

## Minutes

### PETITION HEARING - CABINET MEMBER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES

20 April 2023



Meeting held at Committee Room 5 - Civic Centre

	<p><b>Committee Members Present:</b> Councillor Douglas Mills</p> <p><b>Ward Councillors Present:</b> Councillor Sheryar Ahmad-Wallana</p> <p><b>LBH Officers Present:</b> Kevin Byrne, Head of Health and Strategic Partnerships Liz Penny, Democratic Services Officer</p>
1.	<p><b>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN MATTERS COMING BEFORE THIS MEETING</b> <i>(Agenda Item 1)</i></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest.</p>
2.	<p><b>TO CONFIRM THAT THE BUSINESS OF THE MEETING WILL TAKE PLACE IN PUBLIC</b> <i>(Agenda Item 2)</i></p> <p>It was confirmed that the business of the meeting would take place in public.</p>
3.	<p><b>TO CONSIDER THE REPORT OF THE OFFICERS ON THE FOLLOWING PETITION RECEIVED:</b> <i>(Agenda Item 3)</i></p>
4.	<p><b>PETITIONS IN RELATION TO CORE GRANT TO HILLINGDON AUTISTIC CARE AND SUPPORT (HACS) TO RUN THE RURAL ACTIVITY GARDEN CENTRE TEAROOM</b> <i>(Agenda Item 4)</i></p> <p>The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services introduced the proceedings. Two petitions had been received in relation to the Core Grant to HACS to run the Rural Activity Centre Tea Room.</p> <p>The first lead petitioner was in attendance and addressed the Cabinet Member. Key points raised included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Change.org petition had been signed by 1,259 Hillingdon residents. A further 128 Hillingdon residents had signed an e-petition. Both petitions were in support of the funding for the Tea Rooms;</li><li>• In terms of Transparency, the grant of £40,000 had been a symbol of support for disabled people in Hillingdon;</li><li>• Hillingdon Council did not have a good record on supporting autistic people – in 2012 the Council had been found to have violated the human rights of an autistic man and had paid £35,000 in compensation;</li><li>• The Council had published a review in 2021 entitled 'Making the Council More Autism friendly' as part of which autistic people had requested that their views</li></ul>

be taken into account and that they receive support in getting a job;

- The proposed cut in funding had not been reported in Hillingdon People;
- The disabled people working at the Tea Room had not been informed until January 2023 that they were to lose their jobs and had been unaware that the café was running at a loss;
- The Equality and Human Rights Commission document 'Making Fair Financial Decisions' highlighted the need to consult with disabled people on how changes would impact them;
- Councillor Lavery had indicated there would be no gap in service at the Café but on 18 April it had been already closed;
- A revolutionary way of looking at disability had been introduced globally with the UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled People. The Convention was based on the social model of disability and aimed to remove the barriers faced by disabled people - Hillingdon Council had adopted this model in 2009;
- An example of this was the case of Remploy factories set up to provide employment to disabled ex miners and soldiers returning from WWII. Remploy had closed some factories which were not making a profit. Esther McVey, Conservative minister for disabled people, had been willing to provide support of £6,400 to each Remploy employee for 3 years;
- Autistic people faced huge challenges in the jobs market. Closing the Tea Rooms reduced the options further. It was recognised that working in a rural environment could have a positive impact on Mental Health;
- The Equality Act 2010 indicated that Hillingdon Council should think about the need to reduce the disadvantages faced by those with a disability;
- The Government's National Strategy for autistic children, young people and adults reported that, in December 2020, 22% of autistic people aged 16-64 were in employment, in contrast to 52% of disabled people and 81% of non-disabled people;
- The Tea Room enhanced the Garden Centre as a destination;
- The use of the Tea Room by the Council as a venue would help its cashflow;
- The BBC2 Chris Packham documentary 'Inside Our Autistic Minds' and the C4 Dispatches documentary 'Locked Away: Our Autism Scandal' would provide further understanding;
- Reinstatement of the grant for the Tea Room was requested.

The lead petitioner for the second petition was in attendance and addressed the Cabinet Member. Key points highlighted included:

- The lead petitioner's son had autism, a complex communication disorder and an anxiety disorder;
- He had suffered a breakdown at the age of 15 following the failure of his school placement;
- He was now 25 years old and lived an isolated existence at home;
- The last 10 years had been spent trying to build his confidence, self-esteem and trust in the world, yet he still only interacted with less than ten people;
- The report for the meeting claimed to support the Council's commitment to residents of thriving, healthy households and a thriving economy;
- The Tea Rooms provided a safe space for 20 young people employed on the Skills and Employment programme run by HACS. Trained mentors helped them to develop a sense of belonging, responsibility and ability to work as part of a team. The mother of one young adult who had previously attempted to take their own life on several occasions reported that the Tea Rooms had saved her child's life;

- By refusing the grant, 20 vulnerable adults had had their mental health and emotional well-being compromised therefore the Council had failed to meet its 'Thriving, healthy households' objective as set out in the Strategy;
- With regards to a Thriving Economy, the report claimed that the tea room was loss-making and, with only 20 people benefitting, the grant of £40k was not considered good value for money. The costs in doctor's fees, medication, therapy and counselling to support someone whose emotional and mental well-being had been completely eroded would far exceed £2,000;
- The lead petitioner's son received funding from Social Services to hire a carer for 20 hours per week at a cost of £14,000 per year. With the loss of the tea rooms, more young adults could need such support and the costs could amount to £280,000 per annum;
- Without the tea rooms, the young people could not improve their skills or enjoy good quality jobs hence the Council had failed on its 'Thriving Economy' objective;
- The tea rooms had been closed for nearly a month – it was clear that a decision had already been made and actioned.

The Cabinet Member thanked the petitioners for their submissions. He acknowledged that the Council continued to support the voluntary sector through grants to the tune of £1.6m overall. It was confirmed that all voluntary groups who had received grants had been advised that the Council needed to rearrange its funding mechanisms - moving away from dependence on core grant towards commissioning of services. Those organisations which were unable to provide additional support, or which were running at a loss, had been informed that they were unlikely to receive further funding; unfortunately, the tea rooms fell into this category. The Council continued to support Hillingdon Autistic Care and Support. A core grant of £40k had been awarded by the local authority which would help HACS to support well over 1000 residents. HACS, who were using the grant to run the tea rooms, had decided operationally not to continue to do so, without grant support. The Council had sought other partners to run the tea room now that HACS had withdrawn but there had been reluctance from potential providers due to the low levels of usage. It remained the Council's intention to keep the tea room open but without a direct cash subsidy.

The meeting was adjourned to enable the Cabinet Member to consider his decision.

The meeting reconvened 15 minutes later. The Cabinet Member thanked the petitioners for their petitions and acknowledged the strength of feeling in respect of the matter. It was noted that HACS had not asked the Council to review its decision regarding the grant. In terms of seeking employment, the Cabinet Member observed that HACS and the DWP were the perfect vehicles to help people into employment and had an excellent track record. In conclusion, the Cabinet Member announced his decision not to recommend to Cabinet to change the decisions made in December 2022 regarding the overall level of grants for the financial year beginning April 2023.

**RESOLVED That:**

1. **The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services met with petitioners and listened to their request for the Council to continue to fund HACS to provide a training facility at the rural tea room; and**
2. **The Cabinet Member decided not to recommend to Cabinet to reverse its decision made in December 2022 regarding the overall level of grants for the financial year beginning April 2023.**

	The meeting, which commenced at 5.00 pm, closed at 5.37 pm.
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These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information on any of the resolutions please contact Liz Penny on . Circulation of these minutes is to Councillors, Officers, the Press and Members of the Public.