

Re. Corporation response to us as a Food Bank:

Unhelpful at best, actively a significant hindrance at worst.

We absolutely recognise that we are a random group of residents who are providing very small service in the overall context of the CoL operations. However, the way that the CoL works (or doesn't work) exacerbates these issues.

1. Refusal to engage in a meaningful way - No one has taken up our offer to visit and see what we are doing and build trust in us.
2. The lack of empowered employees to make decisions at the appropriate level has meant that all petty items have to go all the way up to a senior officer to be resolved.
3. A labyrinth of people to navigate to find anyone who can be of assistance, generally with a negative, inflexible attitude whose first response is always 'No'. Not suitable for a pandemic crisis response.
4. A focus on process for its own sake, with hours devoted to Zoom meetings (where the main point has been to read aloud an email sent the prior week, wasting over 5 man hours of volunteer time with nothing important discussed, much less resolved), allocation of tasks, etc, but no focus on delivery
5. What can be most charitably described as a slapdash attitude towards work. Not answering phones, not replying to messages or emails (or only partially, ignoring substantive issues), conflicting instruction and advice given by people within the same area as well as different (perhaps commissioned) areas, maintenance of drains, etc
6. **One of the most egregious examples is the failure of the Supermarket Voucher Scheme. These were not validated for use before being distributed, therefore people were subjected to the humiliation of being turned away at the tills with full baskets**
7. We have been able to operate successfully because of the support of a network of lobby porters, CPAs, estate office staff and City bin men. They are the heroes.
8. Rules, seemingly for their own sake. Refusal to engage to find practical solutions to substantive issues
9. Patronising and untrusting and obstructing (keys, chaperoning, as well as talking about us, not to us which, shockingly, continues right into our current transition to FLF phase)
10. Not understanding where people are at: please use our fabulous website, internet/ email newsletters . We have volunteers without home internet or smartphones, imagine our beneficiaries.
11. Poor communication, in general.
12. Massive wasting of our time, which is the only resource we have. We dare not think about what more we could have achieved, if we could have devoted that time to forging new partnerships, seeking donations, etc

Positive Experiences

1. The most important is being designated as the City of London Food Hub for the London Food Alliance.

2. Grant funding of £11,000, which has been decided quickly, apparently. We had been operating for 2 months on £500 before the first tranche was received.

This is just an outline list of issues we have faced. Once we have turned over to FLF and have some time, we will be more than happy to discuss everything in more detail.

Re. Corporation response to us as resident volunteers:

1. There has been an expectation that resident volunteers will undertake all work required to look after vulnerable residents. Little support has been given to either the vulnerable residents, or the volunteers. On the contrary, if any vulnerable residents have contacted the Corporation or Estate Offices for assistance, they have been passed straight to the resident support groups.
2. No way to get help with easy things / systems difficult to navigate: for example the government box scheme. Boxes turned up outside the doors of people in Barbican who hadn't registered as requiring them. No way of cancelling them. Some placed outside doors of residents who were living out of London - no way for volunteers or Barbican staff to establish whether they had been incorrectly delivered and whether there were therefore people in need who hadn't received them.
3. Difficulty in contacting Corporation workers except via email. Often issues with tardiness in, or entire lack of, response. Even when phone numbers given, phones were infrequently answered. For example the number of people who came to the door of the Golden Lane Community Centre having been given incorrect information that courses/classes/youth groups were starting at (or needed to be paid for at) the centre. No response when they or we tried to ring to clarify (with the exception of Adult Education who did at least respond to our email).
4. As House Group Covid volunteer organisers of two different blocks on the Estate, we have never been offered any support by the Corporation.
5. As mentioned in point 10 above, the assumption is that all residents have access to the internet. Comments have been made by the Corporation that there has been little takeup of the email 'newsletters' relating to Covid. However, many vulnerable residents within the City Estates do not have internet access or computers. They feel very isolated as no information is given to them - indeed the Barbican Estate Office email has a tag on it requesting that the volunteer neighbours print off a copy for neighbours who may not have internet access. However, it is 20 pages long and mainly has links to other websites for more information on anything. Not helpful for people without internet.