



Meals on Wheels Scrutiny Review

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1.0 Foreword

- 1.1 The Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Committee was tasked by Council to investigate the issue of meals on wheels in Blackpool, whilst specifically looking at the scheme provided in Chorley following a notice of motion.
- 1.2 Members of the Committee recognised that the benefits to residents of meals on wheels schemes ranged from solely the provision of a warm meal to having a wider opportunity to engage with isolated and harder to reach residents who might need assistance in other areas of their life. We were happy to find that meals on wheels schemes were already in operation in Blackpool and that as part of their services they offered customers the opportunity to engage with staff, however we did find a few areas for potential improvement which have been detailed within this report.
- 1.3 We recognise the importance of this topic to residents and thank Councillor Tony Williams for submitting the notice of motion that directed the Committee to look at this issue in more detail. I would also like to thank the Members of the Panel and officers who supported the Panel for their time and effort. We were also able to engage with a wider range of partners including representatives from the NHS, Age UK Lancashire and Blackpool Coastal Housing and we thank them for their time, as well as the members of the public that took the time to respond to the questionnaire we circulated.

Councillor Adrian Hutton
Chairman, Meals on Wheels Scrutiny Review Panel

2.0 Summary of Recommendations

	Timescale
<p>Recommendation</p> <p>That in order to address the concerns raised by the Panel, a leaflet be developed by the Corporate Delivery Unit containing the details of all meals on wheels schemes and providers in Blackpool:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A) That the Scrutiny Panel considers the draft leaflet prior to circulation. B) That the leaflet be circulated to GP surgeries, libraries, community centres and churches and be included in Council Tax bills. C) That the leaflet and/or corresponding information be provided to domiciliary care providers, social workers, community based health practitioners and the Council's Customer Service staff to ensure they can provide advice as appropriate. D) That the leaflet contain advice regarding accessing benefits and be appealing and colourful. E) That the information contained within the leaflet also be provided through a Council webpage and in Your Blackpool. F) That the leaflet be updated on an annual basis by the Corporate Delivery Unit to ensure the information is current and recirculated. 	<p>The Panel would like the leaflet to be circulated as widely as possible before Christmas 2021, with an annual review of the leaflet taking place prior to its inclusion in future Council Tax bills on an annual basis.</p> <p>An initial update to be provided to the Council's Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Committee on 2 December 2021.</p>

3.0 Background Information

- 3.1 The following notice of motion was approved by Council in November 2020 and as a result the Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Committee established a scrutiny review to consider the issue in order to make a recommendation to the Executive:

Even before the pandemic, more than an estimated 1.3 million people over the age of 65 were thought to be malnourished. Malnutrition makes people more susceptible to physical and mental ill-health, extends hospital stays and makes re-admission more likely – malnutrition accounts for nearly £20bn of health and social care spending in England.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made it difficult for many people to access good food daily, not least, older people and disabled people, who were already at high risk of malnutrition. During the crisis, many older people and disabled people struggled to access good food every day and indeed this issue predated the crisis.

Whilst there are a number of ways to support people – like investing in lunch clubs or good care-home and hospital food – having a robust Meals on Wheels service locally is a cornerstone to tackling the issue. Meals on Wheels services provide a lifeline to people struggling to feed themselves in their own homes, ensure that older and disabled people at risk of malnutrition or social isolation can access regular social contact every day and at least one nutritious meal every day, and are cost-saving in the long-term to local authorities and NHS trusts.

Now more than ever the Council must support older and disabled people to be able to stay healthy, safe and nourished in their own homes.

This Council resolves:

To request the Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Committee to review the accredited Meals on Wheels local supplier scheme in Chorley and explore the benefits and challenges of adopting the same approach in Blackpool and recommend the Executive accordingly.

- 3.2 The Review Panel met to consider existing schemes in the town, schemes provided by other local authorities and spoke to a range of partners in order to establish the benefits and challenges posed by the potential introduction of a Council-run meals on wheels scheme as requested.

- 3.3 This review related to the following priority of the Council:

Communities: Creating stronger communities and increasing resilience.

4.0 Methodology

- 4.1 The Panel held two formal meetings and began to form their conclusions and recommendations during these meetings.

Details of the meetings are as follows:

Date	Attendees	Purpose
24 March 2021	<p>Councillors Hutton (Chair), Burdess, Callow, O'Hara and Mrs Scott</p> <p>Kate Aldridge, Head of Commissioning and Corporate Delivery Lisa Arnold, Leisure Services Manager Lynn O'Sullivan, Health and Wellbeing Support Worker, Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust Debbie Kerr, Community Activities Officer, Blackpool Coastal Housing Anne Oliver, Age UK Lancashire Jane Hearne, Resilience Service Manager, Blackpool Coastal Housing</p> <p>Councillor Jo Farrell, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health</p> <p>Sharon Davis, Scrutiny Manager</p>	To consider the existing schemes available in Blackpool, information relating to the scheme provided in Chorley and examples from other local authorities and details of support put in place during the pandemic.
5 July 2021	<p>Councillors Hutton (Chair), Burdess, Callow, O'Hara and Mrs Scott</p> <p>Kate Aldridge, Head of Commissioning and Corporate Delivery</p> <p>Councillor Jo Farrell, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health</p> <p>Sharon Davis, Scrutiny Manager</p>	To conclude the review and identify the recommendation(s) to be made to the Executive.

5.0 Detailed Findings and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

- 5.1.1 Following the approval of the notice of motion at Council in November 2020, the Adult Social Care and Health immediately undertook to carry out the piece of work as resolved and established a scrutiny review panel to consider the matter of 'meals on wheels'.
- 5.1.2 A key request of the notice of motion was to consider the scheme provided in Chorley and Kate Aldridge advised that officers had spoken to colleagues at Chorley Council to try and gather a more recent view of the scheme as all the published information related to the scheme was historical. Although limited information was provided it appeared that the scheme was still ongoing but had not grown since the original pilot. It was estimated that meals were currently being provided to around 30 individuals.
- 5.1.3 It was also noted that Chorley was a district council and therefore did not provide Adult Social Care services. As a unitary authority it was considered that Blackpool was in a better position to understand the needs of residents and engage with communities in different ways.

5.2 Current schemes in Blackpool

- 5.2.1 The scheme currently being provided by Groundworks @TheGrange was considered in detail. It was noted that the scheme had started during the pandemic whilst the café facility had been closed meaning that the necessary equipment and staff with skills were available and had capacity to provide such a service. It was a scheme based in and provided solely for those in the Grange area. It had engaged members of the community and addressed isolation through the provision of food. Key benefits of such a community based meals on wheels scheme were noted such as addressing isolation, the skills of residents to cook/heat food at home, the ability to purchase food and whether income was being maximised. It was noted that the service at @TheGrange was more than a traditional meals on wheels service and had been very successful through the pandemic. Members noted the indication from @TheGrange that when the café and other services provided recommenced following the pandemic, this would impact on the capacity to continue the meals service.
- 5.2.2 Members considered and discounted the idea that the scheme @TheGrange could be rolled out across Blackpool through other community centres noting that not all areas had a community centre and not all community centres had the facilities available to provide such a scheme. It was considered that if a meals on wheels services was to be introduced or commissioned by the Council it should be on a whole town basis.
- 5.2.3 It was noted that there were currently two meals on wheels providers operating in Blackpool – BCM known as Wiltshire Farm Foods and Live Happy which operated from Warren Manor. The service from Warren Manor had commenced during the pandemic and extended out the meals served at Warren Manor across the town. It was a universal service, open to all, not commissioned and the Council did not therefore 'refer' members

of the public to it. However, when members of the public approached the Council for a hot meals service, officers would provide information regarding all the schemes available in the town and how they could access their chosen service. Members considered therefore that there was not necessarily a lack of service provision within the town and that should the Panel decide to recommend that a scheme should be introduced or subsidised the impact on other companies operating in the town must be considered. In response to a question, Lisa Arnold advised that the most cost effective option would be to subsidise a scheme as the costs associated with delivering food safely such as specialist vehicles would be prohibitive.

5.3 Results of public questionnaire

- 5.3.1 A scoping meeting held been held at which Members identified the type of information they wished to receive in order to form a view on whether or not to recommend a meals on wheels scheme in Blackpool. The information requested had included that members of the public would be engaged in the process through the completion a questionnaire which had subsequently been developed and rolled out. Whilst full responses to the questionnaire had not been received, a number of submissions had been received for consideration.
- 5.3.2 The responses of members of the public were considered in detail by the Panel and it was specifically noted that the cost of a meal was the most important issue to residents. From the responses, it was considered that there was no key demographic that might need to access the service and that any such service should be open to all in need. It was also felt that the introduction of such a scheme should not cause people who could cook to stop cooking and that the focus should be on those who could not physically cook or afford to buy ingredients. Members noted that cooking was good for health and morale and a project currently being provided was noted, 'Seasiders Supper' was providing bags of ingredients to engage with people and encourage them to cook nutritious meals.
- 5.3.3 It was queried whether the number of contacts made to the Council regarding the provision of hot meals would be recorded. Kate Aldridge advised that it was unlikely as records were not opened for individuals who did not require support from Adult Social Care. The Panel noted that any queries received through Blackpool Coastal Housing regarding requests for a hot meals service were referred on to Adult Social Care.
- 5.3.4 Members also inputted anecdotal feedback that they had received from residents noting that the current availability of meals on wheels was not widely known and promoted to those that might need or want to use such a service. It was therefore suggested that further publicity of existing schemes was required by the Council rather than the introduction of a new scheme. Members suggested that articles and adverts in Your Blackpool could be utilised as well as a new web page on the Council's website detailing how residents could access services.

5.4 Other Local Authorities

- 5.4.1 A small number of meals on wheels schemes provided by local authorities had been found online. Concern was raised by Members that the example schemes found

appeared to have complex processes for taking up provision which might exclude those particularly in need of such a scheme. It was also noted that many local authority websites simply linked to local private providers in their area.

- 5.4.2 During the course of the review, a request had been received from Wigan Council pertaining to meals on wheels and Members had sought the outcome of that request for information prior to concluding their review. However, unfortunately and despite officers' best efforts no information was forthcoming. Members therefore met again to consider how to conclude the review without the additional information on other local authorities.

5.5 Conclusions

- 5.5.1 Members considered all the information that they had received pertaining to other local authorities, current schemes in Blackpool and the feedback from members of the public and considered that the key issue was a lack of knowledge of the current schemes rather than a need to have a Council run scheme. It was recognised that the current schemes were providing a valuable service at an acceptable cost and that the Council should recognise the schemes as of benefit to residents wanting such a scheme and provide publicity and direction towards them where appropriate. A wide range of places to provide publicity were discussed including Your Blackpool, a new Council webpage, leaflets in Council Tax bills, at GP surgeries, churches and libraries or through the use of bin tags.
- 5.5.2 It was also noted that awareness could be raised amongst private domiciliary care providers, community based health practitioners and social workers of the services provided so that they could offer advice as appropriate of the services on offer and that the Council's Customer Service staff should have the information available of all providers to offer it to residents who contacted the Council requesting a hot food service. It was noted that in order to have this information available, the Council's Corporate Delivery Unit would be requested to compile a comprehensive set of information that would be updated regularly to ensure each company and service was fairly represented.
- 5.5.3 Members also considered that the leaflet could cover the separate issue of ensuring that residents accessed all benefits that they were entitled too if the only concern related to affordability of the meals on wheels scheme.
- 5.5.4 It was noted that the leaflet would need to be costed and a budget identified, however, it was highlighted that this would be significantly less than the introduction of a new Council run scheme. The leaflet should be appealing and in colour and Members requested that should the recommendation be approved by the Executive, the draft leaflet be considered by the Scrutiny Panel prior to it being circulated.

Recommendation

That in order to address the concerns raised by the Panel, a leaflet be developed by the Corporate Delivery Unit containing the details of all meals on wheels schemes and providers in Blackpool:

- A) That the Scrutiny Panel considers the draft leaflet prior to circulation.
- B) That the leaflet be circulated to GP surgeries, libraries, community centres and churches and be included in Council Tax bills.
- C) That the leaflet and/or corresponding information be provided to domiciliary care providers, social workers, community based health practitioners and the Council's Customer Service staff to ensure they can provide advice as appropriate.
- D) That the leaflet contain advice regarding accessing benefits and be appealing and colourful.
- E) That the information contained within the leaflet also be provided through a Council webpage and in Your Blackpool.
- F) That the leaflet be updated on an annual basis by the Corporate Delivery Unit to ensure the information is current and recirculated.

6.0 Financial and Legal Considerations

6.1 Financial

- 6.1.1 There will be a small financial cost for the production and delivery of a leaflet, however, Members considered this to be appropriate and much less than the potential costs of the introduction of a new Council-run and subsidised scheme.

6.2 Legal

- 6.2.1 There are no legal implications.

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Meals on Wheels Scrutiny Action Plan

Recommendation	Cabinet Member's Comments	Rec Accepted by Executive?	Target Date for Action	Lead Officer	Committee Update	Notes
<p>That in order to address the concerns raised by the Panel, a leaflet be developed by the Corporate Delivery Unit containing the details of all meals on wheels schemes and providers in Blackpool:</p> <p>A) That the Scrutiny Panel considers the draft leaflet prior to circulation.</p> <p>B) That the leaflet be circulated to GP surgeries, libraries, community centres and churches and be included in Council Tax bills.</p> <p>C) That the leaflet and/or corresponding information be provided to domiciliary care providers, social workers, community based health practitioners and the Council's Customer Service staff to ensure they can provide advice as appropriate.</p>	<p>The Cabinet Member supports this recommendation and would like to see the recommendation extended to also consider whether the leaflet could be co-produced and ensure that accessible versions are made available.</p>					

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<p>D) That the leaflet contain advice regarding accessing benefits and be appealing and colourful.</p> <p>E) That the information contained within the leaflet also be provided through a Council webpage and in Your Blackpool.</p> <p>F) That the leaflet be updated on an annual basis by the Corporate Delivery Unit to ensure the information is current and recirculated.</p>						
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