

Item No. 8.	Classification: Open	Date: 14 October 2020	Meeting Name: Housing and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission
Report title:		Scrutiny Review of Community Hubs - supporting the needs of the most vulnerable	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Stephen Douglass, Director of Communities	

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the housing and community engagement scrutiny commission note the report.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Southwark Community Hub

2. 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.
3. Through this partnership, the Southwark Community Hub delivered significantly more than the basic offer proposed by central government.
4. Support has been 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 require 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
5. 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 lockdown 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 has been one of the main focal points of the Community Hub, although by no means the limit of the offer. Something over 25,000 good quality healthy food parcels have been provided to date 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.
6. Since the establishment of the Hub 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 20,000 contacts made with residents.
7. 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, although by no means the limit of the offer (see below). Broadly, food parcels have been 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 staff have sorted and delivered food packages to residents on the council delivery list. These packages have included non-food and non-perishable goods purchased wholesale, supplemented by two donated Fareshare deliveries per week (150 parcels) and fresh produce sourced from New Covent Garden and Borough Markets.
 - Distributed through neighbourhood food hubs - food deliveries have also been 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.

8. 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 has 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.
9. The neighbourhood hubs have also been 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 have pivoted to provide access to equipment or cooked meals to supplement food parcels.
10. 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.
11. 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. The arrangements set out in this report are intended to provide coverage of the whole borough moving forward.
12. On the 16th June the Cabinet recognised and agreed to continue to support the significant efforts of the Community Hub in assisting the most vulnerable residents during the worst impact of the pandemic. Cabinet requested that a further report on the learning to date and longer term approach be brought back to cabinet for agreement in September 2020.
13. During July and August, 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 has been unprecedented. Between the Council, VCS and health partners we have 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 have stepped forward to help those particularly in need.

16. In many ways, we achieved more together in the past 6 months than we have in recent years. We now have the 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 has been a strong view of all partners that overall things have gone well and that there is a lot we can build on for the future.

The Community Hub Review Group

18. The rapid review group was established in order to hear evidence from partners from across sectors on the response to date and views on priorities for the future of the Community Hub. The review also sought to capture the lessons of the partnership-working to date.
19. A number of key findings have emerged through this evidence concerning the challenges and opportunities facing the borough that have helped to frame the recommendations on the development of the community hub.

Summary of key findings and recommendations of the review group

20. The review report notes that building a longer-term legacy from the community hub means facing a number of challenges. Until there is an effective vaccine or treatment for Covid-19 we need to manage the transition from the currently emergency phase of the crisis through the next phases of lockdown, as well as remain prepared to scale-up activity again based on any future spikes in the virus. The first two recommendations covered this transition period.
21. As set out in the key findings, the review process has touched on a number of wide-ranging issues that will require concerted work by partners over the longer-term. The review group identified a number of these contingencies and makes recommendations for how these areas of work could be aligned with the framework set out for the borough.
22. **Transition Recommendations:**
 - **Recommendation 1 – A Managed Transition:** That all partners put in place a managed transition for people supported by the COVID19 Community Hub, stepping down support where it is no longer needed and ensuring people who need ongoing assistance are matched with the appropriate support.
 - **Recommendation 2 – The Emergency Operating Model:** The council and partners should agree a Covid19 community support plan that sets out the emergency operating model in the event of a further spike in Covid-19 or a further lockdown.
23. **Legacy Recommendations:**
 - (i) **Governing Recommendation: Building a Borough where everyone can contribute**
 - **Recommendation 3 – A new alliance:** The council, VCS and health partners should work together to strengthen and further develop a Southwark

community support alliance. This should be focused on providing social support that delivers long-term reductions in inequality, combining resources, building on the successes of the Community Hub, and founded on the vision, outcomes, principles and framework set out below.

(ii) Recommendations on related work

The issues raised at the review group have been wide-ranging and has touched on a range of issues that relate to work taken forward by other groups and initiatives. Here we set out a range of recommendations that would bring these workstreams into line with the framework and vision of our governing recommendation.

- **Recommendation 4 – Embedding services in neighbourhoods:** Partners should embed access to existing service provision within neighbourhoods. This should include testing new ways of providing housing, employment, skills, money, social care and immigration support in local communities - including testing how support from established public & VCS providers can be made accessible in partnership with local community ‘anchor’ organisations rooted in each part of the borough.
- **Recommendation 5 – Making the Most of Social Prescribing:** Health partners should explore how social prescribing can become a central element of the community support alliance.
- **Recommendation 6 – Building effective referral systems:** The council, VCS and health partners should develop and embed a social support referral system – building on the success of the work Community Southwark have been leading using the Airtable platform.
- **Recommendation 7 – Encouraging and Supporting Volunteering:** The review recognised the significant role that volunteers have played in supporting vulnerable people in the borough. The review group recommends that Community Southwark should work with partners to find ways to celebrate and support volunteering.
- **Recommendation 8 – Aligning plans for emergency food provision:** Partners should work with the Southwark Food Action Alliance to develop a stronger common approach to emergency food provision, including establishing aligned criteria/thresholds, ways of avoiding duplication of service to individual people and shared relationships with food suppliers.
- **Recommendation 9 – Developing a common long-term approach to tackling food insecurity:** Partners should scale up community run low cost food projects - working through the Southwark Food Action Alliance to develop options for affordable food provision that support people’s dignity and independence (including community supermarkets, pantries etc.), linked to the review of the food security plan.
- **Recommendation 10 – Understanding Southwark’s hidden populations:** Research should be undertaken to better understand Southwark’s population who do not have full recourse to public funds – to identify the scale of the

population and the issues they face. Working with the VCS groups that are currently supporting large number of people in this situation to undertake the research.

- **Recommendation 11 – Tackling Digital Exclusion:** There is an urgent need to prioritise connecting digitally excluded people, including identifying how access to devices and data can be improved for people who cannot currently afford them and strengthening digital skills.
- **Recommendation 12 – Supporting grassroots organisations:** Community Southwark should review how capacity building support in the borough can best support the development of Southwark social/ community support alliance together with development/implementation of a formal partnership model of delivery with Voluntary and Community Sector organisations.
- **Recommendation 13 – Leveraging existing funds:** Funders in Southwark and beyond should consider how they can best use their existing resources to support the delivery of these recommendations.
- **Recommendation 14 – Tackling inequalities:** The review group heard evidence on the significant disproportionate impact on some communities. The review therefore recommends that all partners should:
 - Undertake joint work to understand those who were and remain worst affected by Covid-19, for example BAME groups.
 - Improve the way they collect, use and act on data moving forward, covering all equalities groups.
- **Recommendation 15 – Principles for working together:** The partnership should adopt the following principles in working together:
 - Mutuality and reciprocity – people and organisations contributing what they can as well as receiving support when they need it.
 - Co-design – all partners and residents working together to design the alliance and share approaches and tools.
 - Clarity of purpose - working to a clear common purpose.
 - Collective resources – working to make the best uses of the resources we have in Southwark across the system and across all partners.
 - Operations not just strategy – getting on with practical work together across the system.
 - Relationships and communication - a partnership of equals across sectors.
 - Data and technology - Effective use of data and intelligence to achieve more.

Both this and recommendation 16 are key enablers to the longer term approach.

- **Recommendation 16 – Principles for providing support:** The partnership should adopt the following principles for providing support moving forward:

- Mutuality and reciprocity – people and communities contributing what they can as well as receiving support when they need it, and being valued for what they contribute.
- People are fully involved in identifying their needs and planning the support they receive.
- People have the opportunity to build on their strengths – planning of support helps individuals to identify their strengths at a personal and community level.
- People have access to the information, advice and guidance they need to meet their needs.
- People feel that they have access to services and less formal groups that improve their lives and wellbeing.

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Southwark Covid-19 Community Hub: Report of the Review Working Group

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Papers of the review working group	Communities Division, Environment & Leisure 160 Tooley Street	Stephen Douglass 0207 525 0886
https://www.communitysouthwark.org/southwark-community-hub-one-stop-support-during-the-covid-19-coronavirus-crisis		
September 2020 Cabinet report - Community Hub - supporting the needs of the most vulnerable	Communities Division, Environment & Leisure 160 Tooley Street	Stephen Douglass 0207 525 0886
http://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ielistDocuments.aspx?CId=302&MIId=6662&Ver=4		

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Member	Cllr Helen Dennis, Cabinet Member for Social Support and Homelessness	
Lead Officer	Stephen Douglass, Director of Communities	
Report Author	Stephen Douglass, Director of Communities	
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Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments Included
Director of Law and Democracy	No	No
Strategic Director of Finance and Governance	No	No
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