



EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 22ND APRIL 2025

SUBJECT: MEALS DIRECT

REPORT BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report is to request views of the Scrutiny Committee on removal of the lower subsidised rate of £4.18 per day currently applied to 79% of recipients of the Meals Direct service prior to the report being presented to Cabinet on the 21st May 2025 for a decision.
- 1.2 This is the first stage in making the Meals Direct a sustainable service, as previously agreed by Cabinet.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 In September 2024 Cabinet agreed to retain Meals Direct in its current format whilst officers undertook work to look at options to potentially make the service financially sustainable. Currently the service operates two subsidised rates, £4.18 and £6.89 per day (for a main meal and dessert). 21% of recipients (72 people) pay the higher rate, as they or their families have arranged the meals themselves in accordance with the Social Services and Well-Being Act 2014. The remaining 79% (228 people) were deemed as eligible for the lower rate as they were referred via Social Services
- 2.2 There is no legal requirement for Local Authorities to subsidise food, no other local authority in Wales applies a two pricing system, In no other area of social services provision is food subsidised.
- 2.3 The report will ask Cabinet to consider removal of the lower rate as the first step towards the service becoming financially sustainable by ultimately charging the full economic cost of the service.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The lower subsidy of £4.18 per day currently applied to Meals Direct is removed as of the 1st July 2025 and all recipients of the Meals Direct service to pay the higher rate of £6.89 per day, an increase of £2.38 per day.

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 There is no requirement for a Local Authority to subsidise food for its residents.
- 4.2 No other Local Authority in Wales who provide a meals direct service applies a two-tier pricing system.
- 4.3 Application of two-tier pricing system is inequitable for people receiving the service. The Council could legitimately be challenged on this by those people paying the higher rate as the service is no different.
- 4.4 The application of the current lower subsidy means the service is financially unsustainable.

5. THE REPORT

- 5.1 Currently there are circa 300 meals provided daily, Monday-Friday, these meals are freshly cooked and delivered in specially designed electric vehicles. Frozen meals are also provided for weekends and take up is less circa 67 per week.
- 5.2 228 people (79%), pay the lower rate of £4.18, 72 people (21%) pay the higher rate of £6.89,
- 5.3 Only 30 of these people receive a lunch call from social services for personal care .
- 5.4 Fresh and frozen meals are charged at the same rates.
- 5.5 The current application of the criteria as stipulated on the website is;
- you are not able to prepare meals for yourself
 - meals cannot be provided by anyone else
 - there is a significant risk to you if regular meals are not provided

This is primarily a telephone assessment and not robust and could be open to challenge, from an equalities perspective.

- 5.6 Twelve other Local Authorities in Wales currently provide a meals delivery service but none apply a two tier pricing subsidy.

- 5.7 People in supported living and those in receipt of domiciliary care do not have their food subsidised.
- 5.8 Currently the meal service operates a delivery of a fresh meal 5 days per week and the option of people also having a sandwich delivered at the same time. Again there are two rates £2.83 paid by those on the higher rate and £2.14 paid by those paying the lower subsidy for a sandwich. Again, this could be deemed as inequitable and subject to potential challenge as the same criteria wouldn't be applicable.
- 5.9 The implementation of the recommendations of this report, i.e. the removal of the lower rate of £4.18 with all recipients of Meals Direct paying £6.89 per day will allow officers to begin working on a fully sustainable model that does not require subsidy from the authority.
- 5.10 In order to remove any subsidy it will be necessary to charge people receiving the service the full economic cost of providing Meals Direct. This has been problematic as its not work that has done before and requires apportionment of costs currently charged against Ty Penallta e.g. energy costs, national non domestic rates and elements of staff costs from support services.
- 5.11 Future continued sustainable provision would become a choice for people and their families along with many other model of service options that are available in the community.

5.12 **Conclusion**

The current model of service delivery is not sustainable or equitable for the residents of the borough. Removal of the lower subsidy of £4.18 will be the first step in addressing the inequity and moving towards an alternative model which could be more attractive and financially sustainable.

6. **ASSUMPTIONS**

- 6.1 It is assumed that the demand for the service in its current format will remain the same, this is based on numbers of circa 300 service recipients.

7. **SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

[Link to full Integrated Impact Assessment](#)

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Current charges as set out below:

Meals Direct Options	01/04/25 Lower Rate	01/04/25 Higher Rate
Hot Lunch Dessert	£4.18	£6.89
Frozen Meals	£4.18	£6.89
Sandwiches	£2.14	£2.83

8.2 The budget for the Meals Direct service for 2025/26 is as follows;

Gross Cost	£606,180
Budgeted income	£226,340
Net Subsidy	£379,840

8.3 Should Cabinet agree to remove the lower rate of £4.18 per day and implement a daily rate of £6.89 it is possible that some people will choose to leave the service and make alternative arrangements for their meals. For the purpose of this report there will be a 'leaving rate' of 50%, 25% or 10% of those persons currently paying £4.18 per day. This has the following impact on the current subsidy of £379.840 per year

' Leaving Rate'	Revised number of service users	Impact on Income to 31/3/26	Revised Subsidy
50%	114	Loss of £18,520 p.a.	£398,360
25%	171	Increase of £55,750 p.a.	£324,090
10%	205	Increase of £99,980 p.a.	£279, 860

9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no direct personnel implications associated with this report assuming that the provision numbers do not change significantly.

9.2 Staff and trade unions will be consulted on any future changes to the delivery model of the service.

9.3 Staff will be covered by appropriate HR policies should it be necessary as the future of the service becomes clearer.

10. CONSULTATIONS

10.1 All responses have been included in the body of the report.

11. STATUTORY POWER

11.1 Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014.

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