



Vulnerable Adults, Health and Communities Policy and Scrutiny Committee

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Title:	Winter hot meal provision pilot
Report of:	Director of Adult Social Care
Cabinet Member Portfolio	Adult Social Care, Public Health and Voluntary Sector
Wards Involved:	All
Policy Context:	Fairer Westminster
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1. Executive summary

- 1.1 The Council's Adult Social Care and Health directorate (ASCH) plays an important role in supporting vulnerable residents' health and wellbeing. To help address winter pressures, the effects of the increased cost of living on residents and to contribute to the Council's strategic ambition to tackle inequalities, ASCH designed a two-year hot meals delivery service pilot. The pilot focusses on providing nutritious hot meals during the winter months.
- 1.2 Officers conducted user research with service users, benchmarking with other councils and market scoping and quality assurance exercises to develop the service offer of three hot meals delivered each week from November 2023 to March 2024. Care Premier was the chosen provider, and three hot meals were delivered per week during Year 1 (November 2023 to March 2024).
- 1.3 From November 2023 to March 2024, ASCH delivered the first year of the two-year pilot service to older adults (over 65) who were living alone, housebound, in receipt of social care and not in receipt of a lunch call as part of their existing support provision.
- 1.4 2,578 meals were delivered to 105 older adults, and the service was well-received. In a poll of over 30 service users, 73% of participants reported that receiving a regular hot meal in their home had a positive effect on their life. Year 1 of the pilot concluded in March 2024, and officers will commence user research and service design activities in Summer 2024 for Year 2. As part of this, they will explore how to leverage existing

services and assets in the community, such as befriending services, community cafes and local restaurants.

2. Key Matters for the Committee's consideration

- 2.1 Members are invited to review the initial pilot implementation and make recommendations to inform Year 2 of the service.

3. Background

- 3.1 Adult Social Care supports our most vulnerable residents to enjoy a good quality of life through personalised services that prevent, reduce and delay the need for care and help people to live as independently as possible. A healthy, nutritious diet is an important element of wellbeing and through its existing day service offer, Adult Social Care provides hot meals to residents who attend its day centres.
- 3.2 However, some of our adult social care users cannot easily leave their homes to access hot meals at a commissioned day centre. In recognition of this, the Adult Social Care and Health directorate (ASCH) designed a two-year hot meal delivery service pilot to test how effectively it can support residents' health and wellbeing throughout the winter period (November to March).
- 3.3 This pilot bolstered the Council's comprehensive winter offer, which includes its cost of living hub, its Winter in the City Directory and its advice and support to help residents make their home more energy efficient and reduce energy costs. It also supplemented the Public Health team's messaging related to its flu vaccination offer and staying well during winter campaign.

Service design and co-production

- 3.4 In autumn 2023, ASCH conducted user research with residents who are over 65, housebound, receiving social care, and living alone to understand what they might want from a hot meal delivery service.
- 3.5 Residents expressed a desire to receive a good quality meal made from fresh ingredients. Many service users also noted that they wanted to be able to engage with someone while their meal was being prepared. To help ensure the meals met residents' preferences as much as possible, meal tasting exercises were arranged with a variety of different providers.
- 3.6 User research findings, benchmarking with other councils, and insights from market scoping and quality assurance exercises helped shape the final service offer, which was three hot meals delivered per week. The pilot service was provided by Care Premier.
- 3.7 Care Premier provides similar services for the London Boroughs of Brent, Hillingdon, Camden, Haringey and Harrow. Following market engagement and benchmarking exercises, Care Premier was selected as the provider, as it:
- is the only hot meal delivery service in London (as other providers only offer frozen pre-prepared meals).
 - completes an assessment with each resident before the start of their service to assess and understand their needs and requirements.
 - provides a wide range of meal options that meet our residents' preferences, including health, dietary and cultural requirements.

- uses a consistent delivery driver who is familiar with the area and builds a rapport with residents.
- offers a welfare check for residents and flags any concerns to the Council.

3.8 Although it is not statutory, the pilot service does contribute to meeting the Council's statutory duty to support vulnerable adults, as described in the Care Act 2014.

3.9 During the first year of the scheme, 105 residents signed up to participate. This cohort consisted of older adults (over 65) who were living alone, housebound, in receipt of social care, and not in receipt of a lunch call as part of their existing provision. Each participating resident agreed to contribute £2 for each meal. The first year ran from November 2023 to March 2024.

Service implementation and impact

3.10 During the Year 1 pilot period, 2,578 meals were delivered. The total cost of the Year 1 period was £30k, excluding residents' contributions. The service was administered using direct payments and Westminster's virtual wallet digital solution. This made the service easy to sign-up to and enabled quick processing of payments, as well as providing a council-managed service for residents who would not need to administrate the service themselves.

3.11 In a telephone poll of over 30 service users and service user home visits, 73% of participants reported that receiving a regular hot meal in their home had a positive effect on their life. These effects were varied, including improved health and wellbeing, cost savings and reduced risks associated with cooking. Another resident noted: "Very good idea, most of the meals are nice and the meals are subsidised, value for money with mains and dessert".

3.12 These positive findings could be a result of the meals and ingredients being healthier or of a higher quality compared to participants' usual diets, the regularity of the service, and/or receipt of a hot meal during the coldest months of the year. Care Premier supplies meals that are created and prepared by chefs, alongside dietitians, nutritionists and food scientists to ensure good taste and nutritional value across a range of dietary requirements. The meals are prepared on the day by Care Premier in their kitchen facilities in north London before being delivered to residents. They offer a range of menus to meet service users' health, dietary and cultural requirements, such as textured meals to help people with swallowing difficulties to enjoy meals again. The meals are delivered in disposable containers, and staff can meet the needs of service users who are unable to plate the meals themselves. As much as possible, Care Premier makes sure that the same delivery drivers work the same routes each day, so that they can build a rapport with service users. Residents also praised the menu variety and residents' ability to specify dietary and cultural requirements. Many of them also shared positive feedback about the delivery person and their willingness to engage in conversation while the meal was being prepared, which for some was a "highlight" of their day.

3.13 Although overall reception to the service was positive, some residents desired more social contact. One commented: "It would be nice to have someone to sit and eat together with, someone else who also lives alone to have a laugh and chat." Others expressed a desire for more frequent meal deliveries and greater flexibility in the delivery schedule: "I would like to have the meals Monday to Friday."

3.14 Other feedback shared about the service includes:

- “I’ve lived in my house for 43 years. Unfortunately, I’ve lost my husband and two children, so I now live on my own and experience mobility issues. The first meal I had as part of the service was sausage and mash. I didn’t think I would like it...But I must say, that sausage and mash was delicious.”
- “Feel less worried, because I don’t need to arrange lunch time meals.”
- “Very good, I keep it for evening meal as it saves a lot of problems deciding what to eat. Really appreciate it as it’s very difficult for me to cook.”
- “I feel happier when the meals arrive and have food that I wouldn’t normally cook myself.”
- “Comes piping hot, absolute god send, and delivery drivers couldn’t say a bad word about them. Having the hot meals service breaks the routine of the day.”

3.15 Some service users wanted to continue receiving the meals service outside of the pilot period. To facilitate this, officers provided information and advice and helped to arrange this with Care Premier.

4. Next steps

- 4.1 Year 2 of the pilot will start in November 2024. In advance of this, user research activities such as workshops, surveys and focus groups will run throughout July 2024 to explore with service users what a social element of the service could look like. The user research will also include meal tasting sessions with service users. By mid-August, officers will conduct an options appraisal for Year 2 of the service.
- 4.2 Based on the feedback outlined in the previous section, research for Year 2 will also focus on opportunities for more community-based provision, social enterprises, voluntary sector, local economic development and socialisation. For example, this could include making use of community cafes or catering colleges. Local cafes and restaurants could also be consulted about potential group visits, and small-scale group transport options could be explored to facilitate a ‘lunch club’ style activity. For those residents who prefer a home-based service, user research and co-production activities will explore how a social element (such as befriending) can be incorporated into the offer.
- 4.3 As outlined in the previous paragraph, there are opportunities to leverage existing services and assets in Westminster, without the need for lengthy and expensive administrative processes. This would allow the Council to further shape and develop the local market according to residents’ needs.
- 4.4 Phase 2 of the project discovery will review Winter in the City Initiatives, community-based organisations, and voluntary organisations, and it will explore opportunities for collaboration and enhancing service provision through activities such as befriending or community-based meals. The discovery phase will seek to identify service users and understand their needs through conversations with frontline staff from adult social care and other council services.
- 4.5 Further, the user research and co-production activities will explore how Year 2 of the pilot can take advantage of the synergy between this work and the Community Catalyst programme. The Community Catalyst programme focusses on providing support and tools for local small and micro-scale providers and for volunteers to set up their own community services targeted at residents’ needs.

**If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the
Background Papers, please contact Khatija Rasool,
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