

Committee:	Cabinet	Date:	Tuesday, 9 February 2021
Title:	Day Centres – Hot Meal Service		
Portfolio Holder:	Cllr R Freeman – Portfolio Holder for Council and Public Services		
Report Author:	Adrian Webb, Director - Finance and Corporate Services awebb@uttlesford.gov.uk Tel: 01799 510421	Key decision:	N

Summary

1. This report sets out the current position with the hot meal service provided from the district owned or leased premises.

Recommendations

2. That Cabinet confirms that no financial savings will be made from this process and all allocated Day Centre Service budget will be retained for the new service delivery options, both in 2021/22 and ongoing.

Financial Implications

3. The 2021/22 Day Centre Service budget is £94,500

Background Papers

4. The following papers were referred to by the author in the preparation of this report and are available for inspection from the author of the report.

EqHIA for the proposed Day Centre changes

Impact

- 5.

Communication/Consultation	A staff consultation has started. Wider consultation will take place around future service options should the decision to cease hot food provision be confirmed.
Community Safety	No specific implications
Equalities	An EqHIA has been prepared and is available upon request.

Health and Safety	No specific implications
Human Rights/Legal Implications	No specific implications
Sustainability	No specific implications
Ward-specific impacts	Whilst the Day Centres are in specific Wards users are from anywhere in the district
Workforce/Workplace	There are six staff impacted by the proposed changes

Situation

6. To understand the current process being undertaken it is necessary to set the scene of the service. Going back four years there were five day centres across the district at
 - a. Rowena Davey Centre, Great Dunmow
 - b. Garden Room, Saffron Walden
 - c. The Crafton Centre, Stansted Mountfitchet
 - d. Takeley Day Centre
 - e. Cutler's Kitchen, Thaxted

7. In the intervening time a number of challenges have faced the service, not least of which is the reducing number of users.
 - a. Despite all best efforts to promote the facility, including bringing in external caterers, Takeley Day Centre closed approximately two and half years ago as the user numbers had dropped to a mere handful.

 - b. Saffron Walden Day Centre was run on the Council's behalf by a charity. In late 2018 they closed the venue as they had run out of money due to the ever-decreasing demand for the service. Officers got the centre back up and running but the user base remained very low despite repeated efforts to publicise the centre and introduce other activities.

 - c. Great Dunmow and Stansted day centres are run on our behalf by management committees and both venues have seen a continuing decrease in numbers in recent years.

 - d. Thaxted is the most used of the day centres and this is probably related to its location, being adjacent to one of our sheltered units. It was previously run entirely by volunteers, however due to an ever

decreasing number they were unable to continue to provide the service and once again the Council had to step in.

8. It should be noted that the service was not seven days a week, the number of days, and which days, that each centre opened was also varied
 - a. Rowena Davey Centre, Great Dunmow – 4 days per week (Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday)
 - b. Garden Room, Saffron Walden – 4 days per week (Monday – Thursday)
 - c. The Crafton Centre, Stansted Mountfitchet – 3 days per week (Tuesday, Thursday, Friday)
 - d. Cutler's Kitchen, Thaxted – 5 days per week (Monday – Friday)
9. Whilst anyone over the age of 54 can attend the Day Centres, the majority of users are over the age of 80 with a number also having underlying health issues or other vulnerabilities. The food menu, whilst healthy, is very limited when compared to competing providers. The anecdotal evidence is that users do not attend just for food as they arrive when it opens and leave when it shuts. For them it is much more about social interaction.
10. To give an illustration of the level of use prior to closure due to the pandemic, for the two centres directly under the control of the Council the number of meals served per day prior, to the service closing down, averaged 11 at Saffron Walden and 25 at Thaxted.
11. This type of service will never appeal to all people who qualify. However, as an indication of the potential users that we should aim to reach with an 'offer' that meets their needs, the Office for National Statistics estimates that by 2025 the number of over 65s in the district will increase by 32 percent to 21,400 and represent 22 percent of the total population.
12. Due to the pandemic the Day Centres have been closed since March 2020 and will remain so for the foreseeable future. As a council we have to protect the most vulnerable in our community as well as our employees. It is very hard to predict when community facilities may reopen but to quote just one scientist, Prof Dale Fisher, Chairman of the World Health Organisation: "I think over the next year or two things will loosen up quite a lot. I think we will eventually get back to normal but will that take three years or ten years, I don't know."
13. Consequently, the Council believes it extremely unlikely that this type of service will reopen in 2021 and it may well be mid-2022 before that can happen.
14. Whilst the vaccination programme is excellent news, some qualifying people will either choose not to, or not be able to, have it. It is also yet to be determined whether those inoculated can still be spreaders of the virus. In addition, social distancing is going to be with us for some time yet which creates its own challenges particularly for a hot meal service.

15. As a council we should not be in direct competition with the private sector. With our high streets struggling we should be seen to be supporting pubs, restaurants and cafes not competing with them. One thing the pandemic has taught business is the ability to adapt and many of our pubs, restaurants and cafes now provide excellent takeaway and delivery services that could provide food to these and/or other venues in the future, should it be decided that a food offering is still required.

The Future

16. The Council will use this time of enforced closure to work with parish and town councils, voluntary sector organisations and other partners to establish how these facilities and others can be best used to support older, vulnerable and indeed other members of our communities. There are many opportunities to make better use of these facilities and engage in a more multi-generational way.

17. The 2021/22 budget for Day Centres is £94,500 and Cabinet is recommended to approve that this sum is ringfenced for future service delivery in whatever form that takes. This could include grants to external organisations, be they parish or town councils, existing management committees or community interest companies.

18. Any grants made will likely be on a rolling three year basis to give recipients certainty and the ability to plan beyond the twelve month period.

19. It is important to view this as an excellent opportunity to provide enhanced services to our communities. This is not about reducing the level of service the Council provides; rather it is about finding the best way to provide services that will go beyond the numbers for which the traditional meal service was catering. It is unlikely that each town or village will have the same offering, delivered in the same way, at the end of this process. The Council will work with those closest to their communities to ensure whatever is offered best meets the needs of the people who live there.