

APPENDIX 2

Communications with the media around changes to community meals provision

Background

The communications team recommended a press release was issued to all local media about the proposed changes in relation to the provision of community meals.

This was on the basis that the council was writing to people who used the service and that these people or their relatives would, in all likelihood, contact the media and we would therefore need to respond in any case.

We advised that a press release should be issued shortly after clients had received the letter they were being sent to ensure they did not first hear about the proposed changes in the media.

The downside in issuing a press release at this stage was that it was not possible to give details of the alternative arrangements. However, given the media interest in this, before and after the press release was issued, the council had to make a statement on this issue.

Action taken

To ensure a consistent message from both ourselves and the contractor Sodexo Healthcare an initial draft press release was shared with its press office which made a number of changes. The county council then made subsequent revisions and the final version was cleared with the relevant cabinet members, council officers and Sodexo Healthcare before being issued on 30th March to all relevant local media.

After the press release was issued there were subsequent calls from both The Salisbury Journal and the Gazette and Herald for further information which was supplied.

Outcome

The press release was picked up by a number of local media with coverage ranging from positive to negative, and importantly the majority of stories stated that no vulnerable person would be put at risk by the changes.

Given the sensitivity around changes to such services and the recent history of social services it was always likely that there would be some adverse publicity around this issue.

The story was picked up by The Gazette and Herald, The Chronicle, The Salisbury Journal and The Wiltshire Times. Spire FM and Three Towns Radio

also both carried a piece on this and there was an item on the BBC local website pages.

A letter of clarification from cabinet member John Thomson was subsequently sent to the Gazette and Herald in response to the story it ran.

Copies of these stories, (with the exception of radio transcripts), the press release and the letter sent to the Gazette and Herald are attached.

Matthew Woolford
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