

SP Site visits Friday 21st April 2023

Background

Poverty reduction is a key priority policy area for the Council. However, the pandemic and subsequent cost of living crisis brought poverty even more to the fore. During the pandemic the council was granted the flexibility to work differently with the local voluntary and community sector. This created an environment where early help and prevention became part of their support provision. These flexible ways of working have been implemented for the work on poverty reduction. The new working arrangements have allowed the council to create and facilitate a Community Partnership Network. This network has enabled the council to ensure the people most disadvantaged and furthest away from council services are able to access support services. The objective of implementing this approach was to model early help and prevention working with the voluntary and community sector.

As the council wanted to continue with the new ways of working to harness the benefits of the partnership environment created during the pandemic. The council has used its grant programme to fund purpose and not the traditional form of commissioning a project. This way of funding has enabled some VCS organisations to continue the ways of working they adopted during the pandemic. The council now provides 20 community infrastructure grants to organisations as core funding.

The Scrutiny Panel looked at the Council's work to reduce poverty in 2022 and heard about the council's aims and planned approach to reduce poverty. At this meeting the Council also outlined its strategic framework to tackle poverty. The Scrutiny Panel agreed to review the Council's Poverty Reduction Strategic Framework after 12 months to see how it was working in practice, the impact it was having and how it was being embedded across council services. This new framework is being used to trail the new way of working and commissioning of support services for residents. In preparation for this 12 month update the Scrutiny Panel decided to conduct site visits to VCS organisations working with the council. The Scrutiny Panel's objective was to see the council's grassroots partnership working with local stakeholders in the voluntary community sector (VCS). Some of the organisations visited have receiving funding.

Site Visits

The Scrutiny Panel decided to visit providers based in the north of the borough to cover a range of community groups living in the borough (including the Orthodox Jewish community primarily based in the north of the borough). The Scrutiny Panel also wanted the services visited to cover a range of support services to get a sense of the impact of the Council's poverty reduction work. The Panel observed 3 types of support services:

- A community shops.
- Advice service
- Holistic support.

The organisations visited were:

- Woodberry Aid - community food shop / advice services
- Chicken Soup Shelter food providers
- Volunteer Centre Hackney - Warm Hub funded by additional government funding to councils.

On the site visit to the three organisations the Scrutiny Panel Members asked 3 questions:

1. Asked about the service / support they provided to the community.
2. What resources or support has helped the organisation
3. The challenges the organisation faces.

In addition to the site visits 2 more VCS organisations attended the Scrutiny Panel's formal meeting on 24th April 2023. The minutes for the meeting can be found [here](#). The organisations in attendance at the meeting were the Chinese Community Centre and H.O.P.E.

H.O.P.E

The organisation started initially as a Youth Club in 1999, H.O.P.E transitioned to a charity in 2021. H.O.P.E diversified its organisation and offered a variety of support services including being a youth group, a community centre (running exercise classes), a foodbank and a food hub. H.O.P.E runs a walk-in based foodbank on Thursdays. In the food network they are the main food hub in the southeast of the borough (They have the largest delivery from the Felix project).

Chinese Community Centre

Hackney Chinese Community Services is a community organisation which was originally established over 30 years ago to serve the local Chinese community. Since then, it has expanded to support the wider East and South East Asian community in Hackney, providing services such as learning, education, health & wellbeing, youth activities and caring.

Site visits to the following VCS organisations:

Name	Address	Type of Provider	Notes from Site visit
<p>Woodberry Aid</p> <p>Host</p> <p>Euphemia</p> <p>Chukwu</p>	<p>Unit A Hartingtons Court Coster Avenue N4 2WQ</p>	<p>Community Food Shop and provide Holistic Support</p>	<p>Offer:</p> <p>They operate a food hub and deliver food parcels to people in the community in need in the Woodberry Down area.</p> <p>Woodberry Aid also provides a befriending service to residents, and they signpost to other support services.</p> <p>The Woodberry Aid community shop is part of the food hub network and operates on Fridays between 12pm - 2pm.</p> <p>About the provision</p> <p>Woodberry Aid is a community shop that was formally a foodbank. Woodberry aid transitioned from a foodbank to community shop with seed fundings from the GLA. The GLA seed funding was created to trail different models of food hubs. The models being trailed were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cash for X ● Community food shop ● Co-op shop <p>From all the pilots the community shop model has appeared to be the most successful.</p> <p>Woodberry Aid opted to trail the community food shop model to operate a more sustainable business model and view this as a business model that</p>

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			<p>would empower residents using the facilities. This model also enabled them to help a wider range of residents to get access to food for a fraction of the cost.</p> <p>Woodberry Aid moved from the foodbank model because they found it was very restrictive in terms of the distribution of food (it was by referral only) and with the number of residents they could support (they served a limited number of people). Woodberry Aid identified that the need was great within the community and that many people in work were falling through the gap in provision. In addition, the food donated did not meet the needs of the community they served (Black and Global Majority).</p> <p>The Community shop model also enables Woodberry Aid to provide culturally appropriate provision that serves the black and global majority community without the stigma (within the community) of accessing foodbanks.</p> <p>Woodberry Aid is staffed by volunteers, many of whom started out as beneficiaries too.</p> <p>What has helped the organisation</p> <p>The service users accessing the food hub are asked to pay a contribution of £5. Through this small contribution the customers accessing the shop can feed their family. This provision gives service users so much more for</p>

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			<p>their money. This income is part of the funding used to purchase culturally appropriate food for the black and global majority community.</p> <p>Although the service provision is not a foodbank they still rely on donated food. Local workers in the area have donate food too. However, the donated food does not cater to the cultural needs of the black and global majority community e.g. yam and plantain (it was pointed out that purchasing a yam alone from the Dalston Market would cost £5-7 pounds).</p> <p>Through their work with the council and observing the network they identified that a lot of people were falling through the gaps in services. Pointing out just because a person was working did not mean they are not in need. The Panel was told that it is not just the people on benefits that need support.</p> <p>The Council provides the organisation with core funding and having access to the community partnerships network has helped the Director of the organisation to create partnerships and source additional funding to cover areas like culturally appropriate food, but this needs regular funding to be sustainable long term. Working in partnership has allowed them as an organisation to increase their reach and do more.</p> <p>We learnt that within the black and global majority community there is</p>

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			<p>stigma with accessing a foodbank and some people feel ashamed going to a foodbank. Adopting this model has helped to serve more people in need within the community.</p> <p>With the GLA support Woodberry Aid transitioned to a community shop. The GLA and council support has enabled the organisation to ensure their provision represents the needs of the local community in Woodberry Downs.</p> <p>The features of this service delivery model have been successful because it provides a variety of choices to service users and enables them to feed their family. This model has also helped to reduce waste.</p> <p>Woodberry Aid has found the community Infrastructure partnership network (facilitated by the council) helpful to VCS providers to come together to share skills and develop partnerships. Woodberry Aid have benefited from buddying, sign posting and working with public health, through this network.</p> <p>Challenges</p> <p>A large proportion of the beneficiaries are from the black and global majority communities so having culturally appropriate food is critical to meet their needs. Notwithstanding culturally specific food is very expensive and not easy to source, having a donation from service users</p>

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			<p>accessing the shop allows them to purchase culturally appropriate food. But the problem of not having sufficient food levels remains and the organisation is aware that more sustainable funding for the long-term provision of culturally appropriate food is still required.</p> <p>The premises occupied by Woodberry Aid are not permanent. The organisation only has access to indoor facilities to store the community shop food. The shop for customers is set up outside the store premises. As witnessed by the Panel the organisation must manage the weather conditions that day. Even though it was raining we observed people queuing from 11am despite the shop not opening until 12pm.</p> <p>The supply of food is not guaranteed so Woodberry Aid has volunteers who shadow service users to mitigate against excessive greed and to ensure the equitable distribution of food. The Director monitors the stock levels regularly and if stock gets low, she will reduce access to the most vulnerable.</p> <p>The organisation has had its share of funding challenges. The organisation must be very flexible and adaptable to respond to its own changing circumstances related to funding. Although the key challenge for the organisation is sustainable funding. The organisation moved away from being a foodbank to a community shop so it could be more sustainable and empower residents. Woodberry Aid receives funding</p>

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			<p>from the council (this is nominal) and income from the service users' donations. However, despite this they still need to seek out additional sources of funding to top up. As a small organisation sourcing and applying for additional funding can be time consuming. The Director explained that she works 7 days a week writing bids, monitoring, buying stock, attending meetings, and writing reports to demonstrate the impact of their work.</p> <p>The shop is located on the border of the borough with Haringey and Islington. The shop does get some residents from neighbouring boroughs but most of the service users accessing the Woodberry Aid community shop are Hackney residents. However, it was confirmed that no support is provided from the 2 neighbouring boroughs.</p> <p>As a community shop the data collection is not rigid and they do have some people who just want to shop and go. Where service users provide their details Woodberry Aid notes their needs and current situation. The traditional forms of monitoring (i.e. counting the number of people through the door) is not relied upon. So, if a person does not want to give their details (this could be a person with no recourse to public funds) it does not prevent them from accessing the shop. However, this can result in more stock being given out than is recorded but the Director uses a ratio to work this out. This model is the only model still operating.</p>

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<p>Chicken Soup Shelter</p>	<p>116 Bethune Road N16 5DU</p>	<p>Food Partner https://thechickensoupshelter.org/</p>	<p>Offer: Breakfast and evening meal available drop in 6 days a week. Meals are also prepared and distributed to elderly and vulnerable.</p> <p>Low-cost shop - reduced prices for those in need, families in difficulties e.g. following a bereavement have their shopping paid for them.</p> <p>About the provision The organisation opened in 2003 and introduced breakfast in 2007. The provision offers people in need a shelter and has increased its provision to include a low-cost shop.</p> <p>The food hub offers breakfast daily and, in the afternoon, they package meals for families with young children going through hardship and deliver these meals. This service also gives out Shabbat meals on Friday for the weekend.</p> <p>The service is not just about the food but also about the social aspect for the beneficiaries. We were told that some beneficiaries are not in the best of health and one beneficiary reported that since he eats breakfast daily his medication works better.</p> <p>The service aims to give people a place to go and some routine to help them return to work and engage with society. This service is open all year round with no closure.</p> <p>The organisation diversified its provision and increased the provision in response to the needs of the community. Four years ago, the organisation</p>

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			<p>opened a shop on West Green Road for families to shop in. The shop provides all essential kosher goods at lower cost (particularly kosher food) than the mainstream supermarkets. The shop provides products a third cheaper in response to the current cost of living crisis. The objective is to help families buy food at a more affordable price so they can access their kosher food (this is more expensive). It was pointed out that most of the kosher food comes from abroad like Israel, France and America. The cost of these products has increased significantly in the current economic climate.</p> <p>The shop is used to support people in the community with their weekly shop. They provide a preloaded monetary value card to shop in the shop. For families going through hardship who have been referred by the Shoals or by organisations, from their soup kitchen and through the shop. Other beneficiaries can be orphans too.</p> <p>The shop does not provide food at a reduced cost. They keep the cost of the food low by having a low mark up on the sale price. This is approximately 10-12%. It was pointed out that usually a shop will have a 35% mark up on the products sold. The markup is used to cover the operating costs such as rent, staffing costs etc.</p> <p>The shop is open to all the communities in the locality.</p>

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			<p>What has helped the organisation</p> <p>Their aim is to reduce poverty within the community, and they get help from the council toward the work that they do. The council's funding helps with the family support contributing to the distribution of cards (pensioners and families with young children).</p> <p>Challenges</p> <p>Since the cost-of-living crisis, they have noticed more families coming for help and they are working families.</p> <p>For families assessed as in need they give them a card with an allowance for their weekly food shop. The cost of their weekly food is covered by the organisation for a period of time. This can vary from 1 week to a few months. They recognise that people will spend more if they are not paying for it themselves, so it is still their responsibility to buy within their limit. If the weekly limit is exceeded, they must find the balance.</p> <p>The Jewish high holidays (Passover) are a very expensive time for a family in their community. At this time of the year for the people using the shop they give them discounts.</p> <p>There are approximately 120 people accessing daily food and over 200 families (costing approximately £700,000 a year) use the cards for their weekly food shopping. This number of families in need increases to</p>

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			<p>approximately 400 families during the high holidays season. Therefore, they source additional funding through fund raising activities in Central London (private donors from various sources). Fund raising is a continuous activity throughout the year to ensure they have enough funding to run the services. They keep the cost of overheads as low as possible.</p> <p>The weekly allowance given to families is monitored and if they are allocated a specific amount but spend less it does not roll over to the next week. Equally if the allocated allowance is not spent, they will notice that too. If this is the case, they will make contact and go through a reassessment to see if they still need the support. They also review their purchases to see if they are purchasing essentials or not.</p> <p>The cost to run the service has increased significantly. When they opened approximately 20 years ago the organisation provided 1 meal a day and was staffed using volunteers. But the volunteers did not always come in on time and people would be queuing for food. So, they transitioned to operating with paid staff (a cook and assistant).</p> <p>The organisation is open to exploring working with partners like public health as the previous organisation talked about.</p>

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Stamford Hill Community Centre Community Space on Southern Housing Stamford Hill estate		Food Distribution, Warm Hub, and Holistic Support https://www.vchackney.org/our-place-2/	<p>Offer: A welcome space with Our Space Groups. This operates on a Friday between 10-4pm.</p> <p>About the provision</p> <p>This was a warm hub providing a space for people to keep warm during the winter to reduce their high energy bills. This warm hub also provides residents in the local area with a place to meet each other and get support to do activities. They have volunteers who come and do activities with the people attending the centre. E.g. They have a volunteer in a wheelchair that does seat exercise every 2 weeks, so they try to encourage everyone to get involved.</p> <p>This provision started in January 2023 as a warm space. They have approximately 40 people per week. Open from 10am-4pm. They sign-post to other support services within the local area. The service is open to anyone. Some people come from 20 minutes to 5 hours but on average they stay for 2 hours.</p> <p>What has helped the organisation</p> <p>This service received some funding from the Government's Warm hub grant.</p> <p>A worker / volunteer used her contacts with a charity in Islington and they now receive food every week. This enables the people who attend to go home with a bag of shopping.</p> <p>Challenges</p> <p>The Warm Hubs only received £2000 per organisation through the Government's initiative to support residents. But the challenge with funding can be the amount of data that is being asked to collect in</p>

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			<p>proportion to the level of funding. They also provide vouchers to people which allows a small amount of data to be collected.</p> <p>To keep the momentum going once the warm hub project ends and to help residents make sustainable connections and keep the enthusiasm for the projects going.</p> <p><i>The warm hub was in operation when the Scrutiny Panel Members visited, and they spent time talking to individuals at the centre.</i></p>