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(Please note that "Information Only" reports do not require Integrated Impact Assessments, Legal or Finance Comments as no decision is being taken)

Title of meeting: Health, Wellbeing & Social Care Decision meeting

Subject: Meals Delivery Service

Date of meeting: 5 July 2022

Report by: Mark Stables, presented by Andy Biddle

Wards affected: All

1. Requested by

Cllr Matthew Winnington, Cabinet Member, Health, Wellbeing & Social Care.

2. Purpose

To update the Cabinet Member and HWSC spokespeople with a learning review of the meal delivery service after April 2022 and the plans for a new service from June 2022.

This review will focus on what happened, why it happened, what was learned and next steps.

3. Information Requested

- An outline of the learning following unanticipated change in provider in April 2022 and the interruption of the meal delivery service.
- Details of the arrangements, from June 2022 to ensure continuity and development of the service.

4. Background and Context

The traditional 'Meals on Wheels' service in Portsmouth was provided by a national supplier until 31st March 2022. The meal cost was funded entirely by residents with the Council contributing the Value Added Tax costs, which the Council then reclaimed. With the expiry of the previous contract, the existing supplier informed the Council that the price would increase from £5.50 to £8.00 per meal. Given the cost of living challenges and the limited income of many of our residents in Portsmouth, Council officers felt that this would be unaffordable to local residents. The service was tendered, however no other provider expressed an interest in providing the service.

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The Council's Adult Social Care service explored local options and considered a service that could be provided in a way that better supports the clear direction of the ASC Strategy and the wider priorities of the Council.

Specifically

- Using the strengths of community and creating greater local resilience
- The Council acting as a facilitator in partnership with provision
- Moving beyond limited eligibility criteria to develop low level preventative supports that reduce crisis
- Supporting the local economy and protecting the local environment

As a result, there was positive discussion with 3 prospective Portsmouth based providers focussing on:

- Providing nutritious meals
- Addressing social isolation and loneliness
- Provision of welfare checks

The aims of the service included:

- Expanding nutrition/isolation support beyond the current customer group
- Allocating more time to visits to carry out 'guided conversations' and connect local residents with any other support they might need, directly or through ASC or voluntary support
- Considering innovative approaches for example creating 'virtual dining rooms' so that people do not have to eat alone
- Post pandemic confidence-building leading where possible to people accessing lunch clubs
- Where there is existing social care provision, (e.g., Domiciliary Care) for residents, the meals provision will integrate with this service
- Ingredients to be sourced locally
- Managing the price below the £2.50 increase that had been anticipated
- It would be a service provided for the people of Portsmouth, by the people of Portsmouth

This approach to service provision conformed with the aims of the ASC strategy:

- Building capacity in our communities with a range of solutions
- Commission from outcomes and output measures
- Deliver safe and good quality services through a sustainable market
- Commission responsive care, personalised to individual need
- Work collaboratively with communities and individuals allowing them to exercise choice and control in all aspects of service design and delivery

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5. What happened

One of the three providers informed us that they would require more time, a second provider became uncontactable very late on in the process. We had to agree with the remaining provider to cover the city in the short term.

When this became apparent, council officers contacted residents around meal choices, it became clear that the written customer information passed across by the previous provider had a number of gaps including days of delivery, methods of access and dietary preferences. Whilst information had been provided by the previous provider, it became apparent that, when changes in information had occurred, these may have been learned by the driver, but not updated on the written record held by the previous provider. The council team therefore asked the existing provider to work with the city provider and gather correct information.

Two days before the service started the provider had identified one driver but had no other volunteers. Council officers contracted a local care agency to provide drivers and a council officer based themselves at the provider to support with billing customers.

On the day the service started, there were a significant number of calls, linked to the provider declining to provide meals where payment had not yet been taken and meals being delivered late or not at all. Council officers were mobilised and supported with deliveries and contacting residents and their families.

Council officers continued to work over the weekend and help with deliveries but the accuracy of the information from the previous provider meant that the service was not delivering to all customers. There continued to be a high level of calls from customers.

On the 4th day, council officers became aware that the provider had been placed on an improvement plan for a range of issues including food storage and their hygiene rating was not acceptable. Officers began to verify food temperature and found these were not maintained at appropriate levels. Food was therefore returned to the provider and a sandwich meal was purchased and delivered to customers. The provider and the Council mutually agreed to end the service.

After day 4, council officers reviewed their options and agreed an immediate action plan as a combination of domiciliary care agencies to provide food as part of their service where residents had domiciliary care. Somerstown Hub agreed to take over food provision for those who were not in receipt of domiciliary care. All customers therefore received hot meals, though some received a cold meal for one weekend, with hot meals being fully restored at weekends after that point. Council officers contacted every customer and/or their family to explain the change and inform them that the council would fund temporary arrangements.

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Temporary arrangements will remain in place for some residents until a new provider incrementally takes over all postcode areas, commencing in June 2022.

6. Why it happened

The combination of trying to make the price as affordable for customers as possible and trying to move away from pre-prepared food, heated in a way that was environmentally harmful, to a local provider who could provide increased company for people who are isolated introduced complexity to arrangements.

The new provider was not prepared due to a combination of circumstances and had not appreciated the level of vulnerability of the residents and how long deliveries would take. This was not comparable to the delivery service they had developed during the pandemic.

The new provider had also originally anticipated covering 1/3 of the city and had agreed to try and cover the whole city when others were not able to provide. The impact of the inaccuracies in the written information received from the existing provider was significant, previous drivers knew routes and access methods through memory. Any change to a long-established service will usually experience initial problems, but not on this scale.

This was one of many competing pieces of work demanding attention and the emergence of multiple issues meant that other work was paused in addressing the lack of accurate information to pass across to the provider. There was also delay in getting additional capacity to work with providers, partly due to getting a post evaluated. The service became dependent on one provider, with very limited notice.

7. What was learned

In moving to the new service, council officers used the learning and worked with the new provider through

- Dedicated project support time up to and post-commencement, including contingency planning
- Familiarisation of delivery drivers with residents, processes and routes via shadowing Resilience in driver recruitment and support from voluntary drivers
- The new provider has appointed a Co-ordinator and Catering Manager
- Current food safety arrangements will be maintained through the new provider and equipment is in place
- The new service will commence incrementally enabling learning and adaptation
- Communication is in place for the new service with residents and their families

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8. Next steps

The new service will incrementally cover all areas of the city, phasing in three postcode areas from June 2022, one at the beginning and one at the end of July 2022 and one in August 2022.

9. Conclusion

The intention to turn the disadvantage of a price increase and lack of established providers into an improvement, that would provide a better interaction with our residents (many of whom are socially isolated) was the right one. The desire to be able to signpost our residents to other support that could help prevent isolation and promote well-being was also the right intention. The Council's climate priorities meant that not transporting frozen food over a distance and heating food in vans with the associated environmental impact was also the right intention.

There were clearly lessons in this process and as the Director of Adult Social Care I apologise unreservedly to our residents that our service to them was not to the standard that it should have been. I also apologise unreservedly for the disruption and concern our residents experienced.

I would also commend to elected members and residents the efforts of council officers who responded to this adversity and worked throughout evenings and weekends in addition to their regular duties to ensure people were fed and had information. I hope this paper demonstrates the lessons learned and reinforces the service that we want to enable for our Portsmouth residents with care and support needs.

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Signed by (Director)

Appendices:

Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location