

Summary

The Working Party engaged in discussions on the topics listed below. It was agreed that there was a common underlying issue across all topics in respect of weak communications and that internet/electronic communications did not suit everyone.

1. Food insecurity

Issues

- The need for a food bank during the pandemic and the number of households it served highlighted issues of food insecurity in the City of London. This was identified in a number of different groups of residents.
- The food bank is still receiving requests although it has been closed since before Christmas 2020.
- There appears to be some confusion by recipients of food bank vouchers provided by non-City agencies (e.g. early years) about what to do with them.
- Residents whose distrust of the City Corporation leads them to avoid contact with it.

Recommendations

- Age UK has been commissioned by the Commissioning Team to produce a survey and report on food insecurity. Further actions to be identified when the survey is received by the Commissioning Team.
- The Commissioning Team is investigating ways to address (e.g. food clubs) the relatively high food prices faced by some City residents. A report to Committee will be produced.
- Trust issues and potential barriers to seeking support to be explored. Differing levels of trust by communities in authorities is not uncommon and existing models of best practice in addressing this to be reviewed. Proposals to be co-produced for engaging with communities across the City.

2. Community engagement and volunteering

Issues

- As officers focused in the early lockdown on ensuring proper functioning of statutory services, Community volunteers quickly created their own support networks to address other concerns, including access to food. These worked well but could have been aided by clearer communication channels with the City.
- Queries often required a speedy response and redirection to the correct person, the first time. However, there were many instances where volunteers had to make numerous calls to find the right person.
- It was noted that residents using foodbanks often asked for advice on other matters and volunteers found it difficult to find the right person to address the matter.
- It was suggested that the City Corporation website could be structured better, as there was a perception of it being process and not service driven, ie. it is not intuitive and information, if it is there, is difficult to find.
- Local groups used WhatsApp which worked well. In the East of the City they are generally resistant to City intervention and have volunteer co-ordinators.

- As we exit lockdown, volunteer time is likely to be less available.

Recommendations

- Volunteers would benefit from a City Corporation point of contact and assistance with back office support. This will be important to most efficiently apply potentially reduced volunteer time and should be an important component of a revised emergency response plan.
- The working party is mindful of the importance that the City does not appear to take over volunteer efforts because of the potential requirement for DBS checking if it became a City effort and the trust issue.
- The Chairman had spoken to the Communications Director in respect of City Matters, which had recently revamped its circulation and claims to reach every City resident. This was challenged by some Working Party members living on the Golden Lane estate who no longer receive copies. The circulation was now fortnightly, but copies previously left in public places were no longer being accessed.
- City engagement officers are members of some residents' WhatsApp groups but communication through volunteers is likely to be more effective. The suggested point of contact role could help with communication through these channels.
- Website - the organization and content of the DCCS portion of the web site should be reviewed with resident participation to ensure that it communicates useful information more effectively. The front page of the City's site should have a permanent clear path to resident information.

3. Testing and Vaccination

Issues

- The working party unanimously recognised the importance of testing and supporting those who test positive to isolate.
- The Covid Lateral Flow Test Centre in the Golden Lane Sports Hall caused concern to some residents of the estate as they had no warning and felt that it was wrong to bring potential Covid sufferers into the centre of the estate.

Recommendations

- Lessons be learned from the issue regarding consultation, communications and messaging.

4. Self-isolating

No further comments.

5. Health inequality and support for minority groups Issues

- Some language communities are not reached well with predominantly English language communications.

Recommendations

- Information on services available should be provided in more than English.
- Consider the use of video messaging in different languages.

6. Clinically vulnerable

Issues

- A number of isolated, semi-vulnerable people had been identified by food bank volunteers and expressed their appreciation for telephone calls from the Library service.

Recommendations

- It is important to work to eliminate this isolation. Getting community self-support organisations back in operation should be prioritised.
- Review the commissioned befriending service run by City Connections to determine how it can help in the above action.
- Middlesex St Neighbourhood Watch carry out a number of structured and thorough checks on vulnerable people and might be able to offer advice on good practice.

7. Digital Inclusion

Issues

- Residents' survey (Golden Lane) identified that a number of households did not have access to the internet. As the corporation's primary communications were in electronic form, this was an additional difficulty for those residents.
- Those without school age children had experienced early challenges in accessing dongles.
- Those without internet access did not have the equipment or ability to use it.
- Although the O2 Contract should cover the entire City, it didn't appear to work well on the estates.

Recommendations

- The Committee should review the provision of public internet access.

- The Commissioning Team are collating all digital inclusion offers for sharing with residents.
- Until there is a more comprehensive mailing list other methods of communication should always be available.
- Computer literacy training should be reviewed.

8. Domestic Abuse

Issues

- The Working Party was fully aware of and shared the concerns about under reporting.

Recommendations

- Information on domestic abuse be circulated and as widely available as possible. This is currently being actioned by the Department

9. Carers

Issues

- Support for carers has been challenged by several factors.
- The City's offer is less than clear; City Connections tend to focus on social activities, which are not relevant during a pandemic. There was a request to understand what services had actually been commissioned in the last round.
- The City and Hackney 'Listening Ear' service could take about 2 weeks to provide an appointment.
- Access to bereavement services needs to be within an acceptable time frame.
- The City has been slow to respond to the Carers' organised efforts to address these issues. After a somewhat slow start, the City has provided useful support, particularly in the form of technical support from the library and a small grant for setting up zoom calls for carers.

Actions/Recommendations

- An increased effort is made to discover Carers in the City,
- That a Carers' lead Member be appointed.
- That the City engage more fully in co-production of the services for carers