

# Meals on Wheels

## 10 Week Evaluation Report

February 2014



# Introduction and Context

The Meals on Wheels pilot was implemented as part of a larger piece of work to address social isolation amongst older people in Chorley by connecting communities through food. This work identified that some people, due to chronic health or mobility problems, will be unable to attend activities in the community and therefore some provision is needed to support the most vulnerable residents, to ensure that they get a hot meal and some company during the day.

The Meals on Wheels project looked to develop a pilot Meals on Wheels service, building on current provision by developing a service that not only delivers hot meals to people's homes but also provides some extra support and safety checks, along with a level of company and social interaction. The service would be targeted at the more vulnerable members of the community who need more support and most at risk of becoming socially isolated.

## **Project objectives:**

The following outcomes are the intended impact of running the pilot;

- Meals delivered hot to residents who may be otherwise unable to cook for themselves
- Affordable and accessible meals delivered at a convenient time
- Developing better health outcomes by having a balanced diet with nutritious meals
- Safe and sound check – providing additional support around the home, some company and peace of mind for next of kin
- Enable vulnerable older residents to live independently in their own homes
- Option for additional support such as home shopping service

A subsidised service model was agreed with a set subsidy amount of £1 per person per day for 3 days a week, towards a meal or a meal and a dessert. This brought the overall cost to the customer down to £2.25 or £2.75 for a meal and dessert. The pilot was to be open to residents of Western Parishes as those most at risk of social isolation and targeted at customers who may be particularly vulnerable. A number of customers from other rural wards such as Brinscall were also targeted.

The 20 week pilot commenced in November 2013 and the project plan states that a review of the pilot service is to be undertaken after 10 weeks and then on conclusion of the pilot after 20 weeks on the 4<sup>th</sup> April 2014.

This report details the method, findings and outcomes of the initial 10 week evaluation. It also puts forward conclusions to support the development of options for the future delivery of the service. Although the pilot will continue to run to its conclusion, a decision on future service provision will need to be taken before this time to enable preparatory work and any procurement processes to be undertaken.

# Evaluation methodology

The evaluation aims to understand the response to the pilot, the current user profile and the performance of the service. It also looks to gather some initial feedback on future proposals for the service following the conclusion of the pilot. It covers the 10 week period from the 18 November 2013 to the 25 January 2014. There are two key elements to the evaluation:

## **1. Customer feedback survey to all customers currently taking part in the pilot programme**

Officers from the council's Community team have visited each of the customers receiving the subsidised Meals on Wheels service to complete a very brief satisfaction questionnaire. This provides the opportunity to gain unbiased feedback on the provider and also to signpost to any wider council or partner services that may be appropriate for the customer.

Of 33 current subsidised service users, 23 completed the satisfaction survey. 4 customers were unavailable due to being in hospital or away from home and a further 6 customers were not surveyed due to being relatively new to the service or not able to respond to a survey. As far as possible, if customers had specific issues such as dementia then the next of kin was contacted to respond to the survey or be present when it was carried out.

## **2. Provider performance evaluation**

A number of key performance measures have been developed based on those defined in the project plan and the provider has completed a short report containing both quantitative and qualitative information.

It should be noted that the aim of the evaluation isn't to assess the performance of the provider, rather the service that was provided and the overall Meals on Wheels customer experience.

## Summary of the findings:

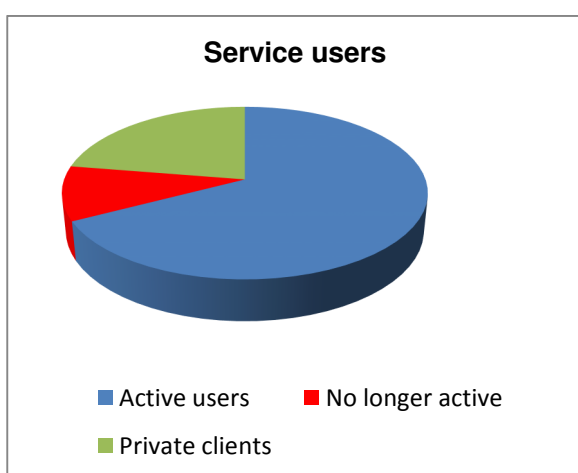
Overall, the service has been very well received and levels of customer satisfaction are high across the board; most customers would choose to continue with the current service if it was available. The pilot reached key customers within the target group and achieved objectives in relation to supporting a feeling of reassurance and increasing access to wider partner services, although the wider impact on social isolation requires further monitoring. Customers indicate that they are happy with the current subsidised rate and a proportion would consider making a greater contribution to the cost if necessary.

## Service user profile

When considering the subsidised model, initial estimates based on similar projects nationally and other local initiatives suggested that for the Western Parishes, take up would equate to approximately 40 people.

The research also suggested that customers would tend to be aged 75 years or over, female, living alone, less mobile, more socially isolated and to have lower incomes than the general older population as well as be more nutritionally vulnerable. Prior to the pilot, the uptake of meals on wheels across the borough was just 43 people.

Below is a breakdown of the profile of current service users:



### Number of service users:

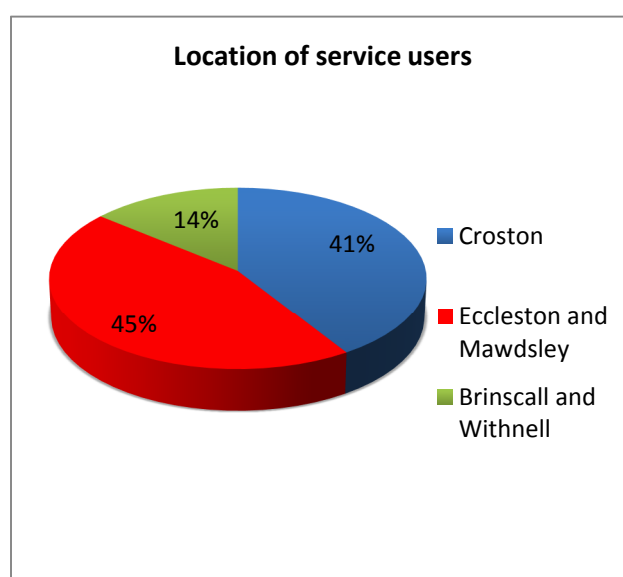
**Number of subsidised clients:** 38 customers have used the service in total, 5 no longer use the service as they have passed away or chosen not to proceed beyond the initial trial.

**Number of private clients:** 11

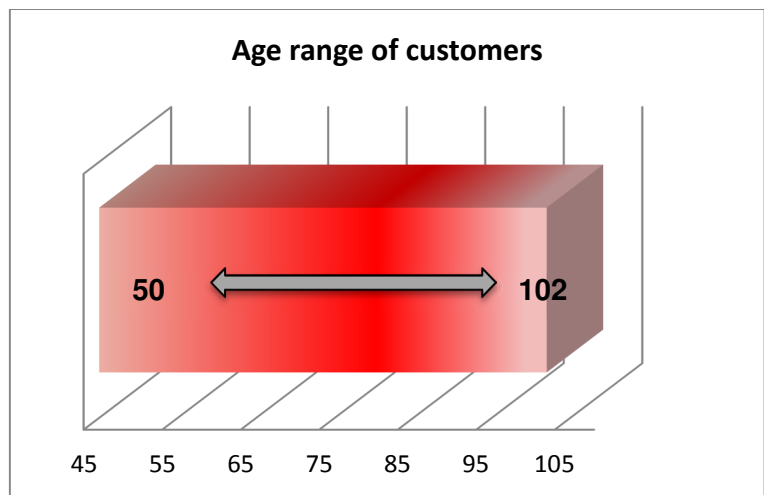
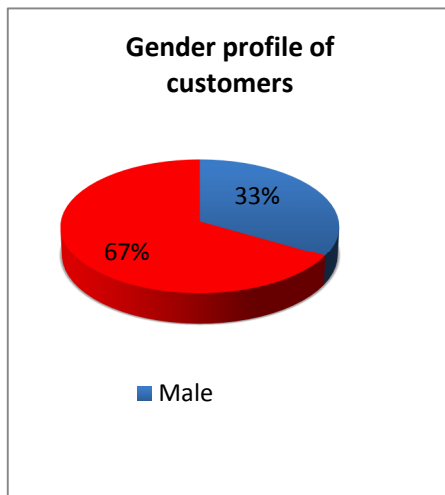
The service provider comments that this would be much higher given a number of requests from other areas of the borough but would not be cost effective given the current geographical constraints of the pilot area.

### Location of service users:

All subsidised clients are from the pilot target areas and primarily Western Parishes. The provider also has private rounds in Charnock Richard, Coppull and Euxton. A number of requests for service have also been received from Adlington.



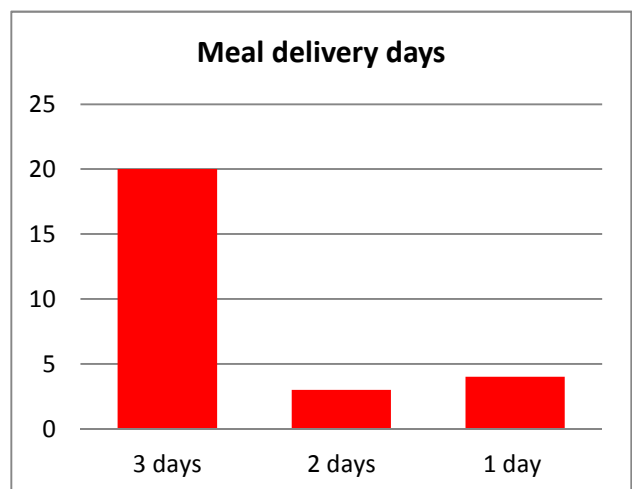
Gender and age range of service users:



The biggest proportion of service users are single females as suggested through the initial research although there are 4 couples that currently use the service. The client age ranges from 50 through to 102 years old.

Meal delivery days:

The service is offered on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays with most customers choosing to receive meals on all 3 days. However, some customers will only have meals on 2 days of the week whereas a smaller number may just have a meal on a single day which may be as a 'treat' for the week or on a day when they have limited other care.



## Social isolation and wider customer needs

The survey looked to gain a broader understanding of social isolation and the needs of vulnerable older people.

Of the customers taking part in the pilot, around 35% commented that they already attend groups/clubs or spend much time at various appointments. A further 39% commented that they wouldn't be interested in groups or clubs. 26% said that they would or may consider taking part in a group or club and were signposted accordingly.

Feedback from the team carrying out the survey suggests that the vast majority of clients seemed to have good support networks from friends and family with many enjoying active social lives. However, a number of customers could be described as socially isolated with one or two customers living in particularly difficult conditions such as properties in need of repair or no longer suitable for their needs. For example, one lady was living in a house with leaking windows that was very cold and causing her a lot of anxiety. Through being able to access the home and observe an issue that might not otherwise have been reported, the lady was subsequently referred to the council and a number of other agencies for relevant support.

It is also worth noting that of the customers surveyed, 5 suffered from dementia, anxiety or other issues which made them particularly vulnerable and therefore in need of significant support from family members and/or carers.

### **Reassurance:**

A key objective of the project was to enable residents to live more independently and also offer a sense of company during the day. Of the residents surveyed **100%** said that they felt reassured by knowing that someone was coming to deliver their meal during the day.

### **Follow-up assessment calls**

A number of additional support needs were highlighted through follow up assessment calls to customers signing up for the pilot, carried out by Help Direct which enabled customers to access a range of wider services. Of the 15 customers contacted:

- 2 stated that they felt very lonely or socially isolated and were referred into appropriate support
- 4 were referred for home visits to understand additional support needs
- 3 were referred to other agencies such as the Falls Team, Safe Trader, the Winter Warmth scheme and volunteers to take to hospital appointments etc.

Several customers were referred for befriending support although currently provision in this area is limited. These added value aspects of the service have proved to be significant in terms of their impact and outcomes for customers.

# Service performance and customer satisfaction

## Service delivery performance

During the 10 week pilot period, the provider delivered 717 meals. Throughout this period the provider reports that no deliveries were missed and all meals were delivered on time.

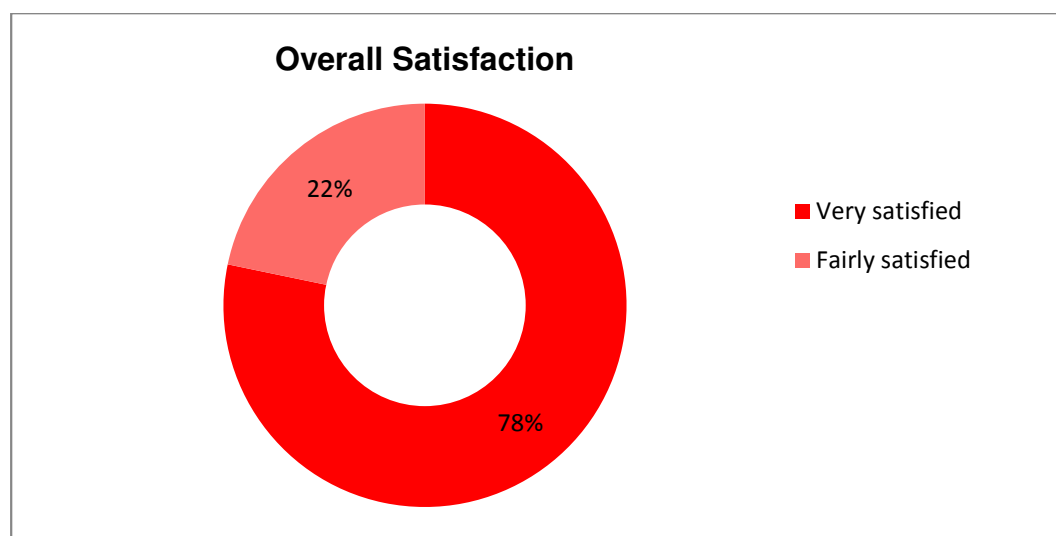
The current provider also offers a range of additional support services which to date have included:

- Cups of tea made
- Letters posting
- Stamps purchased
- Newspaper purchased
- light bulb changed
- Taken rubbish out
- Meal plated and chopped up
- Help reading letters
- Phone calls made for customers
- Wheelie bins in right place

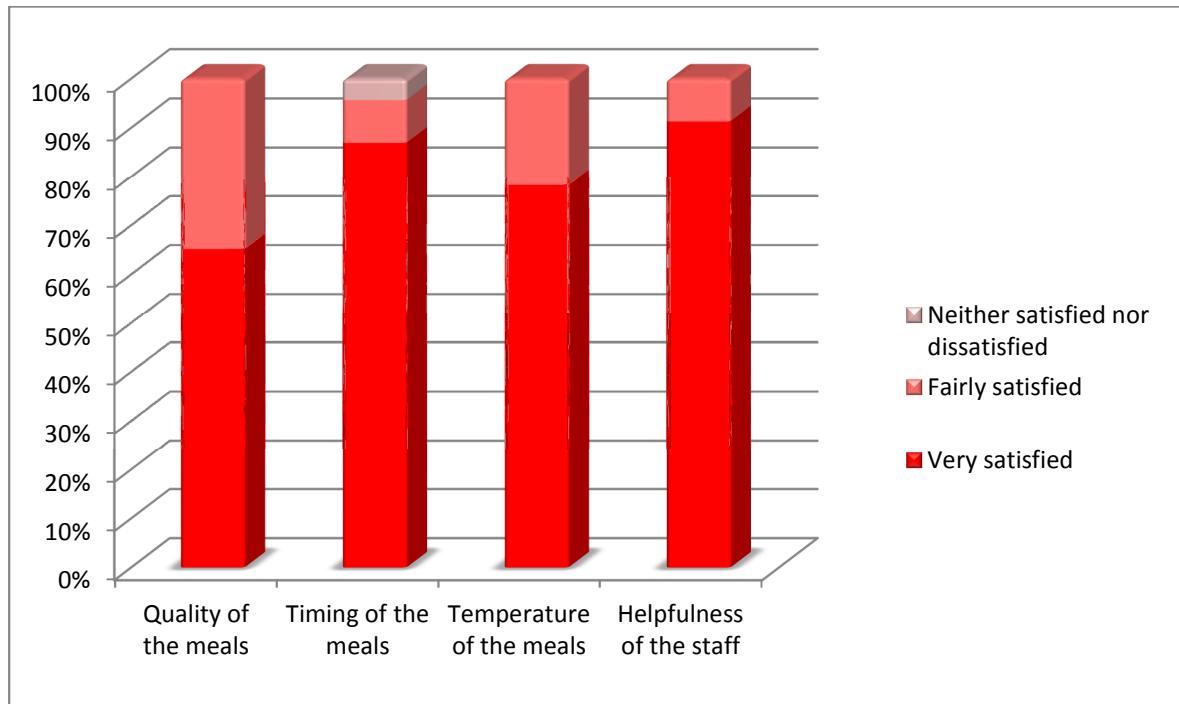
## Customer feedback - Quality

Customers were given the option to rate their experience as: very satisfied, satisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

Satisfaction overall with the Meals on Wheels service was very high with 100% of customers surveyed stating that they were very of fairly satisfied with the service overall; of those 78% were very satisfied.



Customers were also asked to rate their satisfaction across a number of other quality factors: quality, timing, temperature and helpfulness of the staff.



- 100% of customers were very or fairly satisfied with the **quality of the meals**, 65% were very satisfied
- 100% of customers were very or fairly satisfied with the **timing of the meals**, 87% were very satisfied
- 100% of customers were very or fairly satisfied with the **temperature of the meals**, 78% were very satisfied.
- 100% of customers were very or fairly satisfied with the **helpfulness of the staff**, 91% were very satisfied

When asked for general comments on the service or potential areas for improvement all responses were positive with key examples shown below. Where customers did suggest service improvements, they were mainly in relation to the menu choices and particular food preferences.

*‘Good service, David very helpful’*

*‘Hope it continues, been very useful especially over winter.’*

*‘Liked the fact they can also bring a few bits like bread etc’*

*‘Very good when the weather is bad and relieves pressure on family members’*

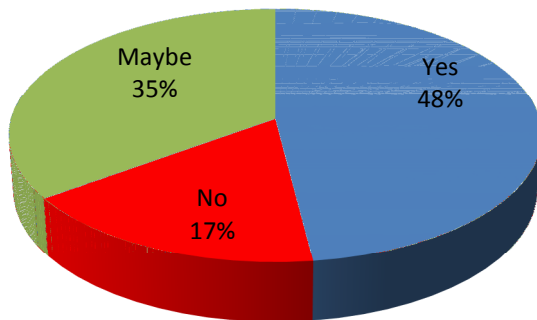
*‘Would like more vegetarian choice’*



Customer feedback – Cost:

100% of customers said that they were very or fairly happy with the cost of the meals at the subsidised rate and of those, 65% were very satisfied.

**Would you consider contributing £1 to the cost of each meal?**



When asked if they would consider contributing £1 to the cost of the meal, almost 50% said that they would consider this contribution. For those that answered 'maybe' (35%) the general feedback was that if the cost was to increase they would think about reducing the frequency of meals perhaps by reducing from 3 days per week to 2. Alternatively, a number indicated that they would choose not to have a pudding.

Future plans:

When asked if they would continue with the service if it was available, the vast majority (91%) of those customers surveyed said that they would continue. The remaining 9% said that they would maybe continue.

## Pilot delivery costs

The table below shows the number of meals delivered each month and the total overall cost to the Council of subsidising the scheme which is on average around £300 per month. The table does suggest that the number of meals a customer chooses to have per week has an influence on the cost. For example, in February, there were fewer customers overall but each customer had more meals per week.

Month	Total meals delivered in month	Number of customers	Average meals per customer in month	Total cost
December	255 meals	35	7.3	£255
January	301 meals	35	8.6	£301
February	322 meals	33	10.4	£322

Marketing and promotion of the service was completed within the allocated budget of £1000 which included publicity, press, leaflets and direct communications. The administration costs have mainly been incurred by the provider although some set up and project management costs can be attributed internally.

Overall, the costs for the pilot have been manageable and within budget.

## Conclusions

- Findings indicate that demand clearly exists for the service locally with a significant level of take up in the pilot area and many clients wishing to continue. The level of demand anticipated in advance of the project was 2% of the population aged over 65 which equates to approximately 40 people in Western Parishes. Average take up of the service is 38 customers which broadly reflects the original research.
- Targeting and marketing of the pilot service was effective with clients broadly representative of the type of customers that the service aimed to attract and support in terms of the age and gender profile.
- The service supported increased access to a number of added value services which might not otherwise have been utilised by the customer, in particular those offered by Help Direct.
- In the case of the pilot, eligibility checking was completed largely by the provider and reliant on their judgement. Should more stringent eligibility checks be required then this may create additional administration by either the provider or the Council.
- Customer satisfaction with all elements of the service is high, particularly the added value aspects such as additional duties/tasks and the feeling of reassurance which was highly valued by the customer.
- The pilot tested some specific aspects of service delivery such as the type of meals, timing and nature of provision. The outcomes of the evaluation confirm that these elements are correct and could be replicated in any future service provision.
- Whilst the evaluation didn't look to test the provider specifically, it did show that the role of the service provider is one that is critical to the overall value of the service in terms of being able to build up trust with the customers and good relationships with the family or carers.
- The pilot did have benefits in terms of reaching those who may be socially isolated, particularly a number of customers with significant additional needs which may otherwise not have been met. This may have value in terms of early intervention and preventing downstream costs to other agencies. However this must be weighed against the overall costs of the pilot and other mechanisms to reduce social isolation.

- Customers indicate that the current subsidised cost is very satisfactory with many giving a positive response to a possible increased in cost. However, for around 50% of customers the cost may influence their future continuation of the service and this may be particularly critical for those customers who are vulnerable.

## Options

Following the first 10 weeks, the following options are put forward for consideration following the conclusion of the pilot on the 4<sup>th</sup> April 2014. Given the success of the service and operating model, a number of options relate to continuing the service and the format this might take. Consideration is also given to discontinuing the service. Any future contract for this service would be subject to an open and competitive tender process.

Of the options below, option 4 could be combined with either option 1, 2 or 3.

- 1. Continue the current subsidised service in the pilot area**
- 2. Continue the current subsidised service and extend to cover other similar areas where social isolation may be a risk amongst older people**
- 3. Continue the current subsidised service and make available borough wide**
- 4. Continue the service but reduce the level of subsidy**

## Cost modelling

The following table indicates the potential cost of rolling out the Meals on Wheels scheme borough wide. Research suggests that nationally, uptake of meals is 2% of the over 65's population<sup>1</sup>. For Chorley, this would equate to approximately 360 people based on the 2011 census figures. Estimates are provided for the annual cost to subsidise the scheme based on:

- 2% take up and 3% take up,
- The number of meals including the current weekly average for pilot customers (2.6)
- Subsidy of £1 per meal or £0.50 per meal

Level of take up	Number of meals per week	Annual cost £1 subsidy	Annual cost £0.50 subsidy
(2% uptake) 360	3 meals per week	£56,160	£28,080
	<b>2.6 meals per week</b>	<b>£48,672</b>	<b>£24,336</b>
	2 meals per week	£37,440	£18,720
(3% uptake) 540	3 meals per week	£84,240	£42,120
	2.6 meals per week/	£73,008	£36,504
	2 meals per week	£56,160	£28,080

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<sup>1</sup> O'Dwyer and Timonen, 2008