

Review of Homelessness and the Customer Journey: Witness Session 4

Committee name	Residents' Services Select Committee
Officer reporting	Melissa Blower, Housing Project Manager
Papers with report	Scoping Report

HEADLINES

This first item on the Committee's major review is the fourth witness session and Members will hear from representatives from the Citizen's Advice Bureau, Bell Farm Christian Centre, NHS Social Prescribers and the Hillingdon Domestic Abuse Advocacy Service (HDAAS).

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Residents' Services Select Committee notes the evidence heard at the witness session and seeks clarification as necessary in the context of its review of Homelessness and the Customer Journey in Hillingdon.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

At its meeting on 16 January 2024, the Residents' Services Select Committee agreed to undertake a major review of the Council's Housing Advice and Homelessness Service, with a particular focus on the residents' journey through the system and customer service. The scoping report for the review was subsequently approved at the Select Committee meeting on 13 February 2024.

At this fourth witness session, representatives of key partners; namely the Citizen's Advice Bureau, Bell Farm Christian Centre, NHS Social Prescribers – Rachel Bulley and Amal Jama and Hillingdon Domestic Abuse Advocacy Service (HDAAS) – Sonia Stewart will be in attendance to outline their roles and answer any questions that may arise.

Citizen's Advice Bureau

For 85 years, the Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB) has been helping people by giving them the knowledge and the confidence they need to find a way forward. Their network of independent charities offers confidential advice online, over the phone, and in person, for free. The service is independent and totally impartial. People across the country can seek advice on a wide variety of matters including those relating to family, work, debt, immigration, health and housing.

CAB help millions of people every year. In 2022-23, this included:

- 42.7 million visits to their website
- 457,000 people helped face to face (more than double the previous year)
- 1.8 million people using their phone service
- 895,000 helped by email or webchat
- 79,000 witnesses supported through the Witness Service

Citizen's Advice provide support in approximately 1,600 locations across England and Wales with 14,000 volunteers and 8,843 staff. By helping people with the underlying cause of their

problems and making sure they don't get worse, they save the Government and public services hundreds of millions of pounds every year.

Bell Farm Christian Centre

Bell Farm Christian Centre is a Christian Church based in the middle of the Bell Farm Estate in West Drayton, Middlesex.

Bell Farm Christian Centre provides a number of services and activities for the wider community. The support and services, used by over 3,000 people each year, have encouraged many residents and families to develop personal skills and self-confidence, and learn how to help both themselves and each other. The organisation works with some of the most disadvantaged and marginalised within the community. The Christian Centre currently provides a number of services for the local community. One such service is the Advice, Information and Care Service which provides, information, advice, advocacy and support to members of the local community who have issues concerning: housing, benefits, consumer affairs, debt, hate crime, domestic violence etc. The work includes partnerships with other organisations that are able to provide information, advice and advocacy on specific issues.

NHS Social Prescribers

Social prescribing is a key component of Universal Personalised Care. It is an approach that connects people to activities, groups, and services in their community to meet the practical, social and emotional needs that affect their health and wellbeing. In social prescribing, local agencies such as local charities, social care and health services refer people to a social prescribing link worker. Social prescribing link workers give people time, focusing on 'what matters to me?' to co-produce a simple personalised care and support plan, and support people to take control of their health and wellbeing. Social prescribing link workers also support existing community groups to be accessible and sustainable, and help people to start new groups, working collaboratively with all local partners.

Social prescribing is an all-age, whole population approach that works particularly well for people who:

- have one or more long term conditions
- who need support with low level mental health issues
- who are lonely or isolated
- who have complex social needs which affect their wellbeing.

Hillingdon Domestic Abuse Advocacy Service (HDAAS) - Sonia Stewart

HDAAS is an independent and confidential service that works with agencies (such as the police, housing and social care) to offer an independent and confidential service for male and female victims of domestic abuse. HDAAS offers support for all victims of domestic abuse, regardless of the level of risk (IDVA and floating support). The service works to reduce the risk and repeat victimisation, co-ordinates services for individuals to ensure safe outcomes, offers comprehensive risk assessments and safety plans for adults aged 16+ and their children and provides advice, training and consultancy to partners.

Site Visits

As part of the review, on Wednesday 22 May 2024, four Members of the Select Committee visited B&Bs in the Borough accompanied by the Counter Fraud Team. On Friday 24 / 31 May 2024 some Members also visited the customer contact centre and the Housing Reception at the Civic Centre to listen to calls and observe proceedings.

Terms of Reference

The following Terms of Reference were noted for this review, subject to any changes agreed by the Committee:

1. To gain a thorough understanding of the Council's Homeless Prevention Service and the resident's journey through this process.
2. To scrutinise the service delivery and review its effectiveness.
3. To review service users' feedback to explore the challenges faced by residents accessing the service.
4. To look at other local authorities that may have different models of service delivery for best practice, including research and findings from charities, housing bodies, regional bodies and organisations, e.g. GLA.
5. Subject to the Committee's findings, to make any conclusions, propose practical and deliverable actions, service and policy recommendations to the decision-making Cabinet.

How this report benefits Hillingdon residents

Select Committees directly engage residents in shaping policy and recommendations from the Committees are presented to Cabinet to consider, and ultimately seek to improve the way the Council provides services to residents.

Financial Implications

None at this stage.

Legal Implications

None at this stage.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL.