



## Background

Before 2007, Meals on Wheels in Hertfordshire was provided by a wide range of organisations, via the ten district and borough councils. Some councils operated their own service, whilst others outsourced to private companies or charitable organisations. Provision was therefore inconsistent across the county, with differing frequency and reach between services. Price and quality were also highly variable.

As a result, the county council led a feasibility study that looked into the most effective, efficient, and sustainable method of providing a county-wide Meals on Wheels service. The outcome was a recommendation for a social enterprise model.

In 2007, Hertfordshire Community Meals (HCM) was established as a charitable social enterprise. Start-up funding from Hertfordshire County Council and a number of district councils was used to purchase fixed assets. In April 2015, HCM changed its name to Hertfordshire Independent Living Service (HILS) to reflect the broader range of independent living support services offered.

## About the service

- Up to 1800 meals delivered each day

Clients choose from a wide-ranging menu, offering five main course and four dessert options each day. They can also opt for a completely personalised menu and order meals to suit their dietary, cultural, or ethnic choices and requirements. Clients receive on average five meals a week.

As well as a main meal at lunchtime, HILS provides tea and breakfast that is delivered with lunch and put in the client's fridge. Breakfast costs £2.75, lunch costs £4.45 and tea costs £3.25.

People can self-refer to the service, or they can be referred by family, friends, neighbours, or health or social care professionals. Clients that meet one of the following criteria receive the service at a subsidised rate: having difficulty preparing a meal safely; having a mental or physical disability; being unable to shop for food; or needing support due to recovery from hospitalisation or illness, carer illness or holiday, or bereavement.

HILS conducted a social return on investment study in 2012 that demonstrated that for every £1 invested in the core Meals on Wheels service, £5.28 of social value is generated.

Every year a client survey measures how much they value and enjoy the service. It also asks questions about its preventative benefits, such as reducing GP visits and supporting quicker recovery from ill health. Survey responses are very positive; for example, three-quarters (76%) said they visited their GP fewer times; more than four fifths (84%) felt less lonely; and almost all customers (97%) thought the service helped them remain in their own home.

## How the service is run

HILS is based at four sites across Hertfordshire – St Albans, Hemel Hempstead, Ware, and Letchworth – each with its own kitchen, freezers and office. In total, 60 Meals on Wheels delivery rounds operate daily with up to 1,800 meals served.

Almost 200 local people are employed across the four sites, in roles ranging from Community and Support teams through to support functions, such as HR and finance, and the Leadership team. All staff are paid at least the Living Wage (set by the Living Wage Foundation).

HILS also offers supported volunteering, work experience, internships, and apprenticeships to enable people who have faced barriers to employment (such as physical or mental health problems, learning difficulties, long-term unemployment, or an offending record) to grow in confidence and get back into routine and work. This equates to around 20% of its workforce. Volunteers are involved in the befriending service and supporting the **dementia fun-clubs**.

HILS has 67 vehicles in its fleet, which are used for delivering all its services. Small and medium sized, fuel-efficient cars are used, with the back seats flattened for Meals on Wheels delivery, and upright for transporting passengers.

Frozen meals are purchased from commercial caterer *apetito* and stored on site in commercial freezers. Every day, each kitchen regenerates the required meals for delivery to the clients and lunch clubs served by the site. *apetito's* food meets the NACC guidelines for Meals on Wheels, and has internal policies to reduce its environmental impact.

A daily, free, seasonal-focused welfare check and medication reminder is offered to all clients, to ensure the service is genuinely preventative.

Hertfordshire County Council provides contract funding, setting the price each year, as it recognises that the preventative nature of the service saves the council and NHS money in other areas, such as care costs and reduced hospital admissions. It also regularly asks HILS to provide additional value-adding services, such as community alarms and telecare, and transport services.

With an organisational objective to reduce its reliance on the public purse, become more efficient, and provide better value for money, HILS' requirement for local authority funding has reduced in every year of operation. The inclusion of welfare checks/support in the service for people meeting the eligibility criteria means that it can be provided without VAT being charged.

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## Added value

Alongside the main Meals on Wheels service, HILS provides a range of additional services to clients.

- **Pop-in visits** for clients wanting a quick welfare check and friendly reassurance without the need for meals. HILS is also exploring the provision of a befriending service for lonely and socially isolated clients.
- Delivery of **multi-portion meals to around 55 lunch clubs** across the county, run by other organisations that need support with high-quality nutritious food.
- Providing **transport** for clients to and from the HILS-run lunch club and six dementia-specialist fun clubs. HILS has been piloting a transport service providing free lifts to its dementia fun clubs, whilst licensing arrangements for the fleet are finalised.
- Creating a Nutrition and Wellbeing team to identify and address **malnutrition and associated wellbeing issues** in the community. Comprising two registered dietitians and a nutritionist, the team:
  - provides a comprehensive **nutrition and wellbeing check** for clients joining HILS' service, prioritising those most at risk from malnutrition.
  - gives **clinical advice**, from support in making more suitable choices from the menu, through to additional drinks and snacks for those who are particularly at risk of malnutrition, and referrals to speech and language therapists or other clinicians.
  - for clients at risk of malnutrition, the team **re-screen regularly**, as well as providing free 'Nutrition Boost' and 'Nutrition Boost Extra' drink and snack packs to ensure they consume enough calories throughout the day.
- HILS has trained two Community Team members in advocacy. In partnership with four other third sector organisations, it offers the **advocacy** service for older people across the county.
- Providing **emergency food and grocery packs** to people (of any age) who are in crisis. The packs provide enough food and toiletries to support someone, or a family, for around 36 hours, until further provision can be put in place. Hot meals can also be provided free of charge if required, funded by the county council's crisis intervention budget.

For more information about Hertfordshire Independent Living Service or speak to a representative please contact [info@thenacc.co.uk](mailto:info@thenacc.co.uk)

## Local partnerships

HILS has strong relationships with a wide range of local partners, including statutory, private, and community organisations. It works very closely with Hertfordshire County Council, the district and borough councils, NHS colleagues, private-sector businesses, and receives in-kind support from the Social Business Trust (£500k over two years).

- HILS works closely with the Fire & Rescue Service, the Police, and Trading Standards to deliver "Operation Sponge Pudding". Officers go out on Meals and Wheels delivery rounds with the Community Team to carry out **home and personal safety checks**, and provide free equipment, reassurance and support to clients in their home.
- HILS works in partnership with Herts Careline to provide a countywide **community alarm and telecare** service. Herts Careline provides the call monitoring, and HILS installs and maintains the equipment across the county on Careline's behalf.
- HILS collaborates with A1 Optician – a local **optometric** service that has an NHS contract to provide free eye checks in the home. HILS refers clients who may be experiencing sight difficulties and A1 visits them in their home.
- HILS enables client access to **local handyman** partner services. It intends to extend this offer and support clients to access cleaning, gardening, shopping, and handyman services across the county.

## Hopes for the future

HILS aims to become a 'one-stop-shop' for independent living support. It will continue to expand its range of independent living support services to help clients stay happy and healthy at home, and will work in close partnership with other charitable organisations to provide holistic support services.

In the London Borough of Camden, HILS has established the London Independent Living Service (LILS) which is currently running a small-scale Meals on Wheels pilot in partnership with apetito and housing provider One Housing.

*"To all those concerned with Meals on Wheels. Not only do I write to say a very big thank you to ALL involved with my daily meal, but now today for the wonderful gift of the blanket, extras, soup etc. I am overwhelmed by your thoughtfulness and kindness, it's unbelievable. Very often your driver is the only person I see in 24 hours."* HILS client

*"Please pass on our thanks to the people who delivered the meals, they were excellent at letting us know if our dad wasn't eating or causing them concern. We appreciate your service which has enabled my dad to continue to live at home – as he wanted."*

Daughter of HILS client



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