

Committee:	Dated:
Community and Children's Services	11/06/2021
Subject: COVID-19 Lessons Learnt	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	1,2,3,4,9
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	N/A
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	N/A
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Summary

This report reflects on the lessons learnt for the Department in its response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the related recommendations made by the Member Working Party.

Throughout the pandemic, the Department has continued to deliver its statutory functions and services, while responding to the unprecedented additional demands of the pandemic. This has driven agile and creative new ways of working, many of which have secured efficiencies and will be retained.

The Department has continued to deliver results for new and increased demands as the pandemic has continued and its effects continue, but have learnt valuable lessons from the period to inform that.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Background

1. The Member COVID-19 Working Party considered the departmental response to the pandemic, and made a number of recommendations in respect of the following areas:

- Food insecurity
 - Community engagement and volunteering
 - Testing and vaccination
 - Self-isolation
 - Health inequalities and support for minority groups
 - Clinical vulnerability
 - Digital inclusion
 - Domestic abuse
 - Carers.
2. The Working Party report identified that, across all these areas, a common underlying issue was communication, and that digital forms of communication did not work for everyone.

Current Position

3. This section sets out a response to the recommendations of the Working Party and reflects on some of the lessons learnt during the period of the pandemic.

Communication

4. As noted above, a common theme across all areas was communication. The Working Party also made a specific point about the organisation and the Department's content on the corporate website, suggesting that this should be reviewed with resident participation. It was also suggested that the front page of the City of London Corporation's site should have a permanent clear path to resident information.
5. Some specific issues raised by the Working Party in relation to communication are addressed below. A wider review of the Department's approach to communication activities is being undertaken as part of the response to the Target Operating Model.

Website

6. The departmental pages of the website will be reviewed and revised, with resident input, following our review of communications across the Department, and development of a new approach.
7. Recommendations relating to the front page of the City Corporation's website have been passed to the relevant team.

Communication relating to services

8. There has been a wide range of communication in relation to services during and outside of the pandemic. This includes:
- Domestic abuse: The Domestic Abuse page on the City of London website is regularly reviewed and updated. A range of posters about domestic abuse and available support services are displayed on City of London estates, in

shops and pharmacies and at COVID-19 testing sites. The Department is running workshops for partners and updating a toolkit for businesses to support employees who are working from home and affected by domestic abuse. The City of London Police have created a video raising awareness of sexual violence, with one on the issues of domestic abuse to be released shortly.

- Digital inclusion: Communication has been sent to community partners and key stakeholders providing information on referral routes for eligible residents to access some elements of the Digital Offer, such as the Mer-IT scheme, to provide access to a laptop. A leaflet has also been prepared for residents and for display in public places on the Digital Offer, and this will be distributed shortly.

Digital vs other forms of communication

9. It was noted by the Working Party that digital forms of communication (and indeed service) do not work best for everyone.
10. During pandemic restrictions, increased digital and virtual forms of communication and service delivery became necessary, but it was recognised that not everyone has access, or is comfortable using digital technology. However, some people actually preferred it and would like to see some online access continue – for example, meeting with young people in Children's Social Care.
11. Going forward, we will ensure that a range of information sources and service delivery options are available.

Information in other formats

12. It is noted that there is inconsistency in the production of information in other formats such as 'easy read' versions or translations in other languages.
13. There are good examples of this, such as: City Connections translating some of its information into community languages for residents in the east of the City; a Member preparing a video in Sylheti language about the COVID-19 vaccine; and the development of an 'easy read' version of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Strategy.
14. However, there is not a coherent approach. Following the communications review, the Department will produce a protocol and standard on this issue.
15. A standard addition to webpages has been developed that explains (in a range of languages) how to use the Google in-browser translator on Google Chrome. Though some individual materials have been translated – including a letter for the Square Mile Foodbank – it is recognised this has minimal impact and therefore we need to consider a range of methods to deliver messages to those for whom English is not a first language.

Food Insecurity

16. The report from the Working Party noted that a report had been commissioned from Age UK on food insecurity among older people in the City of London, and that the Commissioning Team were investigating ways of addressing relatively high food prices faced by some City of London residents. Overall, it was noted that potential trust issues and barriers to people seeking support needed to be explored, and that any proposals for engaging with communities across the City of London should be co-produced.
17. The City Corporation has been working across a number of areas to address issues around food insecurity, including working with:
 - First Love Foundation to provide food bank provision to City of London residents. First Love Foundation are a specialist organisation that combine emergency food support with accredited advice services that support people on issues such as debt, income maximisation and other financial matters. Households can be referred to First Love Foundation by City Corporation services and by external partners at City Advice, City Connections and Age UK. First Love Foundation have bid to the Corporation's Stronger Communities Grant Programme for a year-long programme that will provide support to communities including the City of London. This application has been assessed and is presented to Members at this Committee meeting for approval
 - St Luke's Community Centre, which also provides food, advice, and other support for those within its catchment area via agency or self-referral.
 - colleagues at East End Homes to provide further support to residents in the Aldgate area. Scoping is currently underway with East End Homes to explore the potential to provide and resource a 'food club' – a model that sells low-cost fresh groceries. St Luke's also operate a food club which benefits those who live in the north of the City.
18. As noted above, a report was commissioned from Age UK to carry out a piece of work looking at food insecurity among older people in the City of London. The report made a number of recommendations (considered below) but was unable to quantify the scale of need (and hidden need) in relation to these recommendations. Therefore, a pilot may be needed to test approaches to these recommendations and determine the level of need. The range of recommendations will need to be prioritised if they are to be adequately resourced.

Recommendation	Current provision	Response
A 'community fridge' with the aim to reduce food waste	St Luke's Community Centre has a community fridge which is accessible for residents in the north of the City.	This could be considered as an opportunity for the new Portsoken Community Centre. Research suggests that community fridges only truly work effectively when kept at a very small scale for local people. Maintaining a community fridge can be resource intensive requiring a designated person to ensure health and safety requirements are met (temperature, electrical supply, disposal of out-of-date goods, etc)
A drop-in centre for people to come along for a cup of tea and pick up a few long-life basics at cost price	Prior to COVID-19 lockdowns, there were coffee mornings in the City of London (or just over borders) – for example, at Toynbee Hall and at St Luke's Community Centre. Many of these have resumed (or will resume when appropriate).	<p>There is a need for greater promotion of these opportunities (see section on Communication in paragraphs 4 to 15).</p> <p>There will be explorations with providers about whether there is any demand and opportunity at these groups to be able to pick up any basic provisions.</p>
Very basic cooking classes targeted at single older people	<p>The City of London Corporation currently commissions Bags of Taste to provide free cooking classes to residents. At present they are being offered virtually but are normally held in community centres or local locations.</p> <p>St Luke's Community Centre offers cookery classes (for residents in the North of the City of London).</p> <p>There are many free online cookery classes for residents to sign up to via a range of websites for those who do not wish to engage in face-to-face classes in the future.</p>	<p>Discussions are currently taking place with Bags of Taste to deliver a course for over-55s towards the end of 2021 to understand the level of demand and to shape long-term commissioning.</p> <p>When this contract comes up for renewal, the specification could consider offering specific classes to this cohort of the community if needed.</p>

Offer to hire or purchase white goods – such as microwaves	No similar schemes were found locally in relation to the hiring/lending of white goods to enable cooking.	A possible scheme is currently being investigated to be operated through a partner that would purchase (new or refurbished) white goods and gift to beneficiaries, or award grants.
Men's Shed-type club offering a men-only space	<p>St Luke's have a men's club, offering an range of activities for those living in the north of the City.</p> <p>There are other organised club activities in the City of London that men can attend, along with other smaller community-run clubs.</p>	The new Portsoken Community Centre may provide opportunities in the east of the City.
A delivery option for those who are temporarily, or permanently confined to their home	Choice in Hackney is a voluntary sector service that is available to City of London residents with a relevant need. It offers support for disabled people to live more independent lives. Choice staff help with shopping services, gardening, walking, befriending, etc.	<p>Previous commissioned shopping services have not been successful, mainly due to a low level of demand.</p> <p>However, Choice in Hackney is a good, established scheme which can meet the need for shopping when necessary and appropriate. This helps reduce the burden on more informal volunteer networks in the City of London.</p> <p>Generally, voluntary sector provision is more focused on supporting online, telephone and other food shopping services. These are more efficient and avoid some of the issues of a direct shopping service. There are also links to the voluntary sector work around digital inclusion and capacity building.</p>

Community Engagement and Volunteering

19. The Working Party report noted that volunteers would benefit from a City Corporation point of contact and assistance with back office support. This would potentially reduce and make more efficient use of volunteer time and contribute to a revised emergency response plan.
20. The Department is currently scoping work on how we support and build the capacity of the voluntary sector in the City of London, and in particular the volunteer groups that exist. An update paper will be submitted to Committee at a later stage.

Testing and Vaccination

21. The Working Party noted that there were lessons to be learnt in this area regarding consultation, communications and messaging.
22. The communication and messaging around testing and vaccination was very much directed by the NHS, however, it is acknowledged that, in line with some of the points in paragraphs 4 to 15 on communication, local messaging could have been better tailored.

Clinical Vulnerability and Self-Isolation

23. The Working Party report considered the response to those who were self-isolating and those who were shielding due to clinical vulnerability. It noted that it is important to work to eliminate the social isolation experienced by those who may be self-isolating and ensure community self-support. It recommended that the commissioned befriending service run by City Connections determines how it can help and that the Middlesex Street Neighbourhood Watch may be able to offer good practice from the experience of their welfare checks on vulnerable people.
24. Social isolation is an ongoing issue nationally and one which was exacerbated by COVID-19 restrictions, particularly for those who were shielding or self-isolating. The City of London has been committed to taking a number of steps to address this issue.
25. In the Department's work with those who were shielding, people who identified that they felt lonely or isolated were offered weekly befriending calls from library staff (library staff were also making regularly befriending calls to those on the housebound delivery list) and were then transferred over to the City Connections Befriending Service. Not all of these residents felt an ongoing need for befriending, but City Connections continue to provide this service to those who value it.
26. People who are experiencing social isolation generally can also be referred to the City Connections Wellbeing Service and other activities.

Health Inequalities and Support for Minority Groups

27. The Working Party report noted that information on services available should be provided in languages other than English, and consider the use of video messaging in different languages. This is addressed in the section on Communication in paragraphs 4 to 15.

Digital Inclusion

28. Since the start of the pandemic, digital inclusion has become a national issue and concern, especially due to much communication, information and services shifting to a digital channel during the lockdowns.
29. The Working Party report noted that: the Committee should review the provision of public internet access; all digital inclusion offers should be shared with residents; other methods of communication should always be available alongside digital; and computer literacy training should be reviewed.
30. Members of Community and Children's Services received a report on the Digital Offer in March 2021. This offer is wide-ranging and comprehensive and includes: publicly available computers at community libraries; support and training with digital skills through voluntary sector services and our Adult Education and Skills Service; and a scheme to help vulnerable and low-income residents to have a laptop or computer for personal use.

Domestic Abuse

31. The Working Party report noted that information on domestic abuse should be circulated as widely available as possible. This is addressed in the section on Communication in paragraphs 4 to 15.

Carers

32. The Working Party report recommended that an increased effort be made to discover carers in the City, that a carers' lead member be appointed, and that the City Corporation engage more fully in co-production of services for carers.
33. Following a report to Community and Children's Services Committee in January 2021 on the support provided to informal carers, there has been ongoing work in relation to carers, including:
- Appointment of a lead member for carers – Sue Pearson.
 - A workshop held in February 2021, involving carers in discussions on key priorities for work in the Strategy Action Plan. One of the key overarching areas for action was identified as communication and information sharing. This workshop effectively relaunched the Carers Strategy Implementation Group which now has carers as integral members.
 - The Director of Community and Children's Services met with carers to discuss ideas for improved support.

- The Department is currently engaging with carers to identify how we could enhance the existing support offer to carers and pilot enhanced support.
- Part of the City Connections Contract is to expand the reach of support services to carers, and this is ongoing. City Connections have specifically been making a wide range of links in the east of the City to try and reach carers there, and have produced leaflets in community languages.
- Work is underway with the Contact Centre to highlight carers on the system so that information and support can be targeted appropriately and applications for red badges can be streamlined.
- As part of their offer, secured counselling support is available to carers for free through the City Wellbeing Centre.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

34. Strategic implications

The Department contributes to the following Corporate Plan objectives:

- Number 1: People are safe and feel safe
- Number 2: People enjoy good health and wellbeing
- Number 3: People have equal opportunities to enrich their lives and reach their full potential

The issues raised in this report, lessons learnt and actions taken all relate to these objectives, as well as the following objective:

- Number 9: We are digitally and physically well connected and responsive.

35. Financial implications: None

36. Resource implications: None

37. Legal implications: None

38. Risk implications: None

39. Equalities implications

- This report is presented for information and, as such, does not have a specific EQIA attached to it. An EQIA was completed in terms of our initial response to COVID-19 and, where services are introduced, changed or decommissioned, a specific EQIA would be carried out.
- It is well documented that the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have been experienced differently between different cohorts of the community and in different ways in terms of physical, economic, and social impacts.
- This report demonstrates some of the issues faced by different groups within the community and how these are being addressed to ensure that no part of our community is specifically disadvantaged by the effects of the pandemic.

40. Climate implications: None

41. Security implications: None

Conclusion

42. This report updates Members on lessons learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic and the Department's response to it. The report is informed by the work and recommendations of the Member's Working Party established to look at this issue.

43. This report addresses each of the areas the Working Party examined but, as noted, one of the key underlying issues relates to communication. This is therefore a key element considered in the report.

Appendices

- None

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