

Committee: **Social Services Scrutiny Committee**
Date of meeting: **21st December 2021**
Report Subject: **Community Meals**
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr John Mason, Executive Member Social Services**
Report Submitted by: **Alyson Hoskins, Head of Adult Services**

Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
10/12/20		06.01.21			21/01/21	24.02.21		

1. **Purpose of the Report**

To inform on the transition of the Community Meals (CM) service and progress made since transition from the Community Services Directorate to the Social Services Directorate.

2. **Scope and Background**

2.1 The decision to transfer the service, along with its budget deficit of £25k, was agreed at CLT on 22nd October 2019.

2.2 The service was scheduled to transfer to the Community Options Division of Adult Services on 1st April 2020 with direct delivery of the service being managed by the Community Options Team Manager (COM). A Project Officer (PO) was appointed, on a fixed term basis, to support the COM in developing and supporting the implementation of strategies to create a sustainable service.

2.3 The COVID-19 outbreak resulted in transition being “informally” brought forward to the 23rd March to ensure customers’ needs were taken into consideration as part of Social Services emergency planning. Having to react to increased demand as well as challenges within the service, has meant the Department has not been able to focus on service development as planned.

2.4 As the Department needed to prepare for transition of CM prior to the 1st April 2020 a significant amount of work needed to be undertaken to create robust mechanisms for monitoring customer and capacity levels.

2.5 COVID-19 created additional operational pressure on the service resulting from social distancing rules and Protective Personal Equipment (PPE) requirements. However, the Department developed the appropriate risk assessments, ensured adequate stocks of PPE were available and additional staff were identified to provide cover where necessary.

2.6 A number of operational processes were identified as creating unnecessary pressure on the service. The COM and PO worked with staff to review these processes and ensure efficient and effective running of the service. These have

included processes to support leave requests, stock control, cash reconciliation and referrals for new customers.

- 2.7 Working with the service, has on times been challenging. To resolve issues, the Department had a formal meeting with staff in August 2020. The meeting facilitated an open discussion and has been further supported by the implementation of structured supervision sessions across the whole team.
- 2.8 It is important to note all staff are valued and committed to the service. Previous staffing/operational issues were a result of staff having gone through a number of changes and uncertainty of the future of the service. The Department has built positive relationships with the remaining staff and will ensure they are fully communicated, consulted and supported through any future changes to the service.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

- 3.1 The options for consideration are:
- 3.2 **Option One:** Members are asked to scrutinise the report and evaluate the recommendations for the long term forward planning of the service (section 6.4).
- 3.3 **Option Two:** Members are asked to scrutinise the report and propose an alternative approach in relation to the future planning of the service.

4. **Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

- 4.1 The Blaenau Gwent Corporate Plan 2020/22 notes the Authority aims to intervene early to prevent problems from becoming greater and asks residents to take more responsibility for managing their own health and wellbeing.
- 4.2 The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 places a statutory duty on all local authorities to increase preventative services within the community to minimise the escalation of critical need.
- 4.3 The CM service supports both the objectives of the Corporate Plan and the Blaenau Gwent Well-being plan by enabling citizens to have a choice in accessing a service that allows them to stay independent and take responsibility for managing their own health and wellbeing thus reducing reliance on more traditional care.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

5.1 ***Impact on Budget***

- 5.1.1 Having undertaken an analysis of the period 6 budget forecast (September 2020) for the service, the Department estimates a cost pressure of approximately £18K which is a reduction on the original deficit of £25k.

5.1.2 The Department will be prioritising a review of the budget to identify how it can be brought inline with actual expenditure.

5.2 ***Risk***

5.2.1 The Department recognises the importance of CM and the negative impact its cessation has for both vulnerable citizens and other teams across the Directorate. For example, removal of the service leads to increased demand for domiciliary care as some citizens may not be able or have support to prepare meals.

5.2.2 These risks will be mitigated by the Department focussing on key areas to build a sustainable service as noted in section 6.4

5.3 ***Legal***

CM is not a statutory requirement. However, the Department follows the key principles of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 which provides a legal framework for improving the well-being of people who need care and support and carers who need support.

5.4 ***Human Resources***

5.4.1 A report presented to CLT on 6th November 2018 and Special Council on 12th December 2018 (**Appendix One**) recommended CM reduce from 8 to 5 Drivers each working 16 hours per week, 80 hours in total. However, negotiations at the time resulted in all 8 staying in post with 10 hour contracts.

5.4.2 As noted in section 2.3, transition of CM took place on the 23rd March 2020 and as this was the date the country went into full lockdown only 4 drivers remained in the workplace; three permanent and one fixed term. The remaining 4 Drivers due to being in COVID-19 vulnerable groups refrained from the workplace under the furlough scheme.

5.4.3 The fixed term post was terminated as of 31st July 2020 and backfilled via a redeployment arrangement and with the furlough scheme ending on the 31st October 2020, the Department entered into discussions with the remaining 7 Drivers and their Trade Union to discuss and agree a return to work for all staff on furlough in-line with social distancing guidelines.

5.4.4 The outcome of these discussions was the Department agreeing a mutual termination date of 11th November 2020 with the furloughed staff members. The hours of the 5 remaining posts have been increased to 16 per week. The COVID-19 social distancing rules had enabled the Department to test the feasibility of operating the service with the reduced drivers which supported this decision.

5.4.5 The service now employs 3 permanent Drivers. The 4th post is currently filled via a re-deployment arrangement with Community Options providing relief cover for the 5th post. This arrangement will be revised when Community Options reinstates full operations.

6. Supporting Evidence

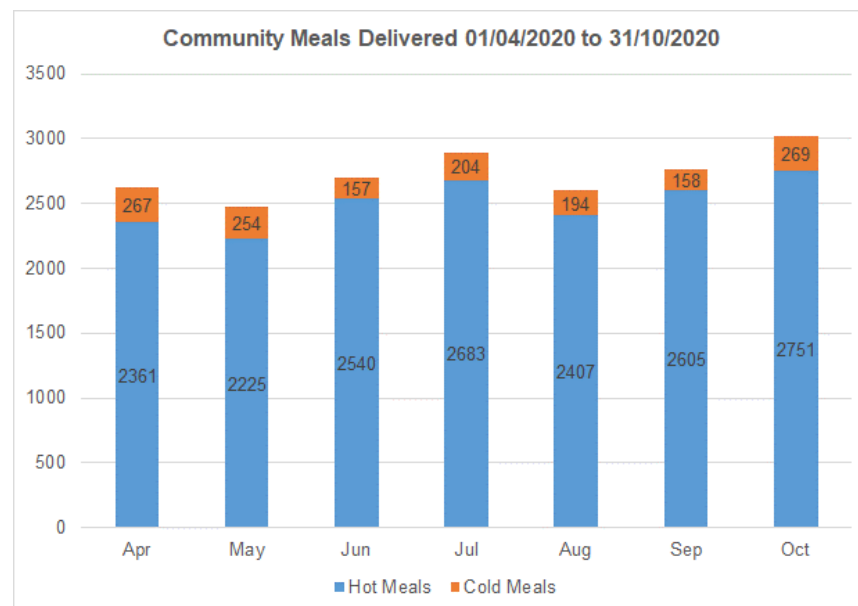
6.1 Performance Information and Data

6.1.1 In the period 1st April 2020 to 31st October 2020 the service delivered a total of 19,075 meals:

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Total
Hot Meals	2361	2225	2540	2683	2407	2605	2751	17572
Cold Meals	267	254	157	204	194	158	269	1503
Total	2628	2479	2697	2887	2601	2763	3020	19075

Prior to transition CM was delivering between 88 and 94 hot meals per day. During the first quarter of 2020/21 the service was averaging a delivery of 128 hot meals per day which based on an average delivery of 94 meals is an increase of 36%.

6.1.2 As the graph below indicates, demand rose from April in-line with the COVID-19 pandemic and as expected dropped by just under 10% from July to August as restrictions were lifted. However, it did not drop to the levels seen pre-transition with the service still averaging the delivery of 120 hot meals per day throughout August. During the week commencing 26th October 2020 an average of 130 hot meals was delivered per day.



6.1.3 As of 10th August 2020 new referrals to the CM service were routed via the Information, Advice and Assistance (IAA) team. Between 10th August and 31st October the service received 29 referrals for 33 customers as highlighted below. Of those customers referred, 85% took up the service.

Route	Aug		Sep		Oct		Total Referrals	Total Individuals
	No. of Referrals	No. of Individuals	No. of Referrals	No. of Individuals	No. of Referrals	No. of Individuals		
Abertillery			4	4	7	8	11	12
Brynmawr	2	2	5	6	1	2	8	10
Ebbw Vale	2	2			2	3	4	5
Tredegar					6	6	6	6
Grand Total	4	4	9	10	16	19	29	33

6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***

The continued provision of an accessible, affordable healthy meal service.

6.3 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 looks to build and strengthen existing arrangements by involving service users, carers and other key partners where possible in helping to shape and influence future design of services. It is the Department's intention to involve both staff and customers in future service developments.

6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***

The Department is committed to the future of the CM service. The PO is currently implementing a project to move the service to digital cashless payments with a pilot planned for April 2021. The Department has also identified a number of key priorities for moving the service forward over the next 12 months:

6.4.1 ***Resilient Budget Monitoring:*** As noted in section 5.1, the budget deficit remains a priority for the Department. Some Areas to be explored to reduce this deficit are; re-mapping of routes, accessing capacity of vehicles, investigating opportunities / grants available for "going green" and staffing arrangements.

6.4.2 ***Development of a Marketing Strategy:*** With usual service promotion being impacted by the pandemic, the Department will develop a robust marketing strategy to further enhance service demand. This will enable a full understanding of customers' needs and build on existing trust to re-brand and promote the service. As well as developing the current more traditional method of promoting the service we will explore the benefits of digitally promoting the service

6.4.3 ***Learning from Other Local Authorities:*** Exploring how other local authorities are operating their CM services' will enable the Department to modernise the service. We will investigate other services that can be provided alongside traditional meals and will evaluate the impact of introducing an eligibility criteria and subsidising meals for most vulnerable citizens

6.4.4 ***Enhancing Links with Health & Social Care Colleagues:*** This will involve identifying and strengthening partnerships within both health and social care as well as the wider community in future service planning arrangements. There is also an opportunity to understand how the Community Options Service could assist in supporting and enhancing the service. One example could be the preparation of tea trays to be delivered alongside the traditional meal.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***

Investment in prevention and early intervention services reduces reliance on Social Services by supporting the future health and well-being of citizens. The CM service supports early intervention and prevention as it promotes independence by assisting citizens to stay within their own homes.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

Being situated within Adult Services provides CM with opportunities to strengthen collaborative arrangements to further promote and build resilience within the service.

6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***

As the Department have been focussing on stabilising the service and responding to additional demands resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, as noted in section 6.4.4, the Department will explore opportunities for integrating the service with other aspects of Community Options such as the Catering Enterprise.

6.8 ***EqIA (screening and identifying if full impact assessment is needed)***

Not applicable.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 The PO has established a Project Board which meet on a monthly basis to discuss any operational, strategic or managerial implications for the service.

7.2 The Department will propose a number of key objectives for the service to be included in the relevant team and service business plans for 2021/22.

7.3 Where necessary key decisions and changes to the service will be ratified at the appropriate reporting level.

Background Documents / Electronic Links

- ***Appendix One: CM Original CLT Report (6th November 2018)***