

Minutes

RESIDENTS' SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE

15 February 2023

Meeting held at Committee Room 5 - Civic Centre



HILLINGDON
LONDON

55. **A REVIEW OF ALLEY GATING IN HILLINGDON - WITNESS SESSION 1** (*Agenda Item 5*)

Helena Webster, Community Engagement and Town Improvement Manager, and Neil O'Connor, Community Engagement Project Officer, were in attendance and presented the report noting that the scoping report for the review had been agreed at the previous Select Committee meeting.

Three residents were in attendance to give evidence in relation to the Committee's review of alley gating in the Borough.

Jane Turnbull, Chair of Oak Farm Residents' Association (OFRA), addressed the Committee Members noting that OFRA covered an area to the east of Long Lane. The area was unusual as a large part of the estate had been designed with vehicle access behind the houses. In some other roads there was a narrower access path for pedestrian or bicycle access. Historically the wider access had been used by refuse vehicles, but the open alleys had resulted in burglary and fly tipping. In the late 1990s and early 2000s Chrysalis funding had been made available to put in gates to be maintained by residents – burglary numbers had dropped immediately. However, no central record had been kept of the lead residents who held the maintenance account and spare keys for each alley.

Members heard that, over the years, OFRA had been approached by residents regarding damaged gates and locks being broken or replaced. They had asked for lead residents to contact OFRA in order to pass on these requests but with little response.

Two main areas of concern were behind the shops at Ryefield Parade where the locks were regularly broken or changed, or gates left open thereby compromising security. In 2022 OFRA had been requested to hold a key to the gates to the west of the shops on the north of Ryefield Parade due to a problem with access to emergency vehicles. On the other side of the Parade, the gates and lock were often damaged and fly tipping and drugs use were an issue there. On one occasion a property developer had installed his own gates thereby cutting off a pedestrian access route onto Ryefield Avenue – action had not been taken in time hence the gates could no longer be removed. The Committee was advised that OFRA would be willing to keep a separate list of email / phone contact details for lead residents in charge of keys.

Paulette McGowan, Lead Resident with responsibility for 11 sets of gates in Hillingdon East, informed the Committee that she looked after the alley gates in Denecroft Crescent, Woodcroft Crescent and Grosvenor Crescent on one side of the road and Denecroft Crescent, Grosvenor Crescent, Windsor Avenue and Burleigh Road on the other side.

Members heard that the alleyway gates at Denecroft Crescent, Woodcroft Crescent

and Grosvenor Crescent had been installed in 2008 following problems with burglaries and fly tipping. Other gates including those in Windsor Avenue and Burleigh Road had been installed two years later in 2010.

Ms McGowan was now solely responsible for the maintenance of the gates as the people who had previously helped her had either moved away or had never wanted to be involved with more than the initial start-up. Maintenance issues included locks needing to be replaced having been ground off, locks being broken, and locks being removed – none of these issues had been reported by the perpetrators who were local residents in the vicinity of the alley gates in question. Other problems had included gates which had dropped. This had all come at a cost to the maintenance fund, which was now dwindling. Moreover, the gate post at Denecroft / Woodcroft Crescent on the Denecroft Crescent side currently needed resetting as it was leaning, and the gate could not be closed – this would need to be resolved and quotes for the work were being sought.

The Committee was informed that the Nationwide Building Society Treasurer Accounts that had been held for the alley gate maintenance funds since the start up had now been closed as they no longer supported these types of accounts. Ms McGowan was waiting for the funds to be sent to her in the form of cheques and would then need to source another Treasurer/Society account.

Ms McGowan reported that she was planning to move away from the area in the near future and did not know who would then assume responsibility for the maintenance funds and the upkeep of details relating to the alley gating schemes.

Raj Jhuti, local resident, was also in attendance and gave evidence in relation to the Parkfield Avenue alley gating scheme. He informed Members that the alley gates had been introduced to reduce burglary, fly tipping and drug use in the area. The results had been positive, and those issues had reduced significantly following installation of the gates approximately 17 or 18 years previously; however, many of the residents who had been part of the original scheme had now moved away. Members heard that the bank account for the scheme was now dormant hence residents were fixing locks at their own expense. It was no longer possible to access the funds in the maintenance account and there was no lead person with responsibility for the gates.

In response to their requests for clarification as to how the current system could be improved, the Committee Members heard that the main issues related to maintenance costs, the handling of keys when new people moved in and access to bank accounts. It was confirmed that it would be very helpful if a lead person at the Council could be identified to help residents with matters relating to the funding and maintenance of alley gates. It was also suggested that it would be beneficial if the Council could maintain an up-to-date record of the main key keepers which would be reviewed every year or so.

Members enquired how the issues relating to bank accounts could be resolved. It was confirmed that residents had paid a sum of money into a maintenance account when the schemes were originally set up; however, it was estimated that approximately 80% of current residents had no knowledge of this fund therefore took it upon themselves to get keys cut and repair locks. Funds had dwindled over the years, and, in some cases, accounts had become dormant and inaccessible. It was noted that Nationwide no longer offered Treasurer's accounts and had ceased to do so in December 2022. Other banks including Metro Bank, HSBC and Lloyds TSB continued to offer these types of accounts, but, with the exception of Lloyds TSB, meeting minutes were generally

required in order to set them up. Mr Jhuti confirmed that, with regard to the aforementioned dormant account, HSBC would not release the funds to an individual and had requested copies of Residents' Association minutes etc which he was unable to provide. Any association set up would have to run for at least six months to qualify.

It was confirmed that, when a resident moved on, the keys to the gates should automatically be passed on to the new resident but this did not always happen. New residents tended to ask a neighbour for a key and then made their own copy. Over the years this had led to problems such as locks getting broken as the keys had been recut many times. There was a small charge of £5 when a new non-high security key was requested. The process was different for high security keys.

The Community Engagement and Town Improvement Manager advised the Committee that, for older schemes such as those dating back to 2008 and 2010, a paper-based system had been in use. However nowadays officers held a central list of all new schemes together with contact addresses - the system had changed significantly over the years. Alley gating schemes ranged from 5 to over 100 households so a flexible scheme was needed to address all possible scenarios.

It was confirmed that an alley gating information pack was available on the Council's website and in hardcopy which included guidance on how to set up a scheme. It was not possible to recommend which bank to use but would be useful to review the information currently on the website. The Community Engagement and Town Improvement Manager noted that, as set out in the review scoping report, there was now a discretionary option agreed by the Cabinet Member to support the repair or refurbishment of gates where schemes had been successfully running for over 10 years. Residents could apply for this and, if agreed, funding would be allocated on a 90/10 basis - 90% Chrysalis funding with a 10% contribution from residents. This also provided an opportunity for the Council to make contact with lead residents and refresh the information currently held.

In response to questions from the Committee, it was confirmed that an overarching organisation to keep records and assist in the running of the alley gating schemes would be extremely useful and would be welcomed by the residents.

Members noted that the alley gating schemes were designed to be self-help schemes whereby residents were responsible for maintenance of the gates. It was confirmed that the schemes were dependent on residents using the gates properly and closing them appropriately; however, if there were specific issues in relation to certain schemes officers would be willing to look into these in an attempt to assist. It was confirmed that the police did not currently get involved with alley gating schemes although the previous Safer Neighbourhood Team had been very helpful.

RESOLVED: That the Residents' Services Select Committee noted the evidence heard at the witness session and sought clarification as necessary in the context of its review of alley gating in Hillingdon.



Minutes

RESIDENTS' SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE

15 March 2023

Meeting held at Committee Room 6 - Civic Centre,
High Street, Uxbridge UB8 1UW

56. **A REVIEW OF ALLEY GATING IN HILLINGDON: WITNESS SESSION 2** (*Agenda Item 5*)

Ms Helena Webster, the Council's Community Engagement and Town Improvement Manager, advised that the Council had made grant funding available to residents in Hillingdon to secure alleys and mitigate levels of fly tipping and burglary in the area. At its meeting on 15 February 2023, Members received evidence from residents about their experiences. Officers had subsequently attended a site visit and identified the need for repairs to just one gate which was being followed up by the team through the new existing gate refurbishment initiative.

Mr Adam Stitson, the Council's Team Leader for Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) and Environmental Protection, advised that alleygating schemes had reduced levels of certain crimes in the Borough, and complaints about fly tipping and similar issues tended to reduce following the installation of alley gates. However, the effectiveness of the alley gates depended on the compliance of residents in using them appropriately. Residents needed to understand how the alley gates should be used and that they needed to be kept locked when not in use and that keys should be kept safe.

Insofar as hotspots were concerned, Mr Stitson advised that there were no geographical hotspots for alley gates being broken or left unlocked and resulting in ASB. Residents' buy-in addressed this issue so it was imperative that, to maintain the effectiveness of the scheme, new residents moving into the area needed to have a handover. The longer a scheme had been installed, the more likely it was that the system would break down as those residents coordinating things like keys locally may have moved away. The Council's Community Engagement Team was currently looking into this issue to come up with a solution.

Members were advised that localities-based action would be taken by the Council to address reports of ASB in an area and that, if this action was successful, there would potentially be no need to install an alley gating scheme. Evidence was needed to be able to tackle instances of fly tipping and other crimes and identify the perpetrators. In these situations, the Council could write to all households in the area but these generic communications tended to have limited effectiveness as they were impersonal and easy to ignore.

Inspector Dan Lipinski, Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), advised that the police interaction with the Council's ASB team was limited as the team appeared to be largely autonomous. However, the MPS worked with the ASB and Community Engagement teams when needed and undertook intelligence led patrols and the MPS' Design Out Crime team had significant expertise in identifying preventative measures that could be taken to address crime. The Democratic Services Manager would circulate the Police Crime Prevention Initiatives Guide to Alley Gating to Members of the Committee.

Inspector Lipinski had contacted Safer Neighbourhood Team (SNT) officers to garner their thoughts on the alley gating schemes and had received a number of testimonials. These SNT officers were wholly supportive of alley gating and noted that the schemes had reduced fly tipping and worked well if the gates were kept locked when not in use.

Mr Neil O'Connor, the Council's Community Engagement Project Officer, advised that the last six alley gating schemes had been installed to address issues of fly tipping, burglary, drugs and loitering. Prior to the installation of an alley gating scheme, the Council always contacted the MPS through the relevant Safer Neighbourhood Team to determine whether or not the police had any concerns.

Members queried whether the OWL network could help to identify residents that would be prepared to act as coordinators for the keys or as a point of contact for particular schemes. Inspector Lipinski chaired the OWL Steering Group for the West Area and noted that there were sometimes issues with things like bank accounts.

Concern was expressed that, even though there was an alley gating scheme in place, there were times when fly tipping in the alleys still occurred which then fell to the residents to resolve as it was effectively on private land. It was important that residents kept the gates locked. Mr Stitson advised that reports to the Council of these instances would be looked at and officers would engage with residents to help them to resolve these issues themselves. If this was not possible, consideration could be given to the installation of CCTV to gather evidence and identify perpetrators of large-scale fly tipping as they might be linked to other instances in the Borough.

Whilst the footage from the video doorbells of properties in the vicinity of an alley gate could be used to gather evidence in the event of a crime having taken place, it would not be possible for the Council to install a video doorbell on the gate itself as it would need access to Wi-Fi. All action taken needed to be risk and intelligence led and Inspector Lipinski confirmed that the police routinely requested footage from neighbours' video doorbells during the cocooning process.

With regard to fly tipping, Mr Stitson confirmed that officers could take the rubbish back to the depot and examine the content to see if the perpetrator could be identified but that this would not happen in every instance. There would be times when the waste collection service removed and disposed of the rubbish and it would not be examined.

Concern was expressed that fly tipping would often occur in the alley ways behind shops. There were often houses of multiple occupation (HMOs) in the vicinity and sometimes residents did not exhibit neighbourly behaviour resulting in a build-up of fly tipped waste. Mr Stitson advised that there was a balance between expecting residents to deal with issues themselves and the responsibilities of the Council. The Council was reliant on residents involved in an alley gating scheme to cooperate and make the system work. The Council would offer residents information and advice rather than intervening, unless the fly tipping was on a very large scale.

Inspector Lipinski advised that instances of crime depended on a myriad of factors. If an area appeared to be looked after and there were no broken windows, etc, it would be less likely to attract things like graffiti. The installation of alley gates gave the impression that residents in that area were aware of security and potential perpetrators of crime might therefore move onto another area.

At the start of the process to get an alley gate installed, residents received a lot of

support and guidance on the process. After the gates had been installed, there could be a churn in residents with people moving out, tenants moving in and changes to the scheme. There was then sometimes very little information available to residents about the existing scheme and support needed to be put in place and residents needed to be advised that they were responsible for the scheme and that a certain behaviour was expected.

Ms Webster advised that each alley gating scheme covered between 5 and 100+ properties. All issues reported to the Council about the alley gating schemes would be responded to and residents might be signposted to another service. A review of the older schemes was being undertaken to establish if any repairs were needed or to identify other issues. A database of alley gate keyholders across the Borough had been set up and they would be contacted annually to check their contact details and establish whether or not they wanted to continue to act as the keyholder.

It was recognised that the Council had a list of the schemes that were currently in situ. Members were advised that, as the work was resident-led, no action had been taken to identify those areas across the Borough that did not currently have a scheme but which would benefit from alley gating. Although more experienced police officers were aware of the alley gating scheme, the more junior officers would not necessarily be familiar with it. Where there was an issue, an MPS Design Out Crime Officer (DOCO) could be assigned to make crime prevention recommendations which could include alley gating. It was suggested that the MPS be provided with alley gating information to hand out and that information about the scheme be circulated to OWL subscribers and at police development days.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1. the Police Crime Prevention Initiatives Guide to Alley Gating be circulated to Members of the Committee; and**
- 2. the discussion be noted.**

Minutes

RESIDENTS' SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE

12 April 2023

Meeting held at Committee Room 5 - Civic Centre



HILLINGDON
LONDON

57. **A REVIEW OF ALLEY GATING IN HILLINGDON: WITNESS SESSION 3** (*Agenda Item 5*)

It was noted that this was the third and final witness session relating to the Committee's review of alley gating in Hillingdon. Elleni Yangu, Gating Officer and Yasmin Basterfield, Safer Communities Team Leader, were in attendance representing Ealing Council. A report setting out Ealing's alley gating scheme had been included in the agenda pack and Members were invited to ask questions in relation to this. It was noted that, in Ealing, alley gates would only be gifted to residents on private land and in ASB hotspots.

In response to questions from the Committee, it was confirmed that Ealing Council kept records of key holders' details for one year after an application had been received; this

information was never shared and was deleted after a year for GDPR reasons.

With regards to bank accounts, Members heard that Ealing bore the full initial cost of providing alley gates in the borough; thereafter ongoing maintenance costs etc were the sole responsibility of the residents. Generally, one lead resident would be responsible for setting up a bank account and no known issues with frozen bank accounts had been experienced to date. It was confirmed that Ealing always used the same contractor; officers would check their eligibility first then refer residents to the contractor directly to obtain keys. Alternatively, residents could approach their neighbours.

In response to further questions from the Committee, Councillors heard that, in Ealing, 100% consent of all homeowners was required prior to installation of alley gates. In cases where a resident, or residents, did not wish to consent, officers would contact them directly to establish why. If landlords were out of the country, the approval of managing agents or whoever was residing in the property would be sought. Members were informed that two applications had been rejected recently as developers had an interest in the land.

Members sought further clarification regarding the monitoring of ASB in Ealing. It was confirmed that not all cases were monitored; only those where there had been high levels of ASB prior to installation of alley gates. In one such case a significant reduction in burglary had been observed following installation of gates in a problematic area.

Members thanked the officers for their report and attendance at the Committee.

RESOLVED: That the Residents' Services Select Committee noted the evidence heard at the witness session and sought clarification as necessary in the context of the review of alley gating in Hillingdon.