

**REVIEW OF MEALS SERVICES
TO OLDER PEOPLE
IN THE
NORTH WEST
INNER CITY OF DUBLIN**

FINAL RESEARCH REPORT

*STEPHEN ROURKE
SEPTEMBER 2007*

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Written by Stephen Rourke

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Foreword

The Council for Services to Older People (CSOP) is a network of statutory agencies, voluntary organisations and community based groups which provide services to older people living in the North West Inner City of Dublin. It is a Working Group of the North West Inner City Network. The primary role of the CSOP is to identify ways in which services to older people can be improved and to put in place strategies and actions to enhance the quality of services being provided to older people.

For some time members of the CSOP have been concerned about meal service provision to older people in the North West Inner City. The Council was unclear as to how many older people in the area received regular meals either through a local centre or in their own homes and the quality and standard of the meals being provided. The CSOP felt that it was difficult to make recommendations to the statutory and voluntary bodies involved in future planning and delivery of meal services in the North West Inner City in the absence of relevant factual information.

In March 2006 Stephen Rourke was commissioned by the CSOP to review meal services provision to older people in the North West Inner City. The CSOP would like to express its thanks to Stephen Rourke for his time and commitment to this report. It provides a valuable source of information for short term and long term planning for meal services in the area. It is noted in the report that there is very little research available in Ireland in relation to meal services for older people and we believe this research will also be a great resource to inform policy on a national level.

Thanks also go to the members of the Meals Services Research Sub-Group of the CSOP for the commitment and valuable input they have given to this report. This group comprised - Avril Dooley (Age Action), Mark Hogan (St. Vincents Trust), Sr. Peggy McArdle and Janet Dillon (Stoneybatter Senior Citizens Outreach Project), Breeda McNamara (An Siol Community Development Project), Maeve Halpin (CARELOCAL), Phyllis Hall and Sr. Mairead King (MACRO Senior Citizens Project).

We are very grateful to the group of local researchers for their assistance and all those older people who gave their time to be interviewed and to fill out questionnaires. We would like to thank the representatives of statutory and voluntary organisations who took part in interviews - their information and views were very helpful in compiling this report.

We are grateful to the agencies that provided funding for the research and publication of this report - namely, Dublin City Council, Dublin Inner City Partnership and The Health Service Executive.

Our hope is that the recommendations outlined will inform future planning of meal services in the North West Inner City for the benefit of its older residents.

Nora Kirrane, Chairperson
Council For Services To Older People, North West Inner City



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND

The North West Inner City of Dublin is an area which stretches from the North Circular Road to the Liffey Quays and from Infirmary Road across to Constitution Hill and Dominick Street. The two main neighbourhoods in the North West Inner City are Stoneybatter and The Markets. The population of the North West Inner City, as per the 2006 Census of Population, is 18,702. The population of older people aged 65 and over in the North West Inner City is 1,395 – this represents 7.5% of the overall population of the North West Inner City (compared to 9.2% in 2002).

The Council for Services to Older People (CSOP) in the North West Inner City is a multi-agency group which is concerned about improving and enhancing the services being provided to older people living in the North West Inner City. It is a Working Group of the North West Inner City Network. The CSOP comprises representatives from key statutory agencies and voluntary organisations which are involved in delivering services to older people in the North West Inner City.

One of the main services being accessed by older people is meals services, including meals delivered to a person's home (often called meals on wheels) and meals which take place within a communal building or Centre (often called community meals). The CSOP considered it to be important and necessary to carry out a review of the ways in which meals services are provided to older people living in the North West Inner City.

1.2. RATIONALE FOR REVIEW

The review was considered important on account of the growing evidence at an international level of the importance of meals services for older people. This evidence, which will be considered later in this report, clearly indicates that effective meals services can have significant impacts on the health and general well-being of older people. Health and well-being outcomes relate both to the nutritional value of the meals which are prepared and presented (thereby ensuring that older people receive the necessary daily intakes of iron, proteins and carbohydrates); and the companionship and socialisation benefits of meals services (this especially applies to community meals rather than meals on wheels – although there is also an important human contact element to the meals on wheels services).

There are currently three meals services for older people operational in the North West Inner City. These meals services provide meals for approximately 135 older people each day – 75 of the meals are served in Centres (i.e. community meals) and 60 are delivered to the homes of older people living in the North West Inner City.

In the context of the clear nutritional and socialisation benefits of meals services to older people, the CSOP is anxious to ensure that the meals services being provided to older people in the North West Inner City are of the highest standard (both in relation to the food and in relation to the

ways in which services are organised). The CSOP is also interested in finding out whether the overall provision of meals services to older people at an area level (i.e. within the North West Inner City) could be improved over the next number of years.

In order to assist them in the process of assessing the adequacy and effectiveness of the existing meals services in the North West Inner City and of developing new models or strategies for the future provision of meals services to older people, the CSOP decided to commission a review of the existing meals services. It was anticipated that the outcomes from this review (involving significant levels of consultations with older people, with service providers and with relevant statutory agencies) would help to identify the most appropriate and effective ways of providing meals services to older people living in the North West Inner City of Dublin.

1.3. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The terms of reference for the review of the meals services provided to older people in the North West Inner City are as follows:

- To quantify the number of older people living in the North West Inner City who receive a regular meal through the meals services (either in their own homes or in Centres)
- To compare the percentage of older people benefiting from the meals service in the North West Inner City with the percentage of older people benefiting from meals services in other parts of Dublin
- To carry out an assessment of the quality and standard of the meals services currently being provided to older people in the North West Inner City
- To consider the funding arrangements which are currently in place for meals services and the funding framework/system through which meals services receive financial assistance
- To make recommendations about how the meals services for older people might be improved in the North West Inner City
- To produce a plan for the future organisation and delivery of an effective meals service for older people in the North West Inner City

1.4. METHODOLOGY

In relation to the review of meals services to older people in the North West Inner City of Dublin the following research activities have taken place between May 2006 and July 2007:

- Interviews and consultations took place with 53 older people who are currently using the meals services in Aughrim Court Centre, Dominican Day Centre in Dominick Street and St. Bricin's Court Centre. These are the three existing Centres in the North West

Inner City which prepare and provide meals for older people (within the context of the Meals Services for Older People provision of the Health Service Executive)

- A questionnaire was drawn up to determine the number of older people who are currently using the meals services in the North West Inner City and the number of people who might be interested in using these services in the future. A total of 220 older people participated in the completion of the questionnaires with the assistance of a group of local researchers who are well known in the areas where the questionnaires were distributed
- Interviews took place with representatives of relevant statutory agencies and voluntary organisations which have an involvement and/or interest in the provision of services to older people in the North West Inner City
- Documents and reports relating to the development of services for older people were analysed. These documents include international research carried out on the provision of meals services to older people and relevant documents produced by bodies like the Department of Health and Children, the Health Service Executive and Dublin City Council
- Twelve meetings took place of the Meals Services Research Sub-Group of the Council for Services to Older People in the North West Inner City. This Sub-Group has supported the research into meals services for older people and was a valuable source of information and advice

1.5. STRUCTURE OF REPORT

This introductory section of the review report will be followed by an overview of the benefits and impact of meals services for older people and a description of the meals services in the North West Inner City (Section 2). Section 3 of the report will assess the effectiveness and adequacy of existing meals service provision in the North West Inner City. Section 4 of the report will consider a number of key issues which were mentioned on a regular basis during the various interviews which took place during the review process. Section 5 of the report will set out a framework and a strategy for the future provision of meals services to older people living in the North West Inner City.

2. OVERVIEW AND DESCRIPTION OF MEALS SERVICES

2.1. INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH

Very little research has taken place in Ireland in relation to the value and the impact of meals services for older people. At present, however, the Social Policy and Ageing Research Centre at Trinity College Dublin is carrying out a major national study on ‘The Role and Future Development of Community Meals for Older People in Ireland’. This study will be completed in late 2007. On account of the current paucity of local or national research in Ireland about the benefits and the impacts of meals services for older people, it has been necessary to access research and evaluation reports which have been produced in other countries.

It is considered that the outcomes relating to the benefits of meals services for older people in these countries is relevant to the circumstances of older people living in Ireland – the need for good food, the need for nutrition, the need for a well balanced diet and the need for companionship and socialisation are universal needs which are applicable to older people across the globe. Hence the transferability and the relevance of international research concerning meals services to the needs and circumstances of older people living in Ireland. International research has demonstrated the following outcomes and benefits from the provision of meals services to older people:

(i) Health and nutritional benefits¹

Many studies have shown that older people are generally healthy and well-nourished (Finch et al, 1998; Manton and Gu, 2001). However, the Irish National Health and Lifestyle Survey has indicated some worrying trends in the food consumption of older people. These include an increase in the number of older people eating more than the recommended daily intake of food high in saturated fat (i.e. crisps, biscuits, cakes and chocolate). This has led to an increase in the number of overweight and obese older adults.

There is also a small but significant proportion of older people who are underweight. The Irish National Health and Lifestyle Survey concluded that one in twenty older people are underweight and that the proportion of underweight adults increases as adults get older (Shiely and Kelleher, 2002). In this context there are clear benefits in the provision of meals which are healthy and nutritional and which help to ensure that older people are neither significantly overweight nor significantly underweight.

The nutritional benefits of community meals and meals on wheels have been well documented. For example the nutritional status of those availing of the Elderly Nutrition Programme (ENP) in the United States is significantly higher than that of non-participants. The ENP was designed to help delay premature institutionalisation of older people by providing improved nutritional intake and

¹ *Information contained in this section of the report has been extracted from a Literature Review of the study on ‘Community Meals for Older People in Ireland’ carried out by the Social Policy and Ageing Research Centre at Trinity College Dublin.*

opportunities for social contact. The Older Americans Act (1965) requires that each meal provided through the ENP must provide at least one third of recommended daily dietary intakes. The ENP was evaluated in 1992 and 1996 and the evaluations concluded that the ENP was an effective national framework for preventative nutritional interventions.

In Ireland, there is a growing recognition of the benefits and value of community meals and meals on wheels services for older people. This is reflected in some localised research carried out by the Health Service Executive in areas like the North West of Ireland. It is also evident in documents produced by organisations like the National Council for Ageing and Older People – *‘Despite the perception, meals services for older people are not simply a form of economic support for older people. Older people have a higher risk of malnutrition than younger people and meals services have an important role to play in maintaining nutritional health’*

(ii) Socialisation and companionship benefits

There are a number of factors which increase the risk of older people becoming undernourished or malnourished. These include social isolation, widowhood, dental problems, poor mobility, low socio-economic status, depression, medication which impacts on the absorption of nutrients and living in care institutions (Forster and Gariballa, 2005). It is evident that a number of these factors relate to loneliness, social isolation and the lack of regular companionship and social interaction with other people. In this context it is difficult to overestimate the socialisation and companionship benefits of community meals services.

A number of studies have demonstrated that the opportunities presented for socialisation are one of the key reasons why older people attend local clubs or community meals (Dichiera et al, 2002). Community meals services often provide other activities along with the meals which are presented – these activities include physical activity, cooking programmes and health education classes. Within the United Kingdom community meals are often provided within a pub rather than in a community centre, so as to minimise the stigma attached to receiving a meal subsidised or paid for by the State.

There is an increasing awareness of the fact that the socialisation aspects of the meals services for older people are equally as important as the nutritional benefits of meals services for older people. The more opportunities that older people have to meet with other people on a regular basis lessens the likelihood of these older people becoming depressed, becoming reclusive and perhaps losing the will to live because they don’t see much point in living if they have very limited interaction and contact with other people. Studies have clearly indicated that older people involved in community meals services have higher levels of socialisation than non-participants (Administration on Ageing, 2003; Lin, 1999).

(iii) Independent living benefits

Meals services can play an important role in enabling older people to remain living in their own homes for as long a period as possible. Together with other community based supports such as Home Care Packages, Home Helps, visitation and pastoral services and the role played by Public Health Nurses, meals services play an important role in creating the type of support structure which is necessary to enable some older people to remain living within their own homes and communities. The staff and volunteers who provide meals services are a vital point of contact with older people receiving

meals and are often the first people who will know when something has happened to an older person with whom they are in contact.

The flexibility of meals services is one of the main reasons why older people can remain in their own homes. Many older people use meals services on a temporary basis (e.g. when they come out of hospital) and the availability of meals services can act as an important support as older people regain their independence and confidence (Bartholow et al, 2003; HDG Consulting, 2003).

The various benefits of meals services are recognised in policy documents produced by organisations like the Northern Area Health Board – *'The inter-agency group acknowledges the tremendous health and social gain from a Centre based health provision as the preferred choice due to the benefits of social interaction and stimulation. However it is recognised that there are a number of persons who are unable to leave their homes due to their dependency level. They are often the most in need of a hot midday meal'*.

In relation to the coverage of meals services in different countries it is estimated that community meals and home delivered meals reach approximately 7% of the older population in the United States (Miller, Ohls, Ponza and McCool, 2003) and nearly 5% of the older population in Australia. In the United Kingdom and Ireland it is estimated that between 2% and 3% of older people are linked into a meals service within the area in which they live (O'Hanlon et al, 2005).

International research would suggest that meals services tend to target the most vulnerable older people. Whilst the Elderly Nutrition Programme in the United States reaches about 7% of the older population it is interesting to note that 20% of the service users are older people on low incomes (Millen et al, 2002) – this figure of 20% is significantly higher than the national proportion of older people on low incomes in the United States. Many studies report that meals services recipients tend to be older, female, living alone, widowed, on low incomes (de Graaf, 1990; Lee and Frongillo, 2001).

In relation to the issues of eligibility there is growing evidence that many organisations have stopped using eligibility criteria (apart from the criteria of being over a certain age) and/or have imposed a charge for the meals service so that meals can be made available to all people over the age of 60 or 65. This type of approach helps to remove some of the stigma associated with meals services and to make it a more acceptable option to a larger proportion of older people.

For example clients of the Elderly Nutrition Programme in the United States tend to be poor, aged 75 and over and have a higher than average nutritional risk (Administration on Ageing, 2004). Through opening up these types of programmes to a wider cross-section of older people and removing some of the associated stigma (e.g. you have to be poor to avail of the service), there is evidence to suggest that the reach of community meals services will naturally expand and it will begin to include more older people who might not be poor but who do have significant nutritional, nourishment and socialisation needs.

2.2. MEALS SERVICES IN IRELAND

In Ireland there is no legislative framework for the provision of meals services to older people and the right to food is not an essential human right within the Irish constitution. Meals services in Ireland are virtually all organised and provided by voluntary organisations and community based groups (although a small proportion of meals to older people are also being provided by private catering companies).

The fact that the provision of meals services is not enshrined in the Irish constitution or Irish legislation and that it is hugely dependent on the existence of a local voluntary/community service provider means that, in effect, the likelihood of an older person receiving a community/delivered meal is far more influenced by the availability of a local provider than it is by the nutritional or socialisation needs of individual older people in Ireland.

As mentioned earlier, there has been very little research or evaluations carried out in Ireland in relation to the provision of meals services to older people. There is no national framework or programme (such as the Elderly Nutritional Program in the United States) for meals services to older people in Ireland. Whilst there is generally a certain level of subsidy from the Health Service Executive to local providers of meals services it appears as if the nature of the arrangement between the Health Service Executive and the local providers differs from region to region.

The research on meals services being carried out by the Social Policy and Ageing Research Centre at Trinity College Dublin involved the distribution of over 530 questionnaires to meals service providers and responses to these questionnaires would suggest that there are different funding, organisational and administrative arrangements for the provision of meals services to older people across Ireland. It is also apparent that meals services are more widely available in some parts of the country than other parts (Garavan et al, 2001).

The organisation of meals services seems to be both arbitrary and discretionary – arbitrary in the way that it only operates in areas where there are voluntary organisations and community groups interested in delivering a meals service and discretionary in the sense that it is up to each local voluntary/community provider to decide who they will prioritise and who they will allow to avail of the meals service. There do not seem to be any clear criteria about who is eligible for the meals service nor about mechanisms for ensuring that those who are eligible and in need are linked up with local providers if these local providers are in existence.

Examinations of health and social services for older people, carried out in 2000 and in 2004, indicated that 4% of older people in an urban area (Eastern Regional Health Authority) and 1% of older people in a rural area (Western Health Board) were using meals services. Older people in higher socio-economic groups, those aged 80 and over, those living alone and those with limited mobility were most likely to use meals on wheels services (O’Hanlon et al, 2005). Meals services were used about three times each week by recipients and 91% of service users indicated that they were satisfied with the service being provided (Garavan et al, 2001).

In relation to Government policy it is evident that there is a clear and unambiguous policy to support older people to live within their own homes and in their own communities for as long a period as possible. This policy is reflected in statements which have been produced by the Minister for Health and Children and by the Health Service Executive. This policy of maintaining people in their own homes has been strengthened in recent years on account of controversies surrounding nursing home provision and residential provision for older people.

'There will be a major improvement in home-based and community-based support for older people. I am determined to put in place comprehensive health and social care for older people in a way that is reliable, that respects and values older people, their families and taxpayers alike. The initiatives I am setting out today underlines the Government's commitment to older people and to putting them at the centre of health policy in the future. The investment package is focused on caring for people at home where they want to be.'

'It is entirely right that we should devote additional resources to services for older people. They have made a great contribution to our society and to our present-day economic and social success. Through the proposed initiatives we are saying that the next generations value their contribution and will respect their needs and their continuing role in our society'

Mary Harney,

Minister for Health and Children,

December 2005

'The investment is a response by the Government to older peoples' preferences to be cared for at home rather than going into residential care. Very often that may require some additional home help or more developed home support including various therapy services. It is estimated that 28% of nursing home residents have a low to moderate dependency level and that many of these residents might very well have continued to live at home if the right supports had been made available to them at the appropriate time'

Mary Harney,

Minister for Health and Children,

January 2006

In more specific terms, the supports which could or should be made available to older people to enable them to remain living at home include Home Care Support Packages, Home Helps, Day/Respite Care Centres, Specialist Palliative Care, Meals Services and Sheltered Housing. It is evident that many of these services and supports are being delivered by voluntary organisations and community based groups and that more is now being expected or requested from the voluntary and community sector in relation to community care for older people – this is reflected, for example, in the significant increase of monies allocated by the Health Service Executive to voluntary/community organisations.

Some organisations and commentators have questioned whether the voluntary and community sector has the capacity to deliver a range of important support services to a substantial number of older people living in Ireland. There have also been issues about the extent to which community and voluntary sector organisations are carrying out work which should primarily be the responsibility of the State and should be delivered by relevant Government Departments and statutory agencies (Timonen, Doyle and Prendergast, 2006).

It has been argued that over-dependence on voluntary and community sector providers leads to large variations in the standard and quality of service provision and that the State should play a more direct role in ensuring quality standards are in place. Perhaps the State should also take more responsibility for the delivery of services (rather than out-sourcing or contracting them out to voluntary/community organisations) and, as the demographic profile of the population becomes older, the State needs to strike the right balance between services for older people which are provided directly by the State and services for older people which are provided by voluntary organisations and community groups.

In line with the Government's increasing prioritisation of community based services and supports for older people to enable them to stay living at home, there has also been additional public money provided for these services and supports. In relation to meals services for older people there will be a 50% increase in the budget for these services between 2005 and 2007 – from €10 million in 2004 to €15 million in 2007. Whilst this increase of €5 million over two years is to be welcomed, it is significantly less than the increases for other community based services for older people e.g. increase of €55 million in Home Care Support Packages over two years and increase of €33 million in Home Help services over two years.

In projecting ahead, it is anticipated that there will continue to be a significant increase in the amount of money allocated to services for older people with a clear focus on services which enable older people to remain within their own homes. The National Development Plan for 2007 – 2013 ('Transforming Ireland – A Better Quality of Life for All') states that €9.7 billion will be invested in the Older Peoples Programme –€4.7 billion in the Living at Home sub-programme and €5.0 billion in the Residential Care sub-programme. The measures to be covered through the Living at Home sub-programme include Home Care Support Packages, Home Help Services, Meals Services, Community Intervention Teams and Respite/Day Services.

2.3. MEALS SERVICES IN NORTH WEST INNER CITY OF DUBLIN

There are three voluntary organisations providing meals to older people in the North West Inner City of Dublin. These organisations are An Síol Community Development Project (which manages the meals service in Aughrim Court Centre in Stoneybatter); St. Bricin's Court Management Committee (which manages the meals service in St. Bricin's Court Centre and organises delivery of meals to older people in the Stoneybatter area); and St. Vincent's Trust (which manages the Dominican Day Centre in Upper Dominick Street and organises delivery of meals to older people in the Dominick Street/Dorset Street area). In addition to these voluntary organisations a private catering company named Welcare

delivers meals to a small number of older people in the North West Inner City who are referred to Welcare by the Health Service Executive.

The following is a description of the meals services being provided to older people in the North West Inner City by voluntary/community sector providers of meals services:

- The meals service in **Aughrim Court Day Centre** is organised and managed by An Siol Community Development Project which has five strands to its work with older people (i.e. meals, minibus, activities, friendship and security service). The meals service is based in a community facility which forms part of an older persons complex that also contains 41 residential housing units for older people. The meals service in Aughrim Court was started by An Siol in 1999. The Aughrim Court complex is owned and managed by Dublin City Council.

The meals service in Aughrim Court operates for five days each week and lunches are served to people who come to the Centre between 12.30 p.m. and 2.00 p.m. each day. Lunch consists of two courses and tea/coffee and the menu is rotated on a regular basis so as to ensure that there is good variety in the meals being provided to older people.

The Centre is able to cater for up to 40 older people each day. Current usage is approximately 90% on a daily basis – the balance of 10% are generally people who have indicated that they will be receiving a meal but for one reason or another (e.g. illness) are unable to attend. This meals service does not have a meals on wheels or delivery element. The service does not operate on Bank Holidays and provides a reduced service between Christmas and New Year. The number of meals prepared in Aughrim Court Day Centre, based on an analysis of figures over a three month period, is a monthly average of 728 meals. In 2006, a total of 8,628 meals were served in Aughrim Court Day Centre.

The meals service in Aughrim Court Centre is staffed by a team of four Jobs Initiative workers (paid through FÁS' Jobs Initiative programme) and a part-time worker funded through the Health Service Executive. The organisation of the meals service in Aughrim Court is also supported in a significant way by An Siol's Development Worker for Services to Older People. The An Siol minibus transports older people to and from the Centre (approximately 12 people are transported each day). All of the staff in Aughrim Court Centre who prepare and present the lunches to older people have received internationally recognised accreditation in food hygiene standards (through the HACCP qualification).

The main catchment area for the meals service in Aughrim Court Centre is the Aughrim Court complex of residential housing units and the streets/roads within the Stoneybatter area of Dublin 7. About 15% of service users live in the Aughrim Court complex and the balance of 85% generally live in their own houses in the streets and roads around Stoneybatter.

The meals service in Aughrim Court has a particular focus on older people who are living alone, who could benefit from socialisation and/or who might have some difficulty in looking after themselves. The service does not have strict eligibility criteria and accepts self-referrals and older people who have been referred to the service. In general terms, the service accepts any older person living in the Stoneybatter area who feels that he/she could benefit from the lunch, the companionship and the social activities which are provided.

Older people using the meals service pay €3 for each meal in Aughrim Court Centre and the Health Service Executive contribute a subsidy of €1.45 towards each meal (this subsidy is reimbursed to An Síol at the end of each month). In addition to the meals provided to the older people, social activities are also organised for four afternoons each week – these activities include bingo, arts and crafts, holistic therapies and remedies. On the afternoons when these types of activities are organised, older people can spend from 12.30 p.m. to about 4.00 p.m. having their lunch, socialising with other people and engaging in activities which are fulfilling and enjoyable.

Residents in Aughrim Court have access to the Day Centre outside of the times when meals and activities are organised through An Síol – a number of residents in Aughrim Court are keyholders for the Day Centre.

– The meals service in the **Dominican Day Centre** is organised and managed by St. Vincent's Trust which is a community education agency of the Daughters of Charity. The Dominican Day Centre is based in 31 Upper Dominick Street. It was developed into a Day Centre by the Dominican Province of St. Saviours in 1984. The Centre provided services for older people, teenagers and pre-school children for many years – gradually the services for teenagers and children ceased. Responsibility for the management and operations of the Day Centre transferred to St. Vincent's Trust in 2004 at the request of the Dominican Community

The meals service in the Dominican Day Centre operates for five days each week and lunches are served for people who come to the Centre between 12.30 p.m. and 2.00 p.m. each day. The lunch consists of two courses and tea/coffee and the menu is rotated on a regular basis. The Centre operates a community meals service in the Centre itself which caters for 15 - 20 people each day (the Centre has the capacity to accommodate up to 30 people) and also operates a meals on wheels, delivery service which provides meals for an additional 25 people each day.

The meals service from the Dominican Day Centre does not operate on Bank Holidays or during the Christmas holidays. The number of meals prepared in the Centre, based on an analysis of figures over a three month period, is 371 in-Centre meals each month and 525 delivered meals each month. In 2006, there were 166 older people registered for meals and other services with the Dominican Day Centre. In 2006, a total of 4,516 meals were served in the Centre and a total of 6,049 meals were delivered to the homes of older people in the North West Inner City.

The meals service in the Dominican Day Centre is staffed by a full-time Manager (who works for four days each week), a Catering Supervisor, a part-time Catering Supervisor, a part-time driver and maintenance person and by a team of Community Employment workers. Core salary costs and other running costs are largely covered by an annualised revenue grant from the Local Health Office Dublin North Central of the Health Service Executive Northern Area.

In 2005, the Health Service Executive also provided a significant level of capital funding to improve the cooking area and other facilities within the Dominican Day Centre. The relationship between the Centre and the Health Service Executive is based on annual work plans and budgets which have clearly agreed goals and targets for the service being delivered. The staff who prepare the food in the Centre have the HACCP food hygiene standards qualification.

The main catchment area for the meals service being provided by the Dominican Day Centre (both in-Centre and delivered meals) are older people living in the North Inner City of Dublin with a particular emphasis on those neighbourhoods immediately adjacent to the Centre – in the Dominick Street, Dorset Street, St. Mary’s Place and Markets area. The Centre operates a minibus service which drops and collects older people from the Centre and which also delivers meals to those older people availing of a meals on wheels service. The Centre also operates an outreach service for those availing of the meals on wheels service and for those in residential care.

The Centre has a particular focus on older people who are living alone, who are vulnerable, who could benefit from socialisation and company and who might have some difficulty in looking after themselves. The Centre does not have strict eligibility criteria and is prepared to accept self-referrals and older people who have been referred to the Centre by the local public health teams and by other agencies. In general terms, the Centre is prepared to accept any older people who feels that he/she could benefit from the lunch, the companionship and the social activities which are provided. Older people using the meals service pay €3 for each meal and the Health Service Executive contribute €1.45 towards each meal.

In addition to the meals provided to older people, social activities are also organised through the Dominican Day Centre. These activities include afternoon events like bingo and singalongs (which allows the older persons spend a full afternoon in the Centre); trips to places like Dollardstown and other locations outside of Dublin; and parties which are organised at special times of the year (e.g. St. Patrick’s Day, Halloween). It is evident that these social events and activities are an integral part of the programme organised by the Dominican Day Centre, a Centre which is open from 9.00 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. from Monday to Thursday and from 9.15 a.m. to 3.30 p.m. on Friday.

– The meals service in **St. Bricin’s Court Centre** is organised and managed by St. Bricin’s Court management committee. St. Bricin’s Court Centre is located in a Dublin City Council complex in Dublin 7 which is focused on providing residential and meals services for older people and for people with psychiatric difficulties. In addition to the Centre which is located in the middle of the complex, the complex also comprises 51 units of residential accommodation.

The meals service in St. Bricin’s Court was initially supported by An Síol Community Development Project (which helped to facilitate the employment of Community Employment workers for St. Bricin’s Court Centre). The meals service in the Centre is now run and managed solely by St. Bricin’s Court management committee.

The meals service in St. Bricin’s Court operates for five days each week and lunches are served to people who come to the Centre between 12.00 noon and 1.00 p.m. each day. The lunch consists of two courses and tea/coffee and there is some rotation of the meals which are served every day. The Centre operates a community meals service in the Centre itself which caters for 12 – 15 people each day (the Centre has the capacity to accommodate up to 30 people) and also operates a meals on wheels, delivery service which provides meals for an additional 35 people each day.

The meals service of St. Bricin's Court Centre does not operate on Bank Holidays or during the Christmas holidays. The number of meals prepared in the Centre, based on an analysis of figures over a three month period, is 240 in-Centre meals and 670 delivered meals each month. The meals service in St. Bricin's Court Centre is staffed by two part-time cooks and kitchen workers who work from 8.30 a.m. to 2.00 p.m. on the days when the Centre is operational. These workers were originally paid through the FÁS Community Employment programme and are now paid directly through the contributions from service users and the subsidies from the Health Service Executive. For the meals on wheels aspect of the service, meals are delivered by a volunteer driver who uses his own transport to deliver these meals.

The main catchment area for the St. Bricin's Court meals service is the St. Bricin's Court complex for older people and the wider Stoneybatter area. In relation to the community meals part of the service virtually all of the people who attend the Centre for their meals are residents of St. Bricin's Court. In relation to the meals on wheels delivery service, the driver delivers meals throughout the Stoneybatter area and takes in the area around Infirmity Road, Oxmantown Road and North Circular Road as well as other places where there is a concentration of older people (e.g. older persons complex in Drumalee, Kirwan Street Cottages).

St. Bricin's Court meals service has a particular focus on older people who are living alone, who are vulnerable, who could benefit from socialisation and company and who might have some difficulty in looking after themselves. The meals service receives referrals from a number of sources – these include hospitals, social workers and public health nurses. Older people can also self-refer themselves into the meals service at St. Bricin's Court and can present themselves for lunch whenever lunches are being served. In this type of context, the service does not operate strict or rigid eligibility criteria.

Older people using the meals service pay €3 for each meal and the Health Service Executive contribute €1.45 towards each meal. Dublin City Council allocates €300 each year towards the service, as well as having supported a major refurbishment of the kitchen in the Centre which took place in 2003.

In addition to the meals being provided, a limited range of social activities are organised for the older people attending the meals service and for other people living in St. Bricin's Court. These activities are limited on account of the lack of resources available to St. Bricin's Court management committee and the absence of volunteers to run different activities for older people living in St. Bricin's Court and in surrounding areas.

On the odd afternoon some activity such as bingo might be arranged. For the large proportion of afternoons, however, there is no activity and the older people who have their meal in the Centre leave immediately after the meals finish at 1.00 p.m./1.30 pm. with no subsequent activity taking place in St. Bricin's Court Centre.

In addition to the three existing meals services which are operational within the North West Inner City it is also considered important to make references to Drumalee and to the MACRO Community Resource Centre. In relation to Drumalee there was a meals service for older people which took place in a Centre in Drumalee and which primarily catered for the older people living in the older

persons housing complex in Drumalee, a complex of 70 housing units. This Centre was closed down in 2000 and has not been replaced. On the basis of consultations with older people living in the area it is evident that the meals service in Drumalee is much missed and that many of the older people who linked into this meals service have not transferred or been re-directed to other meals services in the North West Inner City.

In relation to the MACRO Centre in North King Street there is a very active and strong programme of activities for older people living in the Markets area of the North West Inner City. However there is no meals service for older people operational in the Markets area although there is a fine kitchen and restaurant facility within the MACRO Centre which could provide a meals service for older people living in the Markets area. On account of the lack of a local facility there is a very poor take-up of meals services amongst older people in the Markets area, an outstanding gap in provision which could be filled by the establishment of a new meals service based in the MACRO Centre. The issue of coverage of meals services in the North West Inner City will be considered later in this report.

2.4. OVERALL PROVISION IN NORTH WEST INNER CITY

It is estimated that the three existing meals services in the North West Inner City provide approximately 135 meals for older people each day between Monday and Friday (excluding Bank Holidays). As mentioned earlier in this section of the report these meals represent a combination of community meals which are provided within Centres and meals on wheels which are delivered to the homes of older people. The breakdown of the 135 meals which are prepared each day is as follows:

Name of Centre	In Centre	Delivered to Homes	Total
Aughrim Court Centre	40	0	40
Dominican Day Centre	23	25	48
St. Bricin's Court Centre	12	35	47
Total	75	60	135

On a weekly basis, it is estimated that approximately 170 older people in the North West Inner City avail of meals services being provided by the three existing providers. Not all of the older people linking into the service would avail of the meals service for five days each week. It is estimated that about 55% of the total number of weekly users would attend each day whilst the remaining 45% would attend for between one day and four days each week (they have alternative arrangements made for the days when they do not attend the meals service).

It appears that nearly all of the 170 older people who link into the meals services in the North West Inner City can be accommodated within these services for as many days as they wish between Monday and Friday each week. There are no significant issues in relation to excessive demand in the Dominican Day Centre and St. Bricin's Court Centre and whilst there are some older people who cannot be catered for as often as they would like in Aughrim Court Centre this appears to be a fairly small number of people. However, it is also evident that if there was greater capacity a larger number of older people would be interested in using, and would be referred to, Aughrim Court Centre.

The coverage of the existing meals services for older people in the North West Inner City is relatively high in relation to the coverage of meals services in other parts of Ireland (average of 2% - 3%) and in countries like the United States (coverage of 7%). The 2006 Census of Population stated that there are 1,395 people aged 65 and over in the North West Inner City. On the basis of these figures, it is apparent that about 12.2% of the overall elderly population is receiving a meals service.

3. ANALYSIS OF EXISTING PROVISION

3.1. INTRODUCTION

This section of the review document will consider the ways in which the existing meals services are being delivered to older people in the North West Inner City and the impact of these services on the general health and well-being of service users. The analysis contained in this section of the report is largely based on feedback from 53 older people who are currently using one of the three meals services in the North West Inner City (either Centre based meals or meals on wheels). The analysis of existing provision will be considered under the following headings:

- **Quality and variety of food**
- **Socialisation and companionship**
- **Staffing of meals services**
- **Physical surroundings**
- **Availability and opening hours**
- **Cost and affordability of service**

3.2. QUALITY AND VARIETY OF FOOD

There is generally a high level of satisfaction with the food which is prepared and presented to older people who are participating in meals services in the North West Inner City. A total of 83% of older people consulted during the review process said that they were either very satisfied or satisfied with the food which is being provided to them – levels of satisfaction varied from 85% - 90% in the Auhgrim Court Centre and the Dominican Day Centre to approximately 70% in St. Bricin's Court Centre. Service users generally said that the food was well cooked, that it was the type of food that they liked and that there was some consultation about their own particular food preferences.

There also seems to be a reasonable amount of variety in the food which is being served to older people. On a weekly basis, there is a different meal served each day between Monday and Friday and some of the meals services also provide a significant amount of variety throughout the month (i.e. it is not the same dish/menu every Monday, every Tuesday and so on). Older people consulted during the review were unsure about the extent to which their nutritional and dietary needs were taken into account during the preparation of the meals i.e. were the meals informed by an analysis and understanding of the particular nutritional needs of older people or were the meals similar to meals that would have been prepared for any age group?

There seems to be a fairly high level of flexibility in the ways in which the meals services are provided to older people in the North West Inner City. This comment is particularly applicable to older

people who participate in the community meals service within the individual Centres – the general feedback from older people is that if a person does not like the food that is being served on a particular day the staff will do all that they can to come up with a suitable alternative meal. Obviously there are more limited options about having meals changed if the older person is getting the meal delivered to his/her home – the person delivering the meal is simply not in a position to rustle up an alternative meal.

'If I don't like the food I can ask for something different. The staff are very obliging'

'I am very happy here. If I don't like the food some day I can get something different made for me'

'No choice exists and this is bad since some people have special diet needs, people like diabetics'

There were some complaints during the review process about the quality and variety of the food being provided. These complaints were from a fairly small minority of older people who were consulted during the review process. Some people felt that the food was not fresh (e.g. the vegetables were from tins); that the food was not cooked properly; that the dietary circumstances of some older people (e.g. diabetics, coeliacs) were not taken into account or accommodated; and that, in one Centre, the food was poorly presented in tinfoil containers rather than being presented on proper plates.

3.3. SOCIALISATION AND COMPANIONSHIP

A large number of older people consulted during the review referred to the socialisation and companionship benefits of the meals services being provided in the North West Inner City. They said that the opportunities which meals services presented for older people to meet with other people (e.g. other older people, staff of Centres, drivers) was as important as the quality and variety of the meals which are provided. It is estimated that approximately 75% of the older people who participated in the review of meals services live by themselves and, if it were not for the meals service, many older people said that there would be a lot of days when they would not see anybody else or have a chance to have a chat with anyone.

'It helps to break up the day'

'It is great to be able to see my friends every day'

'We have lots of fun and a few laughs'

'It helps to put in the day. Without the meals service the days would be a lot longer'

A number of older people said that the meals service was like some type of lifeline for them, that the meals service kept older people in contact with other people and that the meals service was something which they really looked forward to every day. It is evident that either going to a Centre for a meal or having a meal delivered to your home by a friendly driver is a really important part of the daily schedule and daily routine for many older people living in the North West Inner City. The extent of the importance of the meals service can be gauged by the fact that many older people do

not like weekends and Bank Holidays – these happen to be the times when the meals services are not operational.

‘I hate the long weekends. It is a long time from when I leave the Centre on Friday afternoon until the Centre opens up again for lunch on Tuesday’

There was a high level of support for the idea of the meals services being integrated with a broader programme of social activities, a programme which could enable older people to spend longer periods of time in the Centres where the meals are served. It is recognised that there are resource and staffing implications in organising a full range of social activities and events for older people and that there are significant differences in the scale and scope of social activities which are organised for older people in the three Centres in the North West Inner City where meals for older people are provided.

‘I would like more social activities like music and singalongs’

‘When the door is closed at home you know you are on your own again. I would love to be able to stay in the Centre for a while longer every day’

Many older people said that they would be lost without the meals service and felt that their physical health, their mental health and their emotional health would deteriorate fairly quickly if they did not have the meals service to look forward to. Whilst a number of older people consulted during the review said that they were well able to cook for themselves or to go out to a restaurant or a café for lunch, they also said that it would simply not be the same as being able to go to their own Centre and to meet with friends and other people whom they know.

There is a clear sense that the availability of meals services, and that the attendant opportunities for socialisation which come with these meals services, is a very important factor in the well-being and optimism of many older people and is a key feature in enabling older people to lead independent lives, to remain living in their own homes/communities and to have a stronger sense of purpose and hope in their daily lives.

‘Going to the Centre is very important for me. It is better than looking at the four bare walls at home. Loneliness is a terrible thing’

‘The company is lovely and I look forward to meeting my friends every day’

‘I could go for lunch with some of my family but I am not too sure if they really want me. I prefer it here in the Centre’

3.4. STAFFING OF MEALS SERVICES

There is a high level of satisfaction with the staff and volunteers who are involved in the provision of meals services to older people in the North West Inner City. The older people feel that the staff are efficient, that they are courteous, that they are friendly and that they have the best interests of older people in their minds at all times. Favourable comments about the staff and volunteers were applied both to the people who work in the Centres and to the people who deliver meals to the homes

of older people. There was an overall satisfaction rating of approximately 85% with the staff and volunteers who are involved in the meals services in the North West Inner City.

'The staff in here are very kind to me'

'It is grand and handy in here. The girls are great'

'For me it is so nice to meet up with people and to have a conversation with them. The staff are so good to each and every one of us. They are always cheerful and friendly – they have a great sense of fun and it cheers me up no end'

It is evident that many of the staff who are currently working in the various meals services have been in their jobs for a fairly lengthy period of time and that a trusting and respectful relationship has built up between the staff and service users over the last number of years. Older people using the services are grateful for the continuity and consistency which has existed and for the fact that there have not been large turnovers of staff in the three meals services in the North West Inner City. Older people said that it is very reassuring to have the same people providing the meals service on a regular basis and that they would not like a lot of chopping-and-changing amongst staff. This would seem to indicate a clear desire to employ core staff on an ongoing basis rather than depending on temporary employment schemes.

'Since my accident just over a year ago I am quite confined to the house. It means a lot to me to get my dinner cooked and handed to me. Also it is good for me to see Joe every day and to have a few words with him'

The older people were complimentary about the ways in which the staff and volunteers did a lot more than prepare meals, serve meals and deliver meals. The older people referred to the ways in which they could talk to the staff and volunteers about things that might be worrying them and they mentioned many examples of the staff staying behind after the meals to help with social activities and of the staff being heavily involved in organising special events which might take place at times like Christmas and St. Patrick's Day.

Whilst many of the older people would like to spend more time in the Centres where the meals take place (for social activities and companionship) there is also a realisation that staff and volunteers give enough and that it would be unfair to expect them to work longer hours to keep Centres open for longer periods of time. However, older people did say that if it was possible to employ more people to extend the service (e.g. for more hours each afternoon, for Saturday and Sundays), it would be hugely appreciated – especially by older people living alone who might have a very limited network/circle of family and friends.

'It would be great if the Centre would open up on Saturdays as well but I know that this would be too much to expect of staff who are already doing a fantastic job'

'The staff have a lot of love and kindness for all of the older people'

3.5. PHYSICAL SURROUNDINGS

The Centres where the meals services take place are fairly spacious, are generally well equipped, are comfortable and have modern industrial type kitchens which can produce the quantity of meals which are required for the community meals and meals on wheels aspects of the meals services in the North West Inner City. For the meals services, each Centre comprises the kitchen facility and a restaurant/café area where the meals are served to older people. In relation to the kitchens, these are maintained to the highest standards and have regularly passed inspections from Environmental Health Officers. In relation to the dining areas the feedback from older people is that they like these areas and feel comfortable and relaxed when they are having lunch with other older people.

'I love coming in here. I feel that it is like home and that I can be myself. It is very relaxed'

There has been a significant level of investment in the Centres where the meals services take place in the North West Inner City. Aughrim Court Centre is a relatively modern facility and there has been a major upgrading and refurbishment of the industrial kitchens in St. Bricin's Court and the Dominican Day Centre over the last five year period. It is considered that all three Centres have the capacity to continue to operate meals services for many years to come on account of the modern kitchen facilities and the dining areas which are located in each of the Centres.

During the course of the interviews and consultations, older people expressed a clear preference for meals to be served in relatively small, local Centres (such as the three which are operational in the North West Inner City) rather than in larger regional Centres. Many of the older people said that the number of people attending the meals service was about right, that it was a 'cosy' number and that they would not like the numbers to grow too big. A further advantage of the more localised Centres, from the perspective of older people, is that they tend to be fairly close by to their homes and there is a strong sense of familiarity and neighbourliness with other older people from the neighbourhood who are also using the local Centre.

On the basis of the interviews and consultations which took place during the review of the meals services, it is evident that there is a fairly high level of satisfaction with the locations of the Centres where the meals services take place and with the facilities which exist within these Centres – as well as the meals services some of the Centres also have other services such as laundry services, education services and healthcare services. The older people interviewed during the review process would be very anxious that the existing facilities should be retained and developed further (there are already ambitious plans to build a completely new Centre in St. Bricin's Court).

In addition, older people living in Drumalee and in the Markets area felt that meals services for older people should be developed in these areas – with the re-instatement of the Centre for older people which did exist in Drumalee before it was closed down by Dublin City Council and the creation of a new Centre for meals services within the Markets area of the North West Inner City.

3.6. AVAILABILITY AND OPENING HOURS

There is a fairly strong consensus amongst the older people using the meals services within the three Centres within the North West Inner City that they would like to see these Centres open for longer periods of time. Over 70% of the people currently linking into the meals services in these Centres said that they would like the Centres to be open for longer in the afternoons, to be open in the evenings and/or to be open during the weekends and at Bank Holidays. A number of interviewees expressed some surprise and disappointment that such fine facilities within local neighbourhoods were not utilised on a more regular basis.

‘It is sad to have to go home at 2 o’clock when the Centre could still be used and we could be doing different activities within the Centre’

‘It is a shame that our Centre is closed all over the weekend when a lot of us have nothing to do and no-one to see or to talk to’

‘It should be a lot more like the Centre up in Clareville Court where there are things for older people from early in the morning to late in the evening’

Older people consulted during the review process expressed a clear desire for the meals service to be extended beyond five days each week. Over half of the existing service users said that they would like the meals service to be operational on Saturdays and/or Sundays – the balance of the interviewees said that they have alternative arrangements at the weekends with family and friends or that they have got into the routine of looking after themselves at the weekends.

Whilst many older people do not think that a week-end meals service is a realistic option (because of the difficulties in opening up Centres and paying staff), they said that the development of this type of service would make a very significant and positive difference to their lives and could make the week-ends a more enjoyable and less lonely time for them.

‘I would really like to have the Day Centre open on Saturdays and Sundays. It would give me somewhere to go’

‘Meals on Saturdays would be great. It would help to break up the weekends – weekends can be very long’

‘The company is good and it would be great if the Centre could be open for a while during the week-end’

Older people felt that the meals should not be served too early in the day. This comment particularly applied to the meals service in St. Bricin’s Court where lunch is served at 12.00 noon. A number of service users in St. Bricin’s Court felt that this was too early since they are only after having their breakfast at 10 or 11 o’clock in the morning. In addition, some people said that the early timing of the lunch made the rest of the day very long and that it would be a lot better to have a lunch at a later time and for lunch to be followed by social activities. This type of schedule would help to break up the day, would give service users more to look forward to and, on the basis of feedback from residents in

St. Bricin's Court, would attract more of these residents into the local meals service.

'I would be interested if I could have the meal later in the day. 12 o'clock is too early for me since I am only just after having my breakfast'

3.7. COST AND AFFORDABILITY OF SERVICE

The older people who participated in the review of the meals services in the North West Inner City felt that the meals service which they received represented very good value for money. Across the three meals services in the North West Inner City, older people are asked to contribute €3 towards the cost of each meal – this money can be paid each day or, alternatively, the older person can pay for a number of days at one time. Not one of the older people consulted during the review said that the payment of €3 per meal presented a problem for them. Indeed, the large majority were delighted to be able to get a good lunch at such an affordable price.

'It would be impossible for me to put together this kind of meal in my own house for a cost of €3'

'The food is great value – where else would you get a dinner for €3'

Some of the interviewees consulted during the review of the meals services, and especially interviewees from meals providers, felt that there was a need to carry out an assessment of the ways in which the meals services in Ireland are funded. On the basis of the clear benefits of these services (health benefits, nutritional benefits, socialisation benefits), as set out in Section 2 of this report, there is a strong view that the State should be providing a greater level of subsidisation to meals services for older people and that funding of meals services should be incorporated into Service Level Agreements between the Health Service Executive and providers of meals services at the local and area-based levels.

'The meals services for older people are helping to fulfil the Government's public health responsibilities and its stated commitment to supporting older people to live in their own homes for as long a period as possible. Therefore meals services should receive more financial assistance from relevant Government Departments and statutory agencies'

'It is not about charity and a bit of a handout now and again. It is about rights and the rights of older people to receive a decent meal either at home or in the company of friends and other older people'

There is a sense that in addition to supporting the cost of each meal (through the €1.45 subsidy per meal from the Health Service Executive), there is a need to support the core costs involved in providing efficient and effective meals services across local communities in Ireland. It is evident that in the North West Inner City only one of the providers of meals services has a core funding arrangement with the Health Service Executive (i.e. St. Vincent's Trust → Dominican Day Centre). The other two depend on a combination of FÁS and voluntary contributions. A number of interviewees said that all meals services should be moving towards the core funding, Service Level Agreement model of service provision.

3.8. CONCLUSIONS

It is evident that many older people in the North West Inner City, up to 170 each week, are benefiting from the three meals services being provided by St. Vincent's Trust (Dominican Day Centre), An Síol (Aughrim Court Centre) and by St. Bricin's Court management committee (St. Bricin's Court Centre). There is a high level of satisfaction with the services currently being provided – the older people generally like the quality and variety of food being served, they appreciate the opportunities being provided for friendship and companionship, they think that the staff are kind and courteous, they are happy with the cost of the meals and they feel that the meals service is an important aspect in their daily and weekly routine.

'The meals service is as good as it could be. I cannot see any ways in which it could be made any better.'

'The meals service here is perfect for me. It meets all of my needs'

Therefore, there are a lot of positive aspects of the meals services to be commended and to be built upon. However, it is evident that clear challenges still exist. These include ensuring consistency of quality and delivery across the meals services in the North West Inner City; setting up, where appropriate and necessary, new meals services (in places where there is little or no coverage); and improving the funding arrangements of meals services with a clear movement towards core funding and Service Level Agreements. These challenges and issues will be considered in some detail in the next two sections of this review document.

4. KEY ISSUES

4.1. INTRODUCTION

In the course of the review of meals services for older people in the North West Inner City, a number of issues were highlighted on a regular basis in relation to existing provision and in relation to the future development of meals services in the North West Inner City. Consideration of these issues will help to inform any new framework or structure which might be put in place for the provision of meals services. These issues, which will be addressed in this section of the review document, are as follows:

- **Need for expanded and comprehensive service**
- **Diversity of service provision and need for localised centres**
- **Greater prioritisation of meals services**
- **Eligibility criteria for meals services**
- **Investment of additional resources**

4.2. NEED FOR EXPANDED AND COMPREHENSIVE SERVICE

There is a clear need for a more comprehensive and expanded meals service in the North West Inner City. This statement is primarily based on the outcomes from the 220 questionnaires about meals services which were completed by older people living in the North West Inner City. Of the 220 questionnaires respondents, 34 (15.4%) are already using one of the existing three meals services and are generally very satisfied with the service they are receiving. In relation to the balance of 184 questionnaire respondents, 76 (41.3%) said that they would like to be able to link into a meals service with a clear preference for the community meals option within a Centre rather than the meals on wheels option.

These outcomes in relation to the need for an expanded meals service for older people in the North West Inner City reflect similar outcomes from the Research Project on Older People Living in Stoneybatter which took place in 2005. In response to the question about receiving meals from a meals service on a regular basis, 133 out of 240 respondents (55.4%) stated that they are using a meals service or would be interested in availing of this service. This type of outcome would suggest that there is a fairly significant gap between the existing coverage (i.e. 12.2%) and the proportion of older people who would like to receive meals and be able to benefit from the social aspects of the meals services (i.e. 55-57%).

There were three main reasons put forward as to why people who are interested in a meals service are not currently using a meals service. These are as follows:

- Some older people had not heard about the availability of meals services. A total of 52 older people who completed the questionnaire (i.e. 23.6% of completed questionnaires) said that they were not aware of the meals services.
- Some older people felt that they were not eligible for meals services. They said that they were able to cook for themselves and look after themselves and that they thought the meals services were only for people who were very old or who were incapable of independent living
- The unavailability of meals services in particular parts of the North West Inner City. The highest level of demand for meals services were from the Markets area (72% of questionnaire respondents said that they would like a meals service) and Drumalee (48% of questionnaire respondents said they would like a meals service). It is not coincidental that there is currently no meals service in the Markets area and that the meals service in Drumalee was closed down seven years ago – hence the demand for local meals services to be established in the Markets and in Drumalee.

In addition to the development of new or re-instated meals services, there is also a view that greater usage could be made of existing meals service facilities within the North West Inner City. Whilst Aughrim Court Centre is virtually at full capacity, there is additional capacity at St. Bricin's Court Centre (for up to another 20 older people) and at the Dominican Day Centre (for up to another 10 – 15 older people). Apart from the spare capacity for the actual meals themselves, there is also a strong view that the existing facilities should be kept open for a longer period of time so as to enable older people to engage in different types of social, recreational, educational and healthcare activities.

Older people would like to see social activities being more integrated with the provision and delivery of food. Whilst some social activities do take place (e.g. bingo on a particular day each week), they happen on too irregular and too infrequent a basis for many older people in the North West Inner City. Older people who took part in the review expressed a clear preference for integrated programmes to be put in place for 4 – 5 hours each day, programmes which might begin with meals at 12.30/1.00 p.m. and be followed by social activities up until 4.30/5.00 p.m.

Many of the older people said that it was sad to have to go back to where they live after they had finished their meals at between 1.00 p.m. and 2.00 p.m. and to have to put the whole afternoon in by themselves when social activities could be taking place in the Centre which they had just left. There was a view that it should be possible (with the right type of support from relevant agencies) to put in place a programme of activity which would provide socialisation and developmental opportunities for five afternoons each week within the three Centres for older people in the North West Inner City.

There is also a fairly high level of support for the idea of meals services operating for six or seven days a week and at Bank Holidays. Of the older people surveyed during the review of meals services who want to access these services 38% said that they would like to have the meals service for six days each week whilst 17% said they would like to have the meals service for seven days each week. Earlier references have been made to the fact that weekends, and especially Bank Holiday weekends, can be long and lonely for many older people living by themselves.

For these people, the availability of meals services at weekends would have clear socialisation and companionship benefits as well as nutritional and dietary benefits (e.g. a number of older people

surveyed during the review said they hardly eat at all when they are by themselves in their own houses).

4.3. DIVERSITY OF SERVICE PROVISION AND NEED FOR LOCALISED CENTRES

Older people consulted during the review of meals services in the North West Inner City expressed a clear preference for relatively small and localised Centres rather than very large Centres which would cover a large geographical area. Older people said that they would feel more relaxed in local neighbourhood Centres, such as the three Centres which are currently operational in the North West Inner City. Older people in the Markets area and in Drumalee also said that they would like to see meals services being set in their own areas rather than being expected to travel to a meals service in another neighbourhood. In fact many clearly said that they would not be interested in a meals service unless it was established within their local area.

In relation to the matter of local needs and local concerns the following issues and points should be borne in mind when devising a new strategy for the provision of meals services to older people in the North West Inner City:

- There is disappointment and anger at the decision to close down the meals service in Drumalee. There are over 60 older people living in the older persons complex in Drumalee and since the demise of their Centre a few years ago, very few of these older people have linked into other meals services in the North West Inner City

'I liked the social nights we had in the Centre but they closed it down. Is there any chance of it opening again? I really miss it'

'It would be great to have some kind of Centre in this complex where I could go for a hot meal'

'I did use the Centre when it was open. It was nice to be able to go around to meet people and to have a chat'

'There are people in the estate who need meals and company. I say that it would be great to have our Centre back'

- There are significant gaps in services in the Markets/Smithfield area and in the North Circular Road. Older people living in these parts of the North West Inner City do not generally consider the three existing meals services to be local enough to respond to their particular needs.

However it is apparent that if the meals service was re-activated in Drumalee (which is adjacent to the North Circular Road) and a new meals service was set up in the MACRO Resource Centre (which is located in the Markets/Smithfield area), this would be of fundamental importance in plugging some of the outstanding gaps in the provision of meals services which currently exist in the North West Inner City

- Whilst there is a clear need to develop Centre based meals services in the Smithfield/Markets and Drumalee areas, it is also necessary to increase the coverage of meals which are delivered to

the homes of older people. On account of the fact that there is no home delivery service operating out of Aughrim Court Day Centre there is a limited availability of home deliveries to older people living in the Stoneybatter area who do not have the capacity or the desire to make the journey to either Aughrim Court Day Centre or St. Bricin's Park Day Centre. The greater availability of home deliveries has to be a key component in any new strategy or plan for the development of meals services for older people in the North West Inner City

- It is proposed to completely re-develop the older persons' complex in St. Bricin's Court – this complex currently comprises maisonette style housing and a Day Centre. The plans for St. Bricin's Court are quite impressive and it is likely that the new Day Centre to be constructed will comprise a range of different services to be made available to older people living in St. Bricin's Court and adjoining communities.

Older people who participated in the review of meals services felt that the meals services should be informal (there should be no formality or standing on ceremony); that they should be locally based (within 10 – 15 minutes walking distance of where older people live); that they should be flexible (if you don't like the lunch on a particular day you can get it changed for something else); that they should be integrated (integrating the serving of meals with social activities and other activities of interest to older people); and that they should combine Centre based community meals with other meals which are delivered to the homes of older people who cannot, or do not want to, go to local Centres.

4.4. GREATER PRIORITISATION OF MEALS SERVICES

In the opinion of many people consulted during the review of meals services in the North West Inner City there is a need to give greater prioritisation to the provision of meals services for older people. There is a sense that meals services are not given the same attention or the same resources as other services for older people e.g. Home Help services, residential care for older people who are unable to live at home.

The haphazard nature of the funding for meals services (which seem to differ from area to area), the lack of core funding and Service Level Agreements and the fact that the provision of a meals service to an older person is primarily dependent on the existence of a local sponsoring community group are all reflections of the low priority which is given to the organisation and delivery of meals services to older people in Ireland.

'In the provision of meals on wheels we depend on the voluntary support of individuals and organisations to bring the meals to older people. Often this is the only outside contact these people have'

Sean Power,

Minister of State for Older People

January 2007

Some interviewees said that if it was taken more seriously, like it is in countries like the United States, a meals service would automatically be available to all eligible older people. It would not be so hit-and-miss as it is in Ireland where if you live in an area where there is a meals provider you get a meal and if you live in an area without any meals provider you don't get a meal. In the opinion of people consulted during the review of the meals service this type of approach is far too loose, too arbitrary and too discretionary – even within areas where there is a meals service there is no consistency about who should be offered a meal (in some cases it is any older person who presents for a lunch while in other cases there are more stringent eligibility criteria).

There is a clear need to reinforce the socialisation, nutritional and general health benefits of meals services for older people. These benefits have already been set out in Section 2 of this report. However there is a sense that these benefits are not fully appreciated and understood by key decision makers and policy makers within organisations like the Health Service Executive and the Department of Health and Children. In the opinion of some interviewees meals services are still treated like 'some type of Cinderella service' (words of one interviewee) and the title of meals on wheels which is still used in much of the documentation does little to reflect the community meals aspect of the meals services or the diverse nature of the services being provided.

In this context it is important that strategies are put in place for increasing awareness and understanding of the benefits and value of efficiently run and well managed meals services. For example older people can live longer in their own homes with the assistance of meals services; they can lead happier and more content lives through being able to avail of a meals service; they can be physically, mentally and emotionally healthier with the assistance of nutritious well-balanced meals provided through meals services. These public health benefits should be clearly articulated and need to be backed up by additional resources for the core funding of meals services for older people throughout Ireland.

'The most commonly reported nutritional deficiencies in older people are of iron, protein, Vitamin D, zinc, water and fibre. Poor nutrition in older age can negatively influence the health, longevity and quality of life of older people. Commonly cited major risk factors for malnutrition in older people are social isolation, recent bereavement, poor dentition, reduced mobility, psychiatric morbidity and multiple medication usage. A good quality meals service can help to counter these malnutrition triggers'.

National Council on Ageing and Older People –
Community Care Services,
Ageing in Ireland Fact File Number 6, 2001

4.5. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR MEALS SERVICES

Earlier references have been made in this report to the different eligibility criteria which are applied by different meals providers in relation to the older people who can avail of meals services at the local level. Some providers in Ireland apply quite strict criteria (e.g. total inability to cook a meal,

no relative or friend available to cook a meal, mobility problems which hamper capacity to prepare a meal). Other service providers apply fewer and less stringent eligibility criteria for their service. Indeed it seems that for many providers of meals services to older people there are no eligibility criteria apart from being over 60 or 65 years of age.

The absence of strict eligibility criteria for meals services is becoming a more common practice in the United States and United Kingdom. There is an increasing recognition of the socialisation and companionship benefits of meals services for older people and an understanding that if older people wish to make contact with other people through a meals service that this is justification enough for allowing older people to link into a meals service. In this context there is no need for an older person to demonstrate that they can't cook for themselves or they can't look after themselves. In effect all that they have to do is to say that they would be interested in a meals service and that they would pay a contribution towards the costs of meals.

There is a view that meals services for older people are as important a response to social isolation and loneliness as they are a response to malnutrition and poor dietary intakes. If meals services help to create new social outlets and socialisation opportunities for older people they will be of benefit both to the older people themselves and the public health system within Ireland (i.e. the longer that older people remain happy and healthy within their community the less likely they are to require residential care facilities subsidised by the State and the taxpayer).

It is suggested that consideration should be given to the universal provision of meals services to all older people over a certain age (e.g. 75 and over) with perhaps some other criteria in place for people aged between 65 and 75. It is also suggested that one of the most important criteria should relate to older people who are lonely, socially isolated and/or living alone. This criteria would clearly reflect the fact that meals services have important social benefits as well as nutritional benefits.

'I would come along to the meals service if my friend would come with me'

'A lot of people would use the meals service for the company and for a laugh'

'A lot of older people don't get out too often and it can be very lonely for them. It would be great if they could go to a local Centre for a meal'

4.6. INVESTMENT OF ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Community based and community managed meals services need to be properly resourced if they are to provide a comprehensive and integrated range of supports to older people living in areas like the North West Inner City. It is evident that there is a clear link between the number of people employed by meals services (or by the Day Centres which run these meals services) and the extent of the services being provided through these services/Centres. For example, the key reason why some Centres in the North West Inner City close early in the afternoon and do not open at weekends is purely related to resources – if there were more people employed the Centres would be open for longer periods of time.

The consultations and interviews carried out during the review of meals services in the North West Inner City have identified a clear demand for the existing three Centres to be opened up more in the afternoons, the evenings and the weekends and for new/revived meals services to be set up in the Markets and Drumalee. These types of positive developments can only take place with a significant level of additional investment – capital investment for the new Centres and ongoing revenue investment for the staffing and maintenance of all of the Centres for older people in the North West Inner City.

Experiences in other places would suggest that investment in key staff positions can have a very positive impact on the range of services being provided to older people in Dublin City. Some interviewees, for example, referred to the Clareville Court Centre in Glasnevin which has programmed activities for older people from 9.00 a.m. to 9.00 p.m. each day during the week – these activities include the provision of a meals service. It is important to note that the Clareville Court Centre has a full-time manager funded through Dublin City Council and the Health Service Executive. This manager has a critical role to play in ensuring that a whole range of activities for older people take place in the Clareville Court Centre and for ensuring that this Centre is utilised to its maximum capacity.

The Centres for older people in the North West Inner City are not being utilised to the same type of capacity and will not be effectively utilised until there is a significant injection of ongoing revenue funding into the various Centres. This will require new types of funding arrangements and management arrangements between the main relevant stakeholders in the provision of meals services.

These stakeholders are Dublin City Council (who own two of the Centres in Aghrim Court and St. Bricin's Court), the Health Service Executive (who subsidise the meals provided to the older people and allocate some revenue funding to the service provider groups), the service provider organisations (who are responsible for the actual implementation and delivery of the service) and the older people who use the meals services. These stakeholders will need to agree on ownership, management and funding arrangements for the provision of an enhanced and expanded meals service for older people in the North West Inner City of Dublin.

5. FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF MEALS SERVICES IN NORTH WEST INNER CITY

5.1. INTRODUCTION

This section of the review document will set out a framework for the ongoing development of meals services for older people in the North West Inner City of Dublin. This framework has been significantly influenced by the views, opinions and ideas of older people living in the North West Inner City. Two key themes which have informed the framework relate to the need for equity (i.e. every older person eligible to link into a meals service should be able to do so regardless of where they live in the North West Inner City); and the need for quality (i.e. there needs to be a very high nutritional and delivery standard of service provision across the meals services which are operational in the North West Inner City).

The proposed framework for the future development of meals services in the North West Inner City will be set out under the following headings:

- **Area Based Strategy**
- **Guiding Principles**
- **Increase in provision**
- **Development of local Centres**
- **Integrated package of supports**
- **Eligibility criteria and overall coverage**
- **Organisational and management issues**
- **Funding arrangements**

5.2. AREA BASED STRATEGY

An area based strategy should be developed for the organisation and provision of meals services for older people who live in the North West Inner City. It is proposed that all of the community sector meals providers, private providers of meals services (e.g. Welcare) and relevant statutory agencies should become part of this area based strategy. The overall objective of the strategy would be to support the development of the individual providers of meals services and, where considered necessary and appropriate, to embark on co-operative actions which have the potential to enhance the effectiveness of all organisations which are involved in providing meals to older people in the North West Inner City.

It is recommended that all of the existing providers of meals services to older people, and any new providers which might become involved in the next few years, would maintain their own independence and autonomy. They will not be subsumed into some type of super-structure for the

provision and delivery of meals to older people in the North West Inner City. However, within the context of the proposed area based strategy, they would come together on a regular basis to discuss issues of common interest and concern; and to instigate and manage initiatives which will be of benefit to all providers of meals services (e.g. the employment of a nutritionist or a dietician to provide advice and guidance to all the meals services).

It is proposed that the meals services in the North West Inner City together with relevant statutory agencies and community/voluntary organisations should set up an Older Persons Meals Service Group and that this group should be a sub-group of the Council for Services to Older People in the North West Inner City. The role of this Meals Service Group would be to work through issues of common interest: to identify ways in which meals service providers might co-operate and collaborate (e.g. joint training, joint purchasing of services and materials, joint transport arrangements, sharing of equipment); to lobby for financial supports and other resources.

The Meals Service Group might also develop eligibility criteria and procedures for older people interested in linking into meals services. It might develop brochures and other promotional materials on behalf of all meals service providers in the North West Inner City. Through the proposed Meals Service Group or through some other mechanism, consideration should be given to the development of shared resources across the meals services in the North West Inner City. These shared resources might include nutritionists. This type of shared resource would be made available to the staff employed by the various meals services in the North West Inner City.

There could also be other opportunities to enter into shared resources arrangements, arrangements which would enable the various meals providers to collectively buy in a skill or a contribution to good practice which would be difficult for individual providers to buy in from their own resources/budget. It was suggested, for example, that it might be possible to engage in collective training programmes for staff and/or management committee members from the various meals services and to provide professional training which could be paid through appropriate contributions from each of the participating meals services.

5.3. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The guiding principles which will inform the development of an area based strategy for the provision of meals services to older people in the North West Inner City should include the following:

- The area based strategy will build upon the work and achievements of groups and organisations which have been involved in providing meals services to older people
- The area based strategy will aim to ensure a consistency of high quality service provision across all of the providers of meals services to older people
- The area based strategy will promote an integrated approach towards the development of services for older people, an approach which will combine the provision of meals with the organisation of social activities and other activities of interest to older people

- The area based strategy will become an advocate for significant additional resources to be invested in meals services for older people, resources which would enable local meals providers to expand their services and to stay open for longer periods of time (e.g. for more afternoons each week, in the evening time, at weekends)
- The area based strategy is predicated on a clear understanding of the value and benefits of meals services for older people (in relation to their physical, mental and emotional well-being)
- The area based strategy will adopt an inclusive approach towards the provision of meals services and social activities for older people in the North West Inner City and welcomes the participation of quality service providers from the community, private and statutory sectors.

5.4. INCREASE IN PROVISION

It is recommended that the number of meals provided for older people in the North West Inner City should double from the current level of 135 meals per day to a total of 270 meals within a two year period. It is likely that a daily total of 270 meals would enable about 360 people each week, i.e. 25.8% of the over 64 year olds, to avail of the meals services (this figure allows for the fact that some people will only want to access the meals service for a few days each week, not for five days each week). On the basis of the responses to the questionnaires completed during the review process it is evident that there is a clear but unmet need for an expansion of the meals services for older people in the North West Inner City.

Whilst recognising that there is some spare capacity within the existing meals services (e.g. Dominican Day Centre could accommodate an extra 10 – 15 people each day, St. Bricin’s Court Centre could accommodate an extra 20 people each day), there is still a clear need to extend the coverage and increase the number of meals services for older people in the North West Inner City. It is recommended that this increase in coverage should be achieved by the establishment of two new Centres to provide meals services for older people in the North West Inner City – one in the MACRO Centre and one in Drumalee. The development of a comprehensive network or necklace of meals services for older people will be considered later in this section of the review document.

Serious consideration should be given to opening up the meals services on Saturdays, on Bank Holidays and more often during the Easter and Christmas holidays. There was particularly strong support in the completed questionnaires for the idea of a six day per week service which would include Saturdays. Many people said that weekends were often very long and very lonely and that the opportunity to meet with other people on Saturdays would be very welcome. People also said that a full meals service would not be required on Saturdays and Bank Holidays - soup and sandwiches would be sufficient. In effect, the main appeal about a meal on Saturdays is not the meal itself but the opportunity to meet and to mingle with other people.

5.5. DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL CENTRES

A network or necklace of meals services for older people should be developed in the North West Inner City. These meals services should be based within local neighbourhoods and should not involve a walk of any more than 15-20 minutes for people who wish to access the Centres in which meals are being provided. It is also recognised that for some older people it might be necessary and preferable for meals to be delivered to their own homes. In this context it is recommended that each of the meals services within the network of local providers in the North West Inner City should be able to provide Centre based meals and that some providers would also take additional responsibility for delivering meals to the homes of older people

Five meals services for older people should be developed in the North West Inner City. These should include the three existing services (i.e. Aughrim Court, Dominican Day Centre, St. Bricin's Court), one revived service (i.e. Drumalee) and one new service (i.e. MACRO Resource Centre in the Markets area). It is considered that the development of these five services would represent a good geographical balance across the North West Inner City and would mean that older people are not too far from a local meals service within their own neighbourhood or community.

It is important that the proposed five meals services within the network have common eligibility criteria for older people wishing to avail of these services and that a certain level of standards and good practice would apply within each of the services.

In order to reach the proposed daily target of 270 meals each day, it is suggested that each of the five meals services within the North West Inner City should provide a total of between 40 and 60 meals each day. This would involve a combination of meals provided within Centres and meals delivered to the homes of older people – although in one or two cases it might only be possible to provide Centre based meals.

In meeting the target of 40 – 60 meals each day, this target is within the capacity of Dominican Day Centre, St. Bricin's Court Centre and Aughrim Court Centre. It will, however, involve new services in Drumalee and the MACRO Resource Centre. The MACRO Resource Centre has the necessary capital facilities (i.e. kitchen and dining area). In Drumalee it will require the construction of a completely new kitchen facility and dining area in an appropriate location.

Whilst it is anticipated that all five of the Centres involved in providing meals to older people (i.e. three existing Centres, two new Centres) will provide a community meals service it is considered that only two or three of the Centres need to be involved in providing a meals on wheels delivery service. The logistics of providing a delivery service are quite different to a community meals service (e.g. the ways in which the food is prepared and presented, the need for transport and for a driver) and it might not be possible for every Centre to afford the additional costs involved in setting up a delivery service. In any event it should be possible for 2 – 3 providers to deliver up to 100 meals each day (with the balance of 270 meals being consumed by older people within the various Centres).

5.6. INTEGRATED PACKAGE OF SUPPORTS

Meals services should form part of an integrated package of supports to older people living in the North West Inner City. This package of supports would equate to the Home Care Packages initiative which is one of the key Government measures for assisting older people to remain living within their own homes.

The provision of meals and the opportunity to have these meals in the company of other older people should be important components within Home Care Packages and should be given the same prominence and emphasis as the availability of Home Help workers and access to healthcare services and supports. Indeed, many people consulted during the research commented upon the fact that the availability of regular good healthy meals in the company of other people can have a significant impact on the quality of life and general well-being and happiness of older people.

A further issue concerns the integration of meals services with other activities which might take place within the Centres. There is a clear demand for more social activities to accompany and to follow on from the meals which are provided to older people in the various Centres in the North West Inner City. Earlier references have been made to the way in which many older people feel sad and gloomy about having to return to their homes by themselves in the early afternoons after having finished their meals. Many of these people would really like to stay on in the Centres in the afternoon to participate in different social activities.

All efforts should be made to organise more social activities and to make better use of the excellent facilities within the various Day Centres for older people. One of the positive benefits of any enhanced funding arrangements with bodies like the Health Service Executive and Dublin City Council should be a greater capacity to provide a broader range of social activities for older people as part of an integrated programme which might also include the meals services, education classes/courses, holistic therapies and other forms of healthcare (e.g. chiropody).

'It would be great to be able to have lunch and then to have a game of bingo. Life would then be beautiful'

5.7. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA AND OVERALL COVERAGE

There should be universal coverage in relation to meals services for older people living in the North West Inner City. Effectively this means that all older people within the North West Inner City should be entitled to link into meals services which are being provided within the eligibility criteria which are set out for these meals services.

Eligibility criteria might relate to age (e.g. over 65, over 70, over 75), it might relate to living alone and social isolation, it might relate to levels of disability and immobility. The key issue in relation to whether older people are entitled to access meals services should concern the extent to

which they meet the eligibility criteria for the meals service rather than where they live in the North West Inner City (and whether they live near an existing meals service)

There are strong grounds for suggesting that all older people over the age of 75 should be considered eligible for a meals service and should be entitled to receive a meal each day (either in their own home or in a Centre close to where they live). The number of people aged 75 and over in the 2006 Census of Population within the North West Inner City was 650 people. It should be possible to provide meals to those older people within this age cohort who wish to avail of a meals service.

On the basis of the responses to the research questionnaires it is evident that many people aged between 65 and 75 are fairly independent and are well able to look after themselves. These people also said, however, that when they got older and a bit more feeble, they are far more likely to need to access meals services. Hence, the view that meals services should have a particular focus on people aged 75 and over.

In relation to consistency it would be extremely positive if there could be universal coverage of meals services across all older people living in the North West Inner City with the various meals service providers applying similar criteria and similar procedures when deciding upon who is eligible to benefit from the meals services (both in-Centre meals services and mobile/at home meals services).

5.8. FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS

The current funding arrangements for the provision of meals services in Ireland are very unsatisfactory. Some are dependent on voluntary labour, some are dependent on temporary employment programmes (i.e. Jobs Initiative, Community Employment), most receive some type of subvention from the Health Service Executive (in the North West Inner City this involves €1.45 for each meal) and older people themselves contribute to the cost of their meals (in the North West Inner City this involves a cost of €3 per meal).

In recognition of the public health value of the meals services for older people (in relation to food intake, nutritional benefits, socialisation and companionship benefits) it is recommended that the Health Service Executive and Dublin City Council should cover all of the core staffing costs and all of the running costs for each of the proposed five meals service providers in the North West Inner City. These core staff positions are likely to include a full-time Manager and a Kitchen Supervisor for each of the meals services and, depending on the type of service, other personnel such as Kitchen Assistants, Drivers and maintenance staff (some of these people might be employed on a part-time basis).

It is also recommended that the funding arrangements between the meals providers and relevant statutory agencies (especially the Health Service Executive and Dublin City Council) should be incorporated into Service Level Agreements. These Service Level Agreements would be multi-annual funding arrangements which clearly set out agreed targets and outcomes and the amount of funding which will be allocated on the basis of these targets and outcomes being achieved.

It is important to note that the proposed core funding arrangements relate to relatively

significant Centres which will each cater for 40 to 60 older people each day and which involve meals being prepared and cooked within these Centres. It is not envisaged that all meals service providers across Dublin will require core funding and the employment of core staff – for example, providers of meals services who collect meals from a central depot and do not cook meals on their own premises or do not provide a Centre-based meals service would not require the same level of support as a Centre-based service.

It is considered that the Service Level Agreements and the signing of funding contracts will play an important role in demonstrating the extent to which the Health Service Executive believe that local meals providers are playing an important role in the health and well-being of older people. In more specific terms it will reflect the Health Service Executive's commitment to support services which will enable older people to remain living within their home and within their community for the maximum period of time.

It is hoped that the Health Service Executive and other relevant statutory agencies will agree to support the core costs and the running costs of meals services in the North West Inner City. This should enable these services to provide a more effective and comprehensive programme (e.g. longer opening hours, more social activities). It should be noted that the existing subvention from the Health Service Executive and the amount paid by the older people would still be collected in order to cover the costs of buying food/groceries and raw materials for meals and perhaps to purchase new equipment for the kitchens.

It is also recommended that the Health Service Executive contribute to some of the shared costs to be incurred by new collaboration initiatives set up through the proposed Older Persons Meals Service Group. These shared costs might relate to the employment of specialist workers (e.g. dieticians, nutritionists), the organisation and delivery of training programmes, the production of brochures and reports. It is recommended that the Health Service Executive allocate an agreed amount of programme money to the Meals Service Group to enable it to deliver actions which have the potential to enhance the overall provision of meals services to older people living in the North West Inner City of Dublin.

6. CONCLUSIONS

In reviewing the meals services for older people in the North West Inner City it is clear that these services have been of significant benefit to those older people who have accessed these services – whether in their own homes or in the Centres within the area in which they live. The meals services have had nutritional benefits, socialisation benefits and longevity benefits and there is strong evidence that they have significantly improved the quality of life for older people and the capacity of older people to remain living within their own neighbourhoods (rather than being moved into residential care).

Whilst recognising what has been achieved through meals services in the North West Inner City it is apparent that there are still a number of important challenges for meals providers in the North West Inner City and for those Government Departments and statutory agencies which have responsibility for the care and well-being of older people within Irish society.

These challenges include ensuring that quality standards are established and maintained for Centres and organisations providing meals services to older people; putting in place integrated programmes of service provision which include meals, social activities and other activities of interest to older people; extending the opening hours of Centres which provide meals (longer opening hours in the afternoon and evening, opening at weekends and Bank Holidays); and expanding the number of Centres in the North West Inner City which provide meals services (through the development of two new services in the MACRO Resource Centre and Drumalee).

It is considered that the framework for the future development of meals services in the North West Inner City which is set out in this report has the potential to significantly enhance the existing work being carried out by community based providers of meals services. This framework, if supported by relevant Government departments and statutory agencies, will lead to a more comprehensive range of services and supports for older people living in the North West Inner City. There will be more localised meals services available, there will be a doubling of the number of people accessing these services and there will be more activities available for older people attending the various Centres in the North West Inner City.

These are notable and significant outcomes. The international research into the potential and value of meals services clearly indicates that numerous nutritional and social benefits would flow from the proposed expansion and extension of meals services to older people living in the North West Inner City of Dublin. In this context strong and robust arguments can be put forward, from a public health and a social inclusion perspective, for a substantial development of meals services for older people within areas like the North West Inner City.

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