

MEALS ON WHEELS

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1. To ascertain whether or not the Council wishes to make a response to the current consultation exercise being carried out by Essex County Council in respect of providing frozen meals.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1. Rochford used to administer the Meals on Wheels service on behalf of Essex County Council up until 31 May 1998.
- 2.2. During April 1998, Essex County Council proposed significant increases in Meals on Wheels charges to local residents. At that time the Council could not support the proposed increases and was not prepared to further subsidise the service.
- 2.3. As a result of the above, the Council terminated the agreement with Essex County Council. With effect from 1 June 1998 the County has administered the service in Rochford utilising voluntary services to deliver the meals.

3 CURRENT POSITION

- 3.1. As the County now administers the service direct, the Council is not involved in any of the discussions pertaining to it.
- 3.2. Any discussions in respect of the service are now conducted direct with the voluntary sector providers.
- 3.3. The Council has not, therefore, been consulted formally on the proposals for introducing frozen meals. Members will be aware that this issue has received significant publicity on the local press.

4 THE ISSUE

- 4.1. As far as Rochford District is concerned, residents do not receive meals on a seven day a week basis.
- 4.2. The meals provided by the Rochford services are freshly cooked and are delivered hot to the recipient.
- 4.3. Under the County proposals, frozen meals would be delivered in bulk at periodic intervals.

4.4. The arguments in favour of frozen meals are:-

- seven day supply
- choice for recipient
- better control of nutritional value

4.5. The arguments against the proposals are:-

- loss of regular contact with recipient
- recipients may not reheat food correctly.

5 RESPONSE

5.1. In December 1998 the Council made a previous response to this issue. At the Council meeting held on 8 December 1998, Members considered the draft report of Essex County Council on the future of the meals service. At that meeting, Members requested a response to Essex County Council. The response is attached at Appendix 1 to this report .

5.2. Council is now asked to consider whether they wish to repeat this response to the County, notwithstanding the fact that we have not been consulted formally.

6 RECOMMENDATION

It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**

To determine whether or not to make a response to the County Council.
CD(F&ES)

Roger Crofts

Corporate Director (Finance & External Services)

Background Papers:

None.

For further information please contact Roger Crofts on (01702) 546366

ROCHFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Date: 14th December, 1998

Dear Mr. Rennie,

Meals on Wheels

Thank you for your letter of 26th November enclosing a copy of your draft report to the County Council's Community Care Sub Committee on 16th December. The Council is grateful to be consulted on such an important issue but at the same time, is extremely disappointed about the short timeframe allowed for this. When the issue was raised at the recent Association of Essex Council's meeting, it was indicated that the matter might be deferred for 3 months to allow for an extended period of consultation to take place. However, since that meeting, I have received no written confirmation that this will in fact be the case and hence I am writing with this Authority's formal comments on the draft report, so that if the matter is considered by the Sub-Committee on 16th December, you are in a position to report the views of this Authority.

There is concern over the inference from the report that the emphasis on consultation with Districts is over the mechanics of implementing any proposal, rather than on the proposals themselves although, hopefully, if there is now to be an extended consultation period at the outset, then clearly this comment would no longer apply.

When your draft report was considered by the full Council at its meeting on 8th December, the unanimous all party view was that the District Council is horrified by the County Council's proposals to introduce frozen food and would certainly urge County Councillors to reject any such proposals. In particular, Members are concerned about the impact such proposals would have on the more vulnerable sectors of the community from a social and practical viewpoint and wished to highlight the following specific points for rejecting any option which led to the introduction of frozen/chilled food:-

Cont/d

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- i) that little thought appears to have been given to the costly cooking and storage facilities (microwaves, refrigerators and so on) which recipients would need to have, together with the associated costs for such facilities. There could also be a problem in achieving delivery of any revised arrangements;
- ii) that proposals appeared to be driven by the need for financial economies alone, rather than any care for the elderly;
- iii) that it would be wrong to replace an effective well-ordered community based facility with one purely offering a form of grocery facility;
- iv) that the client base represented is a very vulnerable section of the community prone to the type of food infections which the proposed changes could introduce and that, at the very least, the proposals are likely to mean the supply of food is of a lower nutritional value;
- v) that the Medical Health Officer should be involved at an early stage in the development of any amendments to existing services;
- vi) that there are a number of inconsistencies in the draft County report which are cause for concern. For example, whilst not actually stated, it would appear from the statistics quoted that the number of meals ordered but not delivered during 1997 /98 was an extremely low percentage of the total meals delivered and thus to highlight this as one of the reasons for change seems to exaggerate its importance;
- vii) that proposals appear at variance with earlier comments made to the District by a County-Member representative with regard to the imbalance which already existed between the elderly and children's Standard Spending Assessments;
- viii) that there are concerns about the likely expectations to be placed on voluntary bodies as a result of these proposals.

If the matter is debated at the Sub Committee meeting, Members also asked that the Council be advised promptly of any decision made, together with details of the voting of County Members on the issue.

Yours sincerely,


P. Warren
CHIEF EXECUTIVE (DESIGNATE)

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