

# HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



## **WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **MEALS ON WHEELS TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

### **REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**FEBRUARY 2014**

**Task and Finish Group Members:**

**Councillor Kay Gilder  
Councillor Tim Holton (Chairman)  
Councillor Philip Houldsworth  
Councillor Lindsay Ferris**

**Report approved by the Meals and Wheels Task and Finish Group:**

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## **1. Section 1: Review Conclusions:**

### **1.01. That the Meals on Meals Service is at the tipping point of viability in its current form and unchanged does not have a future.**

**Reason:** The Task and Finish Group fully recognised that Meals on Wheels Service as a long established service performed a very important function and was highly valued and relied upon by its customers. However, given the severe financial pressures on the Council to use its available resources in the most effective way possible it concluded that the current situation of declining revenue and increasing costs could not continue in its present form. It was not confident that sufficient new entrants could be encouraged to take up the service to reverse this position.

### **1.02. That the current Meals on Wheels Service increasingly does not fit with the needs, aspirations and preferences of the people now entering the social care system.**

**Reason:** The landscape around the provision of hot meals to those in need of them has changed radically over the last 5-10 years. Meals on Wheels no longer fits with the aspiration of need of a growing number of service users in light of higher expectations, changing attitudes and choice in the market including the introduction of Personal Budgets.

### **1.03. That the Care and Companionship element of Meals on Wheels visits were as important as the nutritional aspects of the service and that this function could be provided in a different way.**

**Reason:** The Task and Finish Group recognised the evidence presented to it which suggested that given the vulnerability of service users it was important that meals were not just delivered and plated, but also eaten. The value of the companionship offered by visits was also important. The nature of the pressures on the time of the drivers delivering the meals under the current arrangement meant that they could not stay with the service users whilst they eat their meal. This was not their role.

## **2. Section 2: Recommendations:**

2.01 That the Council should formally begin the process of considering possible alternatives to the present service of Meals on Wheels provision;

2.02 That as part of the consideration of possible alternatives, the following proposals be included:

a) Active support by the Council to enable eligible service users to buy frozen or ready meals from a supplier of their choice, (i.e. supermarkets, Wiltshire Farm Foods, Oakhouse Foods etc) that would be delivered on a regular, probably weekly basis. The full cost of the meals would be met by the service user unless there were short term emergency circumstances.

b) Funding by WBC via a Personal Budget or appropriate mechanism for the preparation, plating of the meal and supervision of service user whilst eating their meals on a 365 days a year basis by either a client's existing carer or by

dedicated meal preparation staff. The Task and Finish Group felt that this would require a 30 minute slot.

- 2.03 That prior to any decision to cease the service consideration needs to be given to the risk of an increase in day and residential care cost from those currently in receipt of the service, as it was felt that that the current provision of Meals on Wheels to those clients was acting to keep them in their homes longer.
- 2.04 That the introduction of any alternative scheme needs to be handled in a sensitive and considerate way with the development of an appropriate communication plan and engagement with service users, their representatives and interested parties.
- 2.05 That the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee should be consulted and given an opportunity to comment on any formal proposals for alternative provision prior to a final decision by the Executive.

### **Possible Alternative Model of Provision**

- 2.06. The Task and Finish Group propose that as part of developing alternatives to the current Meals on Wheels service, consideration be given to the following suggestion which is based on a care visit led approach.
- 2.07. Active support by the Council to enable eligible service users to buy frozen or ready meals from a supplier of their choice, (i.e. supermarkets, Wiltshire Farm Foods, Oakhouse Foods etc) that would be delivered on a regular, probably weekly basis. The full cost of the meals would be met by the service user unless there were short term emergency circumstances.
- 2.08. Funding by the Council through service users Personal Budget or appropriate mechanism of:
  - the additional cost of 30 minutes of time for service users' existing carer to prepare, plate and spend time with the service user if they visited during lunch time or;
  - if service user did not have an existing carer, a 30 minute visit by a domiciliary worker who would be designated to prepare and plate the meal and spend time with the service user.
- 2.09. The Task and Finish Group noted that the cost of a 30 minute care visit ranged from approximately £8.00 per hour to £12 per hour. For the purposes of illustrating this proposal it has assumed a price of £10 and that travel costs are included within the rates charged by domiciliary care agencies to the Council.
- 2.10. Currently meals through the existing contract are delivered in a 90 to 120 minute window. Under the suggested arrangement, the Task and Finish Group felt that this might be extended to a three hour window between 11:45 and 14:45.
- 2.11. The Task and Finish Group noted that drivers under the existing RVS contract made between 15 and 20 deliveries, depending on the nature of their route and the geographical spread of the location of their service users. It was accepted that it would not be possible to complete that number of 'meal plus care' visits and

therefore an assumption has been made that a maximum of **six** such visits could be completed by one carer within the 11:45 to 14:45 window.

2.12. On the basis of the information presented to the Task and Finish Group: that in 2012 there were approximately 85 customers in receipt of Meals on Wheels in, this would require 17 staff to deliver the service, assuming the worst case that none of the meals could be prepared by existing carers. It was also assumed that all service users would wish to receive meals 7 days a week to illustrate maximum demand.

2.13. **Estimated costs:**

The weekly cost per service user assuming seven meals plus care visits is estimated to be £70 per week, (£10 per visit x 7) or £3650 per annum, (£10 per visit x 365 days). An illustration of the possible costs is set out below.

Number of Service Users	Cost
6	£21,900
12	£43,800
24	£87,600
48	£175,200
85	£310,250

2.14. The Task and Finish Group was aware that this analysis was very high level and that further detailed work would be needed in order to provide more comprehensive figures. However, it was felt that whilst the costs of the possible alternative scheme were significant; they had to be compared to the possible consequences and costs of ending the subsidy under the existing scheme arising from additional residential and nursing home costs.

2.15. As referred to in paragraph 4.42 below, if 10 current Meals on Wheels users could no longer be supported in their home as a result of the Meals on Wheels service being withdrawn it had estimated the residential care home cost to be approximately £286,000.

2.16. The Task and Finish Group felt that the arrangements for the hiring of additional carers required to run such a scheme could be made through existing channels for the procurement of domiciliary care staff and could be adjusted as and when required, led by demand as required.

2.17. The Task and Finish Group felt that this alternative would retain the nutritional care aspects of Meals on Wheels by providing meals to people who could not prepare them themselves, but enhance the care and companionship aspects of daily meal visits by allowing sufficient time for the service user to eat the meal and have the companionship offered by the visit. In their submissions to the Task and Finish Group witnesses had indicated this aspect of visits were almost as important as delivery of the meal itself.

2.18. The Task and Finish Group did give serious consideration to the possibility of the Council meeting the cost of the meals or contracting with a third party for provision of meals as part of a proposal for alternative provision because of the vulnerability

of the service users involved. However, it recognised the professional advice it received from Officers that it was an established principle in social care that local authorities would only cover the costs of the support needed to meet that individual's care need, not day to day costs such as food or accommodation. To act contrary to this would go against the principle of the 'user pays', would maintain the current inequity of the Council supporting some social care costs but not others and was likely to be unaffordable.

### **3.0 Introduction and Background to the Review**

- 3.1 At its meeting held on 28 May 2013, the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee (OSMC) considered a number of suggestions from Members for possible Scrutiny reviews. Amongst them was a suggestion that a review of the Council's Meals on Wheels Service be undertaken.
- 3.2 In submitting the scrutiny review suggestion Councillor Julian McGhee-Sumner as Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing commented that the cost of providing hot meals to vulnerable adults, (known as Meals on Wheels) was heavily subsidised, but that the number of service users was declining year on year. There was an opportunity for a scrutiny review to look at what the Council currently did and consider whether that represented good value for money, particularly whether the subsidy should continue to be maintained.
- 3.3 It was agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee that a review should be undertaken and the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee was allocated this task. At its meeting on 29 July 2013, the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee established a Task and Finish Group to conduct the review initially comprised of Councillors Lindsay Ferris, Kay Gilder, Tim Holton and Philip Houldsworth.
- 3.4 The first meeting of the Task and Finish Group took place on 27 August 2013. The Terms of Reference were agreed at that meeting and these are attached at Appendix 1. The key objectives of the review were:
  1. To establish the eligibility criteria for service users
  2. To gain an understanding of service users' views on the current service provided
  3. To gain the perspective of those service users who could utilise the service, but decide on alternative provision as to the reasons for their preference
  4. To establish the value of the continuation of the service in light of the transformation in practices in the delivery of adult social care arising from the personalisation of services, (e.g. Putting People First and Think Local Act Personal programmes)
  5. To establish what alternative services are available for vulnerable residents
  6. To consider if there is other, more effective and efficient means of delivering the service within budget

7. To consider what the potential consequences might be for service users should the service be withdrawn
  8. To identify any wider corporate implications and risks to service users and the Council should the service be withdrawn
  9. To establish, if the service was withdrawn, how this would be managed.
  10. To establish whether service users would continue to use the service should it no longer be subsidised or whether they would seek alternatives.
- 3.5 At the same meeting, the Task and Finish Group acknowledged that the timescale for completing its review would be tight in light of the objective of making recommendations that could be feed into the Council's annual budget cycle.
- 3.6 The Task and Finish Group also discussed which witnesses it wished to receive information from and it was agreed that representatives from the National Health Service, Voluntary Sector as well as Officers and Councillors be invited to attend meetings of the Group to give evidence. A list of witnesses is set out in Appendix 2.
- 3.7 In September 2013 the Task and Finish Group considered an additional request from Councillor Julian McGhee-Sumner, Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing that the Group extend the scope of its remit to include a review of day care services, service users who need two carers as part of their package and employment support beyond six weeks. The extended scope would have included what approaches had been taken by other local authorities, how the Council compared and whether it was reasonable for Council to consider phasing out services in these areas. However, the Task and Finish Group decided not to examine those elements at the same time as the review of Meals on Wheels as this would have made the review more difficult to manage in the limited time available.
- 3.8 The Task and Finish Group has held meetings on:
- 27 August 2013
  - 30 September 2013
  - 8 October 2013
  - 15 October 2013
  - 29 October 2013
  - 11 November 2013
  - 17 December 2013
- 3.9 Members of the Task and Visit Group shadowed a delivery of Meals on Wheels by the Royal Volunteer Service on 27 September 2013.

## 4.0 Information Gathering

### 4.1. Background Information on Meals on Wheels provision in Wokingham Borough

- The Council has contracted with the Royal Volunteer Service to provide a subsidised Meals on Wheels service to eligible service users since 1994;
- The number of meals delivered under the service has fallen from c. 50,000 in 2006/7 to c.20,000 in 2012/2013;
- As the number of service users had declined over time, the cost per meal to the Council had increased under the cost and volume contract in operation up to 2013. In 2011/2012 the cost per meal to the Council varied between £5.90 to £8.36. In 2012/2013 the cost of meals varied from £7.61 to £8.52
- In 2013, a one year contract had been entered into on fixed cost basis. The cost of the lunchtime meal service is currently £3.40 to the service user, but the price to the Council was £8.97 in 2013 which covered the costs of preparation and delivery. The service user contributed towards the cost of the food.
- On the basis of 2012/2013 figures, the net cost to the Council was estimated to be £102,076, (excluding VAT and less contributions);
- In December 2013 there were a total of 58 service users.

#### **Key Objective 1: To establish the eligibility criteria for service users in receipt of Meals on Wheels.**

- 4.2 Meals on Wheels services were first established during the Second World War and have historically been very common and popular across the country. However, the provision of a hot meals service to vulnerable adults is not in itself a statutory obligation on councils.
- 4.3 The Council has a general responsibility to assess the needs of any person aged 18 or over if they appear to be vulnerable and follows the Fair Access to Care Services, (FACS) criteria set by the Department of Health to determine whether an individual should receive support from the Council towards any social care need they have. This criterion is banded into the grades of 'low', 'moderate', 'substantial', and 'critical'. Although the criteria are set nationally, it is currently for Councils to locally determine the grade at which support would be provided depending on what level they can afford to fund. Since 2011, the Council has provided support at 'critical' needs level.
- 4.4 The Task and Finish Group established at its meetings of 30 September 2013 and 8 October 2013 that this level of 'critical' need was also used by the Council to determine if an individual was eligible for the subsidised hot meals service. Those eligible for a hot meal service had to be unable to prepare a meal for themselves. When assessed as eligible the service user would be offered the Meals on Wheels service.
- 4.5 In considering this issue the Task and Finish Group also noted that arising from the recommendations of the Dilnot Report; the Government was to introduce a national eligibility threshold for adult care and support from April 2015 which was likely to be set at an equivalent to the existing 'substantial' grade. The Task and Finish Group considered that should the Meals on Wheels service continue, this change had the

potential to increase the number of service users that would be eligible for Meals on Wheels and therefore might act to slow the decline or even increase the total number of customers making the service more financially viable.

- 4.6. In addition, the Task and Finish Group noted that the Council also offered a short term six week enablement or prevention service for adults leaving hospital or at risk of hospital admission. However, this short term service did not form part of the review.

**Key Objective 2: To gain an understanding of service users' views on the current service.**

- 4.7. The Task and Finish Group was consistently informed by Council Officers and by the witness representing the Royal Volunteer Service, (RVS) that those vulnerable people in receipt of the Meals on Wheels service greatly valued it and felt that it made a substantial difference to their lives which went far beyond the provision of a hot meal. The delivery of the meal by RVS drivers who the clients got to know well, provided a degree of social contact and companionship to people who in some cases might not have any other contact during the day.
- 4.8. The Task and Finish Group was informed that the high level of regard for the service was further evidenced from customer satisfaction surveys undertaken by the RVS. In addition, the strong satisfaction of existing clients with the service was corroborated by the direct feedback from customers received from Members of the Task and Finish Group who shadowed RVS on their deliveries in September.
- 4.9. Whilst the Task and Finish Group was very pleased to hear that the service was apparently so well thought of, it also took into consideration the comments made by a number of witnesses, including the RVS, that a note of caution needed to be applied to the data in that some service users might be reluctant to fully express their views, perhaps for fear that the service might be withdrawn. It was also noted that there were considerable difficulties in undertaking user satisfaction surveys where often the service users were extremely vulnerable people.
- 4.10 The Task and Finish Group did consider undertaking its own survey of service users, but however it decided that this would be logistically difficult to do so and would be of limited value given the difficulties in obtaining accurate responses.

**Key Objective 3: To gain the perspective of those service users who could utilise the service but decide on alternative provision as to the reasons for their preference**

- 4.11. The Task and Finish Group was not able in the time available to directly seek the views of those service users who had decided not to take up the offer of receiving the Meals on Wheels service, but was able to seek the opinions of the witnesses on the issue who supplied a wide range of possible explanations.
- 4.12. Consistent themes in the responses across the ranges of witnesses were:
- the impact of the increasing range of alternative provision and choice available to potential service users in contrast to the market place 10-20 years ago;

- the characteristics of the Wokingham Borough as semi-rural which meant it was logistically possible for potential service users who could not prepare their own meals to access alternatives such as take aways, restaurants etc ,
- significant changes in the characteristics, attitudes and expectations of service users which had tended to act to reduce the attractiveness of the traditional Meals on Wheels offer to potential new entrants;
- that Meals on Wheels was not seen as an attractive option by potential service users to the extent that it was felt by a number of witnesses to be the service of 'last resort'. This was felt to be a particularly prevalent attitude amongst younger vulnerable people who wanted more flexibility i.e. around the timing of their meals;
- that the Meals on Wheels service was not well known even amongst health professionals;
- the vulnerable people who in principle would be eligible for Meals on Wheels often had other complex care needs which required care calls whereby a meal might be prepared for them as part of that call;
- Some concerns were expressed that the meals provided were stodgy

**Key Objective 4: To establish the value of the continuation of the service in light of the transformation in practices in the delivery of adult social care arising from the personalisation of services.**

- 4.13 The Task and Finish Group was informed of the changes to the delivery of social care as a result of the introduction of the concept of the personalisation of services. Service users were now given greater choice as to the type of support they wished to receive in order to meet their need.
- 4.14 Under the system of Personal Budgets the service user or person nominated by them was able to pay directly for the services provided to them out of the funds paid to them by the Council through the Direct Payments system. In contrast to the traditional model of social care delivery where support might have been provided by local authorities centrally, this had opened up the possibilities for far greater choice, independence, flexibility and creativity and had radically changed the social care market with a corresponding impact on services such as Meals on Wheels.
- 4.15. Whilst in the past, there might not have been any alternative to Meals on Wheels services, the service user was now able to decide not to take up the service and instead receive a payment to arrange for meal provision themselves.
- 4.16. The data indicated that year on year demand for Meals on Wheels had been falling for at least the last three to four years. Wokingham's experience of a declining number of service users taking Meals on Wheels was consistent with the information available from other local authorities, with exception of Elmbridge which had a very different operation as set out later in this report.
- 4.17. The Task and Finish Group considered that the structural changes had impacted on the value of continuing the service because the introduction of choice now meant that it was crucial for the service that Meals on Wheels be considered to be an attractive option for service users, if the number of clients were to be maintained and the service remain affordable. As set out in this report, the indications were that the current Meals on Wheels offer was not felt to be an attractive option by an

increasing proportion of potential service users which had contributed to the continued decline in number of Meals on Wheels customers.

- 4.18 The Task and Finish Group also took into consideration the point made by Stuart Rowbotham, Director Health and Wellbeing and Julian McGhee-Sumner, Executive Member for Wellbeing that the continued subsidisation of Meals on Wheels represented an inconsistency and inequality in policy when the Council did not support or subsidise other forms of social care or meal provision in the same manner.
- 4.19. Information presented by the majority of witnesses to the Task and Finish Group suggested that the traditional model of Meals on Wheels commissioning through an output based centralised block contract, was no longer attractive enough to meet the preference of an increasing number of services users.
- 4.20 The Task and Finish Group also noted that in a parallel with the advent of the personalisation and choice agenda, there had been a national shift in policy towards social care provision aimed at maintaining an individual's independence and ability to live within their own home. The Task and Finish Group acknowledged that in the opinion of Council Officers this was considered to be one of the contributor factors in the decline in Meals on Wheels service users. Service users eligible for Meals on Wheels who by definition had 'critical' needs often also required other care calls and as part of these calls it was possible that their meal requirements were being met as part of the calls.
- 4.21 From all the witnesses the Task and Finish Group spoke to, there was recognition of the positive value of Meals on Wheels for those very vulnerable older people in terms of the benefit to the individual. However, the value that the existing arrangements provided for individuals was balanced by the Task and Finish Group against the likelihood of potential benefit to the Council and to individuals, of meeting the needs that vulnerable people had for basic nutrition and companionship through alternative means.

**Key Objective 5: To establish what alternative services are available to vulnerable residents.**

- 4.22 The Task and Finish Group had noted that service users whilst eligible to receive the WBC Meals on Wheels service could decide not to and instead receive a direct payment to arrange for meal provision themselves or have meals arranged via their personal budget.
- 4.23 The Task and Finish Group was informed by witnesses that there were a wide range of possible alternatives to the RVS Meals on Wheels service already in existence or alternatives that might be developed. Some of these included:
- Delivering of hot ready meals through private Meals on Wheels companies such as Apetito, (although at approx. £6.25 per meal and desert this would be more expensive to the service user than the current subsidised WBC/RVS contract at £3.40 per meal);
  - Delivery only of frozen ready meals on a weekly or fortnightly basis by firms such as Wiltshire Farm Foods, (sister company to Apetito) or Oakhouse Foods;

- Delivery only of ready meals through a supermarket;
- Preparation by a paid carer of a meal, (through utilisation of their personal budget) and greater use of domiciliary agencies;
- Preparation by an unpaid carer, for example a relative. The Task and Finish Group noted the comments made by representatives of the Community Matron Service that often relatives did not realise that they could easily prepare additional food portions for relatives;
- Depending on the level and nature of the individuals vulnerability, eating out at pubs, restaurants or day centres;
- Having Take-Away meals delivered – (the Task and Finish Group was informed of instances of services users developing strong local links whereby food was delivered and even plated by delivery drivers although it took into account that this would be an exceptional arrangement and would not be recommended on safeguarding grounds);
- Community Projects such as the ‘The Casserole Club’ – the Task and Finish Group was informed that this was a project whereby people within their local communities cooked extra portions of home cooked food for vulnerable people within their own local communities who were not able to cook for themselves. Although currently only in operation within the London Boroughs of Barnet and Tower Hamlets and the district of Reigate and Banstead the Task and Finish Group felt that this was an example of the type of local community initiatives that if encouraged and supported, might help provide alternatives to subsidised Meals on Wheels provision in the medium to long term;
- Provision through local voluntary sector kitchens.

4.24 The Task and Finish Group was mindful that given the nature of the personalisation agenda, the needs of service users were all varied and therefore the support that they required and which they might choose to access depended on the individual. Because of this it was not possible to suggest that there was one single model of alternative provision to the Meals on Wheels that existed.

4.25 The Task and Finish Group also acknowledged that greater use of reablement and prevention services could have a greater part to play in delaying the point at which a service user would require meals to be prepared for them and in supporting some service users back to a position where they were able to carry on providing their own meals.

**Key Objective 6: To consider if there are other, more efficient means of delivering the service within budget.**

4.26. During the course of the review the information supplied to the Task and Finish Group indicated that there appeared to be limited scope to provide the current offer and level of subsidised Meals on Wheels Service in a more efficient way and therefore this objective was not prioritised.

4.27 The Task and Finish Group was informed by Council Officers and the representative of the RVS of the steps that had been taken to reduce costs and make the operation of the service more efficient.

- 4.28 The Task and Finish Group noted that as the number of service users in receipt of Meals on Wheels had dropped, the RVS had acted by consolidating the number of delivery routes within the Borough, for instance the Woodley and Earley routes had been combined into one route. A disadvantage of this was that the consolidation had acted to increase the time pressure on deliveries given the tight two hour window available.
- 4.29 The Council had acted to reduce the cost of the contract by moving to a cost and volume contract on the basis of 16,000 meals a year at a charge to the Council of £8.97 per meal.
- 4.30 The Task and Finish Group noted that the food cost element of the RVS price for a meal was negotiated and determined nationally by the RVS, but that there was some regional variation in the overall price charged to Councils. It also noted that the cost charged to private customers who approached RVS for Meals on Wheels on a unsubsidised basis was charged less than the commercial rate charged to the Council.
- 4.31 From the responses of witnesses the Task and Finish Group noted that Meals on Wheels and what it could offer was not as well-known as expected, even amongst some health professionals. For instance, the representative of the Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust Dietetic Service commented that Meals on Wheels was not prominent in its thinking as a possible solution to some of the needs faced by its clients. This information supported the perception and experience of the members of the Task and Finish Group that locally the Meals on Wheels service was not as well-known as it could be based upon their regular contact with constituents.
- 4.32 The awareness of Meals on Wheels was an important issue because it was felt that a comparative lack of awareness amongst professionals and the public might have contributed towards the decline in new service users taking up Meals on Wheels, contributing to the decline in fee revenue and increase per meal cost.
- 4.33 The Task and Finish Group noted that RVS was nationally looking at increasing its profile and improving its marketing across the range of social care services it provided through mechanisms such as leaflet drops to targeted venues such as doctors surgeries and warden controlled housing etc. Whilst this was welcomed it was felt that there was more that RVS could do to market and promote itself and Meals on Wheels particularly.
- 4.34 If such a marketing campaign were to be successful then it would potentially increase the revenue generated from service users and help to make Meals on Wheels more affordable to run within budget. However, the Task and Finish Group acknowledged that even if this occurred, the model of centralised provision remained at odds with personalisation.

**Key Objective 7: To consider what the potential consequences might be for service users should the service be withdrawn and:**

**Key Objective 8: To identify any wider corporate implications and risks to service users and the Council should the service be withdrawn.**

- 4.35 In considering these Key Objectives, the Task and Finish Group acknowledged what was provided by the Council was a subsidy to offset the actual costs of the Meals on Wheels Service provided by RVS, not the direct provision of a service by the Council.
- 4.36 The Task and Finish Group was very aware of the vulnerability of those people using the Meals on Wheels service and that in many cases those service users regarded the service as being vital.
- 4.37 It recognised that should the subsidy for the service be withdrawn, one alternative would be for service users to continue with RVS service, but at the full unsubsidised cost. It noted that following the withdrawal of the service in Bracknell Forest, RVS had continued to provide meals to a number of clients. However, the Task and Finish Group also noted the comments made by Officer witnesses that they felt it unlikely that existing users would continue with the service at cost price.
- 4.38 Members of the Task and Finish Group felt that there were potentially very serious implications for individuals, the Council and the NHS if the current Meals on Wheels service block contract were to be ended without appropriate replacement provision being made for both new entrants and existing service users.
- 4.39 The Task and Finish Group acknowledged the comments presented on behalf of the Wokingham Clinical Commissioning Group which indicated that it was felt that there was a general issue around vulnerable older people not eating properly. Whilst it was difficult to make an absolute causal link, there was in simple terms a vicious cycle of poor nutrition leading to ill health which in turn could potentially lead to further health problems.
- 4.40 If unaddressed by alternative provision, the Task and Finish Group was very concerned about the potential impact of lack of companionship and loneliness on service users should the Meals on Wheels be discontinued. It was mindful of the comments made to it by various witnesses and the experience gained through its shadowing of the RVS delivery drivers that for many Meals on Wheels service users, the daily Meals on Wheels delivery and discussion with the driver was one of the few contacts that they had with other people during the day. The companionship element of the visit was almost as important as the meal itself, a point also raised by the professional witnesses the Task and Finish Group talked to.
- 4.41 Therefore, the Task and Finish Group felt that Meals on Wheels did provide a very important function as a preventive service. It was concerned that if the service were to be withdrawn it might result in increased admission of vulnerable older people to hospital and/or residential social care. Therefore in the opinion of the Task and Finish Group any financial benefit to the Council gained by the ending of the block contract Meals on Wheels subsidy had to be at least partially offset by the risk of additional costs to the Council from higher instances of residential admission and the alternative support that would need to be provided to new and existing Meals on Wheels Service users.
- 4.42 The Task and Finish Group noted that the cost of an individual residential care placement within the Borough was currently in excess of £550 per week, equating to £28,600 per annum. The Task and Finish Group's view was that should Meals on Wheels be withdrawn without an alternative, it would only take a fraction of the X

number of current Meals on Wheels service users to be admitted to residential care as a result of the service not being present to support them in staying in their homes for the initial saving from the withdrawal of the current approximate £100,000 subsidy to be wiped out by additional costs of residential care. For vulnerable people requiring nursing home care the costs would be even higher. Table 1 illustrates this:

Number of Placements	Approximate Cost of Residential Care	Approximate Cost of Nursing Home Care
2	£57,200	£93,600
5	£143,000	£234,000
10	£286,000	£468,000
20	£572,000	£936,000

- 4.43 The Task and Finish was mindful that it would be very difficult to establish a causal link between any withdraw of Meals and Wheels and a decision to place people in residential or nursing home care given the highly complex needs, histories and circumstances of individual service users. It also accepted that its analysis was at a basic level only. However, it felt that this data did demonstrate that in addition to considering the potential consequences for individual service users, the Council also needed to consider the potential financial risks of ending the Meals on Wheels subsidy without appropriate alternative support measures being put in place. It felt that it needed to be understood that a withdrawal of the service would not be a simple financial saving.

**Key Objective 9: To establish, if the service was withdrawn how this would be managed.**

- 4.44 In their comments to the Task and Finish Group, Officers set out how they considered the withdrawal of the service might be managed if the decision to withdraw the subsidy for the service was taken and also supplied to it an initial draft Project Plan and Equality Impact Assessment developed on this subject in 2012. However, it was stressed to the Task and Finish Group and fully acknowledged by the Group that whilst it was the considered view of Officers that the present subsidy block contract was untenable and possible alternatives had been initially developed, the Council did not have definitive plans for replacing Meals on Wheels and no decision had been made.
- 4.45 In his comments to the Task and Finish Group, Stuart Rowbotham, Director of Health and Wellbeing commented that there were a number of possible options around how the withdrawal of the service could be managed if the decision was taken to withdraw it. It was fully recognised by the Council that such a decision would need to be extremely sensitively handled and that measures for effective communication and support with affected service users and carers would have to be put in place prior to any cessation of the service.
- 4.46 The Task and Finish Group noted that one option might be to close entry to the Meals on Meals subsidised service to new entrants and manage down the provision for existing users for a limited period, probably of around two years after which the subsidy would be fully withdrawn, but setting such a date need not preclude the

subsidy arrangement and block contract ending sooner if this was possible. This period of the notice would be necessary to allow for robust alternatives to be developed and allow for existing users to be supported in moving to that alternative provision in a sensitive and compassionate way. A disadvantage of this approach was that as the number of service users declined further, the contract would become more expensive as revenue decreased.

4.47 The Task and Finish Group noted that the Draft Project Equality Impact Assessment supplied to them had suggested that:

- For new entrants a meal service could be offered that was tailored to the needs of the person primarily through a domiciliary care provider;
- For existing Meals on Wheels Service Users to first offer a reablement service to maximise the opportunity of that person making their own meals. Where this was not possible to offer a service via domiciliary care provider.

**Key Objective 10 – To establish whether service users would continue to use the service should it no longer be subsidised or whether they would seek alternatives.**

4.48 The Task and Finish Group was unable to establish this definitively. It was felt that it was reasonable to assume that some service users would continue to purchase the service privately and it was indicated to the Task and Finish Group by the RVS that following the cessation of a subsidised service within Bracknell Forest around 20 service users had continued to utilise the service and that within West Berkshire most service users had continued privately with its provider, (Appetito) However, it was felt by the Task and Finish Group that the size of the difference between the subsidised cost per meal to service user of £3.40 and the private customer rate charged by RVS of £7.25 was likely to be too steep an increase for many existing service users to absorb despite their satisfaction with the service and that these people would need to have appropriate support to consider alternatives.

**Key Objective 11: To identify what services other local authorities offer and the advantages and disadvantages of these services.**

4.49 A high level summary of the provision by the other Berkshire authorities is set out in Table 2. Members noted that whilst all the authorities had inherited a subsidised hot meals service from Berkshire County Council there had been a move towards ending or amending such provision over the last 3-4 years in three of the six authorities: Reading Borough Council, Bracknell Forest Borough Council and West Berkshire Council. The Task and Finish Group felt that this reflected the national changes to the provision of social care and personalisation as well as the challenging financial circumstances and environment faced by local government as whole.

4.50 The Task and Finish Group was not able to fully explore the advantages and disadvantages of the services offered by these local authorities, but noted from the comments made to it by Wokingham Borough Council Officers and the report presented to the Reading Borough Council Cabinet when it considered changes to its Meals on Wheels provision in February 2013, that West Berkshire Council and

Bracknell Forest Council had reported that the withdrawal of their subsidised meal services had had minimal impact on service users.

- 4.51 During the course of the review the Task and Finish Group also became aware of the Meals on Wheels Service provided by Elmbridge Borough Council. The Task and Finish Group spoke to a representative of Elmbridge as an example of a Meal on Wheels service that appeared to have been reinvigorated and was successful in case there was best practice that could be applied within Wokingham.
- 4.52 It was noted that as a District authority, Elmbridge Borough Council did not have a statutory responsibility for social care but had for some 40 years provide social care services including Meals on Wheels on a discretionary basis in line with local priorities.
- 4.53. The Task and Finish Group noted that within Elmbridge, meals were freshly prepared and delivered each day from kitchens within the 7 Council run community centres located across the Borough. In addition to the preparation of hot meals for delivery, meals were also prepared for those attending lunch clubs in the community centres. Hot meals were ordinarily provided Monday to Friday, but there was provision for weekend deliveries to service users without relatives living within a 10 mile radius. Frozen meals could be provided at weekends. The meals were delivered by around 240 volunteer drivers' recruited directly by the Council.
- 4.54 Currently there were around 298 service users with a range in users receiving between one and seven meals a week. Typically 54,000 meals were provided annually.
- 4.55 The net budget of the community centres was approximately £1.2m, of which £176,610 was the Meals on Wheels element. Surrey County Council contributed £66,970 towards the cost of the service;
- 4.56 The charge to the service user for the regular service hot main meal and pudding was £3.05. For an additional charge of £2.50 a cold supper service was available consisting of a sandwich and cake. In November 2013, the scheme had been extended again to include a cold breakfast service for an additional charge of £1.50.
- 4.57 Service users had to meet eligibility criteria based upon their vulnerability, for instance that they lived alone and were unable to prepare or shop for a meal. This roughly equated to the 'moderate' or 'substantial' criteria under the Fair Access to Care Services Criteria.
- 4.58 Elmbridge Borough Council did not subsidise the price per meal paid by the service users and all services users paid the full charge. However, it was possible that some using the Elmbridge scheme would be receiving a Direct Payments for meals as part of a Personal Budget provided by Surrey County Council.
- 4.59 The provision of Meals of Wheels was considered by Elmbridge to be a preventative service in that it delayed the point at which a service user could no longer be supported in their own home and had to enter the residential home or nursing home system.

- 4.60 The Task and Finish Group was informed that the Hairy Bikers Programme had resulted in the move to the use of fresh ingredients and the relaunch of the Elmbridge Meals on Wheels Service. Positive exposure and publicity as a result of the programme had resulted in an 84% increase in the numbers receiving Meals in Wheels and an increase in volunteers. However, the Task and Finish Group also noted that in common with many Meals on Wheels services, the trend within Elmbridge was still one of gradual decline although they had been successful in partially reversing that decline in recent years.
- 4.61 The Task and Finish Group recognised that the Elmbridge Meals on Wheels service was successful and that there were a number of examples of best practice, for example the use of fresh ingredients and successful use of volunteers. It also recognised that the Elmbridge service was very different to that within Wokingham and that the financial circumstances facing the Council also differed. It did not feel that the Elmbridge model could be applied to Wokingham because the Council would not be able to afford the level of resources required.

**Table 2: Summary of Meals on Wheels Provision in other Berkshire Authorities**

Wokingham BC	Reading BC	RBWM	West Berks	Bracknell BC	Slough BC
<p>Provide a subsidised service via referral from Social Services based on an eligibility assessment.</p> <p>365</p> <p>Information also provided on WBC website on home food delivery services including vegetables and frozen meals.</p>	<p>RBC decided in Feb 2013 to continue current subsidised RVS service for existing customers only for a period of two years.</p> <p>New entrants not subsidised. New entrants who need help with preparing meals supported to make alternative choices which may include hot meal delivery from a range of providers, (including RVS), frozen meal delivery or a home care visit.</p> <p>Alternatives not subsidised but subject to Fairer Charging Assessment.</p> <p>Transitional funding arrangements (on a sliding scale over a period of three years) to existing Meals on Wheels service users obliged to switch to alternative arrangements .</p>	<p>Provide a service via referral from Social Services based on an eligibility assessment.</p> <p>The assessment includes whether the hot meals service or the frozen delivery service is most suitable for the customer's needs.</p> <p>Meal options are offered on the following basis.</p> <p>Hot meal delivery - for those who are able to feed themselves but unable to heat or cook a meal.</p> <p>Frozen meal delivery - for those who are able to heat a meal but unable to prepare one themselves.</p> <p>Meal preparation - for those unable to feed themselves due to physical or mental disability.</p>	<p>Subsidised service ended in June 2012.</p> <p>Where someone has a need for help with getting a meal West Berks do fund this if this need can be met through a private arrangement with provider, unless a home care call is required for this.</p>	<p>No longer provide a subsidised service.</p> <p>A list of trusted food providers from across Bracknell Forest who can either deliver food to client's homes, <i>or</i> offer meals at reputable establishments is available.</p> <p>Service users are expected to pay full cost for the meals they receive and any other associated costs, such as travelling.</p>	<p>Provide a hot meal service on request based upon eligibility criteria.</p> <p>Website highlights that frozen meals can purchased direct from Wiltshire Farm Foods.</p>

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## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REVIEW – MEALS ON WHEELS SERVICE

### TERMS OF REFERENCE

#### Purpose of Review:

To determine why the take up of the service has declined.

To establish whether the service is cost effective and offers value for money from the perspective of the Council and service users.

To establish if the service is responsive and flexible to service users' needs (e.g. whether the service is appropriate for service users and the delivery of the service).

To establish if there are ways in which the service can be improved and to present options around the future provision of the service taking account of the Council's available resources

#### Key Objectives:

To establish the eligibility criteria for service users

To gain an understanding of service users' views on the current service provided

To gain the perspective of those service users who could utilise the service, but decide on alternative provision as to the reasons for their preference

To establish the value of the continuation of the service in light of the transformation in practices in the delivery of adult social care arising from the personalisation of services, (e.g. Putting People First and Think Local Act Personal programmes)

To establish what alternative services are available for vulnerable residents

To consider if there is other, more effective and efficient means of delivering the service within budget

To consider what the potential consequences might be for service users should the service be withdrawn

To identify any wider corporate implications and risks to service users and the Council should the service be withdrawn

To establish, if the service was withdrawn, how this would be managed.

To establish whether service users would continue to use the service should it no longer be subsidised or whether they would seek alternatives.

To identify what services other local authorities offer and the advantages and disadvantages of these services.

### **Scope of the work:**

Available Council policies, practices and background information relating to the operation of the meals on wheels service

Available policies, practices and background information from other local authorities and the voluntary sector relating to the operation of meals on wheels services or alternative provision

Relevant national guidance and legislation

### **BACKGROUND:**

The Council currently provides a Meals on Wheels service, which is a hot meal delivery service available to adults who meet the eligibility criteria for social care services, and are unable to prepare hot food or heat it up themselves. Self-funding individuals are also able to access the service, by putting in a referral which clearly states they are self-funding. This service is provided via the Royal Voluntary Service.

Whilst users are charged £3.75 per meal, the actual cost per meal is approximately £8.30, so the service is heavily subsidised.

A scrutiny suggestion to review the provision of the Meals on Wheels Service and whether it offered good value for money was put forward at the May 2013 Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee meeting. The Overview and Management Scrutiny Committee allocated the review to the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee which established a Task and Finish Group to undertake the review at its July 2013 meeting.

### **INFORMATION GATHERING:**

#### **Witnesses to be invited**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation/Position</b>	<b>Reason for Inviting</b>
Service Users	N/A	To receive the views of service users.
Councillor McGhee Sumner	Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing	To seek the views of the Executive Member with responsibility for service area. Also proposed scrutiny review.
RVS (Royal Voluntary Service)	Service provider	To seek view of and information from service

representative		providers
Dr Johan Zylstra  Dr Stephen Madgwick	Wokingham Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)	CCG member with responsibility for Community Services.  Chairman of Wokingham CCG.  To gain GPs views on Meals on Wheels Service and their views on services for isolated and vulnerable users.
Stuart Rowbotham, Strategic Director Health & Wellbeing  Alain Wilkes (Senior Commissioner)  Mike Wooldridge (Senior Manager Improvement and Performance)  Lynne McFetridge (ASC Assessment Senior Operational Manager)	Wokingham Borough Council	To receive information on the Meals on Wheels Service (procurement and commissioning).
Representatives from Age UK	Age UK	To receive their view on Meals on Wheels and to hear any ideas for alternatives.
	Other local authorities	To establish what neighbouring and similar local authorities offer.

### Information to be obtained from

Organisation	Information to be Requested
Service users and families	Service users' views
Wokingham Borough Council	Information on trends in usage of service (does it highlight a decline in users over a number of years?)  Information on costs – breakdown of elements (e.g. cost of food, cost of transport, cost of staff)  Information on customers' experiences (compliments and complaints)
RVS	Information on logistics of service provided  Understanding of the Meals on Wheels service at the operational level – potentially by a member or small

	sub-group of the task and finish group shadowing the delivery of meals to see the service in action.
Healthwatch	Any available feedback from service users on meals on meals.
Other local authorities	Benchmarking information. Information on alternative means of delivery of service.

**Key Documents / Background Data / Research:**

- |   |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Questionnaires/interviews with service users?;</li> <li>2. Data on service user feedback on the service;</li> <li>3. National Guidance re nutrition;</li> <li>4. Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Wokingham Needs Assessment – how does the service tie in (or otherwise) of the priorities</li> </ol> |
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**REPORTING ARRANGEMENTS:**

Body	Date
Executive	

**TIMESCALE**

**Starting:** August 2013

**Ending:** November 2013?

**Number of meetings:** 6

Site visit – shadow a delivery round to ascertain what this entails?

**Referred by the Management**

**Committee to:**

Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

**Terms of Reference agreed by:** Meals on Wheels Task and Finish Group

**Panel Members involved in the review:**

Councillors Lindsay Ferris, Kay Gilder, Tim Holton, Kate Haines and Philip Houldsworth.

**Executive Member:**

Councillor Julian McGhee Sumner

**Final List of Witnesses**

Mike Allen	Chief Executive, Berkshire Age UK
Ron Brown	Business Area Manager, Brokerage and Support, Optalis
Kim Chadwick	Centre Services Manager, Elmbridge Borough Council
Nick Durman	Healthwatch Officer, Healthwatch Wokingham Borough
Tina Howe	Highly Specialist Dietician, Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
Councillor Julian McGhee-Sumner	Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing, Wokingham Borough Council
Dr Debbie Milligan	Governing Body Board Member, Wokingham Clinical Commissioning Group
Liz Price	Locality Manager, Royal Volunteer Service
Stuart Rowbotham	Director of Health and Wellbeing, Wokingham Borough Council
Helen Spokes	Senior Operational Manager, Health Liaison Team, Wokingham Borough Council
Anne Taylor	Community Matron, Woodley Centre Surgery
Alain Wilkes	Senior Commissioner, People Services Commissioning Hub, Wokingham Borough Council
Mike Wooldridge	Senior Manager Improvement and Performance, Wokingham Borough Council