

## **My views on the Department's response to the Covid-19 crisis to date**

**18 October 2020**

### **PREAMBLE**

I am responding as a resident of Golden Lane Estate and community volunteer. I have looked after the community website and newsletter for a number of years. During Covid 19 I implemented the administrative infrastructure for the GLE Covid 19 HUB, which I managed with our resident Councillor. The HUB is GDPR compliant and offers support, advice and protocols for volunteers and connects them with residents in need.

Whilst we all appreciate that these are challenging times, responding to these challenges is a job of work in order to provide a service with professional standards. The general response of the City did not reach those same standards we volunteers set and maintained for the HUB. I was not furloughed and like many people who were lucky enough to keep their jobs, work demands did increase with managing a transition to homeworking and remote communications etc. During this time I felt that in effect I had two jobs, and that my service charge was paying someone to do the work I was in fact doing.

**As a community volunteer I expected to be supported - the efforts of volunteers should complement rather than replace a City of London response.**

### **EARLY DAYS**

In the week before lock down anxiety levels on the Estate were rising and it was obvious something needed to be done. It was clear that residents were being left to self-organise. The HUB was set up and first flyer delivered to residents on **24 March, followed by further flyers on 30 March, 9 April and 20 April.**

### **LOCAL KNOWLEDGE**

Through the HUB communications (email, flyer, phone support and door knocking) we were able to uncover 'hidden needs' particularly around food and internet connectivity. Initially it felt like our findings were denied by the Department, and our on the ground knowledge discounted. There is now some acceptance that there was and will continue to be a Covid related food need and connectivity is a big issue BUT the action required to remedy these problems is painfully slow in implementation.

### **HIDING BEHIND GDPR**

GDPR is designed to protect the privacy of individuals and should not be used as an excuse not to inform residents about what is going on. This is particularly important to stop panic and rumours. If a Covid death happens on the estate then surely residents in that block should be told in a considered formal way, with relevant information about how to protect themselves, be more vigilant etc rather than through a grapevine?

## CITY COMMUNICATIONS

I posted all City Communications on the GLE website as and when they were received, with an overview so residents would know what info they would find behind each link: <http://www.goldenlaneestate.org/page/covid19>

**18 March:** Letter to Community Groups

<http://www.goldenlaneestate.org/page/covid-19-message-to-community-groups>

*'Rather than look to encourage or develop new groups to respond to coronavirus, we are encouraging those that are already organised by local communities for local communities.'*

At the start of the outbreak there were clearly opportunities for the unscrupulous to take advantage of the vulnerable and scared. This note from the City whilst highlighting this didn't offer any points of contact if you thought neighbours were being exploited or where support for existing groups may come from, or even where to find information on public health. Basically not useful for residents, more of a liability reducing exercise for the City.

**19 March:** Letter delivered to all residents

<https://storage.ning.com/topology/rest/1.0/file/get/4178331711?profile=original>

Whilst a useful letter some of the web links were incomplete / inaccurate. I corrected them for the website.

**30 March** Councillors provided with letter to forward to residents seeking advice

<http://www.goldenlaneestate.org/profiles/blogs/covid-19-a-letter-from-the-corporation-to-all-residents>

Whilst the letter contained useful information this put a huge burden on our single residents councillor on how to distribute the information. This should have been delivered in letter form to all residents.

**28 April** Letter to community volunteers re community food based distribution

After sharing the letter with HUB volunteers I felt compelled on 5 May to take the time to respond – something we were invited to do. One comment from a volunteer:

*'I often think GLE would be much better off managing ourselves than folk who don't live here and are so far removed from the realities of our community that they constantly put their foot in it like this.'*

My response was critical of the tone of the letter and the obvious PR wash but I did make constructive suggestions for moving forward. I received no response.

**@Home newsletter** 3 editions: **27 March; 9 April; 7 May** I posted on the GLE website

Key observation: the City must create a regular email newsletter for the Estate. This shouldn't replace other methods but be in addition. I have offered to help on a number of occasions. The community newsletter gets opened by well over 200 residents and here has been little effort made to grow the sign ups.

## **CONTACT WITH OFFICERS**

By April a number of Officers were getting in touch offering help but in reality the help flowed the other way and I was asked to disseminate City communications on the GLE website, in our flyers etc

An example - an Officer sent through emails and websites of a number of companies delivering food, acknowledging that it may be out of date. This was useful but we needed an up to date list with telephone numbers for vulnerable residents with no internet access. Myself and another volunteer therefore had to make our way through the whole list, finding phone numbers and calling them to check their delivery criteria etc. Residents were anxious enough – they did not want inaccurate information. It would have been useful if the Officer had recognised this and done the research themselves.

I would be happy to discuss contact with individual Officers – both positive and productive, negative and undermining, as a follow up.

## **GOING FORWARD**

As a matter of urgency a task force of Officers, our resident Councillor, GLERA representatives and nominated residents should be set up. Volunteers want to understand what is reasonable to expect from the Corporation and the extent of CoL's duty of care to which residents. The City must be more flexible and proactive in its efforts to find solutions. We can then find a way to work together in these difficult times to make sure all residents are offered the appropriate support and information.

Residents are responsive and can feedback the on-the-ground experience, the City should offer timely support, structure, protocols, accurate and properly researched information.

If there is another lockdown the City must liaise more closely with residents affected by the COLPAI construction and come to a reasonable and speedy resolution about levels and duration of noise, or offer respite facilities. It is very clear that residents suffered immensely from the stress of noise, dust and fumes during the lockdown. An open letter to the COLPAI Project on behalf of 30 residents took **over 8 weeks** to get a response.

<http://www.goldenlaneestate.org/profiles/blogs/mental-health-awareness-week-open-letter-to-colpai-project>