

SUBJECT: Monmouthshire's Meals on Wheels Service

MEETING: People Scrutiny Committee

DATE: 30th September 2025

DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: All

1. PURPOSE:

To present a first stage review of the Monmouthshire Meals Service.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

For committee members to scrutinise the first stage review of the Monmouthshire Meals service and provide feedback and comment on its recommended outcome:

-To continue to deliver high quality meals to Monmouthshire residents and proceed with service development aimed at improving the experience of service users and increasing service sustainability and value for money.

3. KEY ISSUES:

3.1 In June 2025 the service embarked on a first phase review of the Community Meals service to determine value for money and to explore whether there were opportunities to improve and modernise the service, increase its sustainability and reduce the net cost of the service to the Council.

3.2 The Community Meals Service has provided a subsidised service to vulnerable adults in Monmouthshire County Council over many years. The service provides good quality nutritional meals and daily contact with service users during weekdays and weekends for people aged 18+. Eligibility for the service is determined by a social care assessment under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

3.3 There is no legislative requirement to deliver a Community Meals Service. There has been a national decline in local authorities offering similar services with only 29% of UK authorities providing Meals on Wheels.

3.4 As of June 2025, there were 226 active service users receiving meals. The total number of hot meals and packed lunch meals delivered in 2024/25 was 62,444 and is projected to be 69,547 in 2025. The unit cost of a meal is £11.41 with a £6.50

charge to the service user. This means that the council is subsidising the cost of each meal by £4.91. This year, the subsidy is projected to create a budgetary pressure of £341,147.

3.5 At the time of the review, 101 people (44%) were receiving community meals alongside of domiciliary care; 57 people (25%) were receiving community meals as well as enabling equipment (such as grab rails / mobility aids) including careline; 71 (31%) of service users were receiving community meals only. 3 service users (1%) were receiving the meals service alongside of a Direct Payment. 85% of the people receiving meals were over the age of 65. In line with the aging demographic within the county, it is anticipated that demand will increase.

3.6 The first phase review identified that the service has wide benefits. The delivery service provides social contact for vulnerable and isolated service users, who often live alone. The meals give good nutrition for people who could potentially be at risk of having a poor and unbalanced diets. [Good diet and hydration is critical for people living with health conditions such as frailty]. The service reduces pressure on carers and ultimately supports people to retain their independence and remain in their own homes and communities.

3.7 The review examined the critical components of the current model such as food supply, methods of conveying the hot food, vehicles used and the workforce and considered potential opportunities to do things differently. The option of ceasing the service was looked at but discounted because of the wide benefits the service provides. An option of maintaining the service as is, but increasing the price was also discounted on the basis that the service would potentially become prohibitive for people and drive costs elsewhere, for example by increasing the need for domiciliary care.

3.8 The report concluded that the best option for the people would be for us to continue with the service and proceed with a second stage review to take forward opportunities for increased efficiencies and service improvements. Given the likelihood of increasing demand for the service, ensuring sustainability, value for money and a reduction of the subsidy will be a critical factor in the second stage. The focus of the review will be to improve efficiencies and reduce cost rather than increasing charges, but some adjustments in charging policy cannot be ruled out at this stage.

3.9 The report presents some immediate steps that can be taken as well as areas which will require a longer-term approach to achieving improvements and efficiencies. These include opportunities for increased digitalisation; commencing a procurement exercise; optimisation of routes; workforce planning and replacement of the vehicles. The full list is set out in section 15 of the main report. The second

phase of the review will be monitored through the Social Care directorate leadership. Any decisions in terms of resourcing or charging will be taken into Cabinet.

4. EQUALITY AND FUTURE GENERATIONS EVALUATION (INCLUDES SOCIAL JUSTICE, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING):

4.1 The Community Meals service provides a beneficial service to older people and people living with disability or ill-health. Many of the service users are isolated and are at risk of declining health or falls without the good nutrition and hydration that the service provides. The service reduces pressure on family members and carers and provides peace of mind that loved ones are eating and having some social contact during the day.

4.2 The review acknowledges that the council subsidises the service but highlights that any short-term saving would potentially drive costs elsewhere as well as reducing opportunities for people to remain within their own homes and communities. The review recommends that the service should seek to make improvements and efficiencies in order to reduce the subsidy rather than increase the charge or cease the service. This ensures that the service remains affordable to people living on lower incomes.

4.3 The review highlights a range of opportunities to improve the service, with the potential for additional positive impacts in relation to the environment, Welsh language and local economy.

5. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

Option 1 – To continue with the service as it currently operates with the same subsidy levels (Status Quo). **Not recommended**

Benefits	Risks
• Continuation of service will provide an easy accessible service for adults with an assessed care need • Providing healthy and balanced meals is a core strength • Providing support beyond the meal itself such as welfare and well-being checks • Reducing demand on more intensive support	• Insufficient funding and investment may hinder the ability to meet rising demand. • Rising demand will strain existing resources, vehicles and equipment, affecting service quality. • Increased demands on staff may impact their morale and well-being if adequate investment is not provided.

Option 2 – To continue with the service as it currently operates with increased service user charges thus reducing the subsidy per meal from April 2026. **Not Recommended**

Benefits	Risks
- Continuation of service will provide an easy accessible service for adults with an assessed care need - Providing healthy and balanced meals is a core strength - Providing support beyond the meal itself such as welfare and well-being checks - Reducing demand on more intensive support	- Possibility some service users may be unable to afford increased charges, especially those accessing other Council services. - Possible impact on service users health and wellbeing if they exit from the service. - Risk to community meals workforce if service is reduced due to falling demand.

Option 3 RECOMMENDED – To implement the recommended changes identified in Section 14 below whilst carrying out further work to assess the current operating costs, potential funding opportunities to ensure value for money and sustainability for the service.

Benefits	Risks
- Continuation of service will provide an easy accessible service for adults with an assessed care need. - Providing healthy and balanced meals is a core strength - Providing support beyond the meal itself such as welfare and well-being checks - Provides the project with sufficient time to implement necessary improvements without disrupting service delivery. - Allows time to collaborate with internal and external partners to maximise technology integration and external funding opportunities and investment.	- Failure to implement the agreed recommendations could adversely affect service delivery and performance in the long term. - Potential funding opportunities and investments may not be realised within designated timeframes.

6. EVALUATION CRITERIA

An implementation timetable will be developed for the second phase of the review with identified milestones. Implementation will be monitored through the Directorate leadership structure. The service will continue to monitor performance data on:

- Numbers of people receiving meals
- Numbers of meals provided
- Overall cost to the Council and budgetary pressure

- Feedback from the workforce and referrers
- Feedback from service users.

7. REASONS:

The council currently subsidises the Community Meals service creating a budgetary pressure. A review was undertaken to establish how to address this including whether the service should cease, or whether an increased charge should be levied. The review concluded that the Community Meals service is beneficial to vulnerable people and represents an important preventative measure in supporting people's health and wellbeing. The review identified a range of areas where service changes could be applied aimed at increasing efficiencies and improving the service user experience.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

8.1 The total number of hot meals and packed lunch meals delivered in 2024/25 was 62,444 and is projected to be 69,547 in 2025 (across 226 service users). The unit cost of a meal is £11.41 with a £6.50 charge to the service user. The council is subsidising the cost of each meal by £4.91 and the overall budgetary pressure for this year is projected at £341,147.

8.2 On the other hand, at the time of the report, 71 people were receiving community meals only, with no other formal care and support. If the community meal was replaced by a 30-minute domiciliary care call this would cost £224K more than the subsidy currently provided for the meal. [This is a rough illustration only, as it is unlikely that all residents within this cohort would be immediately eligible for domiciliary care.]

8.3 The overall aim is to reduce the subsidy made by the council through service improvements and efficiencies.

8.4 The second stage of the review would be undertaken within existing resources.

9. CONSULTEES:

- Cabinet Member for Social Care, Safeguarding and Accessible Health Services.
- Directorate Management Team (Social Care)
- Head of Decarbonisation, Transport and Support Services

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

None

11. AUTHOR:

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Is my report exempt?

In some instances it may be necessary to submit a report to a committee but withhold the whole report, or part of that report, due to the sensitive nature of information contained within it.

There are specific circumstances in which a report may be considered exempt which are set in legislation. When writing your report bear in mind the following circumstances to consider whether your report should be exempt;

Local Government Act, Schedule 12A, Part 4;

12. Information relating to a particular individual
13. Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual
14. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)
15. Information relating to any consultation or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holders under, the authority.
16. Information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings
17. Information which reveals that the authority proposes –
 - a. To give under any enactment a notice under or by virtue of which requirements are imposed on a person; or
 - b. To make an order or direction under any enactment
18. Information relating to any action taken or to be taken in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime.

If you are unsure if the report should be exempt or not you should contact Democratic Services or the Monitoring Officer for further advice and guidance. The principal to bear in mind however is that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

If your report is to be exempt you should let Democratic Services know as soon as possible if you have not already done so when adding the item to the forward plan of the relevant committee.

When submitting your report to Democratic Services for publication with the agenda you must also include an exemption certificate which give details as to why the report is exempt and not for publication. This certificate will be publicly available with the agenda in place of the report so the reasoning for the exemption should be made clear on this form. The exemption certificate is available overleaf.

Further information on definitions and exemptions is available within the Local Government Act at the following link; <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1972/70/schedule/12A>

SCHEDULE 12A LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 EXEMPTION FROM DISCLOSURE OF DOCUMENTS

Meeting and Date of Meeting: Insert date and meeting

Report: Insert report title

Author: Insert author

I have considered grounds for exemption of information contained in the background paper for the report referred to above and make the following recommendation to the Proper Officer:-

Exemptions applying to the report:

[Enter the section and reason of the exemption, as defined by the Local Government Act set out above e.g – This report will be exempt under paragraph 12 of Schedule 12A – Information relating to a particular individual]

Factors in favour of disclosure:

Openness & transparency in matters concerned with the public

Prejudice which would result if the information were disclosed:

[Give a brief indication of what information would be disclosed and the impact of its disclosure]

My view on the public interest test is as follows:

Factors in favour of disclosure are outweighed by those against.

Recommended decision on exemption from disclosure:

Maintain exemption from publication in relation to report

Date: Insert date

Signed: Signed by report author

Post: Insert post

I accept/I do not accept the recommendation made above

Signed: [Signed by Chief Officer / Head of Service / Chief Executive]

Date: Insert Date