

<b>Scrutiny Committee:</b>	Adult Social Care and Communities Scrutiny Committee
<b>Date:</b>	12 September 2023
<b>Title:</b>	Community Meals
<b>Chair:</b>	Cllr Lisa Spivey
<b>Presenting Officer:</b>	Amanda Jones: Director of Operations for Adult Social Care
<b>Item Type:</b>	Scrutiny
<b>Purpose of Report:</b>	A report from the Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Public Health on the procurement of the community meals service commissioned by Gloucestershire County Council.
<b>Recommendations or actions sought:</b>	To note the recommendations to cabinet members on page 7 of the report regarding the procurement of the community meals service moving forward.
<b>Background Documents:</b>	None
<b>Forthcoming Cabinet Decisions:</b>	An update will be provided at the meeting
<b>Contact Information (for information on the report)</b>	Professor Sarah Scott: Executive Director of Adult Social Care, Wellbeing and Communities Email: <a href="mailto:Sarah.L.Scott@gloucestershire.gov.uk">Sarah.L.Scott@gloucestershire.gov.uk</a>

## **1. Purpose**

This paper will provide a briefing on the community meals service commissioned by Gloucestershire County Council. It will cover the background to the service, the recent procurement process and the steps taken to find alternative providers. It covers the process for assuring ourselves that people who need support to have a hot meal during the day continue to receive this.

This paper provides an examination of the lessons learned for how the Council procures community meals and includes recommendations for cabinet members covering how we procure community meals moving forward.

## **2. Background**

The community meals contract has been part of the Adult Single Programme, (Adults Transformation Programme), since the transfer of the contract from RVS to Apetito following the tender in 2015/16.

The aim of the then, three-year contract, was to manage and reduce the referrals into the service by strengthening the access criteria and the conversations undertaken by the GCC Adults Helpdesk, to enable the service to function within the budget available. Through this work and through clear conversations at the point of Adult Social Care Assessment and Review, the numbers in receipt of community meals were steadily reducing and individuals were being re-connected to their communities.

However, the trend was reversed during the initial lockdown of the Covid19 pandemic the number of customers receiving meals increased and a number of those previously only receiving meals on weekdays requested extensions to the service to cover weekends. In addition to extending access for new and existing users the provider also supported provision of meals to the hotels used to house those previously without accommodation at the start of March 2020 lockdown.

When the paper was presented to Cabinet in September 2021 the flexible, adaptable nature of Apetito during the pandemic was one of the key reasons for seeking a like for like provision.

- The ability to increase the number of people in the service as relatives living out of county sought ways to ensure the impact of lockdowns were minimised.
- The ability to add additional calls to individuals where their weekend provision had previously been met by family members or mid-week service met by day care.
- The benefits of being able to call on this contract to provide meals to those displaced by the pandemic, who became the responsibility of the Local Authority because of need to manage risk of infection.

All of which outlined the benefits of working with a single provider with a consistent offer across the entire county but a flexible and easily adaptable approach. Commissioners also considered the longer-term aim of building on the community activities seen during Covid to develop localised approaches to meal provision. The contract was therefore proposed for three years, plus one, plus one so commissioners could work with community organisations and map local options.

The cabinet approved the community meals subsidy would be when individuals required additional support, for a fixed 6-week period, whilst other alternative options were explored and/or whilst waiting for an Adult Social Care assessment. At the time of going out to tender the annual budget for the service was £162,115.

This decision has been honoured in the new arrangements since Apetito Limited departed Gloucestershire. The publication of the tender was delayed for various reasons, access to support services, Legal, Procurement, Strategic Finance was limited due to remote working, sickness absence and periods of national lockdown. In addition to this planning for ASC to review the current service recipients through Care Act Assessments. As well as building in a training programme for support staff, developing policy documents to explain the new process were being developed as part of the tender package. Under normal circumstances much of this work would have been undertaken in tandem with the Governance process but much of the commissioning resource normally used for this work were redeployed during 2021 and 2021.

When the contract went out to tender in late 2022, the economic position for the country had changed considerably and the specific tensions in relation to fuel and food costs had had a negative impact on these types of provision then available. The tender closed at the start of December 2022 with no bids.

### **3. Actions taken post failed procurement**

The immediate priority after the failed procurement was to secure a service for vulnerable people and prevent any sudden cessation of support. Teams stepped up and put in significant amounts of work to identify people using the service, review their needs, and work with families, and the private, independent and voluntary sector to secure appropriate ongoing support. The situation was undesirable, but the shared work of staff, focused on the needs of individuals was impressive.

We also focused on a lessons learned process, contacting all those on the Yorkshire Purchasing Organisations, (YPO), national framework who had expressed an interest in the contract, including the existing provider, Apetito, in order to understand why they had not bid and how we could improve on the offer in the short and medium term.

Feedback from meals providers was that a region wide/countywide model was no longer financially viable for the following reasons:

- Diesel vehicles were, (or will), attract higher costs in relation to fuel and taxes.
- Diesel fleets would need to be replaced within the next five to ten years.
- The costs of electric vehicles would not be easily recouped in the current funding model.
- The delivery of heated, plated meals attracts greater penalties in relation to waste food, complaints and non-payment.

Most providers were exploring the option to move to frozen meals delivered on a weekly or fortnightly basis.

#### 4. New model of service delivery

With no alternative provision in place Gloucestershire County Council put out a request to the Voluntary and Community Sector. Requesting that those agencies who were able to assist contact commissioners to discuss what they could offer. We received three applications for the Stroud district, one for the Forest of Dean, one for Cirencester and one for the rest of the county.

The Officer decision paper to support working with agencies identified the following:

*It was an unacceptable risk that those currently in receipt of this service would be left without the support and oversight provided by this service should a decision be taken to stop the community meals provision.*

*The timescales involved were too short for us to review all individuals and supply alternatives to delivered meals.*

*The voluntary sector was approached by the council to support ongoing meal provision following which the above-mentioned organisations responded to advise that they could provide the required support services on a short-term basis.*

*Only the suppliers identified above are capable of providing the required services on a short-term basis, as evidenced by:*

*(a) a failed competitive procurement process under which a tender was advertised by the Yorkshire Purchasing Organisation (“YPO”) framework, under “DPS 000985 (UK New Food Deal) Lot 3 - Community Meals”, which went live on 16th November 2022, and which closed on 6th of December with no bids received; and*

*(b) subsequent market intelligence which indicates that no other suppliers would be willing to provide the short-term*

The total estimated aggregate cost of the proposed six contracts is no more than £332,312.00. The value of each of the proposed contracts is as follows:

1. £72,072 – contract with Dean Forest Kitchen
2. £21,820 – contract with GL11 Community Hub
3. £38,220 – contract with The Long Table / Great Plate
4. £87,360 – contract with Age UK Wiltshire
5. £109,200 – contract with HCK Grocery Ltd, trading as Harry's Country Kitchen
6. £3,640 – contract with Bunters Café

These totals include grant funding of £33,000 for initial start-up costs for the four VCS agencies. The resulting provision meant that there was no consistent offer across the county. Each of the services provided a different geographical offer. There were five areas where hot plated meals were delivered, Forest of Dean, three areas of Stroud, (Wotton, GL11 and Stroud Town), Cirencester the majority offer being for frozen or pre-prepared meals reheated as part of a home care visit.

Whilst commissioners were seeking alternative provision the ASC Locality teams were contacting people to identify need, discuss alternatives and their current position. During these conversations practitioners found that a number of families had already made

alternative arrangements as a result of receiving the end of service letters. Some had opted to stay with Apetito and had taken their frozen meals offer, some had found local meals clubs, and some had arranged for home deliveries other meals suppliers advertised on Your Circle and other information sites.

This meant that when the new service started in April 2023 there were less than 80 people still in receipt of a subsidised service. Since April the number in receipt of the service has fallen, at the start of September there are 7 recipients of subsidised community meals.

## 5. Review of new model of service delivery

At the time of starting the alternative provision there were less than 80 recipients of the service. Each of the providers offered a different delivery model. This was a consequence of the need to respond to the situation at speed but enabled us to test a variety of models and look at the impact they had on people.

Dean Forest Kitchen	GL11	Bunters Sandwiches	Long Table	Age UK Wiltshire	Harrys Country Kitchen
Hot plated 7 days per week	Hot plated Mon-Fri	Hot plated Mon-Sat	Hot plated Mon-Fri	Hot plates 7 days per week	Frozen Option
Menu set initially across 2 weeks	Chilled / Frozen option Sat/Sun	Saturday deliver Chilled plate for Sun	Chilled / Frozen option Sat/Sun	Potential issue Fairford / Tetbury	Delivered 1-2 per week
	Microwave required for w/e	Unable to deliver Sunday and BH's	Microwave required for w/e		Microwave Required
	Shutdown Easter / week summer		Closed Christmas day		Freezer Required

Providers were in regular contact with commissioners outlining issues and concerns as they arose. Changes and adaptations to service provision was agreed during these meetings including pricing adjustments as the falling numbers made ongoing delivery less viable. This was particularly relevant in the more rural areas of the county.

The bullet points below outline the changing delivery over the last five months.

- Age UK Wiltshire offered a 'traditional' meals delivery service in Cirencester and the surrounding area. Overall, the service covered little of the Cotswold district area. This provider operated a banded pricing model based on the distance between Cirencester and the meal recipient's home. The costs to the individual was £5, whilst the cost to the Local Authority was between £9 - £22 per meal per person. Few individuals opted to continue with this service once the subsidy ended following assessment, whether this was due to the cost of the service has not been identified. However, as an alternative many chose to look at frozen meals or supermarket

meals. There are however two recipients of Apetito meals service who have stayed with this provider.

- Dean Forest Kitchen offered a traditional model, delivering hot plated meals to the Forest of Dean. At the time of starting the service these meals cost £9.50 each and again the maximum charge to the individual was £5. This service was originally a seven-day service but moved to supplying hot meals in the week with chilled meals delivered on the Friday to cover the weekend. The main issue reported was the lack of volunteers willing to cover the weekend deliveries. Volunteers working during the week opting to spend time with families at weekends. This service continues but they have reviewed both their offer and the geographical spread for delivery.
- GL11 provided access to meals hot plated meals Monday to Friday and chilled meals for family or friends to heat over the weekend, for those in the GL11 postcode.
- Gloucestershire Grace Network introduced a new service which they named Eat & Greet, this service employs 'Greeters' each Greeter is assigned a maximum of five meal recipients. The Greeter attend the individual's home to cook and serve the meal to them, interacting with the person and providing a consistent ongoing contact for the individual(s) concerned. This service costs £16.39 per meal per person. The Grace Network covered the wider Stroud District and have been in discussion with GL11 discussing options to work collaboratively to cover the Stroud District. This service is still in operation and the agency would like to develop this model further.
- Harry's Country Kitchen provided a frozen meals service, covering all areas of the county. This provider was allocated all provision that wasn't covered by any of the other agencies. The service delivers a week's worth of meals at an average cost of £6.25 for a two-course meal. At the start of April there were only six GCC funded clients transferred to this service. It is not clear if they also gained work from individuals choosing to arrange their own frozen meal options before the contract transfer date.
- Bunter's Sandwich Bar & Café covered the Wotton area and provided meals five days per week and chilled meals at the weekend. Bunter's had one GCC funded client transferred because of the end of Apetito contract.

During the five months between April and September the provision delivered has changed, new referrals into the service has been minimal and all providers are struggling to attract private clients, as the range of options for self-funders (such as supermarket delivery etc) is large and more cost effective.

At the same time the number in receipt of the Local Authority subsidy has reduced as the ASC teams continue to review those on the service and talk through options. There are now only 7 people in receipt of the subsidised service.

Due to the low number using the meals services the provider offer has also changed.

- Age UK Wiltshire have now left the county, though they continue to deliver to two of the residents they agree to provision for in Cirencester they are delivering these from their Wilshire base. This means they no longer take on new referrals or private clients.

- Dean Forest Kitchen have moved to a five-day service as they are unable to attract volunteers as the weekend. However, this service continues and is open to new referrals.
- GL11 have ceased their service as of the end of August 2023 due to lack of financial viability due to low referral rate and low take up from private provision.
- Harry's Country Kitchen though still delivering have not seen the level of take up expected.
- Bunter's Sandwich Bar and Café have had one customer, this person is no longer receiving a subsidised service. Bunter's remain a vendor for GCC.
- The Grace Network Eat and Greet have had some level of success with the people in receipt of this service, (and their families), are keen to keep their 'Greeter'. However, the agency only works in the Stroud area of the county.

## **6. Recommendations**

Cabinet members have been clear about the need for an approach to ensure everyone who needs support to eat a hot meal receives the appropriate support. Officers are recommending that this offer includes domiciliary care support to heat and eat a meal in your own home as necessary. This support could be free for up to six weeks whilst an assessment of need is arranged and carried out.

Alongside this we could support local charities to continue to explore community support for food and hot meals. This could be done via a small grants programme. The overall aim of working with these agencies in the short to medium term is to develop sustainable locality-based solutions going forward.