



Corporate Services, Commerce & Communities Policy Overview (Scrutiny) Committee Review Scoping Report

The Voluntary Sector's Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic in Hillingdon

1. REVIEW OBJECTIVES

Aim and background to review

The Covid-19 pandemic has been the single largest challenge faced by both national and local governments for nearly a century, and, nationwide, has led to the deaths of over 40,000 people. This review aims to understand how the voluntary sector and Council collaborated to respond to the challenges of the pandemic, and support residents during such a difficult time.

The review will hear from key witnesses on the response and consider how the voluntary sector and Council worked together to help residents, in particular the Borough's most vulnerable residents, during the pandemic.

At the meeting on 17 September 2020 it was agreed to further explore the voluntary sector's response to the pandemic as a potential review topic, and officers were requested to provide a scoping report that set out the guidelines and timelines to investigate the issue.

Terms of Reference

The following Terms of Reference are suggested for this review, subject to any changes agreed by the Committee:

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.*

2. INFORMATION AND ANALYSIS

Current context

A coordinated response to the Covid-19 pandemic was vital to help protect the most vulnerable residents in the Borough. The Council worked closely with local voluntary and community organisations to respond to such an unprecedented event.

Hillingdon is home to a vibrant and diverse voluntary and community sector. From more established and well-known charities, to the more local residents groups, from a wide range of faith venues, to sporting, cultural, youth and social groups. Hillingdon's communities demonstrated their support for key workers and the Borough saw neighbours, friends and families coming together to support each other at times of need, as people were required to shield and isolate.

This review will consider how the VCS was able to respond to needs of residents during the Covid-19 pandemic and better understand what were the successes of voluntary organisations when tackling this issue.

Key Information

The VCS generally was at the forefront of responding to the emerging and changing demands of the Covid-19 pandemic and was well placed to pick up issues on the ground and provide support. The sector was also impacted directly, as it saw loss of income due to reduced donations or fee income from activities. Volunteers were not always able to continue working, as they themselves required isolation. The sector has had to adjust and transform to continue to support local residents.

Early on in the process, the Council established the Hillingdon Community Hub in collaboration with Hillingdon 4 All (H4All) - the local consortium which brings together five of the main local charities (AgeUKHHB, Hillingdon Carers Trust, Harlington Hospice, Hillingdon MIND and DASH). The Hub also formed part of the pan-london

emergency response. It was widely promoted as the place to call in event of urgent need, should residents be required to shield or isolate.

Emergency food became one of the largest requests and the hub responded quickly with a bespoke paid-for shopping service, and with emergency food parcels, coordinated by the Council's Business Assurance Team. The Hub was seen by the Government as the provider of "last resort", where local needs should be met. Nationally, a free food parcel scheme was offered by the NHS to those who were designated as being extremely vulnerable to Covid and required to shield.

The Borough's foodbanks, faith groups and voluntary organisations also helped respond to many different needs during the pandemic, distributing food, prescriptions and checking on the people with "befriending" calls.

As lockdown requirements changed, the Council has worked closely with the two main established foodbanks in Hillingdon - the Hillingdon Foodbank and the UB7 Foodbank - to support them so that they have the resources and capacity to meet any increased need and to take referrals from the Hub. This has allowed the emergency food distribution elements of the Community Hub to be reduced and moved to a more sustainable model. This was taking place from September and will be kept under review.

In parallel to the process of emergency food distribution, the Community Hub and officers in social care received notification of some 15,000 residents deemed extremely vulnerable and required to shield. Whilst the NHS had offered free food to each, the Council also contacted every person in the shielded cohort to ensure that they had access to food, medication and any other support requirements. The Council invested in a new ICT system to record and monitor actions on each of these case records, and referrals were made via the Hub to H4All to respond to non-food issues, such as medication, befriending and dog walking.

The Council from contact with community groups that, post-lockdown, wider issues beyond immediate food needs are becoming more significant. There are reports of mental health services coming under increased pressure, and an upturn in reports of domestic abuse. Some of the pressures being felt by the VCS in Hillingdon will be hard to fully quantify, so it may be useful for the committee to hear directly from providers about their challenges, responses and plans.

The Committee will also be aware that the Council supports the Borough's VCS through a core grants programme of approximately £2m a year. Applications for the grants round for 2021/22 have been received and are being evaluated, with recommendations to go to Cabinet in December 2020.

Responsibilities

The Council's Covid-19 response was led by the Leader of the Council. The portfolio Cabinet Member responsible for the voluntary sector is Councillor Douglas Mills, Cabinet Member for Communities, Commerce and Regeneration.

Connected activity

Not applicable at this time.

Current intelligence, best practice and research

- Data collected through the Community Hub's response.
- Potential figures regarding the number of shielded contacts in the Borough.

Further information

Hillingdon Council Support for Vulnerable Residents, found at:
www.hillingdon.gov.uk/community-support

Government COVID-19 Guidance for voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations, found at:
www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-guidance-for-voluntary-community-and-social-enterprise-organisations

Special Report to Cabinet detailing "Hillingdon Council's Reponse to Coronavirus", found at:
<https://modgov.hillingdon.gov.uk/documents/s48342/Draft%20Cabinet%20Report%20-%20Hillingdons%20response%20to%20Coronavirus%203.pdf>

3. EVIDENCE & ENQUIRY

Witness testimony

Lines of enquiry will need to be worked up in due course.

Potential witnesses, among others, could include:

- Testimony from LBH Officers; Mike Talbot and Kevin Byrne (and Tracey Bushell ??)
- Testimony from H4All; Julian Lloyd (Age UK) and Sally Chandler (Carers Trust)
- Testimony from local foodbanks; UB7 and Hillingdon Foodbanks
- Testimony from Mental Health Charities; Hillingdon MIND
- Testimony from other local charities involved with the response to the pandemic.

Members may wish to suggest alternative witnesses.

The Committee must also consider that witnesses may be constrained if external partners are required to deploy again to deal with the continuing pandemic. Written testimonies could also prove helpful in these cases.

Potential Consultation & Communications

To be confirmed.

4. REVIEW PLANNING & ASSESSMENT

As Policy Overview Committees now operate under a multi-year work programme, the Committee has scope to undertake a more detailed review.

It is advised that witnesses attend in themed sessions. Draft timeframes & milestones are set out below and can be extended or reduced as the Committee sees fit:

Meeting Date	Action	Purpose / Outcome
13 October 2020	Agree Scoping Report	Information and analysis
4 November 2020	Witness Session 1	Evidence & enquiry
12 January 2021	Witness Session 2	Evidence & enquiry
3 February 2021	Witness Session 3	Evidence & enquiry
4 March 2021	Draft Final Report	Proposals – agree recommendations and final draft report
6 April 2021	Cabinet - Consider Final Report	Agree recommendations and final report
December 2021	Monitoring of implementation of recommendations	

** Specific meetings can be shortened or extended to suit the review topic and needs of the Committee*

Financial assessment

This review is not expected to require a financial assessment at this stage.

Generally, Committees should seek to ensure any recommendations are cost-effective or save the Council money. However, any early findings or recommendations by the Committee which may result in a call on Council budgets should be discussed at the earliest opportunity by the Chairman, relevant Cabinet Member and Leader of the Council to assess viability.

Resource requirements

Not applicable at this stage.

Equalities impact

Not applicable at this stage.