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| Item No. 29. | Classification: Open | Date: 7 December 2021 | Meeting Name: Cabinet |
| Report title: | | Response to the Housing and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission - Review of Community Hubs | |
| Ward(s) or groups affected: | | All wards | |
| Cabinet Member: | | Councillor Alice Macdonald, Equalities, Neighbourhoods and Leisure | |

FOREWORD - COUNCILLOR ALICE MACDONALD, CABINET MEMBER FOR EQUALITIES, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE

I welcome this report from the Scrutiny Commission on the important work of the Community Support Hub, now called the Community Support Alliance. As the report sets out the Community Support Hub supported thousands of people across the borough with food and support at a truly awful time.

As we look tentatively to the future we are committed to ensuring that people continue to get support and this is fully coordinated with our community partners and across the council. The report makes important points about ensuring sustainable funding, avoiding duplication and strengthening coordination. As we continue to develop the Community Support Alliance we will ensure these recommendations are taken forward.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the following response to recommendations set out in the Report of the Housing and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission (September 2021) is agreed.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. On 14 September 2021 Cabinet received a report from the Housing and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission following a scrutiny review of the Southwark Community Hub set up in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and resulting lockdowns to support vulnerable residents.
3. The Southwark Community Hub was set up in response to the pandemic and resulting lockdown to provide support for vulnerable residents, including social support and access to essential food and other essential supplies. Initially a local authority initiative in Southwark the Community Hub quickly evolved to become a joint-initiative between the council, voluntary and community sector (VCS) and health providers.
4. Through this partnership, the Southwark Community Hub delivered

significantly more than the basic offer proposed by central government.

5. Support was provided to three core groups:
 - Shielded residents (those clinically extremely vulnerable to Covid-19), including interim deliveries while central government food deliveries were put in place
 - Residents voluntarily shielding or in a group requiring strict social distancing who required support with essential food and other social support
 - Residents vulnerable or food insecure because of Covid-19, including loss of income or requiring additional social support.

6. Operating under a steering group with representatives from the Council, VCS and local health service, and a range of smaller cross-sector working groups, over the period of the lockdowns the Community Hub developed a range of core offers as set out below.
 - **Borough wide point of access** - a Covid-19 emergency phone line and email inbox was provided and staffed by the council, offering a borough wide point of contact for vulnerable residents to self-refer for support or to make a referral on behalf of friends or family. This gave access to a full range of support provided by the VCS, council, health and business partners.
 - **Triage and case-management function** - Collecting contact information and assessing immediate support needs, these joint wellbeing assessments ensured that the most critical information was gathered by the council and partners for any onward referrals.
 - **Proactive wellbeing calls** - outward wellbeing calls were made to all shielded residents. This was supplemented by efforts of partners to contact existing service users and share and rationalise lists of those in receipt of support where appropriate and safe to do so.
 - **Food deliveries** - provision of food parcels was one of the main focal points of the Community Hub, although by no means the limit of the offer. Well over 25,000 good quality healthy food parcels were provided both direct by the council and through 8 local voluntary sector hubs.
 - **Medical support needs** - the partners worked with the NHS, GP Federations and local pharmacies to support the delivery of prescriptions to shielded and vulnerable residents.
 - **Non-medical needs** - beyond immediate food and medical requests, the Community Hub has also retained a focus on social and wider support needs, including telephone befriending and access to debt and welfare advice.
 - **Referral and reporting system** - establishing quick channels of communication VCS and external partners have been critical to the operations of the hub, ensuring that residents can access the support that they require close to home. With central triage and assessment functions carried out at the centre through the single point of access, a simple and quick means of making outwards referrals and linking

residents to neighbourhood food hubs or other local means of support was developed.

7. Since the establishment of the Hub (now Southwark Community Support Alliance) it has provided support to many thousand Southwark residents and delivered over 25,000 parcels of food to those most in need. In total there were over 1000,000 contacts made with residents.
8. Although by no means the limit of the offer, the provision of food parcels has been one of the main focal points of the Community Hub. These were arranged through two means:
 - Direct from the council - over 25,000 food parcels have been delivered by the council directly to residents. Southwark Building Services and other council staff sorted and delivered food packages to residents on the council delivery list. These packages included non-food and non-perishable goods purchased wholesale, supplemented by sourced from New Covent Garden and Borough Markets.
 - Distributed through a network of neighbourhood food hubs - food deliveries were also made through a network of neighbourhood food hubs, spread across the borough: Pecan, Pembroke House, Albrighton Community Centre, Central Southwark Community Hub, St George the Martyr, Time and Talents, Paxton Green and Lewington.
9. These neighbourhood hubs all stepped forward to offer additional support through the crisis and have developed delivery and collection models to distribute food parcels to local residents. The council provided funding, logistics and supply support to these hubs based on local needs and capacity. Individual hubs have also leveraged their own resources and external funding to grow and develop activity, often significantly.
10. The neighbourhood hubs were bolstered considerably by the efforts of regional charities such as the London Food Alliance and Hubbub supporting access to surplus food and fridges, as well as local businesses Fooditude, Bermondsey Employment Skills and Training and London based environmental charity Hubbub who provided access to equipment or cooked meals to supplement food parcels.
11. Through the course of its operation there were a number of other organisations that the council provided bulk food deliveries to. This included TRAs, foodbanks, faith organisations and sheltered housing units.
12. There is a strong geographically based food network on the ground that can reach people. This extended beyond the neighbourhood hubs. Southwark Pensioners Centre, for example, worked with Central Southwark Community Hub to source food parcels and organise delivery via volunteers to older people.

13. During July and August 2020, a partnership Review Group considered evidence and feedback from residents and partners. It made recommendations on lessons learned from this work that were intended guide the work of the council, voluntary and community sector, NHS and wider partners and funders from September 2020 onwards.
14. The speed and scale of the partnership-working involved in the Community Hub response to Covid-19 was unprecedented. Between the Council, VCS and health partners we established: a borough wide front-door for vulnerable residents; a network of neighbourhood distribution centres; new cross-sector referrals routes and data-sets.
15. In addition to this work on the Community Hub, across the borough a new wave of residents responded to the pandemic by offering support locally, whether through traditional volunteering routes or by establishing street-based mutual aid groups, and a swathe of established faith, community and tenants and residents groups stepped forward to help those particularly in need.
16. In many ways, we achieved more together in a few months than in recent years. The review aimed to be an opportunity to build on the successes of this partnership-working to lay a long-lasting legacy for Southwark.
17. It is clear that a huge amount was achieved in a quick space of time to support those most vulnerable through the Covid-19 crisis. There was a strong view of all partners that overall things had gone well and that there was a lot we can build on for the future.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

18. The Scrutiny Commission made two recommendations. These are set out below together with a proposed response.

Recommendation 1 - That Cabinet ask officers to review support available to those no longer accessing emergency support to ensure services are funded and there is no duplication.

19. The Commission's view was that it is important the council supports residents to move on from emergency food support, where this is possible and appropriate. This means that Southwark Council should be offering advice and support on accessing full entitlement to benefits, employment and training support, housing advice, financial planning advice (paying bills etc.), childcare entitlement and immigration advice. If this support is best delivered in the community hub, then the council needs to be developing and funding this service adequately. If support is best delivered via other means, we need to ensure there is a clear triage and referral process in community hubs. With finances constrained, it is important Southwark is not paying/funding this in two places.

Response to Recommendation 1

20. The recommendation is agreed. The review of the community hub also included a recommendation on a putting in place a managed transition for people supported by the Covid-19 Community Hub, stepping down support where it was no longer needed and ensuring people who need ongoing assistance are matched with the appropriate support.
21. This arrangement remains in place for referral and ongoing support and continues to include access to supermarket, delivery slots referral to volunteers or the VCS, financial support and advice, mental health support, befriending and welfare calls where needed. All of the local community hubs that worked with the council on the Support Alliance were provided with funding that included this transitional phase and a number of these changed their mode of operation to focus on longer term more sustainable forms of support and referral.
22. The Community Hub stopped purchasing emergency food parcels in February 2021 and now in emergency situations has the capacity to make one off purchases. Request for emergency food parcels have now stopped and levels of requests/referrals for other services have increased and common referral mechanisms remain in place across the partners.
23. The Southwark Community Support Alliance are also working on taking forward a test-and-learn approach that will target those populations where we know there is the greatest inequality and ensure that we take an experience-based insight and co-design approach with residents to ensure the development of the support offer in one test neighbourhood delivers tangible impact for people's health and wellbeing. The project includes the following work areas:
 - **Transition:** Creating a clear road map to step-down emergency food bank provision and develop whole-neighbourhood offers that incorporate pantries, community kitchens and co-ops.
 - **Neighbourhood services:** Testing new service models that are embedded in community settings (including existing food offers) and that address the root causes of food insecurity, e.g. debt-, employment-, housing-support through wrap-around support.
 - **Neighbourhood front-doors:** Developing social infrastructure in neighbourhoods that provide opportunities for residents to connect and routes into available services.
 - **Neighbourhood connectivity:** Testing new ways of working between health, council, voluntary and community sector organisations/groups and local residents to reduce fragmentation, duplication and improve cross-boundary collaboration to make better use of the skills, resources and energy in local communities.
 - **Sustainability:** Developing longer-term financing plans for neighbourhood models, incl. building on community wealth-building principles to develop new social enterprise models and local procurement options.

24. As set out below the intention is not to duplicate but to unite and add value to existing services more effectively in one neighbourhood.

Recommendation 2 - That cabinet takes steps to ensure duplication is not occurring as a result of new services being provided from community hubs.

25. The Commission's view was that if new services become available in community hubs, Southwark may need to reconsider providing similar services centrally. Conversely, if Southwark has a well-run centralised service, we should be building on that success and not duplicating via the community hubs. Many services have performed better and more consistently when centralised.

Response to Recommendation 2

26. This recommendation is agreed. The Community Support Alliance was Southwark's crisis response unit, established at pace in the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic by the council and partners from across the VCS and NHS. The alliance developed intelligence-sharing mechanisms at record-speed, new neighbourhood distribution centres for food and essential goods, and referral pathways from a single point of access. This enabled a leap forward in collaborative cross-sector working, achieving more in 6 months than the previous 6 years by uniting the existing 'tiers' of support within the borough and coordinating the response.
27. The alliance is now working on the transition of these ways of working from emergency-response to mainstream policy and practice by undertaking a Place-based Test-and-Learn Pilot in Walworth under the new Neighbourhood Approach. This will build on learning from the covid-response and existing collaborative initiatives like the Walworth Neighbourhood Food Model, Walworth Living Room and Aylesbury Kitchen.
28. The aim is to strengthen and expand this work to 'unite the tiers' as set out in the diagram below in a specific local neighbourhood, bringing partners and initiatives together from across the system including central government. The proposal is for existing services, initiatives and networks to work together in neighbourhoods in different ways to tackle the underlying inequalities that underpin and manifest themselves in issues like food insecurity and disconnection, and that left many local residents more vulnerable to lockdown, than the pandemic itself and achieve better outcomes for people and places.

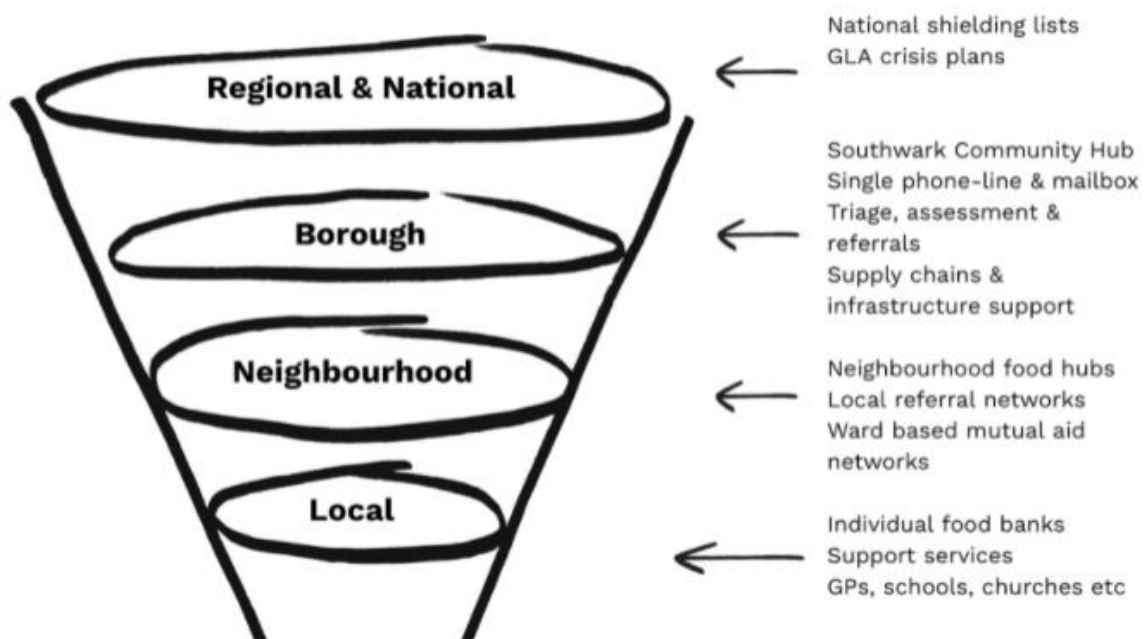


Figure 1 Excerpt from the DRAFT Project Plan for the Community Support Alliance Test & Learn: Walworth Neighbourhood Plan

Policy framework implications

29. The work of the Community Hub, Southwark Community Support Alliance and the test and learn project directly contribute to Southwark Council's Fairer Future Commitments for the following themes:
 - a. Theme 1 - COVID-19 response
 - b. Theme 2 - Southwark Together
 - c. Theme 5 - Tackling health inequalities
 - d. Theme 8 - Thriving neighbourhoods

Community, equalities (including socio-economic) and health impacts

30. COVID-19 continues to impact residents and partners across the borough. As previously noted by cabinet the issues raised demonstrate, the full impact of COVID-19 on the borough cannot yet be known. This will become clearer in the months ahead. Some impacts may not be clear for some years.
31. The work described in this report intends to provide targeted support for those Communities and groups that have been disproportionately affected by the Pandemic.
32. The Public Sector Equality Duty will be taken into account as the project deliver services and responds to the continuing impact of COVID-19 on the borough as well as in planning any changes to operations arising from that impact.

33. A key objective of the project is to learn the lessons of the pandemic and to begin to build neighbourhoods where everyone can contribute and to ensure that services provide a wide provision of support, which is accessible and relatable for Southwark residents that require social and welfare support.

Climate change implications

34. There are no climate change implications to this scrutiny response.

Resource implications

35. There are no immediate resource implications identified in this report.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

| Background Papers | Held At | Contact |
|---|--|--------------------------------|
| Cabinet paper 20 October 2021: Southwark Community Support Alliance Update | Communities Division, Environment & Leisure 160 Tooley Street | Stephen Douglass 0207 525 0886 |
| Link: http://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=302&MId=666 | | |
| Cabinet paper 8 September: Community Hub - supporting the needs of the most vulnerable | Communities Division, Environment & Leisure 160 Tooley Street | Stephen Douglass 0207 525 0886 |
| Link: http://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=302&MId=666 | | |

APPENDICES

| No. | Title |
|------------|--------------|
| None | |

AUDIT TRAIL

| | | |
|---|--|--------------------------|
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| Lead Officer | Stephen Douglass, Director of Communities | |
| Report Author | Stephen Douglass, Director of Communities | |
| Version | Final | |
| Dated | 25 November 2021 | |
| Key Decision? | Yes | |
| CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER | | |
| Officer Title | Comments Sought | Comments Included |
| Director of Law and Governance | No | No |
| Strategic Director of Finance and Governance | No | No |
| Cabinet Member | Yes | Yes |
| Date final report sent to Constitutional Team | 25 November 2021 | |