



SOCIAL ENTERPRISE GRADUATE SCHEME: INFORMATION PACK

What is Health & Independent Living Support (HILS)?

In summary: HILS is a charitable, not-for-profit, social enterprise, whose aim is to support people to be happy, healthy, and independent at home for as long as possible.

In legal speak: Health & Independent Living Support (HILS) is the operating name of Hertfordshire Community Meals Ltd, a community benefit society, society number IP30206R and registered as a charity with HMRC registration number XT37228.

Corporate structure

HILS is a Community Benefit Society (CBS - a type of social enterprise) and is governed by a “management committee” which is referred to as the Board. The Board is comprised of ten volunteers who provide strategic direction, oversight, guidance, and accountability. The Board have the ultimate decision-making power within the organisation, although much of this is delegated to the Executive Team. The Executive Team is made up of three members:

- Chief Executive: Sarah Wren
- Deputy Chief Executive: Tom Cottam
- Director of Resources: Phil Martin

Charitable status

“Charitable” is different from being a “charity”. We have “charitable status” conferred by HMRC as opposed to being a “charity” which would be conferred and regulated by the Charities Commission. This is because charity law means that a CBS cannot also be registered as a charity. However, having the charitable status means that HILS can fundraise, apply for some grant pots, can use gift aid etc. It also means that HILS is treated as a charity for tax purposes and can access business rate relief, some discounts, and doesn’t have to pay corporation tax. HILS is only regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority and its accounts can be found there, not on Companies House. Having charitable status means that HILS has charitable objectives which it must abide by.

These are:

1. *The relief of poverty, sickness, and disability by the provision of meals and services to people who are elderly, frail, ill, disabled, or otherwise in need; and*
2. *The relief of unemployment.*

All of HILS’ activities must be justifiable under these objectives and its charitable reserves must be applied only in the exercise of these purposes. HILS also has “*powers to do all things necessary or expedient for the fulfilment of its objects provided that, in carrying out its objects, the Society shall promote equality of opportunity for all sections of the community in its own affairs and in society generally*”.

The history of HILS

Hertfordshire Community Meals (HCM) was incorporated as an Industrial Provident Society in March 2007 to deliver meals on wheels on behalf of Hertfordshire County Council. It began trading as a Social Enterprise in October 2007 from a base in Letchworth, delivering meals to 180 clients in North Hertfordshire, utilising seven staff, two vehicles, and supported by 200 volunteers.

By 2013, the remaining nine Hertfordshire districts had transferred their clients to HCM and four sites were established across the county in Hemel Hempstead, Letchworth, St Albans, and Hertford. We still operate out of these four sites.

In April 2015, Hertfordshire Community Meals began operating as Hertfordshire Independent Living Service (HILS). This name change was to reflect that we do far more than deliver meals. HILS was now offering a range of services to help keep people healthy, happy, and independent.

We want to increase our impact and reach even more people, so in recent years we have established meals services in new areas. In October 2022 we began delivering meals on wheels across West Sussex, on behalf of West Sussex County Council; as well as taking on clients in Bedfordshire. Following our expansion into these two counties, in October 2023 we took on the meals on wheels service in Hampshire.

So that our name truly represents what we do, in October 2023 we changed our name to Health & Independent Living Support (HILS).

HILS today

HILS' vision statement, as defined in our business plan, is: "Helping older and vulnerable people stay happy, healthy, and independent at home".

HILS' mission is defined in our business plan is: "We will support older and vulnerable people to stay happy, healthy, and independent at home through the provision of innovative meal, community, and health and wellbeing services. In doing so, we will support flexible local employment, and our caring 'HILS Heart' culture will underpin everything we do."

HILS provides a wide range of services to meet the needs of its elderly and vulnerable client group. More information about each service is available on our website.

The problems that HILS is trying to solve

Nationally more than 1.3 million people over the age of 65yrs suffer from malnutrition due to mobility challenges, isolation, poverty, or disease. 93% of those at risk, or suffering, are living within the community (as opposed to hospitals and care homes).

It is estimated that hospital admissions due to malnutrition cost the taxpayer £ £23.5 billion per year, accounting for approximately 15% of total health and social care spending. A significant proportion of this cost is attributed to older adults, particularly those over 65.

Delayed hospital discharges, known as 'bed blocking', cost the NHS £1.7 billion in 2022-23. Across winter 2024-25, an average of 13,000 patients per day were medically fit for discharge but remained in hospital, resulting in 1.27 million bed days lost over the season.

For the individual, longer stays in hospital can lead to worse health outcomes and can increase their long-term care needs. Older people can quickly lose mobility and the ability to do everyday tasks such as bathing and dressing.

As well as malnutrition, around 10-15% of over 65s suffer from loneliness & isolation. People with a high degree of loneliness are twice as likely to develop Alzheimer's and increase the risk of premature death by 25%.

Currently the majority of health and social care services are provided for the highest needs of the most frail and vulnerable. If informal, preventative support (such as meals on wheels) can be accessed early enough, the need for more costly professional health and care services can be reduced significantly. Investing in a community meals service has shown that every £1 invested leads to a social return on investment of between £3.00 and £5.30.

At present, funding and services aimed at preventing malnutrition is overwhelmingly directed to those in hospital or in residential care. There is currently a lack of preventative dietetic and nutritional support for older and vulnerable adults living in the community. Meals on wheels works primarily with isolated vulnerable older adults, often living alone with limited mobility, support, and independence, and this is a growing sector within the community.

Additionally, several reports have shown that older people want to be able to access services which help them remain independent in their homes. The majority of older people want to access 'informal' services that help them remain independent - 'that bit of help'. This service also provides relief for informal unpaid carers who are providing significant amounts of health and social care capacity. Carers are at risk with 54% having suffered depression because of their caring role.

Does it work?

Yes! The services that we provide have huge impact for our clients. Our recent survey results showed that:

- 96% feel happier;
- 95% feel more secure, knowing someone will check on them;
- 92% of clients feel healthier;
- 91% feel more independent;
- 87% were able to recover more quickly following a period of ill health or personal difficulty;
- 86% feel less lonely.

This has a huge impact for the individual clients we serve, but also for the wider health and social care sector. For example, the individual improvements above can lead to a reduction in need for NHS primary care (as older people account for a large proportion of visits), and reduced referrals to social care for homecare support, or residential care. Reduction in malnutrition and dehydration prolongs independence by reducing need for domiciliary or residential care. Quicker recovery time from injury or illness results in a reduction in likelihood of falls and subsequent fractures and a reduction in frailty; and therefore, shorter stays in hospital (and fewer attendances at hospitals). Loneliness is a prime cause of older people visiting the GP and we can help them to feel less lonely. Our services also reduce the burden on homecare services and family carers, improving mental health and enabling carers to work and socialise.

Where does HILS' money come from?

As a charitable social enterprise, there are many ways that HILS can generate income. HILS income in 2023/24 was around £9.1 million.

Income sources include:

- Client income from the sale of services (*clients paying for their meals, etc.*);
- Contract payments for provision of services (*contracts with other organisations, to provide services on their behalf*);
- Social investment from funders (*such as the Social Business Trust*);
- Grant income (*that we apply for, usually used to fund service development*);
- Donations (*used to fund client gifts and exceptional items*).

Why is HILS successful?

We believe there are several factors which have enabled HILS to be successful:

- Having an adaptable business model;
- Relationships – working with the right partners;
- Having the right people in the right teams;
- Our organisational culture;
- Our core values;
- Honesty and integrity as individuals, and as an organisation;
- Hard work breeds success;
- We have a genuine passion to change the world for the better.