



# Virtual Corporate Services, Commerce and Communities Policy Overview Committee

## Councillors on the Committee

Richard Mills, (Chairman)  
Vanessa Hurhangee (Vice-Chairman)  
Lindsay Bliss  
Nicola Brightman  
Farhad Choubedar  
Alan Deville  
Jazz Dhillon, (Opposition Lead)  
Scott Farley  
Wayne Bridges

**Date:** TUESDAY, 6 APRIL 2021

**Time:** 7.30 PM

**Venue:** VIRTUAL - LIVE ON THE COUNCIL'S YOUTUBE CHANNEL: HILLINGDON LONDON

**Meeting Details:** Virtual

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## Terms of Reference

The Following Terms of Reference are common to all Policy Overview Committees (referred to as “The overview role”):

1. To conduct reviews of policy, services or aspects of service which have either been referred by Cabinet, relate to the Cabinet Forward Plan, or have been chosen by the Committee according to the agreed criteria for selecting such reviews;
2. To monitor the performance of the Council services within their remit (including the management of finances and risk);
3. To comment on the proposed annual service and budget plans for the Council services within their remit before final approval by Cabinet and Council;
4. To consider the Forward Plan and comment as appropriate to the decision-maker on Key Decisions which relate to services within their remit (before they are taken by the Cabinet);
5. To review or scrutinise decisions made or actions taken by the Cabinet, a Cabinet Member, a Council Committee or an officer.
6. To make reports and recommendations to the Council, the Leader, the Cabinet, a Policy Overview Committee or any other Council Committee arising from the exercise of the preceding terms of reference.
7. In accordance with the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, to consider ‘Councillor Calls For Action’ (CCfA) submissions.

To perform the policy overview role outlined above in relation to the following matters:

1. Democratic Services
2. Localism
3. Central Services, incl. Human Resources, ICT, Communications & Legal Services
4. Capital programme, property, construction & facilities management
5. Financial Planning & Financial Services
6. Enforcement and anti-fraud activities
7. Procurement
8. Performance Improvement
9. Economic development & town centres and regeneration
10. Local commerce, employment, skills and job creation
11. Local Strategic Partnership and Sustainable Community Strategy;
12. Community engagement, partnerships and the voluntary sector
13. Equalities and Community Cohesion
14. Community Safety
15. Public Safety & Civil Protection
16. Climate Change
17. Energy use and carbon reduction
18. Health & Safety

# Agenda

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## COMMITTEE REVIEW - VOLUNTARY SECTOR RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

<b>Committee name</b>	Corporate Services, Commerce & Communities Policy Overview Committee
<b>Officer reporting</b>	Liz Penny, Democratic Services Officer
<b>Papers with report</b>	Draft Review Report – Voluntary Sector Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic
<b>Ward</b>	All

### HEADLINES

The Committee has been undertaking a review into the Voluntary Sector's Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic. Following agreement on the review's recommendations to Cabinet, a draft report has been prepared by officers for the Committee's consideration.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

**That the Corporate Services, Commerce & Communities Policy Overview Committee:**

- 1) Agrees the final report and recommendations in principle and endorses its submission to Cabinet for due consideration;**
- 2) Delegates any minor drafting changes required prior to the report's submission to the Cabinet to the Democratic Services Officer, in consultation with the Chairman and Opposition Lead as required.**

### SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The agreed Terms of Reference for the review are set out below:

#### Terms of Reference

1. To consider how the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in Hillingdon was able to respond to needs of residents during the Covid-19 lockdown period.
2. To hear how the pandemic impacted on the VCS sector and its ability to deliver services, raise funds, and recruit volunteers.
3. To review how the Hillingdon Community Hub worked with the VCS to meet emergency needs.
4. To make any recommendations that would increase resilience of VCS to respond to any future lockdown or restrictions.

## **Review update**

At the meeting on 17 September 2020, Members agreed that the Committee's next major review topic would be 'The Voluntary Sector's Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic'. Following this agreement, Members conducted a detailed review into the chosen topic.

This information has now been set out within a draft final report, alongside the recommendations that were discussed at the meeting on 4 March 2021. This draft final report will be circulated to the Committee prior to the meeting on 6 April 2021, and it is requested that the Committee consider the draft final report for endorsement to Cabinet.

Should any minor drafting changes to the report be suggested by the Committee at the meeting or otherwise prior to submission to Cabinet, the Committee is asked to delegate authority for this. This would be to enable minor textual changes only and not to the main body of the report or its recommendations.

## **Implications on related Council policies**

The role of the Policy Overview Committees is to make recommendations on service changes and improvements to the Cabinet who are responsible for the Council's policy and direction.

## **How this report benefits Hillingdon residents**

Policy Overview Committees directly engage residents and external partners in the work they do. These recommendations aim to recognise the excellent work carried out by the Voluntary and Community Sector throughout the pandemic and recommend ways in which awareness of the services on offer to residents may be increased to ensure they are able to access the support they need.

## **Financial Implications**

The Committee's review recommendations are not expected to lead to any significant financial implications and are primarily aimed at supporting best practice within existing resources. However, a full financial review of the recommendations will be undertaken as part of the standard reporting process to Cabinet.

## **Legal Implications**

None at this stage.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Voluntary Sector Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic Scoping Report  
Previous Committee papers on the review published on the Council's website

# Voluntary Sector Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic



**A review by the Corporate Services, Commerce and Communities Policy Overview Committee**

**Councillors on the Committee:** Councillors Richard Mills (Chairman), Vanessa Hurhangee (Vice-Chairman), Lindsay Bliss, Wayne Bridges, Nicola Brightman, Farhad Choubedar, Alan Deville, Jazz Dhillon (Opposition Lead) and Scott Farley

**2020/2021**

## Chairman's Foreword

### 'A Review of the Voluntary Sector Response to Covid-19'



On behalf of the Corporate Services, Commerce and Communities Policy Overview Committee, I am pleased to present this report to Cabinet. Given the unprecedented challenges faced by both the Council and voluntary and community sector organisations following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Committee elected to conduct a comprehensive review of the Voluntary Sector Response to Covid-19. The review aimed to consider the ways in which the Council and the voluntary sector had collaborated effectively to meet the needs of the local community and to explore possible areas for improvement and future learning.

A number of virtual witness sessions were held during which Committee Members had the opportunity to meet with a wide range of external stakeholders including representatives of the Hillingdon and UB7 Foodbanks, Hillingdon Mind, Age UK Hillingdon, Harrow and Brent and Hillingdon Carers Trust. As the review progressed, it became apparent that, in response to the pandemic, the Council and voluntary sector partners had worked flexibly and tirelessly to ensure the needs of local residents were met as speedily and efficiently as possible.

Further to the witness sessions and on completion of the review, the Committee prepared a number of recommendations; these related to providing voluntary sector grants to enable partners to continue to deliver services required by Hillingdon residents; providing practical, operational and logistical support and guidance to enable partners to increase resilience going forward and delivering outbound communications to provide information residents could access about key voluntary sector services. It is anticipated that the implementation of these recommendations will assist in increasing the resilience of the voluntary and community sector and enhancing its ability to respond to any future lockdowns or restrictions.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank those witnesses and officers who have given up their time to assist the Committee and commend them for their continued hard work in striving to ensure the provision of high-quality services to support residents within the Borough during these incredibly challenging times.

**Councillor Richard Mills**

**Chairman, Corporate Services, Commerce & Communities Policy Overview Committee**

**Councillor for Brunel Ward**



## Summary of recommendations to Cabinet

Through the witnesses and evidence received during the detailed review by the Committee, Members have agreed the following recommendations to Cabinet:

**1**

**That Cabinet acknowledges, appreciates and recognises the response that all organisations across the voluntary sector have provided to meet the needs of residents throughout the pandemic/lockdown periods.**

**2**

**That Cabinet recognises the pro-active steps taken by the Hillingdon Community Hub/Council Officers to manage and co-ordinate resources across a number of voluntary sector partners, including Hillingdon4All to achieve a strong operating model.**

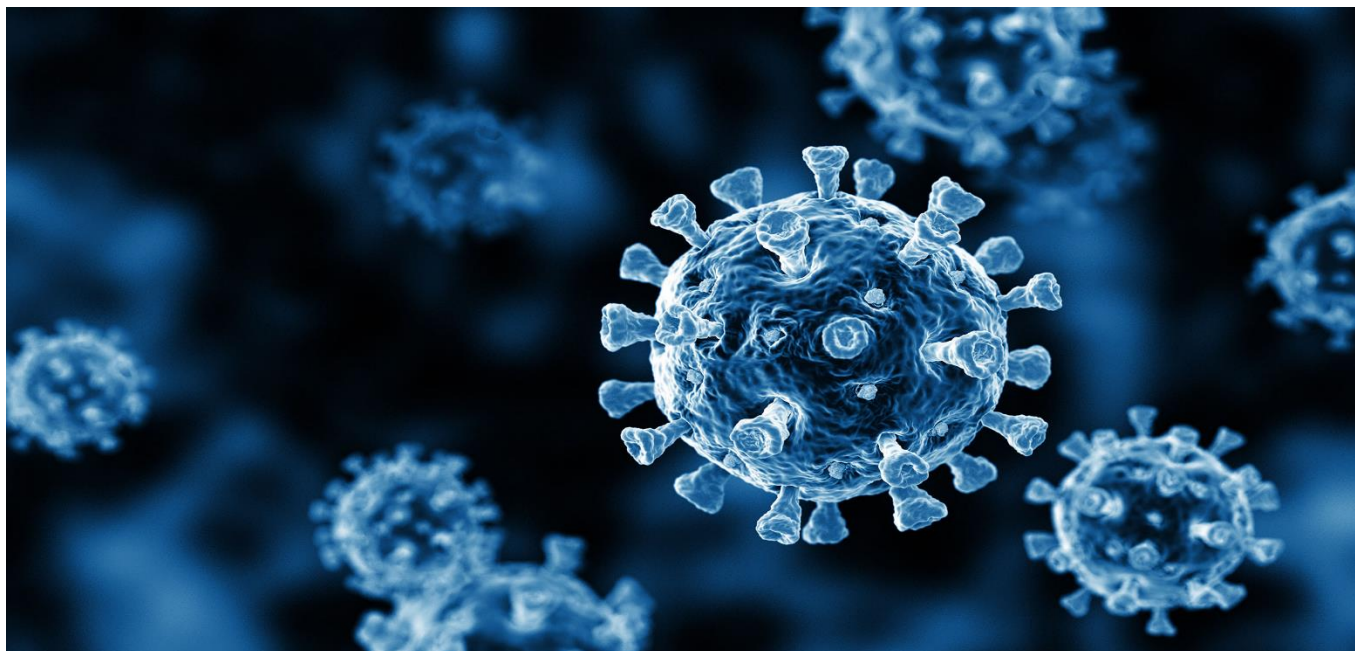
**3**

**That Cabinet continues to review and provide voluntary sector grants to enable key voluntary sector partners to continue to deliver services required by Hillingdon residents. In addition, that Cabinet looks to provide practical, operational and logistical support and guidance to enable VS partners to increase resilience going forward.**

**4**

**That Cabinet agrees to deliver outbound communications, including through Hillingdon People, that provide information to all residents (including children and young people under the age of 16) so they can access information about key voluntary sector services, such as mental health/Hillingdon MIND. Furthermore, to support the dual purpose of such communications to assist in recruitment of volunteers across the Voluntary Sector.**

## Background to the review



The Covid-19 pandemic has been the most significant challenge faced by both national and local governments for nearly a century and has led to the deaths of tens of thousands of people in the UK to date. Clearly a coordinated response was vital to help protect the most vulnerable residents in the Borough, hence the Council worked closely with the voluntary and community sector (VCS) to respond to this unprecedented event. <sup>1</sup>

At the outset of the pandemic, the organisation of the response between charities and the Council was initiated with a call from the Leader of the Council and continued with weekly calls with the Deputy Chief Executive and Lead Officers. Inevitably the first few weeks were somewhat chaotic due to the volume of issues faced; however, as it became clearer what Central Government expected from local authorities in response to the pandemic, the situation began to improve. <sup>2</sup>

The VCS was generally at the forefront of responding to the emerging and changing demands of the Covid-19 pandemic and was well placed to deal with issues on the ground and provide support. However, this sector was also impacted directly and suffered a loss of income due to reductions in donations and takings from activities. Moreover, volunteers were not always able to continue working, as they themselves needed to isolate. The sector was obliged to work closely with the Council and adjust swiftly in order to successfully meet the needs of Hillingdon residents.

In response to the pandemic, the Council established the Hillingdon Community Hub in

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<sup>1</sup> The Government's Covid-19 Guidance for voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations can be viewed at: [COVID-19 guidance for voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/guidance/covid-19-guidance-for-voluntary-community-and-social-enterprise-organisations)

<sup>2</sup> Central Government's Guidance for Local Government: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance for local government - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-local-government)

collaboration with Hillingdon 4 All (H4All) - the local consortium which brings together five of the main local charities (AgeUK Hillingdon, Harrow and Brent, Hillingdon Carers Trust, Harlington Hospice, Hillingdon MIND and DASH). The Hub was widely promoted as the place to call in the event of urgent need should residents be required to shield or isolate.

Emergency food became one of the principal requests and the Hub responded quickly with a bespoke paid-for shopping service, and emergency food parcels, co-ordinated by the Council's Business Assurance Team. The Community Hub and officers in social care received notification of some 15,000 residents who were extremely vulnerable and required to shield. Consequently, the Council contacted each person in the shielded cohort to ensure that they had access to food, medication and other essential requirements. The Council also invested in a new ICT system to record and monitor these cases and referrals were made via the Hub to H4All to respond to non-food issues, such as medication, befriending and dog walking. In addition to this, the Borough's foodbanks, faith groups and voluntary organisations assisted in distributing food and prescriptions and offered invaluable support to those in need.

As lockdown requirements changed, the Council began to work more closely with the two main established foodbanks in Hillingdon - Hillingdon Foodbank and UB7 Foodbank – thereby ensuring they had the resources and capacity to meet any increased need and to take referrals from the Hub. In due course, the emergency food distribution elements of the Community Hub were moved to a more sustainable model led by the voluntary sector.

The far-reaching impact of the pandemic was immeasurable; the Council was made aware that wider issues beyond immediate food needs were becoming more significant. There were reports of mental health services coming under increased pressure, and a disturbing upturn in reports of domestic abuse. In May 2020, a special report for Cabinet was prepared setting out the Council's response to the pandemic. <sup>3</sup>

## Aim of the Review

The principal aim of the review was to ascertain how successfully the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in Hillingdon was able to respond to the needs of residents during the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, the review intended to consider how effectively the VCS collaborated with the Council's Community Hub to respond to the challenges faced and to support residents during such a testing time.

Finally, it was anticipated that the review would enable Committee Members to gain a better understanding of the ways in which the pandemic had impacted the VCS sector and its ability to deliver services, raise funds, and recruit volunteers. Following the witness sessions, the Committee planned to make recommendations aimed at increasing the resilience of VCS to respond to future emergency scenarios.

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<sup>3</sup> The Council's Response to Coronavirus

<https://modgov.hillingdon.gov.uk/documents/s48342/Draft%20Cabinet%20Report%20-%20Hillingdons%20response%20to%20Coronavirus%203.pdf>

## Evidence & Witness Testimony

As the review progressed, the Committee received evidence from a range of officers and external witnesses as set out in this section of the report.



### Age UK (Hillingdon, Harrow & Brent) / The Carers Trust Hillingdon

The first witness session was attended by representatives of Age UK, Hillingdon, Harrow and Brent<sup>4</sup> and the Carers Trust Hillingdon (a local charity which operates support services for unpaid carers living or caring in the London Borough of Hillingdon).<sup>5</sup>

Members were informed that Age UK and the Carers Trust Hillingdon were two of the five larger charities in the Borough that formed part of Hillingdon 4 All (H4All). The Committee was advised that H4All, the NHS and the Council had rallied together in response to the pandemic to address the immediate needs of residents. Initially, the focus had been on ensuring that vulnerable residents and those shielding at home had access to food and medicine. Food parcels, deliveries and shopping services had been organised expeditiously to meet these needs.

As time progressed, calls from residents were of a more complex nature. Some residents reported that they were feeling isolated or lonely. Many were obliged to stay at home with limited human contact and no internet access. Said residents often felt excluded from society which had a significant detrimental impact on both their physical and mental health and wellbeing. It was estimated that 5-6% of the population were digitally excluded, but this rose to 20-25% among older residents. It was therefore vital that older residents were actively encouraged to engage with and use technology. Charities reached out to these vulnerable residents and attempted to ameliorate their online access thereby preventing social isolation - tablets were sourced and provided to those most in need. Staff in full PPE visited elderly residents to train them on how to make best use of their new equipment.

To further assist in combatting depression and social isolation, Members heard that charities delivered Christmas presents and hampers during the festive period. Additionally, a range of social programmes were put in place to support those in need. Other innovative ways to assist in addressing the issue of social isolation were introduced including pamper evenings and language lessons; these proved to be an effective way to bring people together.

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<sup>4</sup> Age Uk Hillingdon, Harrow and Brent: [Welcome to Age UK Hillingdon, Harrow and Brent](#)

<sup>5</sup> Hillingdon Carers Trust: [Carers Trust Hillingdon - Supporting unpaid carers in Hillingdon](#)

These were challenging circumstances and the Committee heard that staff morale was understandably low at times. Volunteers and staff were offered training and support - including death counselling. Many carers in the Borough requested additional help and support at this time and the voluntary sector did its utmost to provide this.

Going forward Members were advised that H4All planned to expand its coverage to include additional charities through the Health and Wellbeing Alliance, which included 45 groups. While the current five organisations had large portfolios, they did not cover everything, hence there was a need for wider collaboration with other groups - plans to expand were underway. The Committee was informed that a programme of support and psychotherapy for carers was being piloted; charities were awaiting feedback from carers to ascertain how helpful this had been.

## Hillingdon Foodbank and UB7 Foodbank



The pandemic had devastating consequences; some Hillingdon residents struggled to feed themselves and their families and had no other option than to approach local foodbanks for assistance. In its article “The Lived Experience of Food Insecurity under Covid-19”, the Food Standards Agency observed that “Covid-19 rapidly worsened insecurity for those who were already missing meals and/or compromising nutritional quality previously, and rapidly tipped those ‘just managing’ into insecurity.”<sup>6</sup> The Committee’s second witness session was attended by representatives of two local foodbanks – Bell Farm Christian Centre ‘UB7’ Foodbank<sup>7</sup> and Hillingdon Foodbank.<sup>8</sup>

Members were informed that UB7 Foodbank had been launched in 2017 serving West Drayton, Yiewsley and Heathrow Villages. Prior to the pandemic, in addition to the Foodbank, Bell Farm Christian Centre had organised a plethora of other activities, including an older person’s dining centre serving weekly hot lunches, holidays for the elderly, parenting groups and holidays clubs. At the onset of the pandemic, the Centre was obliged to adapt hastily to meet the needs of the local community. Fortunately, the Foodbank and advice centre were able to remain open and continued to operate in a Covid secure manner.

The Committee was advised that, in terms of children’s work, this had changed significantly during the pandemic as holiday clubs and toddler groups were no longer feasible. The Centre worked closely with Hasbro who donated hundreds of toys and crafts. Zoom classes and Zoom Christmas parties for children aged 5-11 were organised and packs of crafts were sent to their homes. In

<sup>6</sup> The Food Standards Agency: [The Lived Experience of Food Insecurity under Covid-19](#)

<sup>7</sup> UB7 Foodbank: [Yiewsley & West Drayton Foodbank | Helping Local People in Crisis](#)

<sup>8</sup> Hillingdon Foodbank: [Hillingdon Foodbank | Helping Local People in Crisis](#)

addition to this, food parcels, treat and craft bags were delivered to the elderly and craft boxes and food hampers were provided for adults and families in need.

Members heard that the local community was hugely supportive of the Centre's efforts. Local businesses, caterers and residents volunteered to help and a Facebook page with hundreds of members was set up to co-ordinate this activity. Many who had been furloughed offered to help with deliveries and befriending, whilst local children were involved in making cards for the elderly. The Council had also been extremely supportive – Grant Officers had allowed the Centre to use the Council's funding flexibly as required.

With regards to Hillingdon Foodbank, Members heard that it had been in operation since 2009 and had been the first foodbank in London. Although well prepared in many respects, it had become clear at the outset of the pandemic that the project would need to adapt quickly to enable it to cope with the unprecedented demand; closure was a real possibility at that time as 80-90% of volunteers were over 70 and needed to shield. Fortunately, the response from the local community had been fantastic and the foodbank was able to continue its vital work. Within two weeks, all premises including the main warehouse in Denham were Covid secure. Members heard that Hillingdon Foodbank had served 7672 clients in 2019 whereas, by the end of 2020, the numbers had risen to 18,222.

At the outbreak of the pandemic, a new Community Hub was set up within the Council. Once Council staff had been redeployed back to their former jobs, an exit plan was needed to facilitate a more sustainable system led by the voluntary sector. In August 2020, the Council initiated discussion with the two foodbanks offering funding and support to enable them to purchase additional food supplies and to cover administrative expenses. The Committee heard that this was an entirely new model as previously the foodbanks had relied exclusively on donations. Additionally, the Council helped Hillingdon Foodbank with the purchase of fridges and with transportation costs. A grant application under the Council's core grant scheme was being considered to continue to support them in the future. It was confirmed that the advice centre at Bell Farm was also supported by the Council through the core grant scheme and the possibility of a small grant for the older people's dining centre had been agreed.

In terms of training, Members heard that all staff at the Bell Farm foodbank had been trained in mental health first aid as recommended by the Council. Hillingdon Foodbank had recruited a volunteer Life Coach to support clients in the future. It was confirmed that the Foodbank had a robust team of volunteers; some of whom were professionals with mental health experience willing to help those in the community in need of their support.

With regards to the current situation, Committee Members were advised that people with an urgent need who contacted the Community Hub were now being referred directly to the foodbanks. Some of the needs were more complex than previously; however, partners were extremely adept at adapting their working practices to meet these changing needs. The future model had yet to be determined but there was now some resilience in the system and an understanding of how to scale up if faced with another crisis in the future.

The collaborative effort was applauded. It was noted that the Gurdwara in Hayes, the Muslim Centre and the Salvation Army had offered local residents hot meals during the crisis. Moreover, foodbanks had worked in partnership with various agencies, schools, GPs and religious establishments to raise awareness and distribute food vouchers.

## Hillingdon Mind



In June 2020, Mind published an article entitled “The Mental Health Emergency” noting that “The effects of social distancing, lockdown, the loss of loved ones to the virus and the over-consumption of stress-inducing media reports is taking a huge toll on our mental health and wellbeing and will continue to have lasting effects long after lockdown is over”<sup>9</sup>

At its final witness session, the Committee received evidence from the Director and Head of Psychotherapeutic Service, Hillingdon Mind. Members heard that Hillingdon Mind’s Counselling services had rapidly moved online in March 2020 - about a week before lockdown. The Mental Health Recovery Service had been significantly impacted by the pandemic and all social activities and therapeutic group work had moved to telephone calls / online. A Mental Health Care Calling and Crisis Response Calling Service had been introduced in March 2020 – approximately 160 clients were identified as high-risk and were called regularly. In addition to this, a food and medicine delivery service was introduced in March 2020 and all staff were provided with equipment to enable them to work from home. The current Group Schedule was entirely online with the exception of the Wellbeing Walk – the Committee heard that the online activities had been well received and clients had adapted better than anticipated.

Members learnt that, since March 2020, demand for Counselling had increased by 157%, for Mental Health Support and Advice by 346% and requests for psychological support for Carers had increased by 150% - this had put immense pressure on the team which consisted of only 3.5 members of staff. Some 100 additional volunteer counsellors had been recruited to assist and it was hoped that funding would be received to enable Hillingdon Mind to recruit four new members of staff in the near future.

Additional funding had been secured from the CCG to provide 40 additional free counselling spaces for a period of three months and from the Big Lottery to provide free Key Worker Counselling for twenty clients. An application had been made to the Big Lottery and Postcode Lottery to use existing grant funds to address IT poverty, Food Poverty and Emergency funding for vulnerable clients. Twenty tablets had been purchased for clients and shopping done for those who were struggling to obtain food bank vouchers.

Members were informed that the service had seen an increase in first time users for mild to

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<sup>9</sup> Mind: [The Mental Health Emergency](#)

moderate mental health issues. It had also witnessed an increase in suicide ideation within the Severe Mental Illness group and an increase in Safeguarding referrals to Social Services (from one or two per annum to three or four per quarter).

In terms of future pressures, it was likely that the problems would persist once the pandemic was over. A potential recession would negatively impact mental health and a described 'tsunami' of mental health cases was expected. It would be difficult to get clients to re-engage with GPs and encourage them to get vaccinated. It was anticipated that some clients would struggle with reconnection after lockdown and projects were being initiated to assist people with these challenges.

Members were advised that Hillingdon Mind was exploring a number of avenues to build capacity to meet demand – these included speaking to current funders CCG and LBH, applying to Big Lottery and City Bridge Trust for grants, discussing with CNWL innovative ways to deliver mental health services, for example the One Stop Shop and developing webinars to provide mental health advice.

It was confirmed that Hillingdon Mind had met with the Council's Voluntary Sector Development Office, to discuss possible collaboration with other voluntary sector and community groups. Mental Health first aid courses were planned to enable people to spot the early signs of mental health issues since early intervention was key.

## **The Council's Response to the pandemic**

Members heard that the Council had initially worked closely with H4All to set up the Covid-19 Community Hub tasked with co-ordinating the delivery of food and medicine and related support services. This in-house system initially provided a bespoke shopping service and emergency supplies to those in need. However, it was necessary to scale up rapidly to ensure the needs of the most vulnerable were met.

The original plan had been for H4All to create a Hub with the support of the local authority. However, it had rapidly become apparent that the charities lacked the infrastructure to enable them to achieve this effectively. H4All had 4 phone lines whereas the Council could commission a dedicated contact centre with twenty members of staff. Moreover, the Council had IT resources, purchasing cards and means of transportation at its disposal. It was, therefore, decided that the Council would run the Hub while the charities would co-ordinate volunteers and focus on their core charitable work. In the fullness of time, the work of the Hub had been transitioned back to voluntary partners and a partnership had been built with the local foodbanks.

The Committee was informed that the Council had also been involved in issuing emergency grants to residents as required.



## Looking ahead

It was confirmed that the Council had signed up to the London Funders' Pledge <sup>10</sup> which had enabled partners to use their grant funding flexibly as they saw fit. The Committee welcomed the fact that H4All aspired to develop as an organisation that represented smaller local charities and that a small grant had been made available to H4All to support this work.

Councillors heard that this had been a challenging time for smaller charities as the number of volunteers and donations had fallen dramatically during the Covid-19 pandemic. It was recognised that some charities needed to reinvent themselves and the Council and H4All were helping to facilitate that. Committee Members were conscious that larger charities had drawn down a significant resource during the pandemic and smaller charities were at risk of disappearing without support. The fact that this situation would be closely monitored going forward was welcomed.

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<sup>10</sup> London Funders ["We stand with the sector" - funder response to Covid-19 | London Funders](#)

## Findings and conclusions

### Recognition of the Work of the Voluntary Sector in Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic

As previously indicated within the body of this report, Members acknowledge that the voluntary and community sector in Hillingdon has played a crucial role in ensuring that the needs of Hillingdon residents have continued to be met throughout the pandemic and lockdown periods. Voluntary sector organisations have worked tirelessly to ensure that all residents, including the elderly and the vulnerable, have been well supported and safeguarded throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

As set out previously, local foodbanks have provided food parcels, treat and craft bags, telephone advice and Zoom classes and parties for children. Through H4All, Age UK has reached out to the elderly arranging social activities, delivering Christmas presents and hampers and providing tablets to reduce social isolation while Hillingdon Carers Trust has worked to support carers in need. Moreover, Hillingdon Mind has reacted expeditiously to support its clients by moving the majority of its Counselling services, social activities and therapeutic group work online. Innovative Mental Health Care Calling and Crisis Response Calling Services have also been introduced to support those clients most at risk.

The Committee noted that the voluntary sector response to this unprecedented event has been laudable both in terms of its efficiency and efficacy. It has been a steep learning curve for all those concerned and the response has been highly commendable. Members extended their gratitude to all those involved in this impressive co-ordinated effort.

On that basis, it is recommended by the Committee that:

**1**

**That Cabinet acknowledge, appreciate and recognise the response that all organisations across the voluntary sector have provided to meet the needs of residents throughout the pandemic/lockdown periods.**

### A Strong Operating Model

As noted within the main body of this report, the Hillingdon Community Hub and Council officers have worked together proactively to ensure that the needs of Hillingdon residents have been met throughout the pandemic. At the outset of the pandemic, the Council swiftly established the Hillingdon Community Hub in collaboration with Hillingdon 4 All (H4All) - the local consortium encompassing five of the main local charities (AgeUK Hillingdon, Harrow and Brent, Hillingdon Carers Trust, Harlington Hospice, Hillingdon MIND and DASH). Since many organisations lacked the operational management / business practices to operate at scale, it was decided that the Council would take a leading role in managing logistics while the charities would co-ordinate

volunteers and focus on their charitable work. Despite the logistical challenges faced initially, the Hub was swiftly able to respond to the needs of residents working with a number of leading voluntary groups to manage and co-ordinate resources. Referrals were made via the Hub to H4All to respond to non-food issues, such as sourcing and delivering medication, befriending and dog walking. The Borough's foodbanks, faith groups and voluntary organisations also assisted by distributing food and prescriptions and providing support to people with befriending calls.

Members noted that the Hub was widely promoted as the place to call in event of urgent need, should residents be required to shield or isolate. The in-house system was initially set up to provide a bespoke shopping service and emergency supplies but was able to scale up very quickly to ensure the needs of the most vulnerable were met. Once Council staff had been redeployed back to their normal jobs, an exit strategy was planned to set up a more sustainable system. At this point, the work of the Hub was successfully and seamlessly transferred to voluntary partners.

The Committee welcomed this proactive and collaborative approach noting that the Community Hub and Council officers had worked effectively with a wide range of voluntary sector partners to manage and co-ordinate resources and establish a strong operating model, thereby ensuring that the needs of Hillingdon residents, including the elderly and the vulnerable could be met.

On that basis, it is recommended by the Committee:

**2**

**That Cabinet recognises the pro-active steps taken by the Hillingdon Community Hub/Council Officers to manage and co-ordinate resources across a number of voluntary sector partners, including Hillingdon4All to achieve a strong operating model.**

## Voluntary Sector Grants

The Committee noted that, during the pandemic, Council officers had worked tirelessly to provide support and guidance to local partners. The Council had signed up to the London Funders' Pledge which had enabled partners to use their grant funding flexibly as they saw fit. It was also noted that H4All aspired to develop as an organisation that represented smaller local charities and a grant had been made available to H4All to support this work.

Members learnt that a small grant from Central Government had been made available to develop community engagement. Additionally, Cabinet had agreed that Hillingdon Mind's grant would be increased going forward. Moreover, a grant application under the Council's core grant scheme was being considered to support Hillingdon Foodbank in the future. The advice centre at Bell Farm was also regularly supported by the Council through the substantial core grant scheme and the possibility of a small grant for the older people's dining centre had been discussed.

It was noted that business models were likely to change somewhat as a result of the impact of the pandemic. In view of this, the Committee recommended that officers continue to review financial support and provide grants to enable key voluntary sector partners to deliver vital

services to Hillingdon residents. The Committee felt that the importance of providing essential practical, operational and logistical support and guidance to assist local voluntary sector and community partners in increasing their resilience to meet future need could not be underestimated.

On that basis, it is recommended by the Committee:

**3**

**That Cabinet continues to review and provide voluntary sector grants to enable key voluntary sector partners to continue to deliver services required by Hillingdon residents. In addition, that Cabinet looks to provide practical, operational and logistical support and guidance to enable VS partners to increase resilience going forward**

## Outbound Communications

Having received evidence from a number of local voluntary and community sector partners, Members noted the essential nature of the work carried out by partners throughout the pandemic to support Hillingdon residents. It was vital that all residents (including children and young people) had full knowledge and understanding of the services available to them and were able to easily access said services going forward in times of need. It was acknowledged that the demand for mental health support was likely to continue to increase in the future. The Committee understood that Central Government was making additional funds available to support the mental health of children and young people and a small grant had been made allocated to develop community engagement. Mind had expressed an interest in working with the young people category but were currently able to do so due to a lack of funding.

In view of the above, outbound communications (to include an article in Hillingdon People) were proposed to promote the work of the voluntary sector, reach out to community groups and raise awareness of the services on offer in the Borough. It was vital that all residents, including the young, were aware of the services available to them and were able to readily access such services in times of need. The communications would outline the work of the charities and set out their future needs which could also assist in recruiting more volunteers. Based on feedback from some of the organisations, it was noted that this would need to be managed carefully to ensure that the voluntary sector and community partners did not become overwhelmed with new enquiries.

On that basis, it is recommended by the Committee:

**4**

**That Cabinet agrees to deliver outbound communications, including through Hillingdon People, that provide information to all residents (including children and young people under the age of 16) so they can access information about key voluntary sector services, such as mental health/Hillingdon MIND. Furthermore, to support the dual purpose of such communications to assist in recruitment of volunteers across the Voluntary Sector.**

## About the review - witnesses and activity

The following Terms of Reference were agreed by the Committee from the outset of the review:

1. To consider how the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in Hillingdon was able to respond to needs of residents during the Covid-19 lockdown period.
2. To hear how the pandemic impacted on the VCS sector and its ability to deliver services, raise funds, and recruit volunteers.
3. To review how the Hillingdon Community Hub worked with the VCS to meet emergency needs.
4. To make any recommendations that would increase resilience of VCS to respond to any future lockdown or restrictions.

The Committee received evidence from the following sources and witnesses:

<p><b>Witness Session 1 – 4 November 2020</b></p>	<p><b>Voluntary Sector External witnesses:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Julian Lloyd, Chief Executive Officer at Age UK, Hillingdon, Harrow and Brent; and</li> <li>• Sally Chandler, Chief Executive at Carers Trust Hillingdon</li> </ul> <p><b>Council officers in attendance:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kevin Byrne, Head of Health Integration and Voluntary Sector Partnerships</li> </ul>
<p><b>Witness Session 2 – 12 January 2021</b></p>	<p><b>Voluntary Sector External witnesses:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diane Faichney, Foodbank Chair and Manager and Centre Director of Bell Farm Christian Centre; and</li> <li>• Tunde Balogun, Senior Pastor Kingsborough Family Church – representing Hillingdon Foodbank</li> </ul> <p><b>Council officers in attendance:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kevin Byrne, Head of Health Integration and Voluntary Sector Partnerships</li> </ul>
<p><b>Witness Session 3 - 3 February 2021</b></p>	<p><b>Voluntary Sector External witness:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Angela Stangoe MBACP – Director and Head of Psychotherapeutic Services, Hillingdon Mind</li> </ul> <p><b>Council officers in attendance:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kevin Byrne, Head of Health Integration and Voluntary Sector Partnerships; and</li> <li>• Mike Talbot, Director – Corporate Resources and Services</li> </ul>

## References

1. Government COVID-19 Guidance for voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations:  
[www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-guidance-for-voluntary-community-and-social-enterprise-organisations](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-guidance-for-voluntary-community-and-social-enterprise-organisations)
2. Covid-19 Guidance for Local Government:  
[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance for local government - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-local-government)
3. Special Report to Cabinet detailing “Hillingdon Council’s Response to Coronavirus”:  
<https://modgov.hillingdon.gov.uk/documents/s48342/Draft%20Cabinet%20Report%20-%20Hillingdons%20response%20to%20Coronavirus%203.pdf>
4. Age UK Hillingdon, Harrow and Brent:  
<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/hillingdonharrowandbrent/>
5. Hillingdon Carers Trust: <https://carerstrusthillingdon.org/>
6. The Food Standards Agency: [The Lived Experience of Food Insecurity Under Covid-19](https://www.food.gov.uk/news/news-detail/1144)
7. UB7 Foodbank: <https://yiewsleywestdrayton.foodbank.org.uk/>
8. Hillingdon Foodbank: <https://hillingdon.foodbank.org.uk/>
9. Mind: [The Mental Health Emergency](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-covid-19-mental-health-emergency/)
10. London Funders: <https://londonfunders.org.uk/about/covid-19-0/our-blog/we-stand-sector-funder-response-covid-19>