

North Somerset Council

REPORT TO THE ADULT SERVICES AND HOUSING POLICY AND SCRUTINY PANEL

DATE OF MEETING: 22 JANUARY 2016

SUBJECT OF REPORT: COMMUNITY MEALS

TOWN OR PARISH: ALL

OFFICER/MEMBER PRESENTING: DAVID JONES, INTERIM ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

KEY DECISION: NO

RECOMMENDATIONS

Scrutiny Panel is asked to note the contents of the report and support the recommendations in Section 6.

1. SUMMARY OF REPORT

- 1.1 The Community Meals Working Group presented their report to the Adult Services & Housing Policy and Scrutiny Panel's informal meeting on 20th November 2015. Assurances were sought on the effective operation of the Community Meals Business Support function and an update was requested at the earliest opportunity.

An internal review has been conducted by the Support Services Partnership Client Team, in liaison with the Executive Members for Adult Social Services and P&C senior management, to gauge whether the functions are being effectively performed and the concerns raised are being addressed. A plan has been developed to tackle the various issues.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Context

In order to realise required budget reductions, Council agreed in October 2014 to transfer its business support functions to Agilisys in February 2015. The transfer of the functions (Business Support, Front Office, Business Systems Administration and Financial Transactions) generated a total budget reduction of £780k, which represented a 22.9% saving to be delivered through service redesign, consolidation of teams, and automation. The Business Support for the Community Meals Service was one of the functions transferred.

3. REVIEW OF CONCERNS

A number of concerns had been raised in respect of the delivery of the Business Support functions for Community Meals Service since the transfer. The internal review explored these concerns. The summary of the findings and actions are included below.

3.1 Delivery Model

The initial delivery model adopted by Agilisys at the time of the transfer was to leave the team intact and for it to remain located at Castlewood. This remained the position from the point of transfer in February 2015 through to the creation of the Care Hub in November 2015. This is based in Castlewood. The immediate objective for the Care Hub is to provide a more resilient service for the critical incoming enquiry lines that the hub supports.

Historically within the Community Meals Service individuals had assumed isolated responsibility for certain activities. Holidays or sickness reduced the team's operating capacity. The proposed Hub model allows for wider support of the activities to maintain capacity.

Update: This model is still bedding in and operational issues are being addressed as they arise. Regular meetings between the Business Support and NSC Operational Managers have been set up to ensure effective communication and continued service development.

3.2 Specification not covered

There was a concern raised that the council specification did not cover all the aspects of the business support functions required by the service. The list of service requirements was tested against the specifications for Front Office and Business Support in order to be assured that requirements were covered.

Update: The analysis provided clarity on the functions required and found that all functions were accommodated within the specification.

2.3 Knowledge transfer

Due to the staff leaving under the Voluntary Redundancy (VR) exercise, concern was raised over the effectiveness of the knowledge transfer to new staff taking on support duties.

Agilisys, consistent with all of the Business Support functions, is managing knowledge transfer through the documentation of processes and procedures. Once documented, these are checked by the Business Support Team Leader and referred to the council service leads for validation or refinement.

Update: For Community Meals Business Support a total of 14 processes/procedures have been produced and were referred to the council in November 2015 and found to be sufficient. However, it is accepted that the 'softer' aspects of significant experience and knowledge will take a while to regain.

3.4 Inadequate resources

Due to the low number of the staff in the Community Meals Business Support Team concerns have been expressed at various times over the resilience and cover for staff at times of absence due to sickness or leave.

This has been a common concern across a number of teams prior to the planned consolidation of teams into hubs. Directorate engagement and accommodation planning delayed the intended consolidation from August to November and there is no doubt that this presented genuine resilience issues for the smaller teams.

Update: This resilience issue will be resolved through the amalgamation of the team into the Castlewood Care Hub subject to further training and fuller development of wider knowledge to support the services and address the loss of the experienced staff.

3.5 Team Monitoring

Based on the initial concerns around administrative support it was agreed that two main areas of the service would be reviewed by the Client Team; these were:

- Meals Administration;
- General Office Administration.

Update: A review of all written procedures for the two main areas was undertaken and the general opinion was that the Community Meals Business Support service has a good set of written procedures in place. The procedures are effective in supporting the administration of the team.

3.6 Support to Drivers

Concern was raised regarding the effectiveness of the support provided by the back office administration to the drivers as it is imperative that this interaction works effectively to support service users.

Update: A senior member of the Client Team accompanied a driver on his round to experience and understand the service better, and to test the effectiveness of the relationship between the drivers and the Business Support function.

The main issues raised by the driver were:

1. The lack of experience within the team now that two experienced officers have left the organisation;
2. The difficulties associated with getting through on the telephone.

There were no evident issues in the timeliness and quality of the business support provided to the driver during the day and two instances that required specialist support demonstrated the effectiveness of the support provided.

To overcome potential difficulties contacting the back office team the telephone access will be amended to route calls to enable logistical enquiries to be taken as a priority. The logistical line will cover driver HR, service logistics, ordering and internal finance. This is being implemented.

3.7 Access to systems & process efficiency

In order to understand the possible opportunity for the cross skilling of the service, cost analysis is required for the provision of licenses to access the SMARTT database for all Agilisys Care Hub colleagues.

Update: The cost analysis is currently in progress. Assuming this is financially viable, a number of colleagues will be fully trained to use the SMARTT database. This will avoid the use of an interim capture tool (currently paper and verbal) and the need for double keying of service requests/amendments.

3.8 Improvements in operations

The Client Team review of the operations and procedural notes identified the following areas requiring improvement:

- Meal temperature checks;
- Anomalies arising from driver / client monies;
- The fact that admin staff interviewing drivers is not considered to be appropriate;
- Arranging hospitality.

Update: Agilisys has been tasked with reviewing these procedures and associated notes to ensure there is clarity over the functions and how these are performed. These will be subject to a further review by the Client Team.

3.9 Performance information

A concern has been raised regarding the lack of available performance information on which an assessment of the quality of the service can be made.

Update: Whilst the level of performance information is currently limited, it is expected that call volumes, service user enquiries and driver call volumes will be made available from December 2015.

As part of the monitoring role, the Client Team will examine all performance information to monitor the effectiveness of end to end service delivery and performance. Sample checks will be made with a view to initiating full investigations where required.

4. OPERATIONAL CONCERNS

4.1 From an operational perspective a number of challenges are still being experienced and a number of concerns need to be addressed. These include:

- Limited trained staff to undertake the tasks included in the specification (especially following up on critical welfare concerns) and lack of contingency. This is being addressed but is still a concern.

- The loss of proximity of business support staff has led to difficulties in communications, reduced awareness of issues and lack of timely service updates with the manager.
 - Loss of confidence by drivers that messages and action will be taken in a timely way.
 - Handing back of a number of tasks not deemed to be business support and the need to ensure NSC capacity to address them. Tasks include: maintenance of iTrent for 30 staff, signing mileage and claim forms for delivery and kitchen staff, completion of all staffing and recruitment paperwork, planning of promotional work.
- 4.2 The operational challenges will be monitored and addressed through the new forum with Agilisys and NSC Operational Management. The creation of a risk log will ensure business risk is recorded and mitigated effectively.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The review of the Business Support provision for Community Meals, conducted by the Client Team, identified a number of areas to address and has established a current understanding of the position and proposed actions to resolve them. Whilst some of these challenges remain, there is a forum and an agreed approach to tackle the identified concerns and any future issues at an operational level.
- 5.2 The Client Team working alongside NSC Operational Management will define effective performance measures and monitoring mechanisms and is working with Agilisys to ensure continued, effective safe delivery of this service. The current lack of Business Support contingency could pose a risk to the delivery of the service and will be addressed as a matter of urgency.
- 5.3 A review of the position in three months' time would be warranted to ensure progress and stability for the service.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 It is recommended that:
1. The service improvements identified above are carried out and validated by the Client Team.
 2. The performance information required from the function is provided and performance targets agreed with the Client Team through engagement with the NSC Operational Management for Community Meals.
 3. The staff providing Business Support for Community Meals should spend a day shadowing the drivers in order to experience the service first hand, develop their understanding of the critical nature of the service and build up a better rapport with the drivers.
 4. The operational issues and developments are addressed through the new forum for operational management: Community Meals Management and Business Support management with Client Team input as appropriate.
 5. Creation of a Risk Log to monitor risks to operational delivery and ensure effective mitigation.

6. Review of the tasks 'handed back' against NSC capacity to support and implement steps to address any gaps.
7. To review progress on the various actions within three months.

7. CONSULTATION

The Community Meals Working Group sought the views of the main individuals and groups affected by the changes. Consultation and development is continuing.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The service and related business support have to be delivered within the approved revenue budget.

9. RISK MANAGEMENT

Some risks have been identified by the Community Meals Working Group and within this report. A risk log is to be created to monitor risks to operational delivery and ensure effective mitigation.

10. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

These are being monitored as part of the ongoing work.

11. CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

The service redesign of Business Support, which includes Community Meals, is consistent with the council's target operating model and is required to deliver the level of cost reductions identified within the Medium Term Financial Plan.

12. OPTIONS CONSIDERED

Various options were considered by the Community Meals Working Group and in discussion between members and officers. The focus is now on implementing the changes and addressing outstanding concerns. Progress will be closely monitored and formally reviewed in three months' time.

AUTHORS

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

Community Meals Working Group Report – 20 November 2015