



Caerphilly County Borough Council

Consultation Report on the proposal to cease the Meals Direct service and close its staff catering facilities at Penallta House

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Background

In July 2024, Caerphilly County Borough Council's Cabinet agreed to consult on a proposal to cease delivering its home meals service from the end of November 2024. The proposal would also see the authority close its staff catering facilities within its offices at Penallta House (The Hive Cafe).

The service currently employs 22 members of staff and currently the cost to the council of delivering the service each year is around £444,000 (£109,000 is for the catering operation at Penallta House and around £334,000 is the current cost to the council annually of providing the Meals Direct Service).

Service users who have care plans and are open to Social Services would be reviewed and would then be supported by social work teams to access other provision (external to the Local Authority), if required. All other service users will be supported to find alternative solutions/providers (external to the Local Authority), with support from the Caerphilly Cares Team if required.

Meals Direct Service is a non-statutory service that provides hot and cold meals Monday to Friday between 11.00am and 2pm direct to resident's home or luncheon clubs within the Borough. Frozen meals are available for weekends. Anyone can use the unsubsidised service at a cost of £6.10/day. Alternatively, if they are eligible there is a subsidised service that costs are £3.70 / day. This service is not means tested.

Currently we provide this service to 304 residents of the Borough. (As at the end of June 2024)

The proposal is being considered in line with the Mobilising Team Caerphilly transformation programme which recognises that the council must deliver savings in the region of £45million over the next two financial years. This is on top of the £20million of permanent savings that have already been identified.

Purpose

The consultation was designed to gain an understanding of the impact of the proposal on key stakeholders including Meals Direct Service customers, their families and staff. Where individuals identify that the proposal will have a negative impact on themselves or their family, the consultation will help the council understand the reasons for this and to identify mitigation that could be put in place to reduce that impact.

An initial Integrated Impact Assessment identified that in particular, the decision to cease the delivery of Meals Direct may impact on older people more, given that 84% of service users are over the age of 75. It was also identified that the proposal will have a potential negative impact on people with disabilities. Those who are physically disabled will be less able to access some of the alternative meal provision services due to their curtailed mobility. It is recognised that alternative external providers of meals may not necessarily be able to provide a like for like service. To this end, the consultation sought to identify how the impact could be reduced for current service users and their families.

The Integrated Impact Assessment for Meals Direct can be found here:

<https://www.caerphilly.gov.uk/caerphillydocs/ia/iia-meals-direct>

The Integrated Impact Assessment for the Hive can be found here:

<https://www.caerphilly.gov.uk/caerphillydocs/ia/iia-the-hive>

Methodology (What we did)

The consultation period for Meals Direct and The Hive ran from **Tuesday 30th July to Tuesday 10th September 2024** and was widely promoted.

The Hive

Whilst residents were informed of the proposal to close the staff catering facilities at the Hive in Penallta House, the consultation was focussed internally as the decision will only impact staff and those who have access to staff catering facilities at Penallta House.

A survey was made available bilingually online and paper copies were also available in the Hive. A survey collection box was placed in the Hive for the duration of the consultation for completed paper copies to be returned.

To promote the consultation further, and allow staff we have their say, the following methods were also used:

- An email was sent by the communications team to all staff informing them of the consultation and providing online links to the survey.
- 4 face to face staff drop-in sessions were held in the Hive at Ty Penallta during different times of the day.
- Alongside this, potentially affected staff were informed and engaged directly by their management team, Human Resources and supported by Trade Unions

Meals Direct

To enable all those who wished to give their views to take part, a survey was made available bilingually and in a variety of formats including paper formats.

The consultation was promoted in a variety of ways and made available across a range of platforms. The primary consultation tool was a questionnaire but participants were encouraged to respond in a number of ways. Meals direct users and their families were contacted directly to inform them of the consultation and paper copies of the surveys were sent to each service user and next of kin with a free returns letter. A contact number and email address was also provided for anyone who needed support in completing the survey or had any general queries or concerns.

Other methods that were used to promote the consultation included:

- A dedicated web page linked directly from the home page of the Council's website <https://conversation.caerphilly.gov.uk/meals-direct-service>
- A media release at the launch of the consultation <https://www.caerphilly.gov.uk/news/news-bulletin/july-2024/leader-warns-of-difficult-decisions-ahead>
- Regular social media posts throughout the duration of the consultation period
- Posters displayed in libraries and other public facing Council venues.
- Targeted e-mails to stakeholder groups across the borough
- Internal email to staff sent by communications team.
- As above, potentially affected staff were informed and engaged directly by their management team, human resources and supported by Trade Unions.

Survey

A survey was made available online throughout the duration of the consultation. The survey could be completed online or printed for completion. Hard copies of the survey were also available from all council libraries and were made available at all drop-in sessions held in the community.

The survey focussed on identifying the potential impact of this proposal on stakeholders as outlined above.

A copy of the survey can be found here:

<https://conversation.caerphilly.gov.uk/34540/widgets/101191/documents/65674>

Face to face engagement

4 Face to face staff drop-in sessions were held in Penallta House over the duration of the consultation. This enabled staff to drop in and have their say on both the Hive and Meals Direct consultations.

For Meals Direct, a different, more targeted approach was taken as many service users are disabled and housebound. Therefore, we spoke to service users directly over the phone and send direct letters of correspondence.

Residents and the wider audience

- Council's website with a link directly to the consultation documentation and an online survey. A paper version of the survey was also available for printing from the Website or on request in a variety of formats
- details of the consultation were shared via the Council's Twitter feed and Facebook page. A media release was prepared and also shared on the Council's Website.
- A number of residents also raised Meals Direct at the public drop-in sessions held at 4 venues across the borough.

Results/Key Findings

Note: The statistical data (percentages) presented within this report relates to survey responses only. The number of responses received for individual questions may be lower than the total number of completed questionnaires returned. Percentages are therefore based on the number of responses to individual questions (n=number of responses) and not necessarily the number of completed surveys received.

*Qualitative analysis incorporates both the open-ended responses to the survey **as well as** the qualitative feedback from conversations. **Participation in the consultation was self-selecting. The data should be considered within this context.***

Meals Direct

703 surveys were completed and received by the closing date. Note: all telephone conversations with Meals Direct clients were entered directly into the online survey by officers taking the calls.

Respondent profile

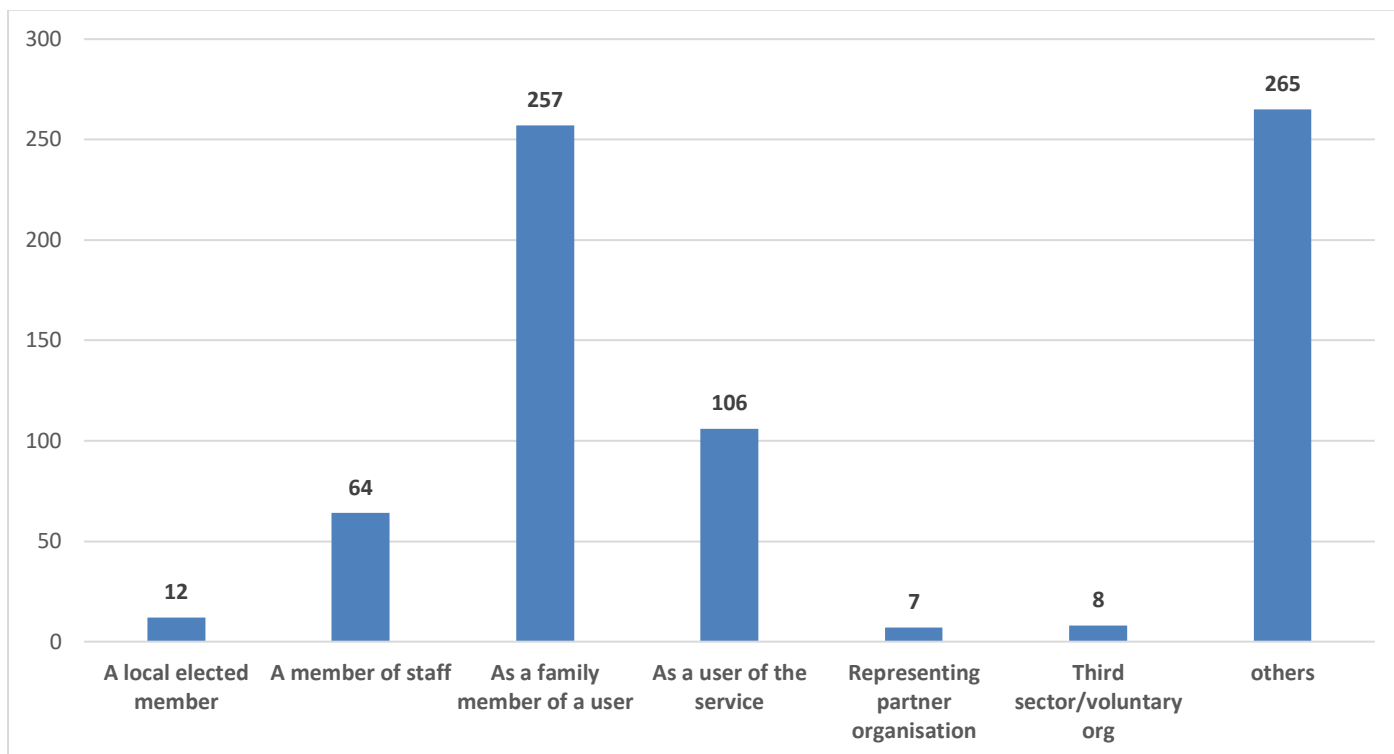
As shown in **Graph 1**, the largest group to respond to the survey, were family members of service users and "other" interested people. One hundred and six (106) service users themselves responded to the consultation.

The average age of service users who responded to the survey was 82 (n=106). The average age of family members (n=211) /all respondents who completed the survey (n=599) was 62.

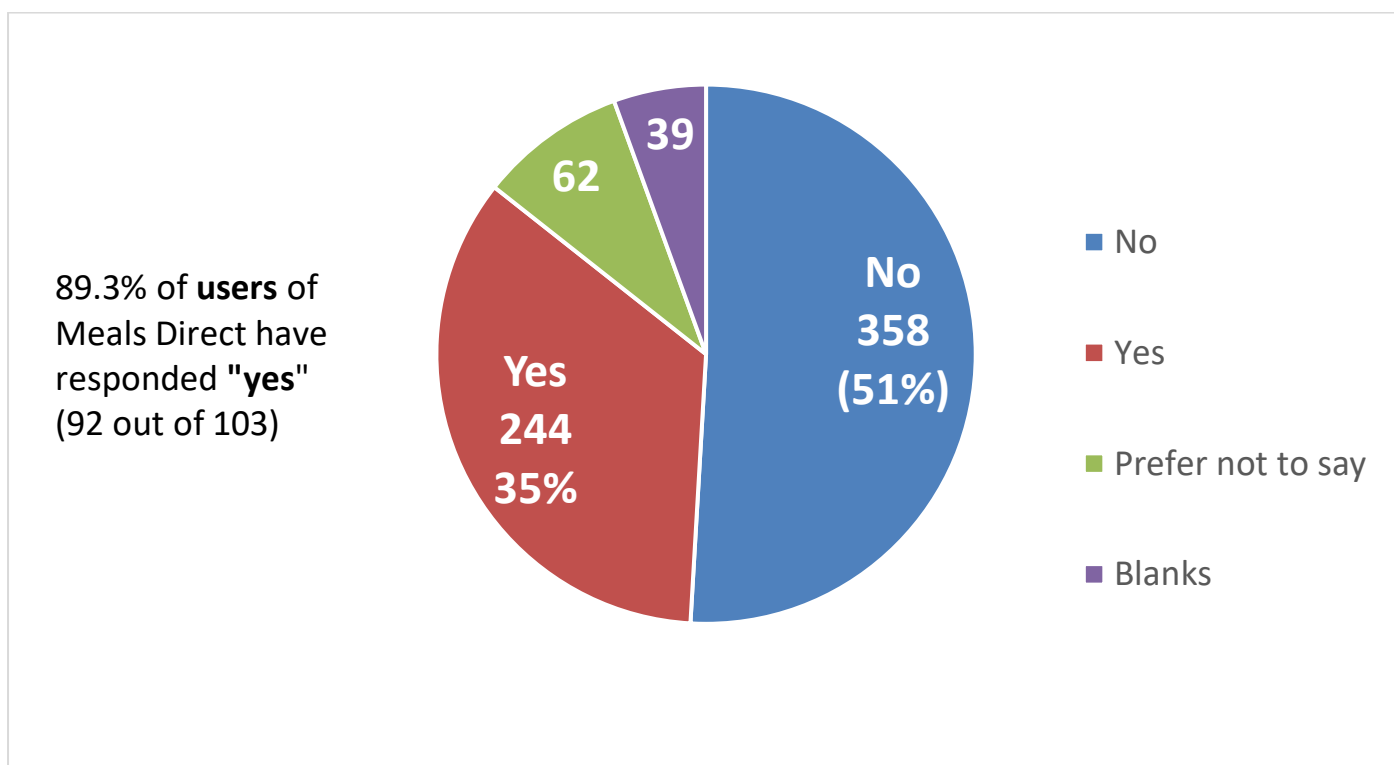
Just over two thirds (67%) of respondents were female and 92% of respondents indicated that their preferred language was English whilst 3% were Welsh speakers.

Just over half (51%) of respondents had a disability whilst amongst service users this was 89% (see **Graph 2**). Of those with a disability, 93% indicated that this impacted on their day-to-day activity (n=244). The figure increases to 98.9% of those who are service users (91/92 respondents).

Graph 1: Interest in consultation (multiple answers possible)

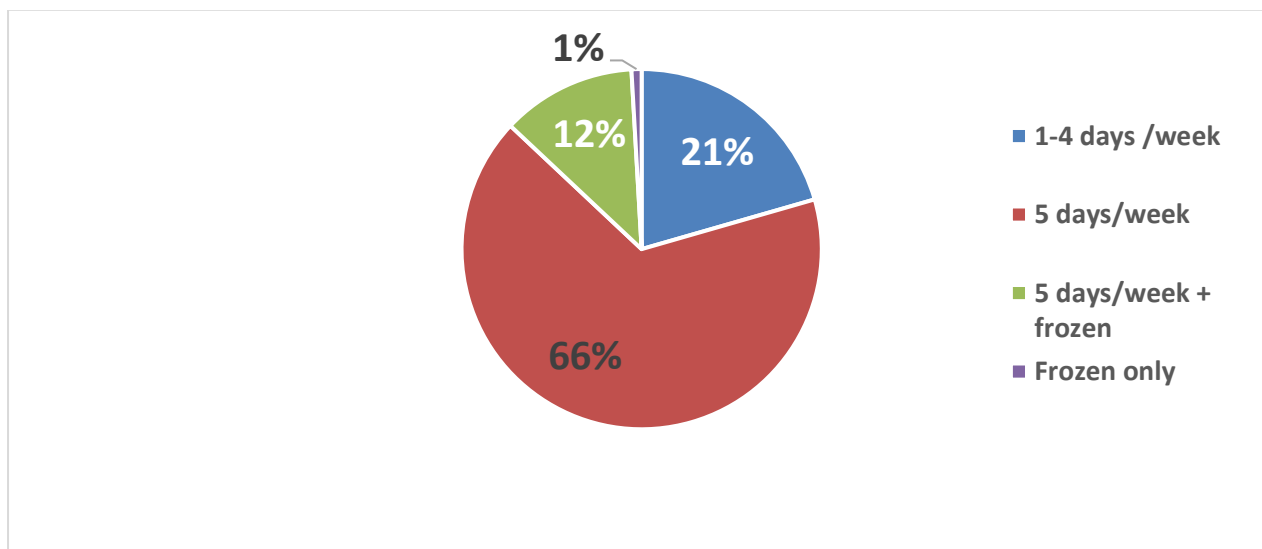


Graph 2: Disability (n=703)



As summarised in **Graph 3**, for Meals Direct customers/family members who responded on their behalf (n=331) around two thirds receive Meals Direct 5 days a week. A further 12% receive meals 5 days a week and frozen on weekends whilst 21% receive meals between 1 and 4 days a week. The remaining 1% received frozen meals only.

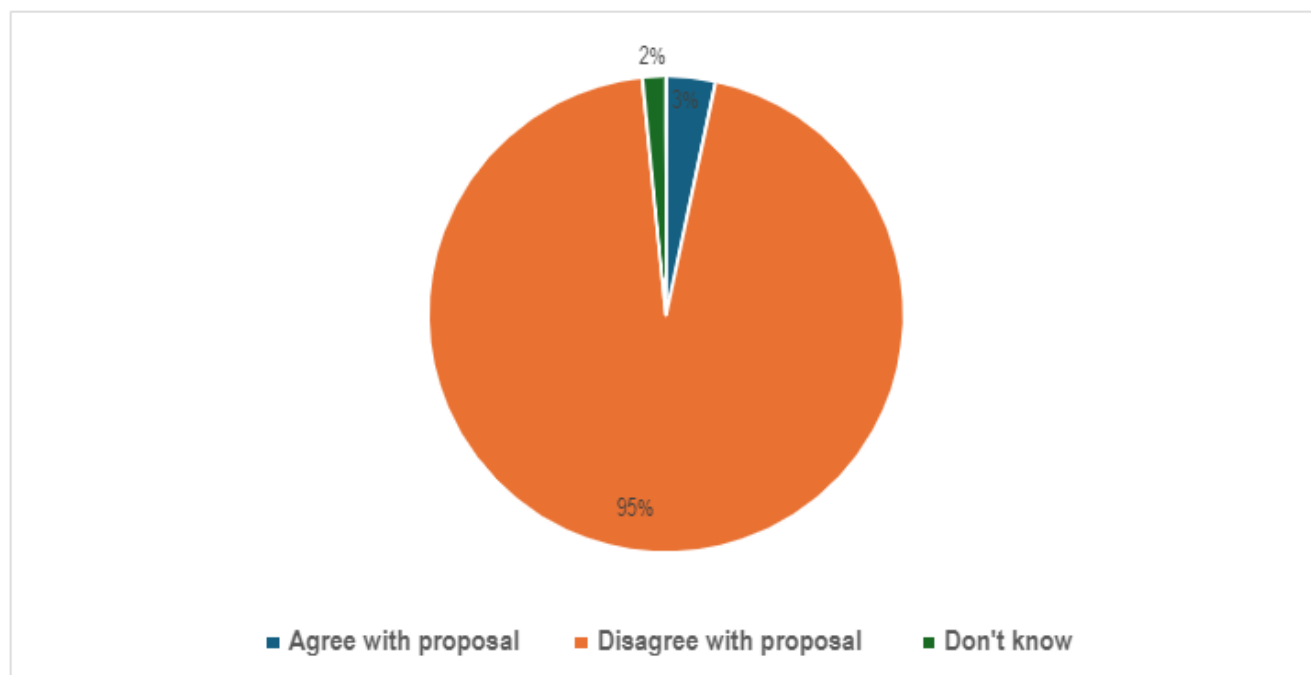
Graph 3: How often do you receive Meals Direct (n=331)



Respondent views and emerging themes

Overall, 95% of respondents (n=689) disagreed with the proposal. **Graph 4** highlights responses to the question “Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the proposal”.

Graph 4: Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the proposal (n=689)



When asked why they agreed or disagreed with the proposal, the key themes were:

Disagree

By far, the overarching theme was the **need to protect vulnerable/older people within our community** with many expressing the view that this service is vital, and that older people should be entitled to this provision. This is particularly the case for users who are disabled or have cognitive impairment (memory loss/dementia) and are unable to cook for themselves

- The absence of a like for like alternative -a hot meal
- The additional benefits that the service provides (more than a meal) to service users in relation to:
 - Social isolation

- Allows independence/people to stay at home particularly where family are unable to support daily through work commitments/distance
- Safeguarding, early intervention – preventative service
- A number felt that the Council should use resources more effectively and save money elsewhere
- There will be an additional impact on social services / health services if this preventative service is removed and that Meals Direct can aid hospital discharge
- Some felt that the food provided is of a good quality, nutritionally balanced and offers good value for money food currently offered with alternatives being more expensive.
- A number indicated that they would be happy to pay more (for a service that offers peace of mind to family members)
- The proposal will result in job losses
- A small number questioned how they would access provision in the future if the service is removed

Agree

Those who agreed with the proposal noted that:

- Affordable alternatives available
- Poor quality of food offered currently
- Cuts need to be made
- Inconvenient timing

Impact on you/your family member

Key themes can be grouped into impacts on the service user, their family member and wider service provision.

- Current service users may be unable to stay in own home or
- unable to cook for themselves so would require wider care package (impact on social services), would eat less nutritionally balanced diet/not eat properly – impact on health
- Social isolation as no-one visiting daily – impact on cognitive/emotional/wellbeing
- Family would need to accommodate but some were concerned that family members who work or live away from the service user would not be able to provide support during the week in particular
- Negative short-term impact but would adjust
- Job losses
- Family unable to support daily - work commitments/distance
- Costly alternative provision
- Too many cuts in Care
- Older generations are being ignored
- A number of comments referenced the need to consider potential future needs of an aging population

Mitigation

When asked what could be done to reduce the impact of the proposal on the service user/family, by far, the most widely given response was to keep the service as it is. The following themes emerged:

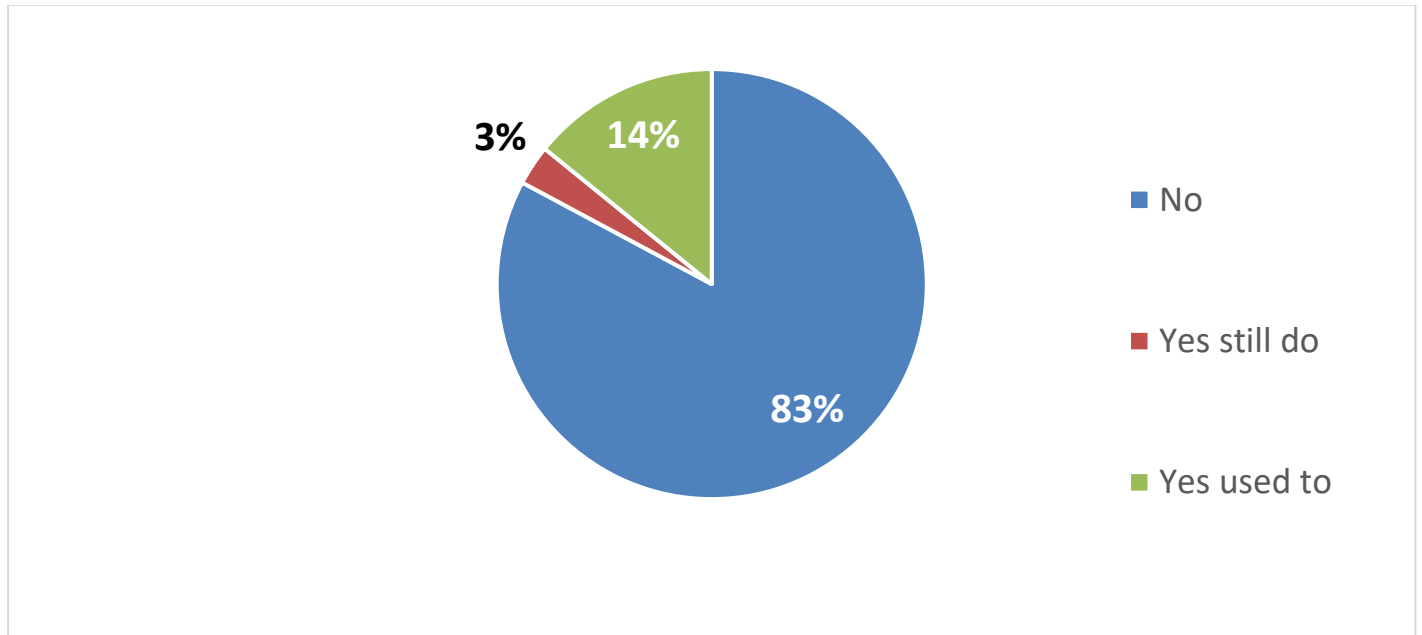
- Provide list of alternatives
- Support those who need (through Social Services or arranging alternative provider)
- Keep but run the service differently
- Make changes in other areas of the Council
- Assess (wider) support needs of current users
- Charge more
- Offer financial support
- Support those who need (through Social Services)
- Engage with service users directly regarding their needs

- A shopping service

Alternative provision

This section of the survey asked Meals Direct users their experience of using alternative provision. As shown in **Graph 5**, the majority of Meals Direct users have never used an alternative provider.

Graph 5: Have you used or do you use any other meal delivery service?



Main reasons given for no longer using alternative provision can be themed as follows:

- High cost
- Didn't want frozen meals
- No longer suitable (physical/cognitive deterioration)
- Poor quality
- No longer required
- Portion size
- High cost AND poor quality
- Personal preference/choice
- Additional support provided by Meals Direct staff
- Less reliable
- Poor choice

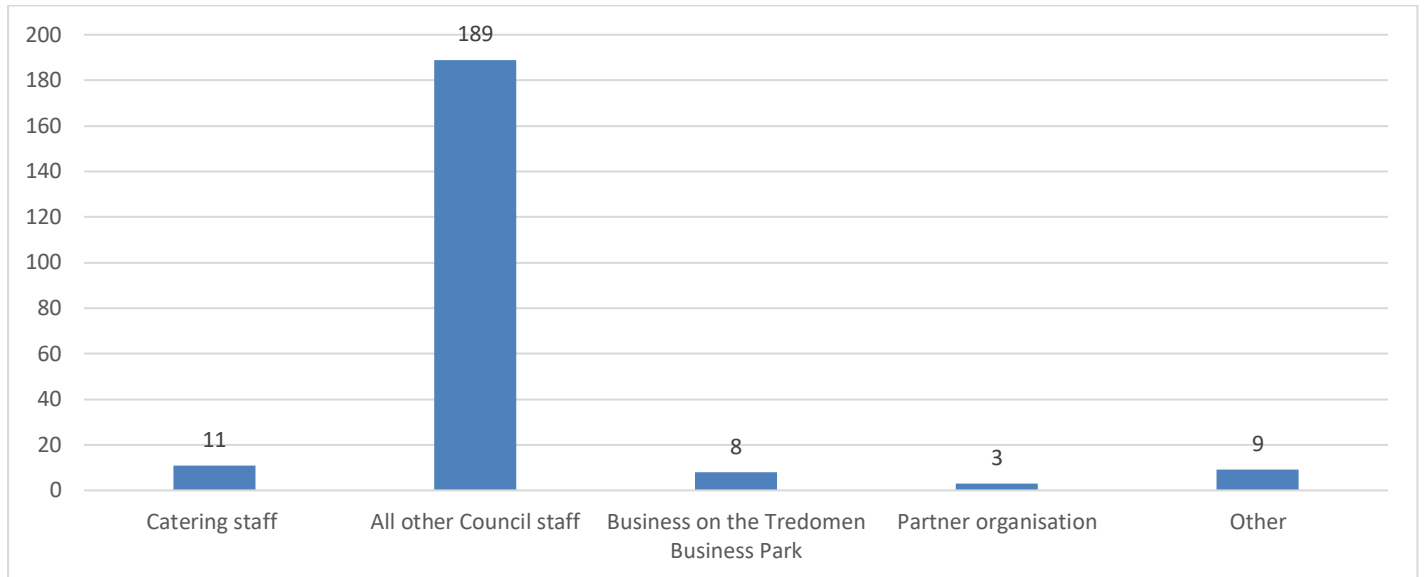
Benefits of Meals Direct over alternative provision

- A HOT meal – plated, no preparation needed
- Regular social interaction
- Service/staff go above and beyond
- Safeguarding role (peace of mind, trusted, links to Social Services)
- Affordability
- Reliability
- Tailored to needs - supporting diets e.g. nutritious, low salt etc

The Hive

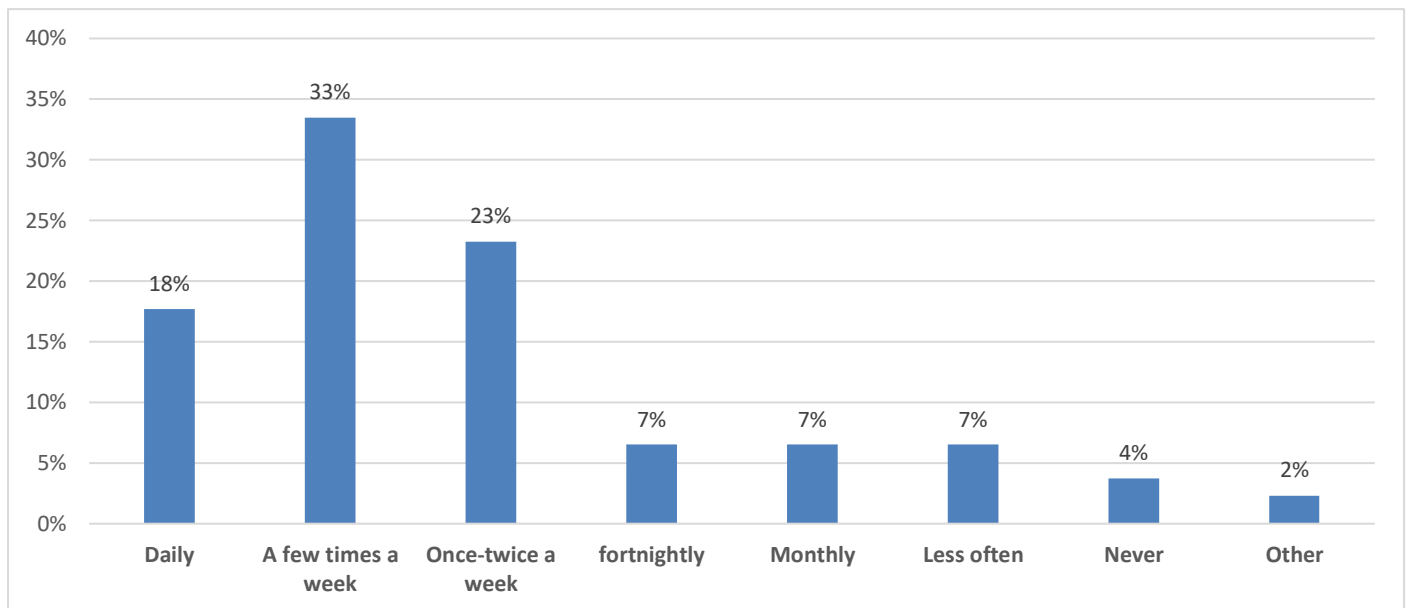
A total of 217 responses were received to the survey. Most of the responses came from staff and the main place of work for 77% of respondents was Penallta House. **Graph 6** highlights the response (note more than one option was possible).

Graph 6: Interest in consultation (multi-response question)



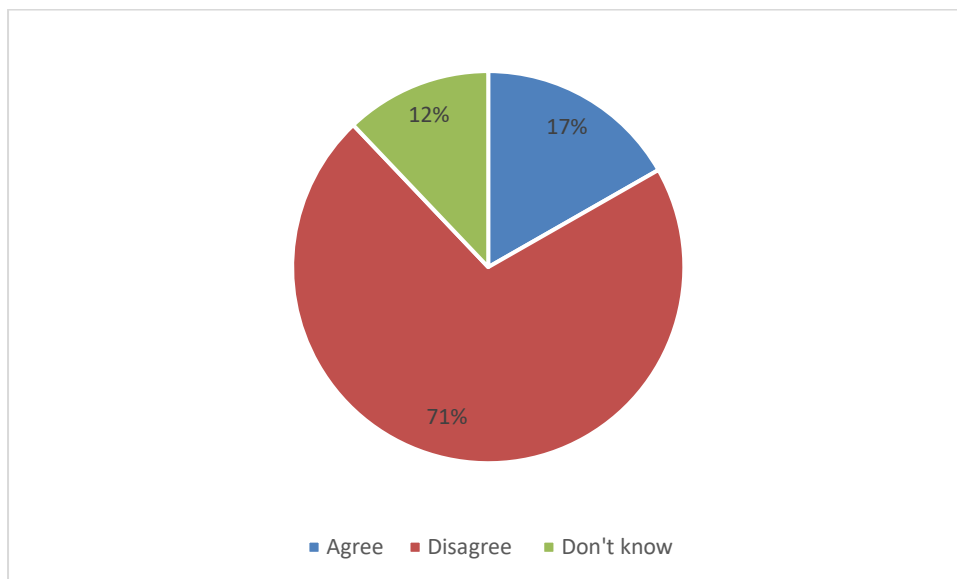
Of those indicated that they visit the Hive to buy something, 73% visit at least once a week (see **Graph 7**).

Graph 7: How often do you visit the Hive to buy something?



Overall, 60% of respondents were female and 10% indicated they had a disability.

Graph: Do you agree or disagree with the proposal to close its catering facilities at Penallta House? (n=215)



Do you agree or disagree with the proposal to close the Hive, Penallta House?

71% of those who responded to the question disagreed with the proposal to close the Hive. 17% agreed and 12% were unsure. As expected, those who visit the hive most regularly were more likely to disagree with the proposal to close the Hive.

Reasons for support/disagreement with the proposal

The main reasons given for disagreeing with the proposal were:

- Closure will have a negative impact on staff in terms of
 - well-being
 - loss of valued colleagues and a negative financial impact if jobs are lost
 - social
- The provision is a basic need
- The provision is well used and of good quality
- There are no alternative close by/within walking distance so the closure will have a negative impact on staff time and the environment as staff will need to travel further (by car) to buy lunch
- Opportunities to improve and opportunities to increase income are being missed e.g. hosting visitors
- Some felt that savings could be better made elsewhere

Reasons for supporting/indicating that they didn't know

- An understanding that this is a non-essential service, and that savings need to be made. If it is not sustaining itself then it should not be subsidised
- There is less demand on the Hive as the council has moved to agile working and the provision is not well used
- A small number felt that the Hive does not provide good value for money (expensive) and the quality of the provision is poor

Regardless of whether they agree or disagree state they wouldn't want to see the catering team lose their jobs

Impact

Reflecting views expressed above, the potential impacts of the proposal identified by respondents can be themed as follows:

- Negative impact on staff morale/wellbeing
 - availability of a hot meal,

- less likely to take a break
- less likely to work from Penallta house
- An impact on work life balance if no food is available - time to prepare/busy family life etc/
- Inconvenience of needing to bring own lunch or needing to purchase food from elsewhere - extra time for lunch/travel pollution/litter/meeting dietary requirements
- Nowhere for visitors to the building to eat/purchase refreshments/lunch or buffet provision
- Economic and financial impact on staff - loss of jobs / work experience and local suppliers

Mitigation suggestions

By far, the most suggested mitigation was to keep the Hive open.

Other suggestions included providing an alternative food and drink provision e.g.

- reduce range of offer
- vending machines
- provide better facilities for staff to use hot water/ storage areas/ larger fridge /microwaves / toasters
- replace with a shop
- change/extend service offered
- offer more food options
- self serve/honesty box
- collaboration with businesses

Ensuring that the space is kept for staff to meet was also felt to be important to a number of respondents

To encourage more use, a number of respondents suggested that staff should be encouraged to return to the office more often and others suggested that the space should be promoted and residents/groups invited to use facility.

Next steps

The outcomes of the consultation will be considered through the Mobilising Team Caerphilly governance structure. The full list of comments received can be found at <https://conversation.caerphilly.gov.uk/meals-direct-service>

List of annexes

Annex 1: Feedback from interested parties

Annex 2: Digest of comments received through survey

Annex 3: Feedback from drop-in sessions

Annex 4: Social media feedback