

## REVIEW BY THE RESIDENTS' SERVICE SELECT COMMITTEE: *ALLEY GATING IN HILLINGDON*

<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Councillor Eddie Lavery
<b>Cabinet Portfolio</b>	Cabinet Member for Residents' Services
<b>Officer Contact</b>	Liz Penny, Democratic Services
<b>Papers with report</b>	Final review report

### HEADLINES

<b>Summary</b>	To receive the final report detailing the major review conducted by the Residents' Services Select Committee which considered Alley Gating in Hillingdon. The review makes recommendations for Cabinet to consider.
<b>Putting our Residents First</b>  <b>Delivering on the Council Strategy 2022-2026</b>	<p>This report supports our ambition for residents/ the Council of: An efficient, well-run, digital-enabled council working with partners to deliver services to improve the lives of all our residents</p> <p>This report supports our commitments to residents of: Safe and Strong Communities</p>
<b>Financial Cost</b>	There are no direct financial costs arising from the initial recommendations.
<b>Relevant Select Committee</b>	Residents' Services Select Committee.
<b>Relevant Wards</b>	All.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

**That Cabinet welcomes the Committee's report and approves its recommendations, which seek to increase awareness and understanding of the Council's alley gating scheme and improve resident communications:**

## SELECT COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1) Scheme awareness:

That updated signs be installed on all alley gates to include the following information:

- a) that residents must keep the gates clear and closed when not in use;
- b) that residents are responsible for maintenance of the gates; and
- c) providing a Council contact email / website address where residents can access further details about the scheme in general.

### 2) Scheme awareness:

That the alley gating scheme be promoted in Hillingdon People.

### 3) Lead resident communications:

That, when sending its annual emails to verify the lead resident of each alley gating scheme, the Council's expands this communication:

- to include a review of any issues with the gates and any ASB which the Council could potentially assist with, and;
- to arrange to send the lead resident a batch of flyers (after verification) to be dropped through letter boxes informing any new neighbours about the alley gating scheme in their area.

### 4) Lead resident communications:

That, in addition to the annual check, for brand new alley gating schemes officers seek feedback from the lead resident six months after the gate has been installed.

## Reasons for the recommendations

The recommendations arising from this major review aim to support the Cabinet and Council in strengthening and improving communications in respect of the current alley gating scheme to enable it to better support residents in the Borough. The recommendations also aim to increase awareness of the alley gating scheme and the service available to residents.

## 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

### About Alley Gating in Hillingdon

The Council's 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.

The scheme is popular with residents - in the 10 years from 2008 to 2018, a total of 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.

Residents organise the scheme themselves with initial financial support from the Council's Chrysalis funding scheme which contributes up to 90% of the total cost of installing the gates. Residents then 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.

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 Programme contribution to a new scheme.

### The Committee's review

Noting that the Council's alley gating scheme had not been reviewed in many years, on 19 October 2022, Members of the Residents' Services Select Committee agreed to undertake a full review of the Council's existing scheme. This review aimed to consider ways in which the current alley gating scheme could potentially be improved to better meet the needs of Hillingdon residents. The scope of the Select Committee's review was limited to the application of alley gates to alleys and paths which are not public rights of way.

The Committee was mindful of the need to find cost-effective, workable solutions, and the recommendations in this report are seen as prudent, effective actions to improve performance going forward.

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

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.
6. Subject to the Committee's findings, to make any conclusions, propose actions, service, and policy recommendations to the decision-making Cabinet.

As part of its three witness and evidence sessions, the Committee received direct evidence from the following officers and external witnesses:

- Helena Webster, Community Engagement and Town Improvement Manager – LBH
- Neil O'Connor, Community Engagement Project Officer – LBH
- Natasha Norton, Community Engagement Project Officer – LBH
- Adam Stitson, Team Leader for Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) and Environmental Protection – LBH
- Inspector Dan Lipinski, The Metropolitan Police
- Jane Turnbull, Chair of Oak Farm Residents' Association (OFRA)
- Paulette McGowan, Lead Resident for various alley gating schemes in Hillingdon East
- Raj Jhuti, local resident in an alley gated area of Hillingdon East
- Elleni Yiangu, Gating Officer – Ealing Council
- Yasmin Basterfield, Safer Communities Team Leader – Ealing

A broad range of other evidence, best practice and information was also presented to the Committee as part of their deliberations.

### **The Committee's findings**

The Committee concluded its review in June 2023 and proposed four key recommendations to Cabinet. The detailed review report is attached as an appendix.

Having heard from a variety of interested parties and partners, Councillors concluded that Hillingdon's alley gating scheme appeared to be operating efficiently at present.

It was apparent that the scheme had evolved considerably since its inception and had been modernised and adapted in recent years to better meet the needs of residents. Notwithstanding this, Members observed that there were a few potential areas for improvement; notably in respect of scheme awareness and lead resident communications.

The Select Committee acknowledged that alley gates were occasionally being mismanaged and used incorrectly thereby compromising the security of residents. It was deemed essential that residents be encouraged to keep the gates clear, closed and locked at all times when not in use.

The Committee felt it would be helpful to consider ways in which residents could be better informed about the operation of their alley gating schemes, noting that some residents, particularly those who were new to the area, could potentially be unaware of the parameters and functionality of the scheme. To this end, Members indicated that they were supportive of a similar scheme to that recently introduced at Ealing Council whereby additional signage was installed on alley gates to serve as a reminder to residents that their alley gating scheme was resident-led and to provide additional useful information in relation to it.

Members concluded that it would be beneficial if the alley gating scheme could also be further promoted via the inclusion of an article in the Council's Hillingdon People magazine which was widely circulated to residents throughout the Borough.

Members were also pleased to learn that a database of keyholders had been set up; said keyholders would be contacted on an annual basis to check their contact details and verify whether they wished to continue to act as keyholder / lead resident. Members agreed that this annual communication would also be an ideal opportunity to establish whether residents were experiencing any issues with their gates which the Council could assist with and to arrange for low-cost information flyers to be sent out to the lead resident for circulation to any new neighbours. The Select Committee observed that it would be advisable to seek early feedback from residents in respect of any new alley gating schemes thereby ensuring that potential issues could be addressed in a timely manner.

The Committee's four recommendations to Cabinet incorporate measures which aim to address the identified challenges in respect of resident awareness and understanding of the Council's existing alley gating scheme and resident communications.

### **Officers comments on implementing the Committee's recommendations**

Officers thanked the Select Committee for providing an opportunity to review the Alley Gating Scheme and for their recommendations which will benefit residents and help provide an improved service. Subject to approval by Cabinet, officers plan to make a start on the implementation of the recommendations:

- New signage will be created and installed on all alley gates in the future. Officers will work on the design for the leaflets which will be handed out to lead residents upon request.
- The Corporate Communications Team will produce an article to promote the Alley Gating Scheme which will be featured in Hillingdon People.
- Lead Residents of new Alley Gating Schemes will be contacted six months after installation to gauge their feedback on the scheme, and to ensure any snagging issues are addressed. Lead Residents of older schemes will be contacted annually, to ensure contact details are kept up to date; this will give them an opportunity to report any issues. A live spreadsheet will continue to be updated.

### **Financial Implications**

The minimal cost of new signage and annual flyers will be met within existing service budgets. There are no other direct financial costs arising from the recommendations in this report.

## **RESIDENT BENEFIT & CONSULTATION**

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

The recommendations will improve scheme awareness and lead resident communications to the benefit of residents in the Borough. 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.

### **Consultation carried out or required**

The Committee sought a range of internal and external witness testimony, as set out in the report.

## **CORPORATE CONSIDERATIONS**

### **Corporate Finance**

Corporate Finance have reviewed this report and concur with the Financial Implications set out above, noting there are no direct financial implications associated with the recommendations contained in this report.

### **Legal**

The legal implications are included in Appendix 1 to the report.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

NIL.