

Finsbury Park Ward Partnership Meeting Minutes

Location: Zoom Meeting
Time: 6.30pm-7.30pm
Date: Thursday 12th November 2020
Chair(s): Cllr. Mick O'Sullivan
Councillors and Speakers: Cllr. Mick O'Sullivan, Cllr. Gary Heather, Cllr. Asima Shaikh

Present: Cllr. Mick O'Sullivan (chair), Cllr. Gary Heather, Cllr. Asima Shaikh, Terry Conway (Mutual Aid), Lucy Bingham (Holloway Neighbourhood Group), Katy Porter (Manor Gardens Centre), Talal Karim (Finsbury Park Trust), Majida Sayam (Jannaty), Halaleh Taheri (Middle Eastern Women & Society Organisation), Wezenet Haile (Community Language Support Services), Ruth Clarke (F.P. women's network) Minutes, Dominique Fitzpatrick FPWP Coordinator (LBI), Kevin Turner (VCS team, LBI)

1. Welcome, introductions, apologies and housekeeping

Councillor Mick welcomed all attendees, explained the format for the first ever virtual online meeting and asked attendees to share their contact details within the Zoom chat.

2. Minutes of last meeting

Chair and attendees agreed last minutes.

3. Focus on the FPWP voluntary sector response to the Covid-19 crisis –Feedback and Discussion.

Terry explained that there is some co-operation with The Hive food bank at St. Mary's Ashley Road, N.19 and that they are planning special activities during Christmas week. Elizabeth House in Hurlock Street, N.5 is also providing food parcels. The Finsbury Park mutual aid group has in the past been well supported and people have delivered medicines, shopping and toys. There are fewer helpers (particularly car drivers) but the need is increasing. The council has helped with publicity and also with co-ordination between mutual aid groups in different wards; there have been a number of meetings to facilitate this.

Manor Gardens ran a food distribution service from the end of March until September, in co-operation with groups like Bright Start. **Katy** will talk to Colin

Adams, with a view to working in partnership with Brickworks over future distributions. They have also worked with partners like Healthwatch to promote the benefits of flu vaccination and iCope on mental health support (iCope still have capacity).

Lucy reported that HNG have focused on mental health support. They have used the government's covid response funding to enhance the counselling services offered by The Stress Project, and these have been well used. They have offered a telephone support service, and elderly and isolated users have received regular telephone calls. There have also been various online classes, including writing, mindfulness, art, yoga, and digital inclusion. Access to services, especially for those without ITC skills, is nevertheless problematic.

Halaleh added that MEWSO staff like HNG have continued to offer legal and welfare advice (in English, Farsi, Arabic and Kurdish). They have also supported increasing numbers of women experiencing domestic violence. There have been online sessions on subjects like story-telling, mindfulness and English conversation, and they have piloted a befriending project. They continue to campaign on issues like polygamy.

Jannaty have focused on mask making 1000 masks free. **Majida** also reported that they have worked with Healthwatch to educate clients about the importance of flu vaccinations.

Talal, now working part-time at Finsbury Park Trust, has focused on developing the story writing skills of local school children, as part of the EU Erasmus project; this work has been constrained by the lockdown and he will be seeking an extension. Muslim Welfare House distributed meals during Ramadan and the summer months, and Talal would like the Trust kitchen to be refurbished to facilitate cooking lessons. A youth project is under consideration, possibly working with Outlandish to develop digital communication skills.

Ruth informed that they have been working with a network of local womans groups as advice and support work is important in keeping residents involved. Also will be attending a community meeting regarding the HMP site and its requirements and on the 10th Dec 2021 a meeting regarding vaccinations too. Currently their sewing/garment project is closed although prior to closure many masks were also made to distribute to the community and we are crying out for publicity resources such as 'on your doorstep'.

4. Councillors Finsbury Park Ward updates

Councillor Mick confirmed that the Friday afternoon distribution of food parcels from the Andover community hub continues, with FoodCycle preparing vegetarian

meals on Saturdays. Demand is increasing whilst donations are going down, so there is a need to supplement the supply.

The councillors are able to allocate limited funding to projects in the ward (Local Initiative funding). In the past they have supported an annual seaside trip organised by the Andover community hub. **Gary** suggested that, since there was no trip this year, the funding could be used to support the food bank.

Councillor Asima, Executive Member for Inclusive Economy, reported on other developments in the ward:

a) We need a meeting to progress the Sewing & Garment making project.

However, the Fashion Center retail outlet in Fonthill Road has opened and Majida and two Andover residents have been accepted as designers. It would be helpful to have publicity leaflets from the council ready for distribution on the estates when the lockdown eases.

b) The tech co-operative Outlandish, is jointly funded by the council and the Greater London Assembly to support community members to develop IT/digital skills.

c) The council has been working with Muslim Welfare House to build trust with the businesses on Blackstock Road, reduce crime and support the single men from North Africa who congregate on the street. Two MWH outreach workers are addressing housing, immigration and employment issues, in conjunction with the council's iWork team and Adult & Community Learning. (Sadia from the Arab Advice Bureau used to work with the women from these communities and it was suggested that Jannaty might take this work up at some stage in the future.)

d) Following the "road rage" murder of a delivery driver in Lennox Road, the council has encouraged workers in the gig economy to join the IWGB union to enhance their security and working conditions; the union now has a desk in Blackstock Road.

5. AOB - Any other business

Wezenet reported that CLSS staff have continued to provide support and advice to vulnerable clients throughout the summer, initially face-to-face but currently on the phone and via WhatsApp. They have assisted Healthwatch with research into clients' response to the pandemic, as well as offering advice in community languages about the virus. Online exercise classes have continued, and some clients and staff are still making masks!

Councillor Gary convenes the Andover Steering Group, and he reported that work is about to start on the 42 new homes in Phase 1 of the estate new build project. The council is proceeding with traffic reduction schemes around four schools in the ward, starting with Grafton in December. Following complaints about ASB in the Nag's Head area (largely disturbance from delivery drivers during

anti-social hours), the councillors convened a community meeting and an action plan has been formulated. Meanwhile the owners of the Nag's Head covered market have submitted two new planning applications; the councillors are anxious to ensure that the current inclusive and affordable retail offer is maintained. Finally, improvement works to Isledon Gardens are planned by the council.

Councillor Mick suggested establishing a WhatsApp group to continue to keep in touch. The food bank also needs strong bags; there is money for fabric from Cllr. Rowena Champion, Executive Member for Environment. He also asked about the Manor Gardens Toy Project and **Katy** confirmed that they still have a small supply. **Majida** confirmed that Jannaty could make bags, and also help with the distribution of masks and information leaflets.

Councillor Asima asked about the finances of the community hubs. She thought it possible that organisations in difficulty might investigate business support grants, or perhaps discretionary grants available for the period of lockdown (charities that are trading, perhaps by running a café, might qualify). She thought that Voluntary Action Islington or Cripplegate could assist with informing local groups.

Lucy commented that community hubs were open between July and October, focusing on socially distanced and online activities. She thought that their finances would be OK in the short term (covid response grants help) but that there could be a "cliff edge" in March. Smaller organisations have found it harder to get money; the council has offered discretionary grants but communication about these needs to improve. (**Kevin** undertook to ensure that there will be better communication in future.)

Katy added that need is increasing, people's problems are more complex, and not everyone is able to access the support on offer. In addition to this staff have worked through the summer and many are worn out.

Councillor Asima noted that central government grants tend to be made available at short notice, which makes communication with groups difficult. Groups need to be vigilant – and also be able to produce their accounts in order to be able to qualify.

Talal suggested that leisure groups might qualify – perhaps this could be investigated.

6. Close and final remarks

Councillor Mick O'Sullivan thanked all for attending the meeting and the VCS continued support within FPWP and all agreed the meeting had been useful and helpful regarding the FPWP C19 response.