

To: SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE		Subject: CHARGING POLICY FOR MEALS	
From: DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK			
Date: 12 JANUARY 2006	Ref: JD/GMcl		

1. Purpose of Report/Introduction

The purpose of this report is request Committee to approve an increase in the cost of meals and to recommend that the charge for meals be standardised.

2. Background

- 2.1. Social Work operate a number of day services and people who use such facilities can purchase a meal when doing so. Currently there are an estimated 202 older people, 146 people with learning disabilities and 35 people with physical disabilities receiving meals in directly provided day services.
- 2.2. In addition the Department provides a Meals on Wheels service to 50,000 recipients on an annual basis and a frozen meal service which, each year, provides a further 23,000 meals.
- 2.3. Whilst service users make a contribution towards the cost of their meals, the actual costs are heavily subsidised by the Department. In day services for people with learning disabilities the average cost of a meal is £4.15, however, the service user only pays 75p. In effect each meal is subsidised by £3.40 per person. There is no standardised approach to charging in other day services, where the charge varies between 81p-£2.
- 2.4. The cost of providing meals on wheels is £3.06 per meal. The service user pays a charge of £1.30, which means a Departmental subsidy of £1.76. The same charge is levied for the provision of meals to Council Lunch Clubs.
- 2.5. As can be seen, by providing meals at less than cost price, the Department is having to expend considerable resources on subsidising the meals service. In doing so, it almost assumes, inappropriately, a responsibility for an income maintenance function.
- 2.6. It should be noted that most recipients of a meals service will be individuals who, because of age and/or disability, will be in receipt of social security benefits, which includes an element for food. The typical benefit level for an adult under 65 years of age attending a day service will range from £136.75 to £194.75 per week. In most cases this will be the net disposable income which is available to the individual. In the circumstances it is suggested it would be reasonable to apply a higher charge for meals which more closely reflects the cost to the Council.

- 2.7. People who receive a meals on wheels or a frozen meals service, are in the main over retirement age. Again, many will be dependent on social security benefits. The typical income for single people in this position will be £195.50 per week, where their income includes Attendance Allowance. Charges for the meals services have remained static for many years and have not been updated to take account of inflation or the rising cost of the service provision.
- 2.8. It is proposed that a £2 standard charge be introduced for all meals, including meals on wheels, frozen meals, lunch clubs and meals provided in day services. It is suggested that the new charge is not exceptional given the levels of income which are available to recipients of this service.
- 2.9. In addition to setting a revised charge which would take effect on 1st April 2006, Committee is also asked to approve the elimination of all subsidies on the meals service, and that the real costs be applied in incremental stages over the next three years to ensure the service is cost effective. By removing subsidies from meals the Department will free up resources to be used for other essential services.

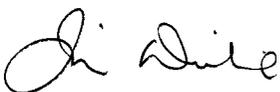
3. Financial/Personnel/Legal/Policy Implications

- 3.1 The application of a standard charge of £2 for a meals service will generate additional income for the Council. It is estimated that this will exceed £50,000 per year.
- 3.2 It is proposed to formally notify those concerned and to set out the reasons why the Council is, for the first time in many years, proposing to apply an increase in the charge for meals.

4. Recommendation

4.1. Committee is requested to:

- (i) approve a standard charge of £2 be applied for all meals provided by Social Work, including meals on wheels, frozen meals, day services and Lunch Clubs;
- (ii) invite the Director of Social Work to prepare suitable publicity materials setting out the reasons for the increased meal charges;
- (iii) approve steps to eliminate meal subsidies over the subsequent three years (2007-2010)
- (iv) invite the Director of Social Work to monitor uptake of meals in the light of the proposed charges and bring forward a report on the impact to a future Committee; and
- (v) otherwise note the report.



Jim Dickie
Director of Social Work
22 December 2005

For further information on this report please contact George McNally, Manager Social Work Strategy on telephone 01698 332555