

## MEALS ON WHEELS

### 1 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Members are aware that Essex County Council have been undertaking a review of the meals service across the County. The attached letter and report has now been received.
- 1.2 The meals service in Rochford is currently operated through four voluntary meals organisations. They are Rayleigh (WRVS), Hockley, Rochford and Great Wakering. The meals are supplied by Leisure Connection (formerly Circa Leisure) and A & M Catering in Southend.

### 2 DISCUSSION

- 2.1 Although this Authority has no direct involvement in the Meals on Wheels service, in previous debates the Council has been concerned with: -

- Retention of a fresh cooked meal
- The daily contact from the meals delivery
- The protection of the voluntary organisations currently operating within the District.

- 2.2 Looking at the main elements of the report: -

#### Cooked Chill as the Best Option

Essex County Council believes that, based on the experience of other Authorities, cook chill will be the best option for customers as it would enable choice of meals and be able to cope with special diets.

#### Delivery

Essex County Council will be looking for: -

- Provision through a fully specified contract
- A - 7 day x 52 week service
- Fully employed
- Livered vehicles
- Uniformed service
- Possibilities of larger areas than single Districts.

- 2.3 All this points to the Local Voluntary Sector being unable to respond to this new structure.

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**3 RECOMMENDATION**

**3.1 It is proposed that the Committee RESOLVES**

- (1) That should Essex County Council invite a representative from this Council to a Member level visit to Nottinghamshire to agree the nomination and to agree that it will count as approved duty.
- (2) That Officers call a meeting of the existing Meals on Wheels organisers to ensure they are informed of the proposals and to obtain any comments that they wish to submit to the Authority or to Essex County Council.
- (3) To determine any comments to be submitted by this Council to Essex County Council. (HFS)



D Deeks

Head of Financial Services

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For further information please contact D Deeks on:-

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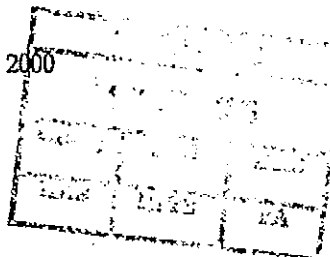
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**Essex County Council**  
**Social Services**

Your ref  
Our ref  
Date

RJ/SG/047  
16<sup>TH</sup> November 2000



Michael Leachster  
DAVID COOPER MA BSc Dip Ed  
Director of Social Services

Dear Mr. Crafts,

**re: Best Value Review of the Meals on Wheels Service**

On the 15<sup>th</sup> November 2000 the Health and Social Services Select Committee concluded their discussions concerning the future of the Meals on Wheels Service.

Their recommendations have now been forwarded to Councillor Mrs. Elizabeth Dines for her full consideration in preparation for her report to the Executive Board on the 13<sup>th</sup> December 2000.

As agreed I attach for your information a copy of the recommendations and Councillor Mrs. Pascoe's covering letter.

Yours sincerely,

Rosemary Jakes  
Service Manager, Project Sponsor

Mr. R. Crafts  
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Your ref  
Our ref  
Date

PP/JG  
15 November 2000



Essex County Council  
Social Services

Michael Leadbetter  
Director of Social Services

Cllr Mrs Dines  
Health and Social Services Cabinet Member

Dear Elizabeth,

**Best Value Review of the Meals on Wheels Service**  
**Select Committee Recommendations**

The Best Value Review of the Meals on Wheels service has been the subject of discussion at three Health and Social Services Select Committee meetings. The attached report details the background to these discussions and indicates those individuals from whom Members have received witness.

Having now considered all the evidence presented, the Health and Social Services Select Committee would request that you give the recommendations set out in Section D your full consideration in the preparation of your report to the Executive Board on 13 December 2000. The Health and Social Services Select Committee would also request that a copy of your report is sent to them as soon as it becomes available via Jane Gardner, Select Committee Co-ordinator, who is based in Room A305a of County Hall.

Yours sincerely,

**Cllr Mrs Pascoe**  
**Chair of the Health and Social Services Select Committee**

**Cc: Members of the Select Committee**  
**Michael Leadbetter, Director of Essex Social Services**  
**Claire Feehily, Head of Finance and Information Systems**  
**Jane Gardner, Select Committee Co-ordinator**  
**Rose Jakes, Project Sponsor**

**Select Committee** : **Health and Social Services**  
**Subject** : **Meals on Wheels Best Value Review**

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**A. Purpose**

To report to Members of the Health and Social Services Select Committee the proposed recommendations to be presented to the Health and Social Services Cabinet Member, Cllr Mrs Dines.

**B. Background**

The Best Value Review of the Meals on Wheels service has been the topic of discussion at three Health and Social Services Select Committee meetings. At these meetings, Members have received witness from: -

- The Project Sponsor;
- The Project Manager;
- The Editor of the Evening Echo;
- District and Borough Council Officers.

Further, some Members of the Health and Social Services Select Committee have visited in Nottinghamshire Social Services to speak with staff directly about how they provide their meals on wheels service using a social kitchen and to view how these meals are then distributed to the service user.

At the Health and Social Services Select Committee on Wednesday 1 November 2000, a Panel was appointed to consider:

- all reports that had been presented;
- all witness evidence received;
- the outcome of the Member visit to Nottinghamshire Social Services.

### C. The Nottinghamshire Meals on Wheels Service

To set a context for the proposed recommendations made in Section D. of this report, the following summaries the findings of the visit by Members of the Health and Social Services Select Committee to the Nottinghamshire Social Services Meals on Wheels Service.

#### Provision

The meals provided by Nottinghamshire Social Services are customer driven. Nottinghamshire Social Services undertake regular customer satisfaction and preference surveys, the outcome of which has been a demonstrated preference for cook-chill.

Nottinghamshire Social Services pay a great deal of attention to the quality of the ingredients that they use and food preparation; for example, meat and fish portions are all prepared on site. All food is prepared with high quality ingredients with no food additives or preservatives, which can only be achieved in a chill-cook presentation. All meals are low salt (to taste) with most dietary and ethnic needs being met. Vegetables are also provided and prepared to meet the customer's preferences.

The social kitchen has high hygiene and Health & Safety criteria. The working environment is temperature controlled to meet the various stages of food preparation. The working atmosphere is ergonomically designed to streamline the operation, goods coming in one part of the building and progressing on a stage-by-stage process until the finished product is dispatched out the other end of the building. In all instances, the product process limits the shaking-up and prefers trays and trolleys to ease movement from one process to the other and eventually to the delivery process where the same guidelines are used. Throughout this process quality is the over-riding concern.

Nottinghamshire Social Services provide a seven-day week service, with all meals being prepared on site Monday to Friday. The system operates on a 5-day life system for chill-cook provision. They also have a frozen meal back up option should a system fault happen.

The trolleys also have to be robust to withstand a full cleaning process on their return to the provision centre from the distributors.

All food batches are coded before despatch to provide good tracking data.

In addition to the provision of individual meals within the community, Nottinghamshire Social Services also provide a service for Day Centres with larger containers that can be dished up at the centre with portions to meet the needs and requirements of the customer.

### **Distribution**

The distribution centres receive the goods in trays and racks as dispatched by the social kitchen. These racks and then wheeled straight into the oven for heating to the required temperature.

When the heating process is complete, the portions are then placed in containers, which have good heat retention properties. They have experimented with various substances and sizes, together with cleaning methods and now feel that the containers currently used provide an ideal solution in the distribution process.

The distribution centre also has the ability to prepare salads, rolls etc, which can be prepared with fresh produce to meet the customers requirements.

The distribution centre also has a back up system to avoid delivery problems from the social kitchen.

There is the ability to order an additional meal should the customer request one for a visitor.

The centre has the ability to provide three meals a day if required and also provides trays of food for Day Centres.

### **Client Satisfaction**

This is taken from surveys of customers. As a consequence of feedback received, variations to the menu are achievable. In Nottinghamshire they have a good satisfaction rate, which Essex must strive to mirror.

#### D. Recommendations

What follows are the considerations of the Health and Social Services Select Committee Meals on Wheels Panel. If agreed by Members of the Health & Social Services Select Committee, these will be presented as recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Health & Social Services.

##### Short Term

1. **Existing contracts** should continue to operate for one year so that the Social Services Directorate can continue to work in partnership with District and Borough Councils in the development of the meals on wheels service to meet the recommendations contained within this report.
2. The **standard of provision** in Nottinghamshire, with its customer focus, good quality and good nutritional values are seen as the template for moving the meals on wheels service forward in Essex.
3. That the Health and Social Services Cabinet Member encourage District and Borough Council colleagues to join her on a **visit to Nottinghamshire Social Services** to experience the service that they offer first hand.

##### Medium Term

1. A **manager** should be appointed to steer the overall development of the meals on wheels service to meet the outcomes of the Best Value Review and to be responsible for the overall quality control and all budgetary aspects of the service, both in its provision and in its distribution.
2. The meals on wheels service must be available **7 days a week, 365 days per year**.
3. To ensure consistency in the quality of meals provided, **supply** should be separately tendered.
4. **Nottinghamshire Social Services** should be invited to tender for the supply of meals on wheels in Essex.



5. From evidence obtained from the visit to Nottinghamshire, the **cook-chill** method of providing meals on wheels is pursued as it has the best presentational effect to the customer.
6. **Frozen meals** should be available to those customers who wish to order them.
7. **Distribution** of the meals on wheels service should be achieved by working in partnerships with District and Borough Councils. All Districts should be provided with the opportunity to tender for the distribution of meals on wheels to their local communities. Such a tender process should not exclude, however, District and Borough Councils tendering to provide this service beyond their district boundary if they so wish.
8. **Specifications for the tender** process for both the provision and distribution of the meals on wheels service should include stipulate that the successful contracts will be rewarded to agencies that can demonstrate that, amongst other things, they are customer focused and fully employed.
9. A single **accountancy system** with **good statistical information** is designed to assist in supporting and monitoring the meals on wheels service.
10. For the **distribution service**: -
  - **Vehicles** should be Liveried, bought or leased, whichever is the most cost effective and LPG or electric to meet local conditions and requirements
  - **Deliverers** should wear a uniform, e.g. overall and cap and must carry appropriate credentials on display.

#### **Long Term**

1. **Contracts awarded** to the successful provider and distributors contracts must, amongst other things, be legally binding, meet strict health and hygiene standards regulations, specify inspection and monitoring arrangements and penalty clauses for failure to deliver the services specified.

2. It would be impossible replicate a *social kitchen* to provide a meals on wheels service along a similar line to that which exists in Nottinghamshire. The initial capital costs, estimated at £2/3 million pound, would be difficult fund. This should not, however, preclude an interim costing from being provided with a view to introducing such a facility in the long term if practicable. It has to be realised that it has taken Nottinghamshire Social Services 12 years to be in a position to provide the meal service viewed by Members.

### C. Conclusion

As Essex is doing a Best Value exercise on Meals on Wheels then the best value we can give our residents is to replicate the Nottinghamshire strategy with quality, quantity and customer satisfaction as our first and foremost consideration.