



# Residents' Services Select Committee Review Scoping Report - 2022/2023

## A Review of Alley gating in Hillingdon

### **1. OBJECTIVES**

#### **Aim of the review**

At its meeting on 19 October 2022, the Residents' Services Select Committee elected to undertake a major review of the Council's alley gating scheme. This review aims to consider ways in which the current alley gating scheme could potentially be improved to better meet the needs of Hillingdon residents. The purpose of the alley gating scheme is to improve the security of residential properties thereby reducing the opportunity for crime to be committed and decreasing the fear of crime. The scope of the Select Committee's review is limited to the application of alley gates to alleys and paths which are not public rights of way.

#### **Terms of Reference**

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

1. to gain a thorough understanding of the Council's current alley gating scheme and what it entails;
2. to scrutinise a service that was established some 17 years ago and review its effectiveness;
3. to explore ways in which the current alley gating scheme in Hillingdon could be improved in terms of its efficiency and ability to meet the security needs of local residents;
4. to look at other local authorities and housing organisations that have established similar schemes for any best practice;

5. To review the success of older gating schemes in the Borough and explore if there are challenges faced by residents; and
6. subject to the Committee's findings, to make any conclusions, propose actions, service and policy recommendations to the decision-making Cabinet.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

### **Context and Key Information**

#### **What are alley gates?**

As defined in a [research paper by the College of Policing](#) dated 16 March 2016: "Alley gates are lockable gates installed to prevent access by offenders to alleyways, such as those which run along the rear of older-style terraced housing in the UK. While normally a burglary prevention tool, alley gates can also prevent other crimes such as littering and anti-social behaviour by preventing access to alleys by non-residents and better controlling the space."

Alley gates are usually made of iron or steel and are bespoke in relation to the requirements and specifications of an individual alley. The residents of homes adjacent to the gated alley operate the gates, either using keys or a key code. Alley gates have been found to be generally cost effective, although the cost varies depending upon location and requirements.

#### **How do alley gates work?**

Alley gates reduce the access of potential offenders to the rear of houses. Available evidence suggests that alley gating schemes can be effective in reducing crime such as residential burglary and anti-social behaviour (ASB) and may assist in improving public confidence. Alley gates can be effective in the reduction of crime in a number of ways:

- They provide a physical barrier which prevents access to alleys and connected properties.
- Residents are encouraged to be responsible for closing the gates and controlling access to them thereby increasing guardianship and surveillance, which can assist in the reduction of crime.
- Gates physically mark boundaries therefore offenders cannot claim that they were unaware access was prohibited.
- Alley gates indicate that the area in question is not a suitable place to offend and that the risk of detection is high.
- Alley gates make it more difficult for criminals to remove bulky items or those not easily concealed and carried.

## **Factors which impact the effectiveness of alley gates**

Alley gates are specifically designed for those crimes that occur in, or are facilitated by, access to alleyways. If burglars enter homes through the front of properties, then gating access to the rear may be ineffective. The neighbourhood in which alley gates are implemented may also have an impact upon their effectiveness – where communities have a high turnover of residents, people with access to keys or key codes may lack investment in the area. Moreover, if residents disagree about the implementation and usage of alley gates it is likely that the scheme will be less successful. The physical environment is also important – gates must be carefully designed and appropriate to the context in which they are to be installed or they may be ineffective in reducing crime.

## **Hillingdon's Chrysalis Community Safety Private Alley Gating**

Each year the Council makes some £1m available through its Chrysalis programme to help residents and community groups to improve local facilities. Within the overall Chrysalis programme, around £30k is earmarked each financial year to support alley gating and community safety schemes including improvements to fencing and lighting which enhance public safety. The Chrysalis programme is used to fund alley gating schemes on private land only. Alleygating schemes on Council housing estate land are considered by Housing Services and under the Housing Revenue Account and were previously considered under the former Better Neighbourhood Fund.

The private alley gating scheme, introduced some 17 years ago, assists residents in securing their privately owned alleyways against intrusion by others by installing lockable gates which can dramatically improve the quality of life of residents and businesses. Not only can the gates reduce the likelihood of burglars gaining access to the rear of properties, but they can also protect the alley from fly-tipping and other anti-social behaviour.

Chrysalis funding contributes up to 90% of the cost of alley gates to successful applicants. Once the gates are installed, future maintenance and ownership is the responsibility of the residents themselves; for example, the Council does not administer replacement keys, encouraging neighbourhood engagement and responsibility.

Businesses who wish to apply for alley gates will be expected to contribute between 30 to 50 percent; each scheme is treated on a case-by-case basis. Electronic gates are not usually provided within the scope of this scheme but may be considered where there is evidence that a management company has been established and that there are sufficient financial resources to fund the ongoing maintenance of the gates.

Following a competitive tender, a framework agreement is in place up to March 2024 for a preferred fencing/gating contractor, which means that residents no longer need to provide three quotations to support their application.

In the years from 2008-09 to 2017-18, in total 112 schemes were implemented across the Borough. Over the years, extensive positive feedback has been received from

residents who have benefitted from the increased security which the alley gating scheme provides.

### **Maintenance of alley gates**

Gating of private alleyways is a self-help scheme; residents organise the scheme themselves with the financial support of the Council. Residents accept direct responsibility for the security of the keys and for the upkeep and repair of the gates once they have been installed. All ongoing maintenance including damage to, or loss of, gates is the sole responsibility of the residents - not the police or local authority. All gates will be installed with a minimum of 12 months warranty against construction failure.

The Council does not have a mandate to hold keys for property which is privately owned hence spare keys are not held for any gating scheme. Residents are recommended to seek advice on public liability insurance for the gates in the event of future damage/maintenance. Guidance provided recommends that, once a scheme has been approved, a designated bank account is opened to collect the contributions and that lead residents should collect a small amount of extra money from each household in order to establish a sinking fund to cover any future repairs and maintenance.

When a new resident moves in, the responsibility for providing the key to the gate lies with the previous owner of the property. If a key is not provided, the new resident is advised to speak to a neighbour to get a key cut. If this is not successful, officers can offer to contact the Lead Resident to ask them to introduce themselves and provide a master key to be cut.

Prior to the introduction of one fencing/gating term contract in 2019/20, in place until March 2024, alleygating scheme applicants were encouraged to seek three quotes to support their applications. Whilst there was an agreed specification, some suppliers are no longer willing or able to undertake repairs especially for gates in schemes installed more than ten years ago.

Newly introduced from April 2022, for schemes installed more than ten years ago, there is a discretionary option for the Cabinet Member to agree to support the repair or replacement of gates based on the standard 90% Chrysalis contribution to a new scheme.

This ensures that residents who have maintained the alley gates in good order for ten years are not financially disadvantaged and ensures that the wider community benefits of reducing the likelihood of burglars gaining access to the rear of properties and protecting the alley from fly-tipping and other anti-social behaviour can be sustained.

### **Current status**

Since the inception of the alley gating initiative, many of the more straightforward schemes have already been implemented. The initiative remains popular with residents affected by crime and/or anti-social behaviour, with four live enquiries currently being supported to develop into formal applications.

## **Areas identified for improvement**

It is anticipated that it may be possible to suggest improvements / efficiencies in relation to the scheme. These will be clarified as the review progresses.

## **Current data, best practice and research**

### **1. Hillingdon Chrysalis Data**

Data for the past five financial years (2018 to date):

53	applications have been approved
522	households across the Borough have benefitted
46	businesses have benefitted
£95,767	total cost to the Council
£22,613	total contribution from residents

Average contribution for the Council per property	£183
Average contribution from each property	£43

### **2. Effectiveness of Alley gating schemes**

Alley gates have been proven to be extremely effective in the reduction of crime and antisocial behaviour.

The paper 'Alley-gating revisited' Armitage & Smithson 2007 reviewed studies which assessed the impact of alley gating on burglary and found that "Previous studies of Alley-gating schemes and their crime reduction impacts have revealed positive findings. These studies focused mainly on the reduction of burglary in the scheme areas, with reductions ranging from 37% (net of changes in the wider area) to 65% (gross reduction)."

In respect of non-burglary reduction related benefits for example ASB and public confidence, evidence has shown that alley gates have led to an increased satisfaction with the area, reductions in reported levels of ASB and increased feelings of safety.

## **Legislative / national context**

Explanatory Memorandum to the Highways Act 1980 (Gating Orders) (England) Regulations 2006 No. 537

4.1 Powers to close alleyways were introduced by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW Act 2000); this enable alleyways, which are also rights of way, to be closed and gated for crime prevention reasons. But they do not enable alleyways to be gated expressly to prevent anti-social behaviour and they exclude many alleyways that are public highways but not recorded as rights of way. Also, under these provisions the removal of rites of passage is irrevocable.

4.2 The procedure for gating under the CROW Act 2000 is often protracted and resource intensive for local authorities. This is because, the Secretary of State first must designate an area that can be subject to a gating order, which can take a long

time. In addition, the trigger for gating is confined to 'crime' only – the local authority must demonstrate that crime is present which is shown by police evidence of recorded crime and therefore it does not include anti-social behaviour and if one person objects to the proposal (regardless of whether they live in the locality), the proposal must be withdrawn.

### **Connected work**

None identified at this stage.

### **Executive Responsibilities**

The portfolio Cabinet Member responsible is Councillor Eddie Lavery.

## **3. EVIDENCE & ENQUIRY**

### **Potential witnesses (including service users)**

Helena Webster, Community Engagement & Town Centre Improvements Manager  
Neil O'Connor, Community Engagement Project Officer  
Service users (local residents with alleygating schemes nearby)

### **Lines of Enquiry**

Lines of enquiry can be expanded as the review progresses or included in relevant witness session reports. However, lines of enquiry may include:

- establishing how well the alley gating scheme is being delivered.
- focus on the end user and how they have found the scheme in practice.
- exploring what support functions are in place and whether these can be improved.
- Experiences from other local authorities and housing organisations
- Further evidence at how they can help to reduce and design out crime

### **Potential Witnesses**

Witnesses will be identified by the Committee in consultation with relevant officers.

### **Surveys, site-visits or other fact-finding events**

Such opportunities will be identified as the review progresses, which could include a site visit to a particular alley gate.

### **Future information that may be required**

List of alleygating schemes by ward  
Further information may be identified as the review progresses.

## **4. REVIEW PLANNING & TIMETABLE**

Proposed timeframe & milestones for the review:

<b>Meeting Date</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Purpose / theme</b>	<b>Witnesses / officers attending</b>
19 January 2023	Agree Scoping Report	Information and analysis	Helena Webster Natasha Norton
15 February 2023	Witness Session 1	Information and analysis	Helena Webster Neil O'Connor Other officers impacted by alley gates
15 March 2023	Witness Session 2	Information and analysis	Local residents, local Police
Outside the committee - Survey / Networking session / consultation / informal meeting with users, site visit etc...			
12 April 2023	Witness Session 3	Information and analysis	Representative of another local authority
June 2023	De-brief and emerging findings	To discuss key findings and identify potential recommendations	
July 2023	Approval of draft final report	Proposals – agree recommendations and final draft report to Cabinet	

### **Resource requirements**

None.

### **Equalities impact**

The 2010 Equality Act outlines the provisions of the Public Sector Equalities Duty which requires Public Bodies to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010.
- advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups.

- foster good relations between people from different groups.

The broad purpose of this duty is to integrate considerations of equality into day business and keep them under review in decision making, the design of policies and the delivery of services. There are no equality impact issues relating to the matters set out in this report. When analysing information on victims, offenders or location of crime and ASB generally, the protected characteristics are recorded, analysed and disproportionate trends identified when planning the appropriate strategic and operational intervention.

### **Background Papers / further reading**

[Alley gating scheme - Hillingdon Council](#)