

MAJOR SCRUTINY REVIEW: COMMUNITY COHESION AND THE ACCESSING OF COUNCIL SERVICES

Cabinet Member	Councillor Douglas Mills
Cabinet Portfolio	Community, Commerce & Regeneration
Officer Contact	Khalid Ahmed, Administration Directorate
Papers with report	Appendix A: Corporate Services & Partnerships Policy Overview Committee Final Report

HEADLINE INFORMATION

Purpose of report	To receive the Corporate Services & Partnerships Policy Overview Committee report on the review on Community Cohesion and the accessing of Council services
Contribution to our plans and strategies	Putting residents first, keeping children safe.
Financial Cost	None
Relevant Scrutiny Committee(s)	Corporate Services & Partnerships
Ward(s) affected	N/A

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet:

1. Welcomes the attached report of the Corporate Services & Partnerships Policy Overview Committee on the review into Community Cohesion and the accessing of Council services.
2. Asks officers, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Community, Commerce and Regeneration, to consider the most practical implementation of the Committee's recommendations set out below:

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CORPORATE SERVICES & PARTNERSHIPS POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

- **RECOMMENDATION 1** – That the work of the Partnerships Team, in conjunction with the Schools Community Cohesion Partnership, be praised for how it has achieved the integration and increased participation of children and their parents from all community groups within the Borough. This work has helped further

strengthen the relationships between different groups in the community and has enabled children and parents to interact and engage in community activities.

- **RECOMMENDATION 2 - That the Council's Adult Learning, Libraries and Sports & Leisure services be congratulated for the wide ranging initiatives and schemes which are provided to engage and interact with all residents of the Borough.**
- **RECOMMENDATION 3 - That information on Council events and initiatives be communicated on a regular basis to community contacts via a Council central list. This will enable such information to be communicated and promoted more widely and to those groups who might not access it from other sources.**
- **RECOMMENDATION 4 - Consideration be given to the Mayor of the London Borough of Hillingdon utilising social media to inform residents and share their experiences of the many diverse community activities and events that take place across the Borough.**
- **RECOMMENDATION 5 - That Council services such as Sports & Leisure and Adult Learning be asked to undertake user surveys to ascertain the view of all users, on how well the services are communicated and what more, if anything, could be done to increase participation of all the community in these services.**

INFORMATION

Reasons for recommendation

The objective of the review was to look at how the Council could reach out to more individuals from all backgrounds, particularly those groups and sections of the community who were difficult to engage with. How could the Council improve the communication of its services to all groups and individuals within the Borough to ensure further interaction and integration? How well did these groups and individuals access Council services?

The Committee wanted to assess how Council services communicated with residents, beyond the promotion of services. Also, the steps taken to break down barriers to engage with groups which would enable the interaction and integration with the rest of the Borough's community.

Alternative options considered / risk management

The Cabinet could decide to reject or amend one or more of the Committee's recommendations.

Supporting Information

The Corporate Services & Partnerships Policy Overview Committee held meetings on 18 September 2012, 16 October 2012, 13 November 2012 and 26 February 2013 when background information and evidence was received to help the Committee in forming their findings.

The terms of reference of the review were as follows:

- To learn about community cohesion in Hillingdon.
- To understand the risk factors that undermine community cohesion.

- To assess the effectiveness of the positive work undertaken to promote community cohesion in Hillingdon.
- To identify whether there are any particular issues or challenges that undermine community cohesion in Hillingdon.
- To identify any measures that would address any issues identified above and would promote community cohesion in Hillingdon.

The Committee heard from the Council's Stronger Communities Officer, the Chairman of Strong and Active Communities Partnership, Council Curriculum and Quality Managers for Adult Learning, a Council Sports Development Officer, a Council officer from Arts and Libraries, a representative from the Afghan Women's Group, Women in the Community Network and Refugees in Effective and Active Partnerships (REAP), the Chairman of Hillingdon Inter Faith Network and from the Council's Head of Corporate Communications.

For purposes of the review it was important to recognise where the positive contributions to community cohesion are taking place and promote greater opportunities for building on those positives and underpin the resilience within communities. Improving knowledge of what works and what helps will reduce the risk.

These included:-

- Strong local leadership (political, community etc).
- Strong communication activity/strategy to engage with local communities.
- Visible local initiatives.
- Developing a local sense of civic pride.
- Uniting local people on issues affecting the Borough.
- Strong partnership approach to local solutions.
- Capacity building and sustainable approach to community engagement and community development which is inclusive and embraces the diversity of the Borough.

The Committee recognised that positive outcomes in terms of community cohesion can influence and make an impact upon:-

- Increased sense of belonging
- Increased participation in community activity
- Increased satisfaction with services
- Increased participation in sports, leisure and cultural activities
- Reduced community tension
- Increased community interaction
- Reduced health inequalities
- Increased aspirations
- Reduced isolation
- Increased health and well-being
- Reduction in crime
- Pride of place
- Reduction in fear of crime
- Increased educational attainment

Implementation of recommendations

The Committee's recommendations have been formed in conjunction with relevant Service Departments. Subject to Cabinet's agreement, officers are prepared to consider the most practical implementation of them, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Community, Commerce and Regeneration.

In relation to Recommendation 3 – *“That information on Council events and initiatives be communicated on a regular basis to community contacts via a Council central list. This will enable such information to be communicated and promoted more widely and to those groups who might not access it from other sources”.*

The Council's Stronger Communities Officer currently has a list of contacts for community, Inter-Faith and organisations which participate in the Strong and Active Communities Partnership. This list comprises of contacts for such organisations and provides a point of reference for the dissemination of information to these groups who then cascade the information to the people they represent.

Throughout the Council there are other contact lists such as for Residents Associations and other local groups and it would be useful for all these contacts to be pulled together into a central list, which could be accessible for officers to use to engage and inform residents and groups, where appropriate.

In relation to Recommendation 4 – *“ Consideration be given to the Mayor of the London Borough of Hillingdon utilising social media to inform residents and share their experiences of the many diverse community activities and events that take place across the Borough”.*

This suggested recommendation is seen as a useful tool to promote and publicise the many community events which the Mayor attends as the ceremonial and civic leading person of the London Borough of Hillingdon. The use of social media would enable engagement and interaction with anyone within the Borough and beyond, and promote activities and services which take place within Hillingdon. Officers within the Mayor's Office of Democratic Services, together with Corporate Communications could assess the logistics and suitability of such an initiative.

In relation to Recommendation 5 – *“That Council services such as Sports & Leisure and Adult Learning be asked to consider undertaking user surveys to ascertain the view of all users, on how well the services are communicated and what more, if anything, could be done to increase participation of all the community in these services.”*

The Committee heard during the review from officers within Sports & Leisure and Adult Learning and were impressed by the many initiatives and methods which were used to enable the accessing of Council services by those groups who were difficult to engage with. A helpful suggestion was to seek out the views of existing users of services to look at any other means these services could be communicated and publicised, to increase participation and integration.

During the review, the Committee heard that the Library service undertook user surveys which helped shape the delivery of some of the services it provided. This enabled the service to tailor some of its activities and events to those groups and individuals who did not usually access such services. This suggested recommendation could be a useful tool for these services to reach out to even more people and communities within the Borough.

Officers from these services could work with the Council's Customer Engagement Team on how to implement this suggested recommendation.

Financial Implications

These recommendations can be implemented using existing resources across the Council and so can be accommodated in existing budgets. Therefore, there is no additional financial cost.

EFFECT ON RESIDENTS, SERVICE USERS & COMMUNITIES

What will be the effect of the recommendation?

The recommendations, if agreed, will improve the engagement and interaction of all the Borough's communities as they access Council services.

Consultation Carried Out or Required

The Committee took evidence from a range of witnesses as described in the review report.

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Corporate Finance

Corporate Finance has reviewed this report and concurs with the financial implications set out above, noting that if agreed, the cost of implementing the Policy Overview Committee's recommendations would be contained within existing revenue budgets.

Legal

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL