

Report of	Meeting	Date
Director (Change and Delivery) (Introduced by Executive Member (Resources))	Executive Cabinet	Thursday, 20 October 2022

Meals on Wheels

Is this report confidential?	No
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Is this decision key?	No
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Purpose of the Report

1. That Executive Cabinet consider arrangements for the provision of 'Meals on Wheels' service in Chorley.

Recommendations to Executive Cabinet

2. The Council enters into a two-year contract with provider ICare to cover the period of 01/01/2023 – 31/12/2024.
3. Authority is delegated to the Executive Member for Resources to approve eligibility criteria for the scheme to ensure it remains targeted at those most in need.

Reasons for recommendations

4. That the council continues with provision of a subsidised meals on wheels service particularly with the rising cost of living and wider demands on access to social care. The provision of the service enables individuals to remain in their own homes, reduces social isolation and can support early action and intervention.
5. That authority is delegated to the Executive Member for Resources to approve in contract price increases based on the volatility of the current market and inflationary pressures that would at points require modest increases to the councils contribution to limit impacts on service users.

Other options considered and rejected

6. Options were considered to deliver an alternative model of providing a subsidised frozen meals on wheels service, however this would not include the safe and well check requirement which is a fundamental role of this service, as meals are delivered to the customer on a weekly or bi-weekly basis, as well as those customers who use the service as they are unable to prepare a hot meal for themselves (including reheating a pre-prepared meal).

7. The council could cease delivery of the subsidised Meals on Wheels service based on the number of users, however the service caters to a vulnerable section of the community and removing the provision at this time of increasing costs and pressures on the care system would not be in the interests of the council and its service users.

Corporate priorities

8. The report relates to the following corporate priorities:

Involving residents in improving their local area and equality of access for all	A strong local economy
Clean, safe and healthy communities	An ambitious council that does more to meet the needs of residents and the local area

Background to the report

9. The subsidised Meals on Wheels service in Chorley is currently being provided by ICare and has been since 23 February 2018.
10. A soft market testing exercise was undertaken via the Chest and was advertised for two weeks from 10 September until 24 September 2019 and by the closing date only two organisations provided a response; ICare (the current provider), and one other (who demonstrated no previous experience of delivering this kind of service and did not have in place the necessary resources).
11. ICare is a long-established company formed in 1994 as a Community Meals Service, their delivery personnel are not just drivers they are also trained in care services and can be relied on to help make menu choices, keep a friendly eye on the customers well-being, and become a familiar face that regularly visits them.
12. A soft marketing exercise was undertaken in 2019 to understand the availability of providers for the service. ICare were the only provider to meet the requirements of the service. A subsequent review has been undertaken in 2022 to review the local market and once again, no new suitable suppliers have been identified.
13. A waiver of the contract procedure rules has been submitted on the basis that there are no suitable alternative suppliers responding to the previous soft market exercise and subsequent research.

Service Scope

14. The aim of the service is to support older people to remain living independently in their home for as long as they are able to and help to overcome issues related to social isolation through regular interaction as part of a wider range of council measures. It forms a key early intervention mechanism for the council, allowing them to make timely interventions and prevent longer term more complex issues. The service also supports health and wellbeing principles through ensuring that customers regularly receive a nutritious, balanced hot meal.
15. The provider of the service is to prepare meals and deliver them, hot, to residents within the borough. In addition, the provider also undertakes a basic safe and well check which includes plating up the meal, checking the wellbeing of the customer, and should they not answer the door contacting their next of kin.

Eligibility

16. The service is aimed at older customers who meet a number of eligibility criteria. To be eligible to receive the subsidy, customers must live in the borough of Chorley. They must also answer yes to at least three of the following criteria:

- Do you live alone?
- Are you aged over 65?
- Are you unable to prepare hot food for yourself?
- Do you have any medical conditions that prevent you preparing food for yourself?
- Do you have any mental health problems that prevent you preparing food for yourself?
- Do you have any physical difficulties that prevent you preparing food for yourself?

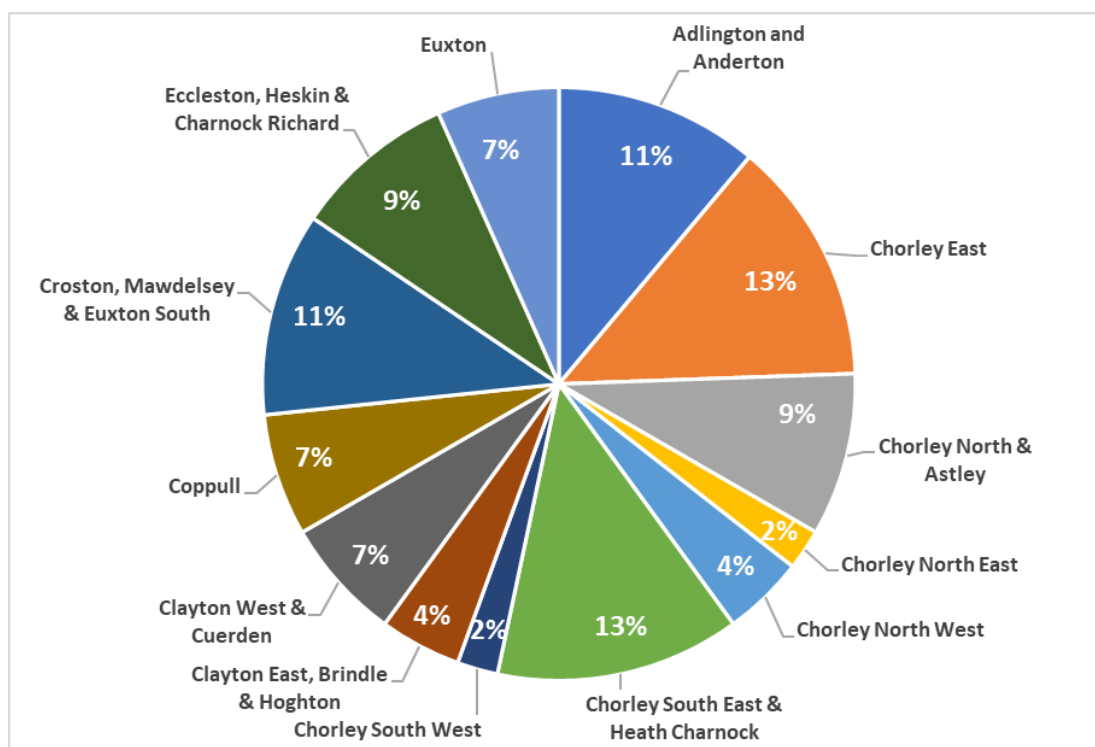
Current Service delivery analysis

17. The Meals on Wheels service is currently used by between 50 and 60 customers in Chorley each week, with approx. 70% of those regularly receiving the maximum of 5 meals.

18. In 2021/22 I Care delivered a total of 11,124 subsidised meals in Chorley, which equates to an average of 214 meals delivered per week.

19. Previously in 2020/21 the Meals on Wheels service proved to be a vital lifeline to some during the pandemic with a more than 12,000 meals provided over the 12-month period.

20. The meals are delivered to customers across the borough with the breakdown by ward as follows, (the only ward with no current deliveries is Buckshaw and Whittle ward):



21. Further analysis also shows the following:
a. 100% of customers are aged over 65,

- b. 78% live alone,
 - c. 49% are male, and 51% are female.
22. From April 2022 I Care increased the price per meal by 50p and, remaining within budget, the Council was able to shield this increase rather than pass it on to the customer. The overall cost per hot meal and dessert on the subsidised service is now £7.15. The cost to the customer is £4.00, with the subsidy paid by the Council at £3.15 inclusive of VAT (£2.63). The private cost for a hot meal and dessert from ICare is currently £8.10.
23. The annual budget is £30,000, with spend against budget in 2020/21 at £28,310.97, and then in 2021/22 at £27,104.09.
24. So far for 2022/23 the spend has been £12,338 which is in line with the same time last year.

Future Service Provision

25. The report recommends that the council continues to provide support to those in receipt of Meals and Wheels, through ICare.
26. To ensure that the service continues to provide value for money and meets the aims and objectives to support older people to remain living independently in their home for as long as they are able to and help to overcome issues related to social isolation, the council will work with the contractor to:
- Explore options on how more individuals can be supported within the scheme,
 - Monitor contract performance and ensure that as many people as possible are benefiting,
 - Agree managed price increases to limit impact on service users.

Climate change and air quality

27. The work noted in this report has an impact on the council's Carbon emissions and the wider Climate Emergency and sustainability targets of the Council. Whilst there is travel involved to deliver the service, the provider also uses recyclable materials to limit impact.

Equality and diversity

28. The service has a positive impact on equalities, particularly those protected characteristics of age and disability. The service is also open to all residents of Chorley and therefore is able to support people who may be adversely impacted by living in rural areas of the borough. Options are also provided to those who may have dietary requirements based upon religious belief ensuring that it remains accessible to individuals irrespective of beliefs.

Risk

29. The key risk to the contract is the current inflationary pressures on the economy and impact on the contractor to provide the service at an acceptable cost. The known increases in prices for food production and fuel are the main contributors to requiring price increases on the services products. The provider is making every effort to keep costs at a minimum and any future price increases will need to be agreed with the council. The impact would be to either pass on the cost to the service user or the

council and it is sought to mitigate with early contract negotiations to agree periods for price increases and delegation to the executive member to approve any changes.

Comments of the Statutory Finance Officer

30. As detailed within the report there is a £30k annual revenue budget to cover these costs. Costs are monitored on a monthly basis and reported within the whole service budget, as part of the council's quarterly budget monitoring report.

Comments of the Monitoring Officer

31. Given the relatively low value of the contract an Executive Cabinet decision would not usually be required. However, given the fact it is intended to proceed after the granting of a waiver, and this mirrors the exercise undertaken at the previous contract award, for transparency it is appropriate for Cabinet to make this decision. Members can be assured that for the reasons in the report, best value can be demonstrated based on previous performance and cost and there is no overriding need to test the market more widely in this situation.

Background documents

There are no background papers to this report.

Appendix

- Appendix 1 – Impact Assessment, Meals on Wheels

Report Author:	Email:	Telephone:	Date:
Howard Anthony, Louise Wingfield (Performance & Partnerships Team Leader, Policy Officer (Engagement))	howard.anthony@chorley.gov.uk, louise.wingfield@chorley.gov.uk	01257 51	7/10/2022