

Minutes

RESIDENTS, EDUCATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

23 February 2021



Meeting held at VIRTUAL - Live on the Council's YouTube channel: Hillingdon London

	<p>Committee Members Present: Councillors Wayne Bridges (Chairman), John Morgan (Vice-Chairman), Allan Kauffman, Devi Radia, Stuart Mathers, Paula Rodrigues, Jan Sweeting (Opposition Lead), Alan Chapman and Farhad Choubedar (In place of Colleen Sullivan)</p> <p>Also Present: Ebony Gonzalez, Learner</p> <p>LBH Officers Present: Neil Fraser (Democratic Services Officer), James Rodger (Head of Planning, Transportation and Regeneration), Dan Kennedy (Director, Housing, Environment, Education, Performance, Health & Wellbeing), Julia Johnson (Planning Policy and Infrastructure Manager), Debbie Scarborough (Adult & Community Learning - Service Manager), Thoria King (Curriculum Manager For Adults With Learning Difficulties and Disabilities Team), Ginette Powis (Sessional Tutor For Adults With Learning Difficulties and Disabilities), Andrew Macleod (Lead Finance Business Partner) and Mandip Malhotra (Strategic and Major Applications Manager)</p>
41.	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (<i>Agenda Item 1</i>)</p> <p>Apologies were received from Councillor Sullivan, with Councillor Choubedar present as her substitute.</p>
42.	<p>DECLARATION OF INTEREST IN MATTERS COMING BEFORE THIS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 2</i>)</p> <p>None.</p>
43.	<p>TO CONFIRM THAT ALL ITEMS MARKED PART 1 WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC AND THAT ANY ITEMS MARKED PART 2 WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE (<i>Agenda Item 3</i>)</p> <p>It was confirmed that all items would be considered in public.</p>
44.	<p>TO AGREE THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 4</i>)</p> <p>On the request for the Committee to receive details of Member Enquiries (MEs) by Ward, made at previous meetings, the Chairman provided an update following discussion with the Conservative Chief Whip. The Committee was advised that the request was not deemed a suitable use of officer time, and could also have implications for the Council's adherence to GDPR regulations. It was therefore recommended that Councillors should approach their Group offices to receive such detail outside of the</p>

Committee.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2021 be approved as a correct record.

45. **FIRST WITNESS SESSION - REVIEW OF HILLINGDON'S ADULT AND COMMUNITY LEARNING SERVICE** (*Agenda Item 5*)

Debbie Scarborough (Service Manager, Adult and Community Learning), Thoria King (Curriculum Manager for adults with learning difficulties and disabilities team), Ginette Powis (Sessional tutor for adults with learning difficulties and disabilities) and Ebony Gonzalez (Learner who has completed ESOL and Maths courses during the lockdown period) were present to provide information as part of the first witness session for the review into the Hillingdon Adult and Community Learning Service.

The Committee sought information through questioning of the witnesses, including:

Did the service provide certification for learners upon completion of their courses, for use when applying for jobs, etc?

Yes. As of September 2020, the Government funded new courses on developing digital skills, for which certifications are given upon completion. Courses until now have focussed on introducing learners to digital learning, while adults with learning difficulties or disabilities (ALDD) have been provided with a low-level 'how it works' courses in an effort to promote comfort with online learning. Once introductory courses are completed, learners can move into the higher level certified courses. In January 2021, new funding was released, which will allow more courses to be across all learner groups.

Was the service expanding to support learner's mental health and wellbeing?

The service has been building mental health provision for several years, called 'emotional health and wellbeing'. When courses moved online as a result of Covid-19, all mental health provision was also moved online. For some, this was not suitable, however optional online wellbeing questionnaires had seen increased submissions vs. in-person questionnaires, possibly due to the increased confidentiality that online affords. Recent enrolments into the mental health provision had decreased, though this was expected to rise once people were allowed back into centres. The 'In Your Shoes' provision, a course designed to help parents support their children's mental health, had seen a significant rise in numbers. Recent team restructuring had resulted in a dedicated officer whose whole role was to help support health and social care within the service.

The majority of people engaging with the service were women, often with low confidence or with little formal education. It took courage to ask for help and support. It was hoped that additional interdepartmental working with other areas of the Council, as well as external partners such as the NHS, could allow the service to provide further support.

What equipment was provided or required to support online learning moving forward?

Recently approved funding from the GLA had resulted in approval for 50 chromebook laptops, which had recently arrived following delays due to supplier shortages. A new 'learn and loan' scheme allowed learners to borrow the devices to support their learning. Since arriving in January 2021, 38 of the 50 laptops had been allocated.

Additional usb wifi 'dongles' were required to allow learners to access online services.

Were issues with learners in care homes due to a lack of training and support of care home staff, or due to issues with equipment?

Issues within care homes included problems with learners accessing the internet through the home's existing wifi or Council vpn, a lack of time for care home staff to help support their residents in their learning, and the availability of suitable learning spaces within the care homes. Additionally, support was required to ensure learners had access to the requisite software or apps.

In general, public awareness of digital skills courses needed increasing, and there was a need to reach more parents and care home staff to enable them to support their children or residents. Often, people were scared of 'doing the wrong thing' which could cause them to give up on courses early, though it was accepted that there were additional barriers to overcome, such as lack of parent time (e.g. if parents worked, etc.

What feedback could learners share in terms of how the service was supporting mental health?

Feedback from Ebony Gonzalez, learner, was very positive. The service had provided help and support for both learning and mental health, as well as other matters, through what had been a difficult personal time. Communication from staff was excellent, and the courses provide much needed social interaction with officer and other learners, especially during the periodic lockdowns. Equipment had been provided which allowed Ebony to log in and attend courses via laptop, which was much easier than through a mobile phone. The course had helped Ebony to increase her self-confidence and allowed her to present a positive role model for her children.

Were any courses requested, but not currently provided?

Not as such, though some courses were unable to be run online. Courses were designed to help promote upskilling to improve economic prospects and personal development, as well as provide social interaction and emotional wellbeing.

What percentage of learners were ALDD? Was the service reaching enough such learners?

The service was reaching a significant number of ALDD learners, but could always do more. Often this was due to people being unaware of the service. Approximal 10% of learners declared a learning difficulty or disability, and the service was also trained to spot those who had not declared, in order to provide support where required. Recent years had seen a significant rise in children with Education and Healthcare plans (EHCPs) which set out commitments until they reached the age of 25.

Work placements and volunteering opportunities post 25 needed to increase, and the service was developing pre-employment workshops to help learners make the transition into employment. Some learners were particularly strong with regard to digital skills and were being trained to be 'digital champions' to help support their peers.

Was the service engaging with the libraries to help spread awareness of the service?

Libraries often ran in-person courses, though these had been suspended due to the pandemic. It was expected that engagement with libraires would increase once the pandemic was over.

The service provided an annual brochure. Would the next iteration be very different due to the new way of working during Covid-19?

The brochure would include a broad overview of many of the service offerings, including new learning opportunities identified through the pandemic. However, not all courses were listed, to enable the service to remain flexible and adjust the service offering based on current need.

The Committee thanked the attendees for the information provided and commended both Ebbony and the officers on their efforts during the significant personal and professional challenges faced during the past 12 months.

46. **PLANNING FOR CANALS AND TOWPATHS** (*Agenda Item 6*)

James Rodger (Head of Planning and Enforcement) introduced a report updating the Committee on the planning policies governing canals and towpaths.

It was highlighted that the matter was topical, as canals and towpaths had become popular recreational spots during the Covid-19 pandemic. Planning officers worked closely with the Canal and River Trust charity, who were very active in the protection of the waterways and were often engaged with as part of planning consultations. The boundary threshold for applications to make financial contributions for the canal improvement was 150m from the canal edge, though the Council was receiving contributions from developments that were beyond this threshold, but whose development would impact the area. Examples were highlighted within the report.

The Committee sought further information by way of questions, including:

Were there plans for increasing freight by water, to offset potential increases in road traffic and help address climate change?

Local policies and policies set out within the new London Plan encouraged the use of waterways, e.g. transportation of building materials by boat. The Canal and River Trust could be engaged with further regarding this.

Did forthcoming changes to planning policies have any impact on S106 and CIL monies?

There were no threats to monies due to the proposed changes to planning policies, with many policies in place to support canals and towpaths. Prior Approval applications were more challenging in terms of powers afforded to planning officers as part of the application process.

Was there any scope to expand engagement to include groups such as the Environment Agency, to help secure maintenance and regeneration of waterways through the planning process?

Engagement with various agencies was being increased, though it was accepted that the Environment Agency had a different ethos and focus than groups such as the Canal and River Trust, in that they focused on protective ecology work rather than enhancements to areas. On the matter of flood plains, officers would engage with the Environment Agency.

Regarding the 150m threshold referred to earlier, was this a Hillingdon or national policy?

This would be reviewed and fed back to the Committee outside of the meeting.

Whose responsibility was it to manage litter picking activity on canals and towpaths?

Often these were run by volunteers through groups such as the Canal and River Trust. In terms of responsibility, this would likely be the landowners, though further detail could be provided outside of the meeting.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

47. **COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY (CIL) REPORTING** (*Agenda Item 7*)

James Rodger (Head of Planning and Enforcement) introduced the annual Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) detailing CIL spend for the period 01 April 2019 to 31 March 2020.

CIL monies were confirmed to be distinct from S106 monies, in that they were not site specific and could be used for wider improvements across the Borough. The neighbourhood proportion of CIL spend (minimum 15%) were spent through the Council's Chrysalis programme, driven by requests from residents and/or Ward Councillors. Detail of the projects CIL supported were set out with the report.

The Committee sought further information on a number of points, including:

What did the Council do to engage with areas of the Borough that did not have residents associations?

All residents were free to suggest projects through Chrysalis, which was widely advertised through the Council's social media channels and through Hillingdon People.

Could CIL money be spent on parking management schemes?

Neighbourhood CIL spend had latitude to fund a wide variety of projects, include parking management schemes.

It was requested that the next report included detail of CIL spend by site. Officers advised that the structure of the report was dictated by the ICT systems used. Recent agreement for the provision of additional software should allow future reports to contain additional detail.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

48. **CABINET FORWARD PLAN** (*Agenda Item 8*)

Consideration was given to the Cabinet Forward Plan.

Members requested clarity on why certain items, such as the climate change item, had not been presented to the Committee before determination at Cabinet. Several items had no POCs listed as consultees.

Officers advised that, with regard to the climate change item, the forthcoming report to Cabinet was seeking approval to consult. If approved, the Committee would receive a report as part of the consultation process, if the matter was under the Committee's remit. Regarding the other reports, it was agreed that the clerk would review this and

feed back accordingly.

RESOLVED: That the Cabinet Forward Plan be noted.

49. **WORK PROGRAMME** (*Agenda Item 9*)

Consideration was given to the Committee's Work Programme.

It was requested that the item on flooding, currently scheduled for the April meeting, be brought forward to March. It was agreed that the clerk would review this, but Members were advised that any such change was dependent on officer and resource availability.

It was requested that an information item on new planning policies be brought to a future meeting.

Members also requested that the item on Youth Services include detail of targeted youth services (though it was accepted that this could fall under the remit of the Social Care POC).

Regarding the item on Early Years Provision that had been postponed, the Chairman advised that the Cabinet Member for Education, Children and Youth Services had advised that the service was currently undertaking an internal review which meant it was not a suitable time for the Committee to receive an information report. The item would be rescheduled as soon as possible.

RESOLVED: That the work programme be noted.

The meeting, which commenced at 7.00 pm, closed at 9.05 pm.

These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information on any of the resolutions please contact Neil Fraser on 01895 250692. Circulation of these minutes is to Councillors, Officers, the Press and Members of the Public.