



TO COUNCILLOR:

S S Athwal
M L Darr (Chair)

R V Joshi
C A M Walter

And To Whom It May Concern

I invite you to attend the following meeting to consider and discuss the items on the agenda below.

Meeting: Community Engagement Forum
Date & Time: Tuesday, 14 November 2023, 1.30 pm
Venue: Microsoft Teams
Contact: Mark Smith (Community Safety & Youth Officer)
t: 0116 257 2675
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Yours faithfully

Council Offices
Oadby
07 November 2023

Anne E Court
Chief Executive



Meeting ID: 2561

ITEM NO.

AGENDA

PAGE NO'S

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- 1. Apologies for Absence**
- 2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting**
- 3. Introductions and Updates from Partner Agencies**
- 4. Any Other Business**

3 - 7

5. Date of Next Meeting

Tuesday, 13 February 2024 – 1:30pm – Venue TBC

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Agenda Item 2

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FORUM HELD AT COUNCIL OFFICES, BUSHLOE HOUSE, STATION ROAD, WIGSTON, LEICESTERSHIRE, LE18 2DR ON WEDNESDAY, 1 MARCH 2023 COMMENCING AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT

S Z Haq Chair



Meeting ID: 2292

COUNCILLORS

J Kaufman

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

B Clark-Monks Selective Licensing Team Leader
M Smith Community Safety & Youth Officer

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE

L Monk Leicestershire County Council
N Swan Helping Hands Community Trust

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

M Flynn – Leicestershire County Council

2. **MINUTES OF LAST MEETING**

Minutes of the Previous Meeting, held on 15 November 2022, were declared true and accurate.

3. **COST OF LIVING CRISIS**

The Council has developed a dedicated Cost of Living page on its website provided a wealth of advice, support, and information to residents of the Borough. This page also provides details of the Warm Hubs that are operating in the Borough, and information for businesses that are also affected by the Cost of Living Crisis.

The Council has allocated £110k in their Discretionary Housing Payment budget to support households during the Cost of Living Crisis.

People already in receipt of Council Tax support will receive an extra £25.00 off of their bill.

Household Support Fund – Operated by LCC and currently remains open.

Dedicated Financial Inclusion Officer, Chetna Solanki-Mistry, is available to be contacted to discuss / apply for grants that are available through OWBC, LCC, or other external sources the Council is aware of.

Cllr. Kaufman queried how busy Helping Hands have been in relation to residents

approaching them for support with the Cost of Living Crisis. It was noted by N Swan that many of these individuals are not aware of the support available to them, and many note a perceived stigma for asking for help with money, food parcels, etc. Helping Hands are represented at the local food banks and are able to engage with residents there successfully. Helping Hands as a service are promoted via a website, social media, posters, flyers, and attendance at various clubs and activities across the Borough.

Helping Hands were directly thanked for their linked in approach to the food banks, making it easier for residents to seek advice and support from the service.

Oadby Food Bank has had to limit its remit to Oadby residents only due to increased demand from outside of the Borough. They are working in tandem with other foodbanks however to signpost individuals to relevant support within their own area, and to avoid overlapping with other services. Roughly 1/4 of food bank attendees in Oadby attending after traditional working hours, highlighting an increase in employed individuals who require food parcels. 37 adults, 42 children have been supported by the food bank. The majority of Oadby Food Banks funding and food comes from donations from the public, although they also have a paid subscription to FairShare who provide food donated directly by supermarkets including fresh fruit and veg. The food bank has also received grant funding.

The Chair queried the community make-up that attends the food banks, and access Helping Hands, who both noted that the background of individuals is very mixed. Helping Hands provides a breakdown of this information to the Council's SLT on a regular basis. South Wigston residents make up roughly 40% of those approaching Helping Hands, but this percentage is decreasing as people from other areas in the Borough approach the service.

Individuals can self-refer to the Food Bank or Helping Hands, or are referred to them by other agencies where appropriate.

Helping Hands note a very good relationship with the Council's Housing Team and the Financial Inclusion Officer.

A barrier to support was identified as a 'digital necessity' to access support via the internet, either through a computer or smart phone, which has been known to exclude some elderly individuals who are perhaps some of the most in need with support. LCC's Household Support Fund has been noted as an example of this, requiring several steps to be completed online in order to access the fuel or food vouchers that are available through the scheme. Helping Hands offer face to face 'clinics' for individuals to support with this.

A number of Helping Hands volunteers have been trained to undertake benefit checks which may highlight help and support available to individuals who could claim them but aren't.

4. COUNCIL TAX

Oadby & Wigston Council Tax will be going up by a total of £7.61 per year, an increase of 2.99% for a Band D property. LFRS will be raising their Council Tax precept by £5 per year, and the Police by £15 per year. Leicestershire County Council will be raising their precept by 4.99%, an increase of £72.50 for Band D property per year, with a meeting to be held to set this next Wednesday (22 Feb). This increase also covers Social Services in Leicestershire.

Oadby & Wigston's Council Tax rate is still the lowest in the County due to not having any Parish Councils within its boundary.

Previously Central Government provided 70% toward the costs of service provision for local government, but this no longer exists with local Council's required to foot 100% of the costs. For Oadby & Wigston this was a reduction of £2million.

The £2million reduction seen by the Council is a 25% reduction in the Council's annual income. Inflation on top of this further compounds this issue.

North West Leicestershire DC has not increased their Council Tax this year due to having built a large number of new housing developments, bringing additional income to the area.

OWBC has previously frozen Council Tax, but has had no choice but to raise Council Tax for the coming financial year due to the reduction in increases. The Council is currently using its reserves to fill in the shortfall in income, which has been supplemented by the income from car parking.

5. ELDERLY AND YOUTH ISSUES

The primary issues facing young people in the Borough currently are the lack of youth provision and mental health, which are seen as national concerns. Both of these issues were amplified immediately following Covid-19, with a significant number of the Borough's already limited youth provision closing down, and all young people having faced disruption through the temporary closure of schools. The Council's Community Safety & Youth Officer has drafted a Youth Engagement Strategy for the Council, covering a five year period, to address these concerns as well as develop 'Youth Voice' work in the Borough, ensuring that young people's views on matters that affect them are given appropriate weighting through consultation, and the redevelopment of the Council's Youth Council. This strategy is being updated with the newly released 2021 Census data before being submitted to the Council's PFD Committee for consideration and adoption. One of the longer term objectives proposed in this draft strategy is the election of a 'Youth Mayor' for the Borough who will serve as a first citizen for young people.

Elliot Hall and Oadby Youth Centre are the only two remaining 'generic' youth provision, with Elliot Hall attracting around 60 young people per week. Elliot Hall has seen an increase in young people self-harming and now has a volunteer counsellor attend the provision to provide support. Elliot Hall is also developing a football project with Leicester City, and a graffiti project with Network Rail. The majority of Elliot Halls funding comes via subs and grants. A National Lottery grant has recently been submitted to boost the funding available.

Youth buses – both no longer operate due to costs. LCC and Reality Youth Project.

South Wigston young people are at risk of being tarred with the same brush due to ASB and drugs issues.

The Council has recently undertaken a closure order in Blaby Road, South Wigston following intervention by the Council. Any other intelligence received by the Council and Police will be acted upon. Groups of young people gathering outside Milners, wearing balaclavas, have become an additional concerns.

Concerns were raised around two betting shops in Oadby Parade that are offering "other items". It was suggested this is reported to the Council's Licensing Team, and to the Police where appropriate. This will be reported currently through the Police's Intelligence Portal.

Elliot Hall currently offers 14 groups, with 4 new groups coming after April. 2 of these are youth work sessions, there is also a young carers group run in support with Young Leicestershire. An SEN group will also be starting up on a Saturday morning, which counsellors and youth workers will be facilitating. Staff at Elliot Hall have also received training on transgender issues. The majority of projects offered at Elliot Hall are 'hands on' including crochet, woodworking, etc. There are concerns that once funding runs out these individuals will disengage from Elliot Hall. All staff at Elliot Hall are volunteers and do not charge a wage.

Concerns were raised around a 'vigilante group' of sorts that has formed in Oadby following a spate of burglaries where young people are being photographed and their images shared online.

Supersonic Boom – A desire amongst attendees to see the event return; this is preferred over a fair on Blaby Road Park due to the risk of damage to the park surface.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Louise Monk – An overview of the LAC service was provided to attendees, and how the LACs can signpost to / provide support with initiatives run by other organisations in the Borough. LACs also refer into the Warm Homes Scheme which can provide heated blankets etc. in regards to the Cost of Living Crisis. L Monk also provided details on a language group that is being set up to aid in communication in the Borough, including with other services where forms etc. may be required to be filled out.

Oadby Youth Centre – A compulsory purchase order is rumoured regarding the building. Nothing will be progressed with this until an alternative venue is available for the youth club.

Kings Coronation – Oadby Library is thought to be arranging an activity during the coronation weekend. L Monk is seeking funding support for this. The Council is planning additional events for the coronation in all three town centres. Elliot Hall will also be doing activities over the weekend. Rob Helliwell was noted to be the lead officer for the Council regarding coronation events.

Baldresh – Initial concerns with the parking charge scheme in the Borough, particularly Oadby. Costa Coffee were offering reimbursement for parking fees with the purchase of a large coffee, but trade in Oadby centre has decreased from the perception of business owners. The price of parking being cheaper with the purchase of an annual permit is not evident to members of the public, and the online form is difficult to navigate for some. Support with this form is available by contacting the Council's Customer Services Team. With the annual ticket being cheaper there is a perception from some people that they 'have to' use it, which encourages more footfall in the area. Information regarding the parking charges and permits should be included in the Council Tax letters being sent out by the Council this month, this would be a huge help in spreading the word to the Borough's residents. Oadby has a higher occupancy rate for businesses than the national average, with shop units rarely being emptied for extended periods. Councillors are awaiting a report on footfall comparing before and after car parking charges.

Oadby Business Group – Setup during Covid when a lot of support was available for businesses, and have now extended into Oadby, with businesses supporting each other through signposting etc. Grants and support funding for businesses has evaporated now, with very little available. The main barrier to this again is the time required to sit and fill out the necessary forms to access available grants etc. Additionally the current work by Severn Trent in Oadby is having a significant impact on trade in Oadby, with no compensation thought to be offered by them. The Council believes that compensation should be available from Severn Trent, with a pot of funding thought to have been allocated for this purpose.

Helping Hands – The Council’s former Customer Service Centre in Bell Street, Wigston will be opening in July as a Community Hub, hosting a number of local organisations and support groups such as the NHS’ Social Prescribers, Helping Hands, etc. 10 different community groups are looking at operating out of the hub once open, with Turning Point already offering services from the building on a Saturday morning. By sharing the same space the ability of services to support and signpost is increased, and costs are lowered for each of them. An open day was held in December 2022, and the mailing list developed following this open day received an update email this week. The Council’s SLT are being kept updated on the progress of this project.

THE MEETING CLOSED AT 8.17 pm