

REVIEW BY THE CORPORATE SERVICES, COMMERCE AND COMMUNITIES POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE - REVIEW OF THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Cabinet Member(s)	Councillor Douglas Mills
Cabinet Portfolio(s)	Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Transformation
Officer Contact(s)	Liz Penny, Democratic Services
Papers with report	Corporate Services, Commerce and Communities Policy Overview Committee's review of the 'Voluntary Sector Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic'

HEADLINES

Summary	To receive the Corporate Services, Commerce and Communities Policy Overview Committee's review into the 'Voluntary Sector Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic'. To give consideration to the recommendations of the review.
Putting our Residents First	This report supports the following Council objective of: <i>Our People</i> .
Financial Cost	The recommendations proposed as a result of this review do not in themselves have a direct financial impact on Council finances.
Relevant Policy Overview Committee	Corporate Services, Commerce and Communities Policy Overview Committee
Relevant Ward(s)	All

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet welcomes the review by the Corporate Services, Commerce and Communities Policy Overview Committee and agrees the recommendations made by the Committee set out below. Furthermore, delegates their implementation to the Corporate Directors in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Transformation:

1. That Cabinet acknowledges, appreciates and recognises the response that all organisations across the voluntary sector have provided to meet the needs of residents throughout the pandemic/lockdown periods;

2. That Cabinet recognises the pro-active steps taken by the Hillingdon Community Hub/Council Officers to manage and co-ordinate resources across a number of voluntary sector partners, including Hillingdon4All to achieve a strong operating model;
3. That Cabinet continues to review and provide voluntary sector grants to enable key voluntary sector partners to continue to deliver services required by Hillingdon residents. In addition, that Cabinet looks to provide practical, operational and logistical support and guidance to enable VS partners to increase resilience going forward; and
4. That Cabinet agrees to deliver outbound communications, including through Hillingdon People, that provide information to all residents (including children and young people under the age of 16) so they can access information about key voluntary sector services, such as mental health/Hillingdon MIND. Furthermore, to support the dual purpose of such communications to assist in recruitment of volunteers across the Voluntary Sector.

Reasons for the recommendations

To consider the report of the Corporate Services, Commerce and Communities Policy Overview Committee's review into the 'Voluntary Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic'.

Alternative options considered / risk management

The Cabinet could decide to reject some, or all, of the Committee's recommendations or pursue alternative routes by which to progress the objectives of the review.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

At the Corporate Services, Commerce and Communities Policy Overview Committee's meeting on 17 September 2020, it was unanimously agreed that the Committee conduct a review of the voluntary sector's response to the pandemic. The Committee has now concluded its review and a report, supported by four recommendations, was endorsed by the Committee at its 6 April 2021 meeting for submission to Cabinet.

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

The review heard from key witnesses and considered how the voluntary sector and the Council worked together to help residents, in particular the Borough's most vulnerable residents, during the pandemic.

The following Terms of Reference were agreed by the Committee from the outset of the review:

1. To consider how the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in Hillingdon was able to respond to the 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.
5. To make any recommendations that would increase resilience of VCS to respond to any future lockdown or restrictions.

It should be noted that progress of the review was hindered by the onset of the Coronavirus Pandemic and nationwide lockdown in March 2020. When the Corporate Services, Commerce and Communities Policy Overview Committee resumed meetings in September 2020, Members embraced new methods of investigation through virtual means. As a result of the review's hiatus, the timeframe for completion of the review was pushed to Spring 2021.

Through a range of information gathering sessions and witnesses, as outlined in the report, the Committee sought to gain an understanding of the nature and extent of the voluntary sector work carried out to provide vital support to residents during the Covid-19 pandemic. Considering all factors, the Committee has made recommendations reflecting the positive work of the voluntary sector whilst also helping to increase its resilience going forward.

Officer Comments on Recommendations

The recommendations have been reviewed by the relevant senior officers. Officers are supportive of the recommendations and have raised no issues regarding their feasibility.

Financial Implications

The recommendations resulting from this review will not require any additional resources.

RESIDENT BENEFIT & CONSULTATION

The benefit or impact upon Hillingdon residents, service users and communities

The recommendations will ensure that all residents (including children and young people) are kept informed, via outbound communications, of key voluntary sector services available to them, including mental health services / Hillingdon MIND.

Consultation carried out or required

The Committee sought a wide range of external witness testimony as set out in its report.

CORPORATE CONSIDERATIONS

Corporate Finance

Corporate Finance has reviewed this report, noting that there would be no direct financial implications of the Policy Overview Committee's recommendations in respect of processes and joint working with partner organisations.

Legal

The Borough Solicitor has confirmed that there are no specific legal implications arising from this report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL.