

Minutes

**Corporate Services, Commerce and Communities
Policy Overview Committee
Wednesday, 3 February 2021
Meeting held at VIRTUAL - Live on the Council's
YouTube channel: Hillingdon London**



**Published on: 24/2/21
Come into effect on: Immediately (or call-in date)**

Members Present:

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

Officers Present:

Kevin Byrne, Head of Health Integration and Voluntary Sector Partnerships
Liz Penny, Democratic Services Officer
Gary Penticost
Mike Talbot, Director of Corporate Resources and Services
Iain Watters, Financial Planning Manager

Also Present:

Angela Stangoe MBACP – Director and Head of Psychotherapeutic Services,
Hillingdon Mind

39. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

40. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Scott Farley declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 6 as he had substituted at the REESPOC meeting at which this matter had been discussed. He remained in the meeting during the discussion of the item.

41. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 12 JANUARY 2021

Councillor Scott Farley noted the omission of Zubin Winter, Partnership Inspector, from the list of attendees. It was agreed that Democratic Services would amend the minutes accordingly.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting dated 12 January be agreed subject to the addition of Zubin Winter, Partnership Inspector, in the list of attendees.

42. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was agreed that items 1 – 9 were in Part I and would be considered in public. Item 10 was in Part II and would be considered in private.

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

Angela Stangoe MBACP - Director and Head of Psychotherapeutic Services, Hillingdon Mind, was in attendance to present information regarding Hillingdon Mind's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Key points highlighted included:-

- All Hillingdon Mind's Counselling services had rapidly moved online in March 2020 - about a week before lockdown;
- The Mental Health Recovery Service had been particularly affected – all social activities and therapeutic group work had moved to telephone / online;
- A Mental Health Care Calling and Crisis Response Calling Service had been introduced in March 2020 – approximately 160 clients had been identified as high risk so were called regularly;
- A Food and Medicine Delivery Service had been introduced in March 2020;
- All staff had been provided with equipment to enable them to work from home;
- Over the last 9 months, 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 huge pressure on the team which consisted of only 3.5 members of staff (including Angela). Approximately 100 volunteer counsellors had been assisting them;
- Additional funding had been secured from the CCG to provide 40 additional free counselling spaces for a period of 3 months and from the Big Lottery to provide free Key Worker Counselling for 20 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. Members heard that 20 tablets had been purchased for clients and shopping done for those who were struggling to get food bank vouchers;
- Qualified bank staff had been recruited to run online activities;
- The current Group Schedule was entirely online with the exception of the Wellbeing Walk – the Committee heard that the online activities were going well and clients had adapted better than expected;
- The service had seen an increase in first time users for mild to 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 1 or 2 per annum to 3 or 4 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 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. Projects were being considered to assist people with these challenges;

- Hillingdon Mind was considering 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 e.g. the One Stop Shop and developing Webinars to provide mental health advice.

Given the difficulties in organising Wellbeing Walks during lockdown, Members suggested that Mind could potentially link up with Hillingdon litter pickers. The Committee heard that this would be difficult given the specific needs of the clients who needed to be monitored closely to ensure they were safe.

Members enquired how the Council could assist. It was confirmed that Hillingdon Mind had met with Carla Canter, Voluntary Sector Development Officer, 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.

In response to Members' questions, it was confirmed that working virtually had been extremely challenging and staff were exhausted. Isolation tended to worsen mental health issues. It had been possible to successfully hold some events online such as quizzes but social groups worked much better in person. Members heard that 30 or 40 people could attend a social club whereas only 10 to 12 people could attend on Zoom. It was impossible to offer the same level of peer support online.

Councillors requested further clarification regarding the support offered to carers. It was confirmed that those caring for people with a mental health condition would often cope well but might seek support if the person went into crisis. Members heard that a Family Support Worker could offer practical help and a psychotherapist ran 1-2-1 sessions with the person in crisis and support groups for the carers. At present, Mind was not able to provide services for young people due to a lack of funding.

In response to further questions, Members were advised that there were currently two community projects funded by LBH – a Somali Outreach Project and an Asian Women's Project. It was acknowledged that there was often a stigma attached to mental health illness in some communities – it was particularly difficult to access the Somali community. The Committee heard that attempts had been made to reach out to imams who had been quite responsive initially but had failed to follow up on this.

Councillors enquired whether it would be possible for different Minds to work together. It was confirmed that this was not possible as each Mind worked independently within a geographical area as a separate franchise with a link to the Central one. In terms of funding, Members heard that Mind was funded through the CCG, the local authority or grant funding. No funding was received from the Central Mind. The Committee was informed that local Mind groups were currently collaborating in an attempt to encourage the CCG to fund services in an equitable way across boroughs rather than in a piecemeal fashion as previously.

Members suggested that an article in Hillingdon People would help to reach out to community groups and raise awareness of the services on offer. A recommendation regarding the promotion of the voluntary sector in relation to Covid was proposed.

Kevin Byrne, Head of Health Integration and Voluntary Sector Partnerships, informed the Committee that Carla Canter was already working on this. A small grant from Central Government had been made available to develop community engagement. Carla was developing online forums and this was going well. There had been lots of activity to promote the voluntary sector. Members heard that Hillingdon Mind was an integral part of H4All. The Integrated Care Partnership in the Borough consisted of the CCG, hospitals, CNWL, H4All, the GP Federation and voluntary sector Health Care providers. It was confirmed that CCGs were moving to a NW London model from April 2021. Members were advised that it would be possible to prepare an article for Hillingdon People to promote the services on offer though some services were already stretched and might struggle to meet further demand. Cabinet had agreed that Mind's grant would be increased going forward.

Members enquired how staff and volunteers working for Hillingdon Mind were supported. It was confirmed that staff were under immense pressure and often had to work late into the evenings to keep on top of the workload. Staff were offered counselling when needed. It had not been possible to run the usual team retreat due to the Covid pandemic. It was hoped that funding would be received to enable Hillingdon Mind to recruit 4 new members of staff.

Members heard that the Government was making additional funds available to support the mental health of children and young people. Mind had expressed an interest in working with the young people category. At the request of the Committee, it was agreed that Kevin Byrne would forward to Democratic Services links to reports which had been sent to the Health & Wellbeing Board regarding child and adolescent mental health services and early intervention work with young people.

The Committee was advised that Hillingdon Mind's website was under construction. It would hopefully be up and running by April 2021.

Members thanked Angela and all the staff and volunteers at Hillingdon Mind for their hard work during the pandemic to support local residents in very challenging circumstances.

Mike Talbot, Director – Corporate Resources and Services, introduced the report on the Voluntary Sector's Response to the Covid-19 pandemic in Hillingdon – from the Council's perspective.

Members heard that Mike had worked with Jean Palmer, the Deputy Chief Executive, and H4All to set up a Covid-19 Hub tasked with co-ordinating the delivery of food and medicine, arranging dog walking etc. Initially the plan had been for H4All to create a Hub with the support of the local authority. However, it had become clear that the charities lacked the infrastructure to enable them to do this effectively; H4All had 4 phone lines whereas the Council could commission a dedicated contact centre

with 20 members of staff. The Council also had the IT resources, purchasing cards and means of transportation readily available. 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. The situation had now changed and the work of the Hub had been referred in to voluntary partners – a partnership had been built with the local foodbanks.

Members enquired whether lessons had been learned and whether the voluntary sector was now better prepared. It was noted that the Council had increased its funding to voluntary organisations but this was not sustainable. The Committee heard that the Council had only been involved in the running of foodbanks but had not been involved in other services offered by the voluntary sector. Emergency grants had been distributed. It was confirmed that 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. 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 in particular 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. The situation would be monitored going forward.

Members requested further clarification regarding the audit process. The Head of Health Integration and Voluntary Sector Partnerships confirmed that, as part of the core grant process, the Council had the right of audit and insisted on having sight of annual accounts. It was confirmed that the financial situation of all grant applicants was reviewed before going to Cabinet in December. Grant applicants were checked to ascertain if they were viable and sustainable concerns and the Council ensured it got maximum value from each grant allocated.

The Committee enquired whether new charities had been identified to feed into H4All. It was confirmed that officers would attempt to gain a thorough understanding of the voluntary sector organisations available with a view to working with them to communicate essential messages. In response to their questions, Members heard that H4All would have to demonstrate that they could represent the smaller groups. They would need to develop their capacity building and ability to develop and manage volunteers. The Council would support them in this; it would be a matter of working together to meet the needs of all local residents.

RESOLVED That the Committee:

- 1) Noted the information provided in relation to the work of Hillingdon Mind during the pandemic;**
- 2) Agreed that Kevin Byrne would forward to Democratic Services links to reports which had been sent to the Health & Wellbeing Board regarding child and adolescent mental health services and early intervention work with young people; and**
- 3) Noted the update regarding the Council's input in respect of the Voluntary Sector's response to the pandemic.**

44. POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE COMMENTS ON CABINET'S BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR 2021/2022 FINANCIAL YEAR

RESOLVED That the Committee:

- 1) Considered the formal comments on the Cabinet's budget proposals from the other two Policy Overview Committees;**
- 2) Agreed its own final comments on the Cabinet's budget proposals for submission; and**
- 3) Submitted a combined set of formal Policy Overview Committee comments to Cabinet for consideration.**

45. HILLINGDON FIRST LIMITED

Iain Watters, Financial Planning Manager, introduced the report. Members heard that Hillingdon First Limited was the Council's wholly owned subsidiary housing development company. The company had been established in April 2018 to deliver high quality housing and generate a sustainable revenue stream for the Council. The Council was the sole shareholder and Cabinet Members on the Shareholder Committee oversaw operations. Key company decisions such as the commencement of projects and approval of the annual Business Plan were presented to the Shareholder Committee, alongside updates on performance and matters arising as necessary. Hillingdon First Ltd employed no staff directly and operated by buying in relevant support services as required – mainly from the Council.

The Committee was informed that the first project undertaken by Hillingdon First Ltd was underway – the construction for open market sale of 31 flats on the site adjacent to South Ruislip Library on Victoria Road, The project was nearing completion with practical completion having been achieved in January 2021 and reservations in place for 25 of the 31 units. The units were retailing at a higher price than expected. A pre-tax profit of circa £1m was expected.

Members heard that a second smaller development consisting of five houses at St Helen's Close, Cowley had been worked up within the business plan and a design and build contractor was currently being appointed. The scheme would launch by spring 2022. Surplus Council-owned sites previously used for Council services but no longer required were currently being used for development – 3rd party land was not being purchased. The Committee was advised that, to date, Hillingdon First Ltd had remained focused on safe in-borough residential development schemes as there was a lower level of risk. The Council was not materially reliant on this business to deliver core services – Hillingdon First Ltd was not the largest contributor to Council finances.

Members requested clarification as to the objectives of Hillingdon First. It was confirmed that the aim was to deliver high quality housing for Hillingdon residents and to generate a return to the Council.

Given the lack of housing stock and high rents in the Borough, Members enquired whether social housing would be included in future schemes. The Committee was informed that the South Ruislip units had been sold to local residents at discounted rates. The proposed development at St Helen's Close was very small therefore fell below the required threshold for affordable units. In future, affordable housing would be delivered on larger developments. It was anticipated that the Council would have first refusal on affordable units.

Members enquired how surplus land for development was determined. It was confirmed that the Strategic Property Governance Group identified redundant sites. Once declared surplus, the company would seek an independent valuation of the land and suggest an offer for the Council to consider. In response to further questions, the Committee heard that, in terms of safety standards, Hillingdon First Ltd drew on the expertise of the Council's inhouse teams. Relevant professionals oversaw all projects.

Councillors requested clarification regarding the number of future developments proposed. Members were advised that no specific goals had been set – a budget totalling £15m was available to Hillingdon First Ltd which could potentially deliver some 150 units; however, there were no firm plans as yet and potential sites for development would be considered on a case by case basis. No brown sites had been used to date. In terms of building control, the Financial Planning Manager agreed to check whether the Council's Building Control team was being utilised. Members heard that, to date, delivered schemes had been worked up through the planning process. For future developments, the Council would need to consider how to deliver the required percentage of affordable homes - Hillingdon First would identify a site and the split would be decided in line with the Council's strategy. A joined approach was essential and the HRA would have first refusal on affordable units delivered.

It was confirmed that the money used to run Hillingdon First Ltd was the Council's general fund money; profits accrued to the general fund. Hillingdon First Ltd was a commercial enterprise but would be more profitable if it were a bona fide building company.

Members were informed that the St Helen's Close scheme was a former garage site; this could set a precedent in terms of options for smaller garage sites in the future. The fact that Hillingdon First Ltd had been able to step in on a smaller site such as this and make it financially viable was a good sign. It was noted that, since Hillingdon First Ltd was not a public sector organisation, it could work with a wider pool of contractors as this was not such a complex process.

In response to questions from Members, it was confirmed that Hillingdon First Ltd was not averse to the idea of developing units for rental which could offer a longer-term investment. Rentals would be at market value. It would not make financial sense to build units to sell to the HRA for use as affordable housing as the company would need to deliver a financial return. At the request of the Committee, the Financial Planning Manager agreed to investigate the wording which appears to suggest that purchasers did not have to live in Hillingdon.

Members were informed that a service level agreement was in place between Hillingdon First Ltd and the Council – no prioritisation issues were anticipated since employees had a responsibility to Hillingdon First but were employed by LBH.

In terms of other local authorities, the Committee heard that 70% – 80% of local authorities had a similar company in place (The Financial Planning Manager would check the statistics). There was a general move amongst local authorities to set up commercial operations. LBH was taking things slowly and was measured in its approach whereas some authorities were trying to run before they could walk. It was confirmed that LBH kept in touch with other local authorities to understand what they were doing.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) **The Committee noted the performance to date of Hillingdon First Limited;**
- 2) **The Financial Planning Manager check whether the Council’s Building Control team was being utilised by Hillingdon First Ltd;**
- 3) **The Financial Planning Manager investigate the wording which appeared to suggest that purchasers did not have to live in Hillingdon; and**
- 4) **The Financial Planning Manager check what percentage of local authorities had a similar company.**

46. FORWARD PLAN

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the Forward Plan.

47. WORK PROGRAMME 2020/2021

In terms of the Local Commerce, Employment, Skills & Job Creation past review delivery update planned for the March meeting, it was agreed that the Chairman would discuss this with Democratic Services in consultation with Nigel Cramb and James Rodger.

In respect of the Performance monitoring item scheduled for the March meeting, it was agreed that Democratic Services would investigate what should be reported on in terms of the performance monitoring of services (national indicators or other).

RESOLVED:

- 1) **That the Committee noted the Work Programme 2020/2021;**
- 2) **That the Chairman and Democratic Services liaise with Nigel Cramb and James Rodger re. the Local Commerce, Employment, Skills & Job Creation Past Review delivery update; and**
- 3) **That Democratic Services investigate the performance improvement monitoring of services to establish what should be reported on (national indicators or other).**

48. SAFETY OF COUNCIL-OWNED PROPERTIES AND BUILDINGS

The minutes to this item were declared as exempt from publication as they involve the disclosure of information in accordance with **paragraph 7** of Part 1 of the Schedule 12(A) to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) in that the report contains **Information relating to any action taken or to be taken in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime** and that the public interest in withholding the information outweighs the public interest in disclosing it.