

## 2025/26 Budget Equality Impact Assessment

### 1. The Project

<b>Directorate:</b>	Adults and Housing
<b>Theme or area:</b>	Hot Meals Service
<b>Lead Officer:</b>	Gerald Hunt
<b>Date:</b>	28 November 2024

Budget Reference	Budget Proposal	2025/26 Budget reduction (£)	2026/27 Budget reduction (£)	2027/28 Budget reduction (£)
ASH22	Review delivery models options of Hot Meals Service	£30,000		

#### Description of the project:

The Community Meals Service has been providing hot meals to vulnerable North Somerset residents for over 20 years.

Meals are provided 7 days a week, except Christmas Day and New Years Day, and are delivered between 11.30 and 2pm. Whilst the meal is delivered, and plated up as required, the drivers provide a welfare check on the person, alerting business support to any immediate concerns, e.g. if a person does not answer the door, appears unwell or has fallen.

The meals, which are prepared and frozen by Apetito, are currently reheated from 2 kitchens, one based @ Worle, and the other based in Castlewood. Castlewood is due to close in 2025 and from September 2025 community meals will no longer have access to this kitchen.

There are currently 4 permanent cooks who are responsible for the regeneration of the hot meals, and the preparation of a cold tea meal provision. There is one cook based at each kitchen, 7 days a week.

Both sites house and charge the electric vehicles which are used for the meal deliveries as well as the home to school transport service. The delivery of the community meals transferred to the Integrated Transport Unit / Place Directorate in April 2023 prior to this the community meal delivery drivers were part of the Adult Social Services Directorate.

The Community Meals service is also supported by Agilisys Business Support, who are responsible for overseeing referrals into the service, responding to queries from customers and their representatives, ordering of food / sundries and data collection. This current contract is due to end in September 2025.

At the weekends and bank holidays, the service is supported by CareLink, who provide support to the Front Line Delivery Operators (FLDO's) / drivers, particularly if people do not appear to be at home to receive their meals, or if meals are cancelled and ensuring the cooks receive these updates. The CareLink contract is due to end in September 2025.

In addition to the provision of a regular hot meal, the community meals service also provides a welfare check to reassure families that their family member is safe and well, and where required will facilitate a health check either by the GP or hospital in a medical emergency. During periods of the year where there is extreme weather, the community meals service will ensure that the environment is suitable for that individual, ensure they have access to appropriate drinks, report any issues with heating etc.

Community meals is also currently supporting people following discharge from hospital to ensure they receive a regular hot meal to support recovery and rehabilitation following their hospital stay and to reduce / prevent rehospitalisation.

## **Summary of changes:**

The Community Meals Service is currently overspending by circa £175,000, with the bulk of this because of the integrated transport unit recharge. The decision was made in April 2023 to transfer the drivers to the Integrated Transport Unit / Place Directorate to improve efficiencies and to deliver £100,000 savings, which have not been achieved.

In addition, Castlewood offices are due to close in 2025, and the meals currently cooked from these kitchens will not be possible from September 2025.

Therefore, it is necessary to review the current delivery model for community meals to achieve efficiencies, improve quality of meals, and to enable ongoing welfare checks and prevent or delay people from needing longer term social care intervention.

The immediate challenge will be to identify the budgetary saving of £30k in the context of sourcing new kitchen facilities. In achieving the immediate goal, we will explore future options for the service which are to be identified. These will include possible closure of the service, a partial service based on urban areas that would require less transport costs and options for the service to continue outside the integrated transport unit, utilising volunteers and community transport services.

The following measures have already put into place: changing provider of food items and sundries to improve budget spend, variety and value for money; improved oversight of Apertito contract including reducing the amount of surplus stock that is held in each kitchen, and reducing waste; improved debt management and oversight of invoices to service users; improved oversight of charges from @ Worle.

Improved management oversight of working hours, including overtime and cover during periods of absence, (sickness and holiday), to improve the staff budget.

**Are any of the proposals within this theme a continuation of a previous medium-term financial plan saving?**

**No**

**If yes, please insert reference number and year of assessment?**

<b>Budget Proposal</b>	<b>Year of assessment</b>	<b>Budget Reference</b>

**If yes, please describe what steps you have taken to review the equality impacts from previous years?**

## 2. Customer equality impact summary

**Will the changes proposed in this project have a disproportionate impact (or bias) for any of these groups?**

Insert X into one box per row, for impact level and type.

H = High, M = Medium, L = Low, N = None

+ = Positive, - = Negative

Protected or significant group	Impact Level				Impact type	
	H	M	L	N	+	-
Disabled people (Including the consideration of neurodiversity)			X		X	
People from different ethnic groups				X		
Men or women (including those who are pregnant or on maternity leave)				X		
People who are LGBTQ+				X		
People on a low income			X		X	
People in particular age groups			X		X	
People in particular faith groups			X		X	
People who are married or in a civil partnership				X		
People who are undergoing gender reassignment				X		
Other significant groups, for example: Armed Forces Community, care experienced young people, carers, parents. Please specify: <b>Carers</b>			X		X	

## 3. Explanation of customer impact

In the context of sourcing alternative kitchen facilities to achieve the budget savings, this should not have a negative impact on customers, nor have a disproportionate impact on anyone in the above listed groups, as the provision of community meals will continue.

Should the location of an alternate kitchen potentially look to affect some people, depending on where they live, a further equality impact assessment will be undertaken.

The decision around impact can be supported with the following:

From our most recent data we know that 66% of meal recipients are female, and 34% are male.

We know that 5% of meal recipients are in the 18-64 age group, 8.7% are between 65 -74 years, 26.6% are 75-84 years and 58.5% are over 85.

We have recently completed a survey with people receiving community meals, which showed that 80% of people were over the age of 70, who were part of the hospital discharge 6 weeks free meals project.

We know from our census data that 24% of the population in North Somerset is over the age of 65, with 3.5% being over the age of 85. The census also confirmed that almost 50% of the total population in North Somerset are over the age of 50.

The community meals service also provides meals to meet a variety of dietary needs, including gluten free, reduced sugar, coeliac, and soft and pureed meals for those who have difficulty in swallowing. The service is also able to support meals which are specific to some one's faith or culture.

The current cost of a hot meal is £7:10 and £4:15 for a cold tea. There is limited scope to adjust the cost of meals, mainly impart due to increasing cost of living and ensuring meals remains affordable.

#### **Please describe how you will communicate these changes to those impacted.**

Recent survey was sent out to all those in receipt of community meals for feedback on the current service provision and to gain information to inform changes to the current service.

Depending on the decisions made in respect of the future of this service, this will influence how these changes will be communicated, for example if the service was to be decommissioned a period of consultation would be required, to identify alternative provision for those impacted, and also staff members currently employed within the service. This would require a separate equality impact assessment.

## **4. Staff equality impact summary**

**Are there any staffing implications for this proposal? No - this current decision has no staffing implications**

### **Explanation of staff impact**

However, the following staff groups could be impacted by the changes to the community meals service should the ongoing review lead to a decision to close the service in the future, , but this is not the case at present.

Community Meals Team Manager – fixed term post

Cooks (Adult Social Care)- permanent posts, no vacancies;

Front line delivery officers / drivers (Place)- permanent posts; a percentage of these also support with home to school transport

Agilisys / Carelink / Liberata – all provide support services to the community meals service

## 5. Cumulative equality impacts

### Is this project linked to or likely to have an impact on any other service areas?

For example are you moving the location of a service that may also be impacted upon by a change to public transport provision.

The community meals provision is intrinsically linked to the integrated transport unit who are responsible for the delivery of the meals to residents across North Somerset and are based at both @ Worle and Castlewood.

Carelink provide support to cooks and drivers at the weekend and provide daily reports at weekends which are then used to update systems on a Monday, for example people who have cancelled meals, or who may have gone into hospital. Carelink also contact families if individuals are not in to receive meals, or if they appear unwell and require a health follow up. This contract ends in September 2025.

**Please see the EIA for ASH17.**

Agilisys provide business support to the community meals service, they take referrals, check contact details, meal requirements, meal cancellations; organise the driver routes. This contract ends in September 2025

Liberata invoice individuals for their meals and follow up outstanding debts.

## 6. Action Plan

### Are there any further actions that should be taken because of this Equality Impact Assessment?

Issue Identified	Planned Action	Lead Officer	Time for review
Identification of alternative kitchen facilities	Options appraisal being undertaken	Teresa Stanley / Christine Ratcliffe	Spring 2025
Options identified for future service delivery	Complete service review	Teresa Stanley / Christine Ratcliffe	May 2025

