

Case study: County Enterprise foods, Nottinghamshire

County Enterprise Foods is owned and run by Nottinghamshire County Council. It provides community meals to the homes of up to 4000 vulnerable people, including 1500 meals which are delivered hot each day. Meals are prepared in the county's own Central Production Unit (CPU), which also prepares chilled and frozen meals for several other local authorities.

The most vulnerable people in the local authority area can have a hot meal delivered each day, or whenever they need it. County Enterprise Foods also provides frozen meals, which can be delivered at the same time as a hot meal and placed straight into the recipient's freezer.

Benefits of frozen meals

Offering frozen meals means that the local authority can provide a flexible service. It allows individuals to retain their independence, because they can choose when to heat up and eat their meal, but also ensures that they have plenty of food available. Hot delivered meals are restricted to a certain timeframe before they begin to cool down, which also requires the recipient to feel hungry and be available to eat the meal during that timeframe.

Some community meals recipients begin with a frozen meal service, before moving on to the hot transported option when they need it. Others take a hot meal on days when they know they will be at home, but also choose to have frozen meals delivered at the same time, so they always have something to eat in the freezer.

Local business

County Enterprise Foods uses as much local produce as possible. The CPU was opened 25 years ago, after Nottinghamshire County Council took the decision to keep their meals service in-house, building on the success of their service over the previous 15 years. They are an ethical employer and over 50% of their workforce has physical or learning disabilities.

Wider benefits

The drivers who deliver the meals also offer a safe and well check for residents. They are trained to deal with a wide range of situations which they might encounter when delivering meals to those who cannot cook for themselves. They can also offer basic help with plating or cutting up food, preparing a cold drink or helping someone to get to their dining table – all to ensure that the individual is able to eat their meal. They will never leave a meal without seeing the person who it is destined for, to make sure they are ok. They will also wait with an individual while an ambulance or other support arrives if required.

An annual survey is carried out amongst those who receive meals from County Enterprise Foods, and the results are always positive. In addition, they regularly receive thank you cards from their customers and their families, who appreciate knowing that a good meal is always available. County Enterprise Foods believes that good nutrition wards off many illnesses. Frozen meals allow them to make meals available to more people more often.

At present, the meals which are delivered hot would be able to achieve the Food for Life Catering Mark, but those which arrive frozen – despite being prepared in the same CPU, with the same ingredients – would not.

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