

‘It’s not just about the dinner, it’s about everything else that we do’

Experiences of Meals on Wheels providers during the pandemic and online information provision on the service

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Importance of Meals on Wheels (MoWs)

- Benefits that extend beyond nutrition (Campbell et al, 2015)
- ‘Ageing in place’ vs. residential or nursing care (Thomas & Mor, 2013)
- Benefits likely to have become more important during the pandemic (Sustain, 2020)
- MoWs suffer budget cuts globally or do not receive sufficient funding (Winterton et al, 2013)



Meals on Wheels in the UK

- 42% of local authorities offered MoWs in 2018 (from 66% in 2014) (NACC, 2018)
- Average cost of two-course meal: **£25.20/week** (NACC, 2018)
 - Average cost of residential/ nursing care: **~£600/week**
and **>£800/week** (Age UK, 2021)
- The pandemic saw a surge in MoWs demand (Sustain, 2020)



Aim

Explore MoWs providers' perceptions around...

- The benefits of the service
- The challenges faced by the service
- How experiences changed during the first UK national lockdown (March-June 2020)



Methods

- n=2 local authorities in South-West England
- n=18 MoWs service providers

- Semi-structured interviews
- Thematic analysis



Benefits to service users

- Encouraging clients to eat and keep physically active
- Carrying out welfare checks and household chores
- Identifying and addressing isolation and loneliness
- Promoting independence following hospital discharge

Papadaki et al (2021) <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/hsc.13634>



Being the 'fourth emergency service'

Being the first responders

*'... if I hadn't got there
within the hour she
probably would've died.
We're a lifeline to a lot of
these people'*

Adverse circumstances

*'Come weather, come
illness, come pandemic,
whatever it is, they will get
that meal'*



Benefits to employees

Sense of pride

'I experienced a round of applause from a neighbour of someone I was delivering to, which filled me with a sense of pride'

Reciprocal relationships

'... because you do it every day, week in week out, it's amazing how much you become, not a part of their lives, but feel that you really connect with them'

Benefits to the wider community

Reducing pressures on families

'It is an absolute lifeline. Especially during COVID. The families were reassured that somebody was going in to check on their relatives and that they were getting something to eat'



Challenges faced by the service

Organisational

'We simply don't have the infrastructure to meet the demand... with COVID-19 we can expect probably two, three years down the line even more cuts'

Time restrictions

'It's hard to deliver a meal and not stay for longer to chat knowing that most of the day the clients will be lonely in the current lockdown'

Challenges specific to the pandemic

Impact on wellbeing

'I get a lot of people now in tears, saying they're lonely, they're frightened. That's hard'

Future of MoWs

'... the challenge is how it's perceived by the Council and national government... whether they continue to support it through additional funding'

Lack of publicity and awareness

'I, like a lot of people, didn't realise this service still existed, and I didn't also realise that part of the service was to offer a bit of support'

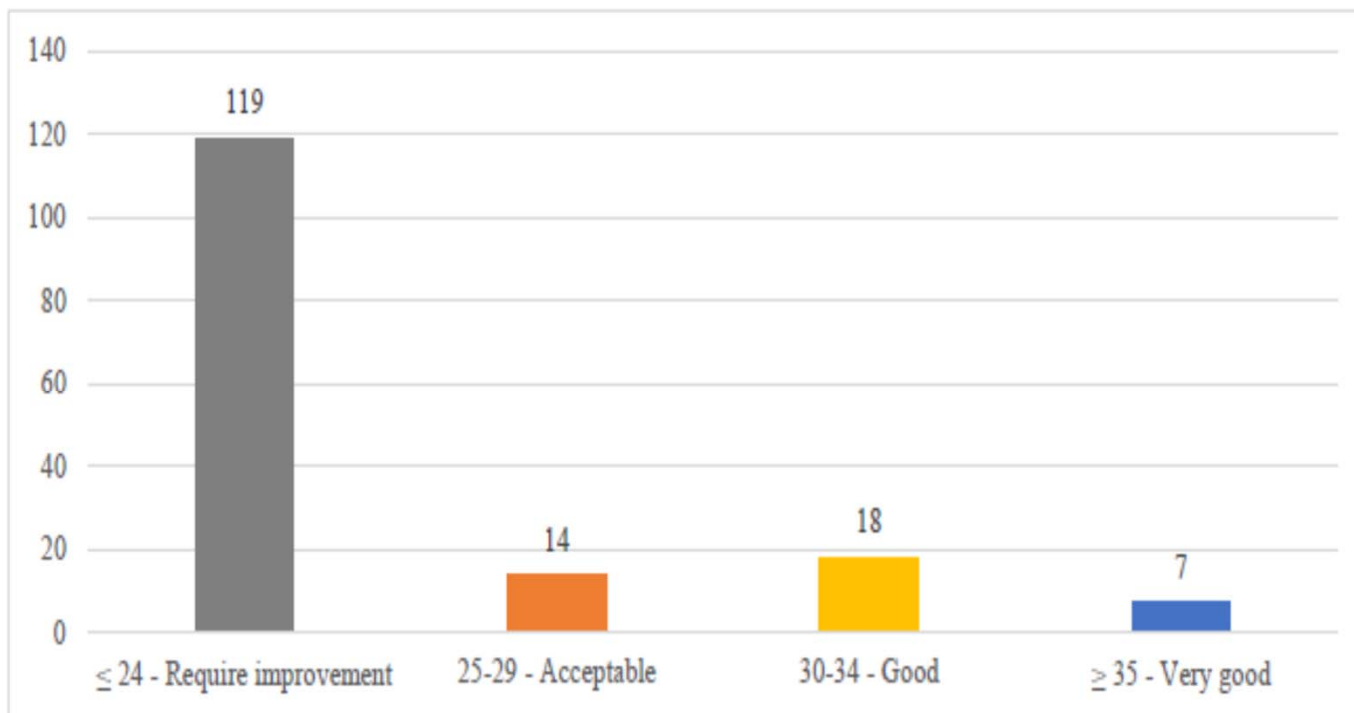


What MoWs information is provided online?

- n=158 websites of local authorities in England, responsible for delivering adult social care

- Data capture form (score range: 0-50 points):
- n=29 criteria: website navigation; type of provision; actual info on provision; website quality

What MoWs information is provided online?

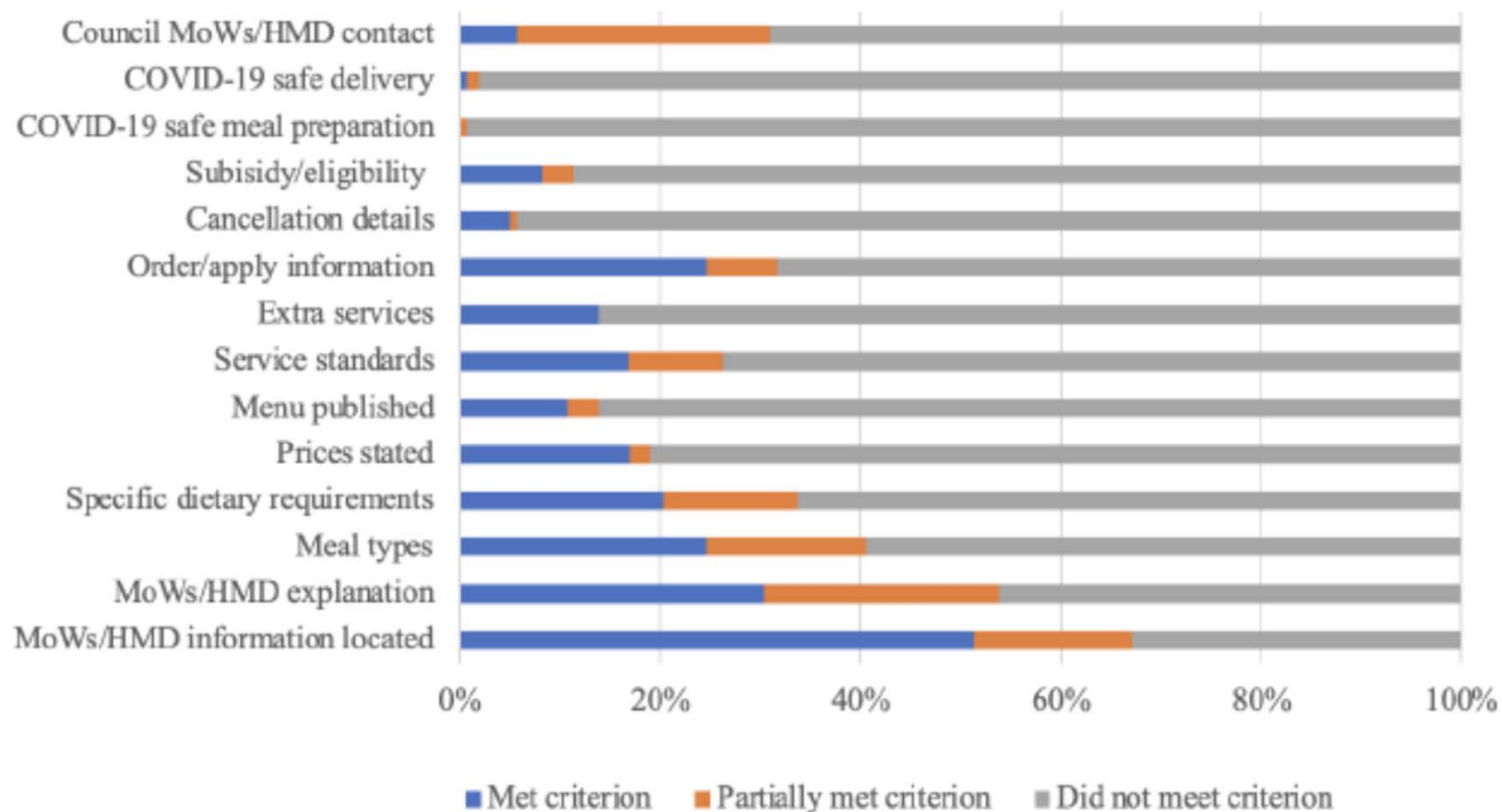


Mean score: 15.5 points

Minimum score observed: 1
Maximum score observed: 38

Figure 5: Councils' scores as categories for Meals on Wheels service (and related information) provision

What MoWs information is provided online?



Percentage of council websites meeting criteria for Meals on Wheels service information provision

What we know now...

- Benefits of the service 'staying local'
- Social policies need to acknowledge MoWs' value
- Ongoing support and funding from local and national governments to ensure increased demands are met
- High quality online information provision



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