

Royal Voluntary Service and Compass Brighton and Hove Community Meals Pilot Report

August 2013



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1. Executive Summary

The Brighton & Hove Community Meals pilot has given the Royal Voluntary Service an ideal opportunity to build upon their in-depth Meals on Wheels experience, explore a new model, and develop partnerships to improve the service not only to the Local Authority, but more importantly to the customer receiving the service.

It is very pleasing to see that the pilot model is feasible, and of course there will be some unanticipated challenges when implementing the model on a larger scale, but given the customer feedback results, learning, and partnership relations, the Royal Voluntary Service feels confident in our abilities to make the model a success, paving the way to a better and improved service to the customer.

2. Background

The Royal Voluntary Service (RVS) was awarded the Brighton and Hove Community Meals contract following a competitive tender process by Brighton and Hove City Council (BHCC), with a commencement date of 1st April 2013. The contract will operate for three years, with the potential to extend for a further year.

BHCC also approved the RVS proposal, submitted as part of the tender process, to a 6-week pilot of a new delivery model that aims to support a more customer-focussed approach to community meals. This is part of a wider review of community meals by the Royal Voluntary Service, which is currently covered by a confidentiality agreement and if the model is successful, the aim is to implement it within Brighton and Hove Community Meals and roll out across other Local Authority areas in England, Scotland and Wales.

The pilot is “A totally customer-focussed approach to community meals” as follows:

Current Model	Pilot Model
Using frozen meals	Using chilled meals
4 main meal, 2-3 pudding options	24 main meal, 15 pudding options
Set delivery time windows	Chilled Meals delivered at a time that suits the customer, hot meals in a set delivery window
Regenerated meals not looking appetising	Tastier meals that look more appetising
Meals ordered weeks in advance	Meals ordered nearer the time received by the customer
Little social interaction with customer (2 hour delivery window on a round)	More time to available to chat with customers either via volunteers going in to heat up meal or during bulk chill delivery (2+ hour hot meal delivery window per round and flexible time outside for chilled meal delivery)
Limited opportunity to identify customer needs to reduce social isolation	Identifying customer needs to reduce social isolation increased
Current carbon footprint	Reduced carbon footprint

2.1. Pilot Objectives

The 10 main objectives for the pilot were:

1. Ensure that the menu suits customer needs and wishes
2. Identify customer requirements in terms of delivering hot or chilled meals and whether they require support to heat up meals where they have been delivered chilled
3. Ensure the meal round logistics are effective to meet the needs of all customers
4. Gain feedback from customers in relation to their experience
5. Ensure that the vehicle prototype is fit for purpose and effectively utilised

6. Review and identify staffing requirements for full model implementation
7. Assess and adapt equipment and back office processes to meet the requirements of a full model
8. Identify increased social, economic and environmental impact
9. Assess overall financial viability of the model, to fit within the contractual parameters
10. Identify any future efficiency savings and improvements with the model

The customer and BHCC will continue to be charged at the contractually agreed rates during the pilot, with any additional costs being met by the RVS and Compass.

2.2. Timescales

The pilot commenced on 1st July 2013, with a completion date of 2nd September 2013. If the pilot is successful, the earliest possible full implementation date will be advised, following West Sussex County Council Community Meals Launch, and agreed financial implication understanding between parties. The pilot consisted of three stages:

- **Stage One** (01/07/13-19/07/13) – hot meals service using a specially adapted vehicle will take place on one meal round, to involve up to 32 customers.
- **Stage Two** (22/07/13-26/07/13) – hot meals service continued as Stage One, with an additional customer round identified whereby meals will be delivered outside of the delivery window and either heated up by the customer at a time that suits them, or by one of the RVS team who will visit during the delivery window.
- **Stage Three** (26/08/13-02/09/13) – Customer delivery returns to the original frozen model and a full review of the pilot takes place.

This report represents Stage Three of the pilot.

2.3. Methodology

To evaluate the pilot, a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods were utilised as follows:

1. Customer feedback questionnaires, one set sent out mid-way and another towards the end of the pilot – 11 quantitative questions plus a comments box (please see Appendix A)
2. Staff feedback on operations, vehicles, meals and overall observations

3. Operational Model

3.1. Meals Supply

The Royal Voluntary Service entered into a partnership arrangement with Compass for the supply of meals during the pilot, and for any further model development and implementation. The partnership will allow more emphasis to be placed on the provision of high quality, tasty and nutritious food to vulnerable residents in Brighton and Hove, whilst increasing customer choice, access and control of the service by offering fresh meal choices and broader delivery options.

Compass has developed an innovative steam-cook process using patented valve technology (Steamplicity) which is currently utilised within hospitals across the UK. The application of the steam cook approach into the community meals service draws on learning from other countries, such as Sweden, Canada and the USA.

The Royal Voluntary Service has worked closely with Compass to develop an exciting selection of individual Steamplicity meals for customers and if the pilot is successful, these will be reviewed on a six monthly basis and include seasonal options. Customers can select from the full menu each time, so will not be limited to a small selection of daily meals.

3.2. Carbon Foot Print and Food Freshness

Fresh ingredients are sourced as locally as consistent quality and continuity allow, providing full traceability and provenance. The meals are made on a daily basis and consist of a combination of fresh, raw ingredients, including vegetables and fish and also chilled product to ensure all components are in their best condition when served to the customer.

Steamplicity meals are produced in St Albans, Hertfordshire, and will be delivered to the Royal Voluntary Service premises on an every other day basis. Food miles will be reduced by using Compass instead the current supplier, TVF (based in Wales), resulting in lower carbon emissions. The use of fresh rather than frozen foods further reduces the carbon footprint.

Meals are packed into plastic self-contained units which are 100% recyclable and are themselves made from 50% recycled material – they are one of the most environmentally friendly forms of packaging. In addition, the meals are packed and transported in reusable formed trays that protect the product both in transit and storage. Meal sleeves will contain the required nutritional values, dietary information and heating instructions. Recyclable materials only are used throughout the whole packaging and storage process.

3.3. Nutrition

The meals meet NACC guidelines and remain fresh for six days after production. The Royal Voluntary Service secured a contingency supply of frozen meals at the service to meet exceptional circumstances, such as long periods of bad weather where the roads are not accessible or for customers who request this, perhaps for when they are returning from hospital. An example of this is towards the end of the pilot, where problems with the pilot van meant it was off the road for two days for repair, so pilot customers were delivered regenerated from frozen meals.

3.4. Customer Choice and Delivery Options

During the pilot, customers selected from the menu a week in advance. However, the aim of the post-pilot model is to establish a process whereby customers can select their meals for the next day. Customers received their meals hot, through the use of a specially adapted vehicle that heats the meals en route. Alternatively, they opted to have their meal delivered chilled and heated in their home whilst having a friendly conversation with the Royal Voluntary Service delivery person, or they may wish to heat it up themselves at a time that suits them.

For customers who choose to have their meal heated up by the Royal Voluntary Service, the process enhances the meal time experience to become more of a social activity, which supports their well-being.

The delivery window was extended by an hour from 11:30 to 14:30. This enabled the team to spend that little bit of extra time with each customer during bulk chilled deliveries or where a volunteer went in to heat up the meal, it also allowed staff to adapt to the new model and the service to fine tune its deliveries. On pilot completion, customers were returned to the original delivery.

3.5. Community Meals Delivery Vehicle

The Royal Voluntary Service commissioned a new vehicle specification to enable the flexible meal provision, as outlined above, taken into consideration requirements e.g. temperature, and equipment (chiller, microwaves, shelves, probe), payload, space for meals and other smaller items e.g. tea packs and hygiene equipment.

The vehicle incorporated a 'Key Out' system enabling the vehicle to be left running whilst the driver is away from the vehicle and with the vehicle locked and keys in the drivers possession at all times. This is necessary to power the microwaves and refrigeration whilst stationary during deliveries.

4. Findings

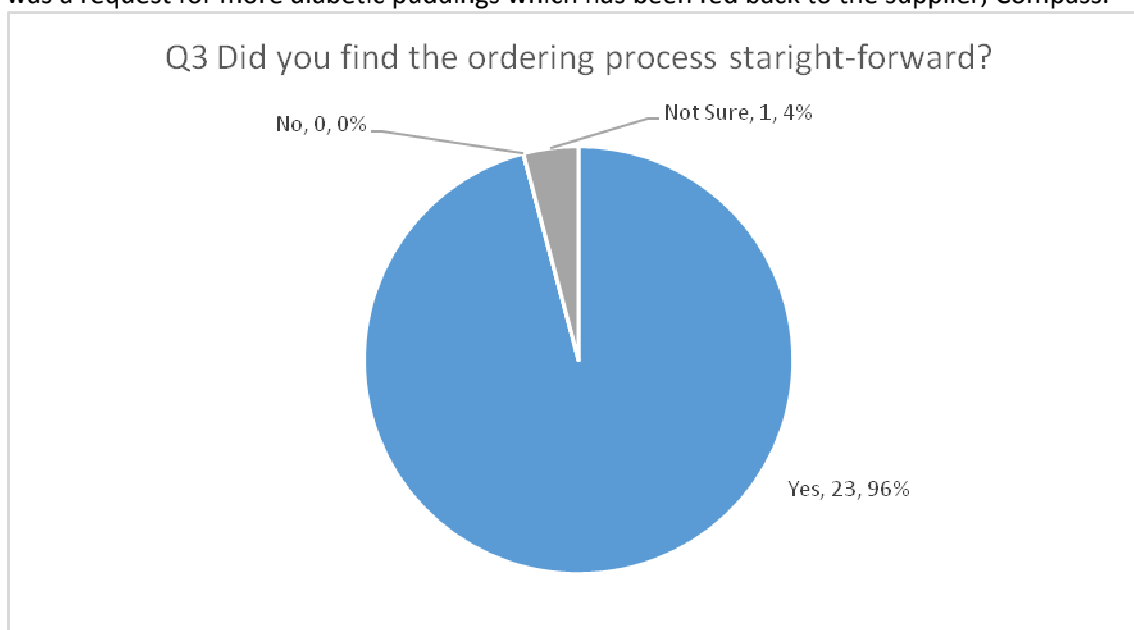
The findings have been split into Customer Feedback, Operational and Financial findings.

4.1. Customer Feedback Findings

Over the two pilot stages, 38 clients were involved, of these 24 (63%) responded to the feedback questionnaire. A summary of results are set out below based on the 24 customer responses. Full details of the customer feedback results can be found at Appendix B.

4.1.1. Menu Choice

The feedback shows that that 92% of respondents were happy with the choice of meals to meeting their dietary needs and that 88% were positive about the choices to select from. Of the latter, one was a request for more diabetic puddings which has been fed back to the supplier, Compass.



4.1.2. Ordering Process

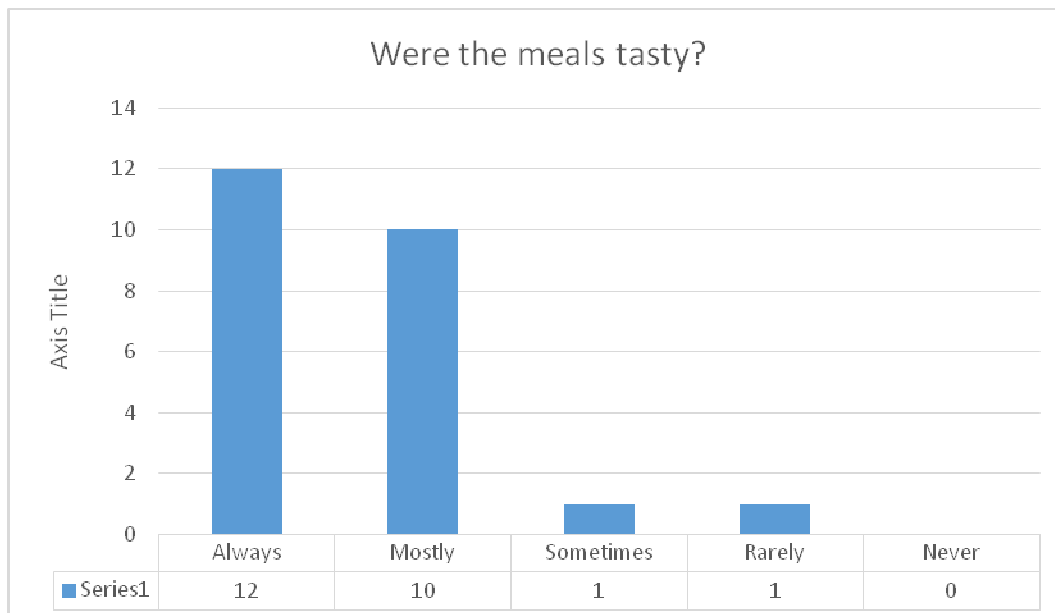
The feedback shows that 96% of the customers found the new ordering process straightforward. To introduce customers to the pilot, they were called, given a welcome letter, Community Meals menu brochure and 7 day tick box menu.

4.1.3. Delivery

The results show that 80% of customers received most of the meals they were expecting, one of the negative responses was because a customer was in hospital halfway through the pilot and never completed the menu selection, which may explain why she did not receive the meals she expected, one diabetic customer kept selecting non-diabetic puddings which could not be sent. 79% of customers received meals at the expected time, this slightly lower positive response could be for a number of reasons, one customer fed back they still wanted the meal within the old delivery window, which was rarely possible.

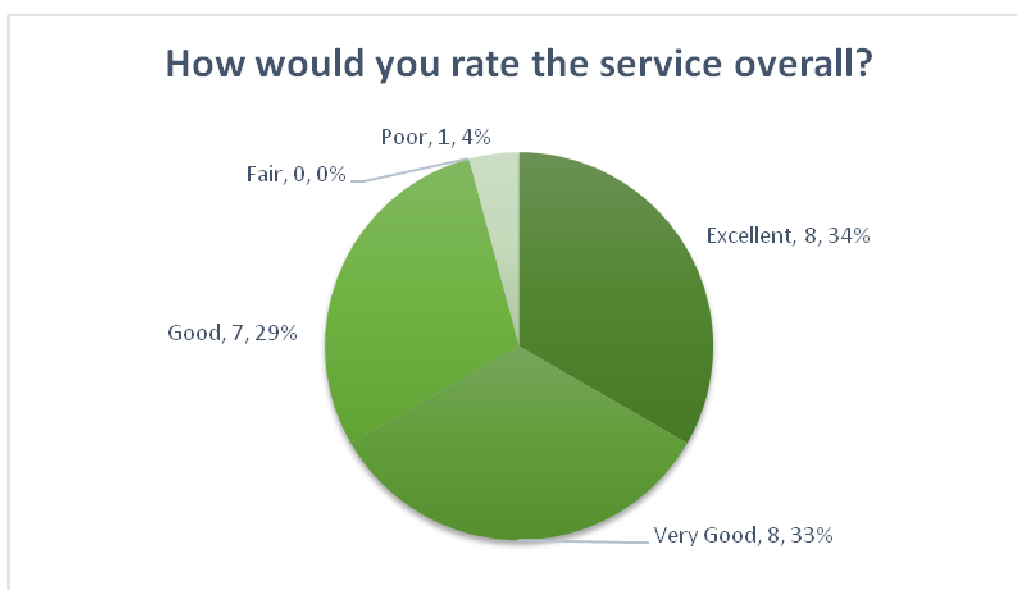
4.1.4. Meals

The customer were asked for feedback on a number of areas in relation to the meal. The vast majority, 88% found the meals were always or almost always hot (note: a further 8% of customer that fed-back received chilled), 79% felt portion size correct, and 92% found the meals were always or mostly tasty.

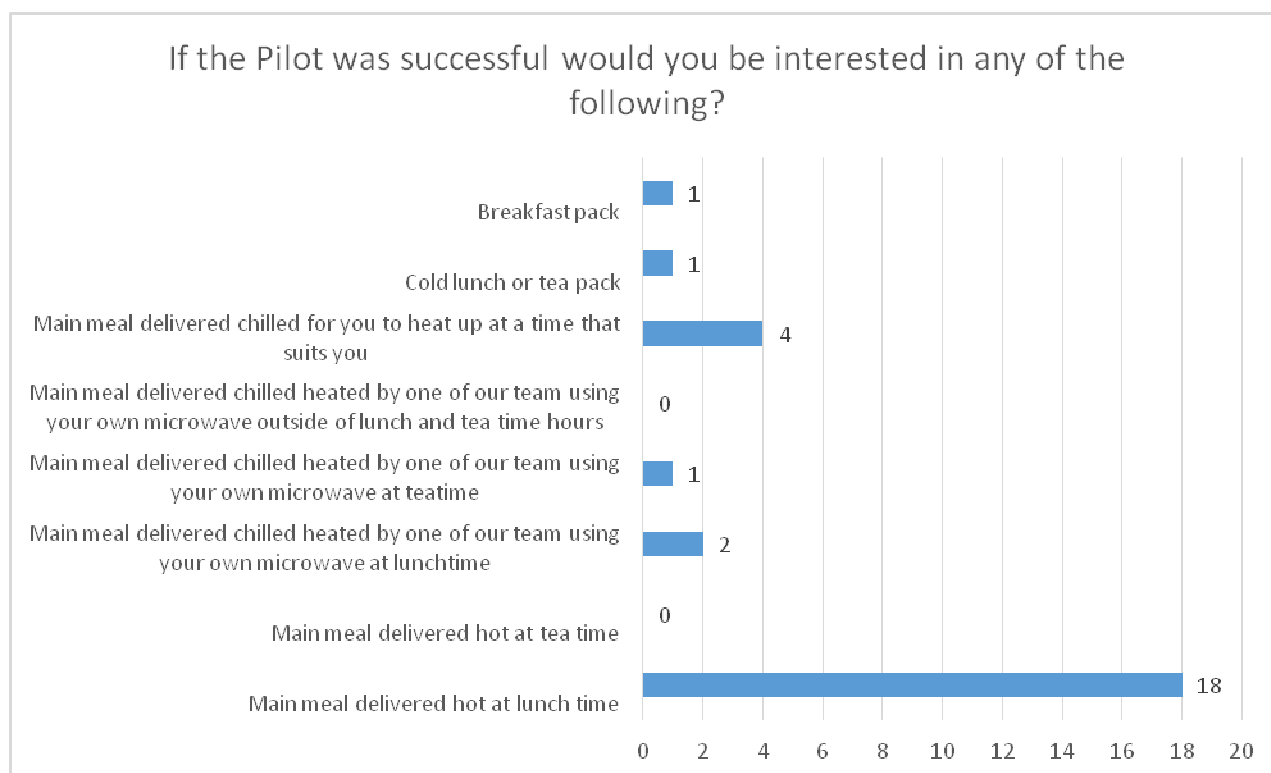


4.1.5. Rating the Service

When customers were asked how they rated the “Steamplicity” meals compared with the old pre-pilot meals, the majority of respondents felt the meals were much or a little better (16, 67%) and the service over all between Excellent to Good (23, 96%). It should be noted that one customer rating the new meals compared to the meals as worse had never received the old meals. Also, another customer rating the service as poor kept on choosing non-diabetic puddings, which could help explain why they rated the service as poor.



The final question asked customers what type of services they would be interested in, the majority of customers wanted a hot lunch, but interestingly, a number wanted chilled meals to heat up themselves – a positive sign of re-ablement.



4.1.6. Comments

10 customers left comments about the service in the comments section. Of these 4 complimented the new meals as being tastier or bigger and one stating that they liked heating up the meal when they wanted rather than waiting for a hot meal to be delivered at any time. Two customers preferred the old meal and another requested more diabetic choices.

Overall, the vast majority of the customer feedback has been positive giving Royal Voluntary Service a really positive indication that customers liked and accepted the new model. We also expected some criticism as not all customers like change, and it is an area we would look to manage carefully should we roll out the pilot model. Feedback on the meals has been shared with Compass and we feel confident working with them to agree a selection going forwards.

4.2. Operational Findings

4.2.1. Menu Selection, Meals supply and Temperature Probes

Approximately 50% of customers are selecting the meals themselves, with 50% asking the service to choose for them based on their needs and preferences which are logged on the service database. Royal Voluntary Service will continue to encourage customers to select their own meals.

Two individual meals required a further boosting and another did not heat up to guidelines. There was an issue with one meal-type container, these issues have been fed-back to Compass to review for feed-back.

Ten wastage meals per delivery was built into the pilot, which were used up during the course of the pilot, we anticipate the wastage to be zero if the service model goes ahead.

4.2.2. Vehicle

The prototype customised vehicle is a key component of the service to enable successful delivery. A number of issues were raised during the pilot in terms of: key out system (leaving the engine running to power chiller/microwaves and centrally locking vehicle whilst driver is delivering a meal); chiller requirements; repairs; microwaves; and adjustments to meal shelf and trays. We worked closely with our van suppliers during the pilot to give feedback, and adjustments were made along the way, with both parties working together to optimise the vehicle for the service model. We feel we have reached a satisfactory agreement on the vehicle specification to be confident in placing an order for the 2nd generation vehicle, with as many of the adjustments as technically possible.

4.2.3. IT, Administration and Staffing

Due to the broad menu range available each day, the service needed to set up the information and meal codes manually on the SMARTT (database) system, as opposed to the current system which is a tick box one. This meant during the pilot, every customer's order needed to be manually inputted with their meal codes for each day.

As part of the new learning on the model, it was discovered it was leading to significantly increased back-office time, although the end result is effective, we expect that once the familiarisation of the system is gained this will reduce. Further consideration also needs to be given to logistical routing which will impact on staffing level requirements and further IT revision needs to be made to help streamline the administration. Further specification for IT revision is currently underway but the scope for such streamlining will be reduced by the extent to which management and admin staff will be expected to provide driver cover relating to annual leave and sick leave of van drivers.

The realistic amount of hot meals that could be provided in a 2 hour delivery window direct from the vehicle has been evaluated at 15. This needs to be taken into account during review, including staffing implications.

4.3. Financial Review Findings

To be circulated – Pilot costs and full implementation forecasts

5. Conclusion

Overall, the Royal Voluntary Service are pleased with the pilot outcomes, especially the customer feedback which gave very positive indication for customers' appetite to move to a new service model. The partnerships with the meal and vehicle suppliers has worked extremely well, with all parties endeavouring to enhance the service model as much as possible. In addition, the pilot enabled significant learning for a wider roll out of the new model.

It is recommended that we move to roll out the new model to all of Brighton & Hove by X, so that staff, logistics, IT and other areas can be taken into consideration, Royal Voluntary Service expects some further learning due to the increased scale but are confident of successful delivery, alongside continued open discussion with all parties to ensure together we build the best model can.

6. Appendices

**Appendix A: Brighton and Hove Community Meals Trial
Customer Feedback Form**

Date Form Completed.....

Thank you for taking part in this exciting Community Meals trial. We would really appreciate your feedback as this will be an important part of the service review. We will be assessing the benefits of the trial and whether it would be beneficial to put place a similar service across Brighton and Hove towards the end of 2013.

For questions 1 to 9, please tick one box.

1. Did the menu provide you with enough choice to meet your dietary needs?

Yes		No		Not Sure	
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2. Was there anything that was not on the menu that you would have liked to order?

Yes		No	
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If you answered Yes, please provide details in the box below:

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3. Did you find the meal ordering process straight forward?

Yes		No		Not Sure	
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4. Did you receive the meals that you were expecting?

Always		Mostly		Sometimes		Rarely		Never	
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5. Did the meals arrive at the time that had been agreed?

Always		Mostly		Sometimes		Rarely		Never	
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6. Were the meals hot when they arrived (please leave blank if you chose to receive your meals chilled)?

Always		Mostly		Sometimes		Rarely		Never	
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7. How was the portion size for you?

Just right		Too Big		Too Small	
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8. Were the meals tasty?

Always		Mostly		Sometimes		Rarely		Never	
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9. How do you rate the meals compared to the ones you received from our standard service?

Much Better		A Bit Better		About the Same		A Bit Worse		Much Worse	
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10. How would you rate this meals service overall?

Excellent		Very Good		Good		Fair		Poor	
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11. If the trial was successful, would you be interested in any of the following? Please Tick as many as you like:

a.	Main meal delivered hot at lunch time (between 11.30am and 1.30pm)	
b.	Main meal delivered hot at tea time (between 4pm and 6pm)	
c.	Main meal delivered chilled and heated by one of our team using your own microwave at lunch time	
d.	Main meal delivered chilled and heated by one of our team using your own microwave at tea time	
e.	Main meal delivered chilled and heated by one of our team using your own microwave outside of the lunch and tea time hours	
f.	Main meal delivered chilled for you to heat up at a time that suits you	
g.	Cold lunch or tea pack delivered with your main meal, consisting of a sandwich and yoghurt, fresh fruit or cake	
h.	Breakfast pack delivered with your main meal, consisting of cereal, milk and fresh fruit	

12. Please use this section for any other comments:

Thank you for completing this form. Please return it to a member of the delivery team when they next visit with your meal or call us on 01273 410117.

Appendix B Full Customer Feedback Responses

		Yes	No	Not Sure /No Reply (NR)
Q1	Did the menu provide you with enough choice to meet your dietary needs?	22 (92%)	2 (8%)	0
Q2	Was there anything not on the menu that you would have liked to order?	2 (8%)	21 (88%)	1 (4%) (NR)
Q3	Did you find the ordering process straight-forward?	23 (96%)	0	1 (4%)

		Always	Mostly	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Q4	Did you receive the meals that you were expecting?	3 (13%)	16 (67%)	2 (8%)	1 (4%)	2 (8%)
Q5	Did the meals arrive at the time that had been agreed?	5 (21%)	14 (58%)	3 (13%)	1 (4%)	1 (4%)

		Always	Mostly	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Chilled
Q6	Were the meals hot when they arrived?	18 (75%)	3 (13%)	0	0	1 (4%)	2 (8%)

		Just right	Too big	Too small	No Reply
Q7	How was the portion size for you?	19 (79%)	1 (4%)	3 (13%)	1 (4%)

		Always	Mostly	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Q8	Were the meals tasty?	12 (50%)	10 (42%)	1 (4%)	1 (4%)	0

		Much Better	A Bit Better	About the Same	A Bit Worse	Much Worse
Q9	How do you rate the meals compared to the old ones?	10 (42%)	6 (25%)	5 (21%)	1 (4%)	2 (8%)

		Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor
Q10	How would you rate the service overall?	8 (33%)	8 (33%)	7 (29%)	0	1 (4%)

Q11: If the trial was successful would you be interested in any of the following?	
Main meal delivered hot at lunch time	18
Main meal delivered hot at tea time	0
Main meal delivered chilled heated by one of our team using your own microwave at lunchtime	2
Main meal delivered chilled heated by one of our team using your own microwave at teatime	1
Main meal delivered chilled heated by one of our team using your own microwave outside of lunch and tea time hours	0
Main meal delivered chilled for you to heat up at a time that suits you	4
Cold lunch or tea pack	1
Breakfast pack	1

Comments

Positive
"The thing I liked best about this new service was being able to have the meal chilled and then heating it when I wanted. I would not like to go back to the old system, meals arriving hot just anytime."
"Just to say thank you to all concerned and to hope these nice comments bring me bigger portions. Seriously praise where praise is due, and you've got mine."
"[Name] preferred the meals from your trial service (pilot scheme), and would be very pleased if they were a permanent option. He has mentioned the portion size were a little small."
"The meals very good. Thank you for very good service."
Positive & Suggestions
"I should prefer main meal times to be from 12.30am to 2.30pm as sometimes my breakfast doesn't finish until 9.45am. I do hope these delicious meals will soon be permanent."
"All meals must be diabetic. I cannot take normal meals due to health."
Negative
"Wasn't keen on the service of heating meal up when delivering as has been arriving recently. Overall to please everybody will take a much more clever man than me."
"Why change a good standard service."
"I preferred the old style meals, they were much more tasty. I found myself leaving some of the new meals as I did not like the taste of content."
"I did not enjoy the new meals".

