Meals Consultation Feedback

Recommendations

The committee are asked to consider and comment upon the report and the key decisions being recommended to Cabinet by the Cabinet member and Strategic Director of the People Group.

The recommendations are as follows:

- a. An increased price of £4.25 per meal, from £4.00
- b. That the price increase is applied for all customers
- c. That the provider considers and investigates the feasibility of extending the delivery window to reduce costs, and trials this if found to be feasible
- d. That the provider is given responses to the survey in order to assist them in evaluating their service and making on-going improvements.

1. Background

- 1.1 On the 7th September 2011, the paper entitled “Proposed Changes to Community Meals” was presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee who approved the report to be presented to Cabinet.

On the 3rd October 2011 the Portfolio Holder for Adult Health and Community Services authorised the undertaking of a consultation exercise and delegated any final decision (based upon the consultation findings) to the Strategic Director of Adult Social Care, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care.

- 1.2 The purpose of the consultation exercise was to help address the issues with regards to uptake of the service and its financial sustainability. The uptake of the service has not been to the level that was expected when the contract commenced. With lower numbers of orders the unit costs of the service to the provider have been much higher than expected, compromising the financial viability of the service. In order to address the need to reduce the subsidy paid by the council, an increase in customer contribution from £3.50 to £4.00 per meal was implemented from the 1st June 2011 (the customer contribution was last increased in October 2009).
- 1.2 The consultation exercise was carried out from the 1st November 2011 to 30th November 2011. This was conducted through a combination of surveys sent to existing and potential service users and a focus group with members of the Transformation Assembly.

2. Key Findings and Next steps

2.1 There were four main domains covered in the consultation, Pricing, Delivery, Quality and Customer Service. The attached appendix includes the full report of findings from both the focus group and the survey together with survey responses. The key findings under each of the four sections are detailed below.

2.2 Pricing

In order to maintain viability of the contract and within the context of the intention of the Council to reduce the subsidy paid to the provider, customers were asked their opinions of how much the service should be costing them, what charging arrangements should be in place and whether there were other issues or ideas relating to pricing that they wanted to voice.

The following key themes were identified.

- A price of between £4.00 and £4.25 would be the most favourable and that pitching the price above £4.50 may currently be too high and there could be a risk that a number of people would leave the service.
- The most favourable charging arrangement would be that “Everyone pays the same, regardless of their need or ability to pay”.
- Discounts for bulk orders, e.g. where a number of frozen meals are delivered together or a lunch and snack pack are delivered together was a prevalent theme in the focus group.

It is recommended that after the beginning of April 2012, the price customers pay for their meals is increased to £4.25 per meal. The intention is for this increase to be shared between Warwickshire County Council and county Enterprise foods. This will help the provider maintain viability and help to reduce the subsidy payments made, and therefore deliver savings against this contract. This level of pricing is broadly in line with other local authorities with charges for this type of service in similar areas ranging from £3.90 to £4.95.

2.3 Delivery

The delivery time window and the question around hot and frozen meals was asked. The aim of this was to identify whether the service could be reshaped and efficiencies delivered through an amended service model.

The following key themes were identified.

- Of the options given, the most favourable time window for deliveries of hot meals was 11:00-2:15, however there was still little support for this time window.
- The focus group generally considered that the current time window was better than the other options given.

- 83% of respondents indicated that it would be unacceptable if the service was a 'frozen only' service, the main reasons for this related to the difficulty they would have in using a microwave oven and the social contact from the delivery driver.

Current delivery times were seen as the most favourable; therefore caution should be taken to extending these at the risk of losing customers, particularly if this is combined with a price increase. It is proposed that in order to reduce the costs associated with the delivery of meals, it is recommended that County Enterprise Foods investigate the feasibility of increasing the delivery time window by a further 30 minutes per route to 11:30-2:15. If this is found to be feasible then this should be trialled by County Enterprise Foods on a temporary basis and the impact evaluated before any long term changes are made.

With regards to frozen meals, the majority of customers indicated that a frozen only service was not acceptable. Therefore there is no recommendation to change any aspect of this part of the service.

2.4 **Quality**

In order to identify customer satisfaction with the service and identify if there are any areas which need addressing, customers were asked about their satisfaction with regards to various aspects of the service.

The following key themes were identified.

- Satisfaction with the current service was high
- The sample meals tasted at the focus group were considered to be of a high quality

Quality of the service was seen to be very high and existing users of the service indicated high levels of satisfaction with the service that they receive. At the focus group the overall impression of the service was that the current service was of good quality. Therefore no recommendations are made with regards to the quality of the service.

2.5 **Customer Service**

Customers were asked if there were any aspects with regards to the service they would like to make or if there were any changes that they would make to the service.

The most common themes relating to changes or other aspect of the service were:

- Consistency around delivery times was mentioned in both the focus group and the survey.
- Current users of the service also made reference to having received a meal different to the one ordered – although without knowing the

specific background (e.g. unavoidable unavailability of ingredients) it is difficult to know if this is an issue that needs addressing.

It is recommended that, in order that County Enterprise foods can evaluate their service and seek to make on-going improvements where necessary, the full anonymised responses will be shared with them.

2.6 **Other Themes**

The social contact of the delivery driver is an important element to the service; this was clear from both the survey responses and the focus group. The wellbeing check was acknowledged to be a cost effective element to a person's care given that the cost of a meal together with the wellbeing check is lower than that visits from a Homecare service.

In both the focus group and in the survey, the quality and importance of a variety of vegetables and the inclusion of other dishes such as Curries or pasta was noted.

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