

Report to: Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health

Date of meeting: 24 September 2019

By: Director of Adult Social Care and Health

Title: Meals in the Community Subsidies

Purpose: To consider the proposed changes to the provision of Meals in the Community

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Lead Member is recommended to:

- 1) Agree to the changes to the Meals in the Community subsidy as outlined in the report**
 - 2) Agree to withdrawing the subsidy from the Lunch Clubs as outlined in the report; and**
 - 3) Delegate to the Director of Adult Social Care and Health authority to take all necessary actions to give effect to the implementation of the above recommendations.**
-

1 Background

1.1 On 5th February 2019, the Council agreed its budget for 2019/20. This included a savings proposal to remove the subsidy for Meals in the Community, which could deliver savings of £483,000. On 24th May the Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health agreed to undertake a consultation on the proposals between 28th May and 6th August 2019.

1.2 Meals in the Community services enable residents to have hot, chilled or frozen meals delivered to their home on a daily or weekly basis. The Council has a contract framework agreement with a number of providers for these services, with the service also being provided directly to East Sussex residents on a private basis.

1.3 The need to ensure adults with needs arising from physical or mental impairments can manage and maintain their nutrition is identified through the assessment and care management process, in accordance with the Care Act 2014 (“the Care Act”) and the Care Act Care and Support (Eligibility Criteria) 2014.

2 Supporting Information

2.1 In August 2019, 679 people were receiving a subsidy of £4.10 per meal based on a full cost of between £4 and £8 per meal. In addition, two lunch clubs (totalling 28 clients) in the county receive the subsidy.

2.2 Under the Care Act, the Council is required to provide information about meal services and to ensure people who are eligible for support can achieve the nutrition outcome described at paragraph 1.3. The Council is not required to pay for or subsidise people’s meals. Many other local authorities have moved away from providing meal subsidy services.

2.3 Government rules on financial assessments set out how much of someone's income the Council can take into account when working out what they should pay towards the cost of their social care support. Everyone has a set protected amount within the assessment to make sure they are still able to pay for their food, electricity, gas, water, and household insurance, plus day-to-day items such as groceries.

3. Consultation Summary

3.1 We wrote to people currently receiving the subsidy to tell them about our proposal to stop paying a subsidy for meals in the community, and to ask them to fill in the survey. Where people didn't have capacity to take part, or contacting them would be inappropriate, we wrote to their families and carers where this was possible.

3.2 We received over 500 responses to the consultation from organisations, groups and individuals, with nearly half coming from people receiving the subsidy and their families and carers. The responses received during the public consultation are in the Members and Cabinet Rooms for Members consideration. Appendix 1 outlines the consultation process and responses and Members must have regard to this.

3.2 Overall themes from the consultation included:

- The majority of respondents disagree with the proposal to withdraw the subsidy, although there are a reasonable number who agree with the proposal;
- The results suggest that a good percentage of people who are currently receiving the subsidy would choose to pay the full cost themselves in order to keep receiving meals (39%);
- There are a similar number of people who say that they would be unlikely to continue using the service if they had to pay the full cost (43%);
- Some people told us that it would not be a viable option to cook for themselves, or even heat up microwave meals, due to an illness, disability or impairment;
- Respondents are concerned that if the subsidy is stopped it could lead to people eating less food, having few or no hot meals, and eating a much less nutritious diet, all of which could have an impact on their health and wellbeing. This could make it harder for people to maintain their independence at home and may mean they end up needing more costly support from adult social care;
- Lunch clubs would be likely to see a reduction in numbers if the subsidy stopped, which would make them less viable and could force them to close;
- There was strong support across all the surveys for additional support being offered to certain groups of people, with most people saying that the focus should be on those with mobility issues, a physical disability, cognitive impairment, and those on a low income;
- There was strong support for making the subsidy means tested, rather than stopping it completely. Although some people are concerned about the administrative costs of means testing.

3.3 Discussions and consultation has also taken place with current providers Presto (formerly Licence to Freeze), Mother Theresa's Meals, Oakhouse Foods and Wiltshire Farm Foods. Providers have indicated they are confident that the changes proposed will allow for the continuation of their services and that they will consider offering deals over a transitional period thereby supporting work to reduce the impact of the change.

4 Equalities Impact Assessment

4.1 In considering the proposals in this report, the Lead Member is required to have 'due regard' to the duties set out in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 (the Public Sector Equality Duty). Equality Impact Assessments (EIQAs) are carried out to identify any adverse

impacts that may arise as a result of the proposals for those with protected characteristics and to identify appropriate mitigations. The EqIA is attached at Appendix 2. The Lead Member must read the full version of the EqIA and take its findings into consideration when determining these proposals.

4.2 In summary the key outcomes from the assessment are:

- The majority of clients who receive subsidy are older and data shows that nearly half of those are aged 85 years plus;
- For some of these older people with reduced mental capacity and physical capabilities, the removal of the subsidy will have a disproportionately negative impact, particularly if they feel unable or unwilling to pay to continue to receive the service owing to reasons of financial unaffordability;
- The majority of people who access the service have either a physical or mental disability, including dementia and frailty. The proposals will have a significant negative impact on those of the disabled people who are unable to prepare meals and require assistance to manage their own nutrition and cannot afford to purchase the service.

4.3 Given the nature of these proposals and the potential for the changes to impact upon those with protected characteristics (most notably those who are in older age groups and those disabled people who receive this service and subsidy) the regard that must be given to the public sector equality duty is high.

4.4 Prior to the consultation the Council identified that a proportion of clients currently in receipt of the meal subsidy may be eligible for additional support due to their disability, reduced capacity and because they are particularly vulnerable. The consultation and the EqIA confirmed that the social care assessment process needs to allow the flexibility and option for a subsidised meal service to be available for vulnerable residents who are at risk of harm. Based on feedback received for those currently in receipt of the subsidy, this is likely to be in the region of 100 to 150 people.

5. Proposal

5.1 The recommendation is not to withdraw the meal subsidy in all cases. Where the provision of a subsidised meal service is the most cost-effective intervention which meets needs, supports independence and the withdrawal would result in more expensive service provision elsewhere, it will continue to be available.

5.2 For existing clients, on a case by case basis, we would:

- Inform them and/ or their carer when the subsidy will be stopping in plenty of time for them to make an informed decision about what they wish to do next;
- Review client records and work with the providers to identify the most vulnerable people and identify suitable alternative options;
- Carry out telephone and face-to-face assessments as appropriate. With the focus being on understanding the strengths and needs of individuals and identifying appropriate support;
- Provide support and specialist advice from key voluntary sector providers to ensure current clients are in receipt of all eligible benefits to maximise their income;
- Where there is an identified risk we will not withdraw the subsidy until alternatives have been agreed as part of the person's care and support plan; and

- Where the provision of a subsidised meal service is the most cost-effective intervention, supports independence and the withdrawal would result in more expensive service provision elsewhere, it will continue to be available.

5.3 For new clients, from October 2019 the option for a subsidised meal service will continue to be available, as determined by the Care Act and Financial Assessment process.

5.4 In line with the Care Act, information to all residents will continue to be offered and people will be supported to access services if they are eligible to receive support from Adult Social Care. In addition, anyone can access community meals services directly from providers. There are a number of alternative options available for delivery in the community with a range of prices. Most people will be required to pay the full charge for the service they choose.

5.5 This proposal will mean that people most at risk and unable to afford a meals service will be able to access hot meals and a welfare check as part of the meals delivery service.

5.6 The subsidy for lunch clubs will be withdrawn. Support will be provided to seek alternative funding to continue if this is required. Individuals who attend the clubs will be given advice and offered assessments if appropriate.

6. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

6.1 This report has set out the rationale for a significant change in the approach to how the Meals in the Community subsidy will be used. If agreed, the new arrangements will be reviewed to ensure the revised approach is being properly implemented and the savings achieved will be monitored through the Council Plan.

6.2 There is a strong rationale for the changes proposed based upon the outcome of the consultation and EQIA.

KEITH HINKLEY

Director of Adult Social Care & Health

Contact Officer: Tom Hook, Assistant Director

Tel. No. 07895 331141

Email: tom.hook@eastsussex.gov.uk

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Consultation Report

Appendix 2 - Equality Impact Assessment