

Minutes

Corporate Services, Commerce and Communities
Policy Overview Committee
Tuesday, 12 January 2021
Meeting held at VIRTUAL - Live on the Council's
YouTube channel: Hillingdon London



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Members Present:

Councillors Richard Mills (Chairman)
Lindsay Bliss
Nicola Brightman
Alan Deville
Jazz Dhillon
Scott Farley
Martin Goddard
Wayne Bridges

Apologies:

Vanessa Hurhangee

Officers Present:

Jacqui Robertson, Service Manager for Community Safety
Iain Watters, Financial Planning Manager
Helena Webster, Community Engagement & Town Centres Team Leader
Nathan Welch, ASBET Officer

Also Present

Diane Faichney representing Bell Farm Foodbank
Tunde Balogun representing Hillingdon Foodbank
Zubin Winter, Partnership Inspector

28. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Vanessa Hurhangee.

29. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Martin Goddard declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 6 as he would soon be taking up a new Cabinet role. He left the meeting and did not participate in the discussion of this item.

Councillor Scott Farley declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 5 as he had been conducting Ward Councillor surgeries at the Foodbanks in question. He remained in the meeting during the discussion of this item.

30. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 4 NOVEMBER 2020

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting dated 4 November 2020 be agreed as an accurate record.

31. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was agreed that all items were in Part I and would be considered in public.

32. REVIEW: VOLUNTARY SECTOR RESPONSE TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Diane Faichney, Yiewsley and West Drayton Foodbank Chair and Manager / Centre Director of Bell Farm Christian Centre and Tunde Balogun, Senior Pastor – Kingsborough Family Church – representing Hillingdon Foodbank were in attendance.

Diane Faichney addressed the Committee outlining the work of the Bell Farm Christian Centre foodbank during the pandemic. Key points highlighted included:

- 1) Bell Farm Christian Centre was a Church and registered charity. In the early 1990s they had started working in the local community where there was a lot of deprivation and unemployment. The Centre worked in partnership with the Council, the Police and other agencies to provide employment and training, toy libraries and children's work. The project had grown from there;
- 2) An advice centre called 'Doorway' had been set up approximately 20 years previously. This was similar to the Citizens Advice Bureau and provided advice on debt, housing etc;
- 3) The UB7 Foodbank had been launched in 2017 in conjunction with other churches in the area serving West Drayton, Yiewsley and Heathrow Villages;
- 4) An older person's dining centre provided weekly hot lunches for 80-100 elderly residents from the local area and organised events and holidays for them;
- 5) The Centre also ran parenting groups and holiday clubs;
- 6) During the pandemic, the Centre had adapted quickly to serve the local community. The foodbank and advice centre had remained open and were operating in a Covid secure manner. The foodbank operated at the door and telephone advice was offered to those in need of this service;
- 7) In terms of children's work, this had changed significantly during the pandemic as holiday clubs and toddler groups were no longer possible. The Centre had worked closely with Hasbro who had donated hundreds of toys and crafts. The Centre had organised Zoom classes and Zoom Christmas parties for children aged 5-11 and had arranged for packs of crafts to be sent to their homes. A toy library had been in operation when possible;

- 8) Throughout the pandemic, food parcels, treat and craft bags had been delivered to the elderly - the Centre had checked with the Council to ensure there was no duplication;
- 9) Craft boxes and food hampers had been sent to adults and families in need;
- 10) The local community had been hugely supportive of the Centre's efforts. Local businesses, caterers and residents had volunteered to help. A facebook page with hundreds of members had been set up to co-ordinate this activity. Those who had been furloughed had been keen to help with deliveries and befriending and local children had been involved in making cards for the elderly. The Council had also been very supportive – Grant Officers had allowed the Centre to use the funding flexibly as required;
- 11) A new member of staff had been recruited who had secured £45,000 in funding from London Community Foundation. This had helped to pay for PPE and some of the Centre's overall costs;
- 12) The foodbank continued to be very busy as people were being made redundant;
- 13) Up to 200 asylum seekers and their families had been visiting the Centre needing food, clothes and support –this had been a challenge but churches across Hillingdon had been helping out;

Tunde Balogun addressed the Committee representing Hillingdon Foodbank. Key points highlighted included:

- 1) The Hillingdon Foodbank had been in operation since 2009 and had been the first foodbank in London;
- 2) Although well prepared in many respects, it was 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 community had been fantastic and the foodbank had been able to continue its vital work. Within 2 weeks all premises including the main warehouse in Denham had been made Covid secure;
- 3) The Foodbank had initially worked closely with the Council Hub to facilitate food deliveries for those in need. Once Council staff had been obliged to return to their usual duties, the Foodbank had assumed responsibility for operations and had continued with the food delivery programme;
- 4) The Centre had been working in conjunction with about 30 churches across the Borough and some 35 schools. The Council had supported the Foodbank to buy food in bulk to supplement donations as demand had increased. In December, the Foodbank had prepared 'Buckets of Joy' – hampers for local families;

- 5) Drivers had volunteered to deliver food across the Borough and food deliveries were completed within a maximum of 48 hours of an email being received;
- 6) The Council's Grants Department had greatly helped with funding to assist with expenses.

Kevin Byrne addressed the Committee confirming that, at the outbreak of the pandemic, a new Hub had been set up. Members were informed that this in-house system had been set up initially to provide a bespoke shopping service and emergency supplies for those in need. It had been necessary to scale up very quickly and ensure the needs of the most vulnerable were met. Once Council staff had been redeployed back to their normal jobs, an exit plan was needed to set up a more sustainable system. In August 2020, conversations had been held with the two foodbanks and funding and support offered to enable them to purchase additional food supplies and to cover admin expenses. This was an entirely new model as previously the foodbanks had relied exclusively on donations. The Council had also helped Hillingdon Foodbank with purchasing fridges and with transportation costs. A grant application under the Council's core grant scheme was being considered to support them in the future. The advice centre at Bell Farm was also being 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 the current situation, Committee Members were advised that people with an urgent need who contacted the community Hub were now being referred to the foodbanks. It was confirmed that the numbers of referrals were growing and some of the needs were more complex than previously. However, the partners were very good at working flexibly and adapting their working practices to meet these changing needs. The future model had yet to be confirmed but there was now some resilience in the system and an understanding of how to 'gear up' if faced with another crisis in the future.

In response to Members' requests for clarification, it was confirmed that, unfortunately, some children had been unable to access the Zoom activities as they did not have the equipment to do so. It was acknowledged that, even if the children could be provided with the equipment free of charge, parents did not always have internet access in the home as this was costly. However, Members heard that, in some cases, families had internet access but were obliged to share equipment which was challenging; in these cases additional equipment would be welcomed.

Members noted that unfortunately there was significant disparity between the north and the south of the Borough in terms of the need. The delivery service was welcomed since some people felt ashamed to visit a foodbank and would travel quite a distance to do so rather than use one in their local area. Members heard that, at Bell Farm, foodbank vouchers were distributed by a variety of people / groups including Civic Centre staff, nurses, health visitors and other agencies such as P3. If people arrived at the foodbank without a voucher, they would not be turned away. If it transpired that there was an ongoing need, food vouchers would be provided for as long as they were needed. At Hillingdon Foodbank, vouchers were generally limited to three as the aim was to refer clients to other agencies for assistance and support

if possible. However, if this was not possible within the timeframe, the system would be by-passed and clients transferred to the emergency food provision scheme.

It was noted that the Gurdwara in Hayes, the Muslim Centre and the Salvation Army had been offering hot meals during the crisis. In response to their enquiries, the Committee heard that foodbanks worked in partnership with a number of different agencies, schools, GPs and religious establishments including the Muslim Centre in Hayes to raise awareness and distribute food vouchers. The foodbanks also offered bulk supplies to soup kitchens around the Borough. It was confirmed that Hillingdon Foodbank's drivers covered 15-20 miles every day to reach out to those in need. Members heard that Hillingdon Foodbank had served 7672 clients in 2019 whereas, by the end of 2020, the numbers had climbed to 18,222.

In response to their enquiries, the Committee heard that all staff at the Bell Farm foodbank had been trained in mental health first aid as recommended by the Council. It was recognised that, in the future, their business plan would need to be re-examined and more resources would be required. It was a matter of concern that funding to local charities would reduce or disappear completely. It was confirmed that the support of the Council would be needed in some form; this would be clarified at a later stage. Tunde Balogun of Hillingdon Foodbank advised the Committee that a volunteer Life Coach had been recruited to support clients in the future. It was confirmed that the Foodbank had a robust team of volunteers; some of these were professionals with mental health experience who were willing to help those in the community who needed support.

Members suggested that the local community, the Council and charities should work together to help people through the next phase of the pandemic. In response to this, it was confirmed that a small grant had been made available by Central Government to support, through H4All, a package of training for volunteers in the community to help disseminate messaging around Covid, vaccinations etc. This would be rolled out by the end of March 2021. An article in Hillingdon People was proposed outlining the work of the charities and their future needs – it was hoped that this would assist in recruiting more volunteers.

Members were informed that, as part of the grants programme agreed by Cabinet in December 2020, a project funded through H4All had been approved to embark on this type of activity and assist in capacity building. ex

At the request of Councillors, it was agreed that Kevin Byrne would source further data regarding the increase in foodbank usage and would share this information with the Committee. It was also suggested that a representative of Hillingdon MIND be requested to attend a meeting of the Committee to provide further evidence.

The Committee thanked the charities for all their hard work noting that their business operations had improved and they had become more resilient and better able to cope with the challenges presented by the ongoing pandemic.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Kevin Byrne, Head of Health Integration and Voluntary Services source further data regarding the increase in foodbank usage to share with the Committee; and
- 2) the verbal update regarding the foodbanks' response to the Covid-19 pandemic be noted.

33. 2021/2022 BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR SERVICES WITHIN THE REMIT OF CORPORATE SERVICES, COMMERCE & COMMUNITIES POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

Councillor Martin Goddard had declared a non-pecuniary interest in this item therefore left the meeting prior to the presentation and discussion.

Iain Watters, Financial Planning Manager, presented the budget report. Members were informed that Cabinet had agreed the budget proposals in December 2020; these were not out for public consultation. Key headlines in the report included:

- 1) The Chancellor's spending review 2020 had set out a £1m uplift in grant funding for the local authority;
- 2) An extra 1% had been added to the Social Care Precept to assist with the impact of the pandemic;
- 3) The Chancellor had set out a pay freeze in terms of the inflationary element of salary for all public sector workers;
- 4) Hillingdon's budget gap which had stood at £19m in September 2020, had reduced to £16m following these changes.

In terms of the Cabinet's budget proposals, Members heard that £8m of savings were proposed; these were mainly efficiency savings based around transformation of services. The only item which was a shift in policy was a £500,000 saving from winding down the local first-time buyers' scheme. A 4.8% uplift in Council tax was proposed which included the additional 3% in the Social Care Precept and a 1.8% increase in core Council tax. A release of £2m from balances was proposed. The older people's discount for Council tax would be protected but Council tax would not be frozen for this group. It was reported that the Council was less reliant on general balances than had been expected in September 2020. It was expected that there would be £28m of general balances going forward. Looking beyond the 2021-22 financial year, it was expected that some 12.6m of savings in 2022/3 and 2023/4 would be required which was a high number but not an impossible target.

In terms of the services within the Committee's remit, savings were proposed mainly around back office efficiencies. These related mainly to revenues and benefits automation to make back office processes more efficient, a review of the technical administration and business support services, energy savings and efficiencies around printing and mail.

In terms of new investment, an uplift in spending on CCTV was proposed and charges were proposed when people requested CCTV footage for example for insurance purposes.

In response to questions from the Committee, it was confirmed that the revenues, benefits and technical administration departments were services which had been the subjects of substantial bid reviews some 4 or 5 years previously. Members were informed that the previous reviews had been around management structure whereas the current proposals related to efficiencies in business processes. It was reported that in the current year an approximate £3m underspend had been recorded; primarily as a result of new working practices due to the pandemic. It was confirmed that the budget for 2021/22 had not been predicated on the basis of this continuing. It had been assumed that, overall, the local authority would be able to secure funding from Central Government to cover the net additional costs relating to Covid-19. If the Government funding did not cover this, £9m had been set aside as a safety net.

In response to the Committee's requests for clarification, it was confirmed that, in terms of business rates, the impact on the public purse was primarily being borne by Central Government. Rates continued to be collected from Heathrow despite the current difficulties experienced in aviation due to the pandemic. Safety net mechanisms were in place to protect individual local authorities. In terms of CCTV cameras, it was confirmed that obsolete CCTV cameras were gradually being replaced.

It was agreed that the POC's comments regarding the budget proposals be drafted by the Chairman for consideration by the Committee at the meeting in February 2021.

RESOLVED: That the 2021/22 budget proposals for services within the Corporate Services, Commerce and Communities POC be noted and comments be drafted by the Chairman in advance of the February meeting.

34. ALLEY GATING SCHEME

Helena Webster, Community Engagement and Town Centre Improvements Manager, presented the report.

Members were informed that, within the Chrysalis programme, around £30k was earmarked each financial year to support alleygating and community safety schemes to enhance public safety. The private alleygating scheme had been introduced about 15 years previously and about 13 schemes had been completed in total. Chrysalis funding contributed up to 90% of the cost of alley gates to successful applicants but responsibility for maintenance and ownership lay with the residents themselves. Businesses could also apply for funding and would be expected to contribute 50-70% themselves. Electronic gates were rarely installed as evidence would be required that a management company would fund the ongoing maintenance of the gates. A framework agreement was in place up to March 2024 for a preferred fencing / gating contractor, so residents no longer needed to provide 3 quotes to support their applications. Information about the scheme was available on the Council's website.

Members heard that the private alleygating scheme was well-known whereas the Housing-owned Alleygating Scheme was less well-known. Each year gating

schemes were implemented on Housing-owned land as part of the Better Neighbourhood Fund. £156k of Better Neighbourhood funding was available each year for improvements on LBH Housing-owned land, to benefit the wider community. For these schemes, keys were held by the Tenancy Management Officer.

With regards to the Chrysalis scheme, the Committee was advised that, over the last 3 years, 23 applications had been received; 19 of which had been approved and 378 households had benefited. The total cost to the Council was £65,366 and £8,609 had been contributed by residents. In terms of the Better Neighbourhood Fund Data, 14 alleygating schemes had been approved and 311 households had benefited. The total cost to the Council was £65,613.

It was confirmed that, for private schemes, responsibility for ongoing maintenance lay with the residents themselves. When people moved on, they were responsible for handing over the keys to the new occupiers. Members heard that it was a very popular scheme. Many of the more straightforward schemes had already been implemented and new applications were becoming more complex.

Members observed that this was a fantastic scheme from which many residents had benefited. However, it was noted that it was now quite old and gaps may have appeared in terms of ownership and management. It was important that the Council kept accurate records to assist residents when problems arose.

It was suggested that officers wrote to lead residents on a yearly basis to ensure contact details were correct and up-to-date.

In response to questions from the Committee it was confirmed that the team worked with the police and ASBET officers who on occasion recommended alleyways that should be gated. The police safer neighbourhood team often advised victims of crime such as burglary to contact the Council to request alley gates. The team was also contacted by ASBET officers. Residents were advised to report all antisocial behaviour through the contact centre so a full picture could be built up.

Members suggested that officers could approach estate agents about the concept of alley gates as this would be a positive selling point and could assist in ensuring that keys were handed over to new owners. The matter could also be discussed with private landlords. In response to queries from Councillors, it was confirmed that property searches would reveal the title of the ownership of a piece of land but would not show any additions, therefore gating schemes would not show up.

It was recognised that the matter of absentee landlords was a problem and it was sometimes difficult to obtain alley gating contributions from households. Such matters were considered on a case by case basis. A briefing note would be prepared for the Cabinet Member to enable him to take a view. It was agreed that this was an area that needed to be monitored in the future.

Members requested further clarification regarding the BHF funding scheme. It was confirmed that gated land continued to be Housing-owned land. More information was available on the Council website and the scheme had also been publicised within Hillingdon People. It had previously been an underused scheme.

Councillors welcomed the alleygating schemes and thanked officers for their hard work in dealing with them so efficiently.

RESOLVED: That the Alleygating Scheme information report be noted.

35. ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR IN LOCKDOWN

The Chairman noted that ASBET matters normally fell within the remit of the Residents, Education & Environmental Services Policy Overview Committee. However, the Corporate Services, Commerce & Communities was at liberty to consider this matter in terms of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Nathan Welch, ASBET Service Manager, presented the Anti-Social Behaviour in Lockdown report.

In terms of the response to the Covid-19 pandemic, Members heard that the ASBET team had been working in partnership with licensing and the police. A team of 4 dedicated officers with delegated powers had been working 12 hour shifts 7 days a week to enforce on the business front and the night-time economy, particularly in terms of breaches of social distancing and businesses not adhering to restrictions. The workload had increased significantly as more people were at home leading to increased noise levels, rubbish accumulation, misuse of communal areas and neighbourhood disputes. The ASBET team had continued to deliver a service throughout the pandemic.

Members enquired whether data regarding the issuing of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) could be made available. Nathan informed the Committee that he would source these figures from Stephanie Waterford in the Licensing Team. In response to Members' enquiries, it was also confirmed that Covid marshalls fell within Stephanie's team.

In terms of hotspots, the Committee heard that there had been issues with repeat offenders all over the Borough. Businesses such as car washes, vape shops and takeaways tended to be repeat offenders as they often did not manage social distancing and mask wearing very well. People congregating in parks often failed to adhere to the rules around masks and/or social distancing. In response to Councillors' questions, it was confirmed that Stephanie and Nathan worked very closely together to tackle these problems.

The Committee was informed that everything was now in place to tackle the issues that arose including joint patrols with police, enforcement action, the issuing of warnings and FPNs, 4 officers working 24 hours a week. The team was doing all it could within the powers and the resources it had.

Members heard that offenders were generally quite receptive to guidance and officers stayed on site until the premises closed if necessary. The matter would be followed up a day or two later.

The Committee thanked Nathan for the thorough report and expressed its gratitude to the ASBET Team for continuing to work exceptionally hard throughout the pandemic despite the risks involved.

RESOLVED: That the report and verbal update be noted.

36. PAST REVIEW UPDATE: LOCAL POLICING REVIEW

Jacqui Robertson of the Community Safety Team presented the update on the Local policing review. It was noted that the review recommendations had gone to Cabinet in July 2019 and, since then, significant progress had been made. Zubin Winter – the new Partnership Inspector was also in attendance.

Members were informed that there had been a number of changes - the original two police teams had now amalgamated into one. During the pandemic work had been done to deliver services more efficiently e.g. the annual White Ribbon conference had been held in Microsoft Teams on 26 November 2020 and had been very successful. Presents had also been delivered to domestic abuse survivors and their children.

In terms of CCTV, the service had been maintained 24/7 throughout the pandemic. The CCTV room was now Covid secure and progress had been made in upgrading cameras. ANPR cameras were in daily use throughout the Borough providing information on fly tipping, suspect vehicles etc. The priority going forward was to ensure the Council had ANPR cameras on all main arterial routes. There was a good flow of information into and out of the CCTV room and the Council had been able to help the police with information on some serious offences.

The Committee heard that there was now only one Partnership Tasking team with one sergeant and 8 constables. Jacqui Robertson and Zubin Winter worked closely together and spoke on a daily basis. Fortnightly tasking meetings with the sergeant in charge were held and departments such as Licensing, Planning, ASBET, Corporate Fraud and Tenancy Management were invited to attend and present their case to the tasking team. Although there was now only one partnership team, this had not presented a problem to date. If the tasking team was not on duty, Zubin could be contacted directly. Members were advised that the tasking team had been ring-fenced to work exclusively in Hillingdon.

Members welcomed the update and were pleased to note that the recommendations had been successfully implemented.

RESOLVED: That the Local Policing Review update be noted.

37. FORWARD PLAN

RESOLVED: That the Forward Plan be noted.

38. WORK PROGRAMME 2020/21

RESOLVED: That the Work Programme be noted.

