

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

CABINET: 22<sup>ND</sup> FEBRUARY, 2016

REFERENCE FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (SOCIAL CARE AND HEALTH): 1<sup>ST</sup> FEBRUARY, 2016

“ THE MEALS ON WHEELS SERVICE (DSS) –

The Head of Adult Services presented the report, the purpose of which was to update the Scrutiny Committee on how the Meals on Wheels Service was being delivered and the rationale for considering alternative ways of meeting the nutritional needs of those eligible for care and support from Social Services.

The report was a follow up to a previous Scrutiny report provided in response to an original Request for Consideration from Councillor R.J. Bertin, who had requested that the Committee receive information regarding the numbers using the service and the potential future funding reductions.

The report advised that Meals on Wheels was a social care service which delivered a hot meal at home to people who were assessed as being unable to undertake this task for themselves. In Barry, one route was previously made available through a service level agreement with the Royal Voluntary Service but this had been discontinued by mutual consent. The volunteer service now operated within Rondel House, supporting people who attended to engage in activities.

The report stated that there was no statutory requirement for a Local Authority to provide a Meals on Wheels service. However, Local Authorities must assess the needs of individual people in need and then ensure that, where there were eligible risks to independence, these risks were mitigated through provision of services. Those who experience risks associated with potential malnutrition would be eligible for a service to ensure that their needs were met. This could be done in various ways and not just through the delivery of a hot meal by the Local Authority. For example, frozen meal delivery services had proved to be popular. The principal advantages of this approach were that individuals had greater choice over what and when they could eat, without any requirement for an assessment by Social Services. Some schemes in other Local Authorities involved the provision of vouchers which could be used in local facilities such as cafés. Additionally, a number of luncheon clubs and day services existed across the Vale of Glamorgan. These provided not only a meal but also an opportunity to engage with other people, tackling loneliness and social isolation.

The report indicated that the use of the Meals on Wheels service had reduced substantially across the United Kingdom. Figures for England, reported following a Freedom of Information Request, indicated that the number of elderly people receiving meals provided by Local Authorities had fallen over the last five years from 296,000 to around 109,000 in 2014/15. In comparison, the position across Wales varied. In 2013/14 six Local Authority areas did not provide a Meals on Wheels Service although it had not been possible to obtain more up to date information.

In the Vale of Glamorgan, the number of people who used the Meals on Wheels service had remained similar since the figures were reported in 2015. The service then was delivering approximately 78 meals and this figure was now approximately 75. At weekends, a reduced service operated and approximately 29 meals were delivered to the Central and Eastern parts of the Vale. The Meals on Wheels service at the further end of the Western Vale was discontinued several years ago, following equipment failure in the local kitchen. Alternative meal services were available. Low demand levels and the additional distances involved in delivery to rural locations in the Western Vale meant that restarting a service in this area would likely incur additional costs.

The charge for a meal in the Vale of Glamorgan was £3.30 in 2013/14 and this had risen to £4.10 in 2014/15. This was in order to bring the charge closer to the costs of preparing and delivering meals. Reductions in the number of meals provided meant that the expected rise in overall income through the price increase had not been fully realised. The current cost per meal to provide the service (unit cost) was £5.34 which was based upon the existing number of recipients. The charge to them remained unchanged from 2014/15. The expected charge required to make the service cost neutral was in the region of £6 per meal. This had been calculated to include an anticipated reduction in the numbers of meals provided.

A review of the service had been undertaken. This included consultation with existing recipients to ascertain their views regarding the current provision and to determine their knowledge and understanding of alternative delivery models. The consultation document and a copy of the questionnaire were attached to the report at Appendix 1. The overall conclusions that emerged from the review were that high levels of satisfaction with the service continued and that individuals were not well informed about alternative options for meals.

Further analysis of the review information was underway. Consideration would need to be given to increasing the price of meals and to the promotion of alternative meal options. The service had deemed it helpful to examine the feasibility of the service being provided in the future by organisations external to the Council. It was proposed, therefore, to initiate some market testing to determine the extent of interest in this across Vale localities. Ideally, this

would include exploring whether services could be made available across the whole of the Vale of Glamorgan.

A Committee Member thanked the Head of Adult Services for the update and the Member stated that he had been worried that service users were not being properly informed about alternative services should arrangements to the Meals on Wheels service be changed.

The Committee then asked if the Cabinet Member could relay some of his thoughts about the future of the Meals on Wheels service. The Cabinet Member indicated that, in his opinion, the Council needed to recoup its costs for providing the service but he recognised that low numbers of service users made this difficult for any company or organisation. The Cabinet Member went on to comment that one large provider was Wiltshire Farm Foods and he stated that observations through the Vale's 50+ Forum had indicated that they had been well received. Furthermore, he advised that Wiltshire Farm Foods would not only deliver meals but they would also undertake physical checks of their service users and would refer people should they have any concerns. The Cabinet Member explained that the Council needed to look at the possibility of alternative service delivery such as through a large mutual company. He also mentioned that the Cardiff and Vale University Health Board had been able to provide a service at £3.10 per meal and he stated that the Health Board could do this because meals were produced in large quantities.

In answer to a Member's question regarding services in the rural part of the Vale, the Head of Adult Services stated that issues had been down to a breakdown in kitchen equipment which had meant that around 20 individuals had been unable to access the Meals on Wheels service. He stated that companies such as Wiltshire Farm Foods offered a number of ranges of meals and would be able to better meet the dietary requirements of service clients.

#### RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the contents of the report be noted.
- (2) T H A T the report be referred to Cabinet to advise on how the Meals on Wheels service was being delivered and to highlight the rationale for considering alternative ways of meeting the nutritional needs of those eligible for support from social services.
- (3) T H A T the progress to date be noted and that further reports on potential alternative service models be received.

Reason for recommendations

(1-3) To ensure that the Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet can exercise effective oversight of this service.”

Attached as Appendix – [Report to Scrutiny Committee \(Social Care and Health\): 1<sup>st</sup> February, 2016](#)