

FRONTLINE SERVICES IN ILFORD



The goal is to understand, and better support, vulnerable people in the Ilford area. The challenge is to get ‘frontline’ services talking better to each other, those developing strategic thinking in Whitehall talking better to each other, and frontline and centre talking better to each other. Relationships are in place that help, for example, a Domestic Violence Unit to engage with other teams. But at other times, linking a person to the help they need can rely solely on an individual’s proactivity, the breadth of their own professional networks, and the time, patience and energy to make the necessary telephone calls.

Ellie, on secondment with the Home Office’s Strategy team, took the initiative to arrange an event for frontline teams in Ilford and central Government Departments. The aim of the event was to increase understanding of where an intervention could really transform a vulnerable person’s life and circumstances, and to form links with a view to better sharing of information. Her motivation for this was that she had seen first-hand the effects of working in silos on individuals, where often the required intervention came too late.

Ellie made a list of all the frontline services in Ilford she knew about, and of relevant central Government Departments. She populated the list with contacts she had built up over the previous 18 months and rang up other teams to find out who might be interested in attending. In all she issued over 100 invitations. 60 people attended, from central Department strategy teams, Home Office, Dept of Health, DfE, DCLG, and DWP, and frontline workers on housing, community safety, employment, child protection, youth offending, schools, social services, mental health, fire, immigration enforcement and the police.

The day was organised to discover what multiple strategy teams having conversations with multiple frontline workers could yield, specifically for citizens. It opened with perspectives from a borough commander working with the private sector on safeguarding, the Head of Community Safety in Ilford, and the Director of Strategy and Transformation at the Home Office. The bulk of the day was spent in world café format based around case studies of individuals commissioned by Ellie from her contacts in frontline teams. The author of each case study facilitated a table conversation introducing and talking through the life story of a vulnerable individual showing how they had got to the situation they now found themselves in. The participants round the table then discussed the what points where there could have been an intervention that could have made a key difference. The participants then moved to another table to discuss another case study.



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Participants found a conversation centred on the story of a particular individual, where the person telling the story knew the individual, powerful and thought-provoking - much more so than simply reading about them. It reminded frontline staff of real clients and prompted thoughts on possible action in relation to them which might lead to better outcomes.

All of the delegates came together for a summary discussion at the end to reiterate the actions to be taken forward.

Challenges and Solutions

The invitations to the event were well-received both by teams in Ilford and central Government. 100 invitations generated 60 attendees. Ellie wonders whether 300 invitations would have made the day even more worthwhile, since both time and resourcing were a challenge to all concerned. Time to attend: participants said they had a better understanding of all the different teams involved, their thinking had been stimulated, and they had a desire for more regular information sharing, but would the demands of the job allow time for this sort of event more regularly? Time and resource to organise the event: it was a big job to organise it, particularly identifying all the relevant teams, and Ellie regrets not being able to capture and disseminate more of the outputs from the event.

The overall benefits as explained by delegates were:

- Insight into other teams and services, strategic direction, and funding constraints
- Encouragement for future partnership working and networking
- Great to share ideas and have the opportunity to make things work better for the borough
- The need highlighted for better information sharing and recognition that other organisations were often best placed to deal with residents.

Taking it forward in Ilford (next steps)

- A further focus on a joined-up person centric approach, adopting a place-based approach needs further work, but seeds have been sown and delegates welcomed the opportunity
- Focus on prevention, and understanding various services on offer (achieved on the day), to avoid passing vulnerable people from service to service
- Practitioners called for clearer, more aligned escalation pathways for individuals and more broadly for Personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) to start in primary schools.



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Taking it forward more broadly

The Home Office strategy team were encouraged by the event and is keen to help the parts of the Home Office sector working with vulnerable individuals to think about operating differently to improve decision making and acquire additional tools to create better outcomes for vulnerable citizens. From December 2017 events are taking place, initially in Exeter and Manchester, bringing together representatives from the police, fire service, health services, charities, and academia to come up with better ways of supporting vulnerable members of society.

Empower your employees to follow through on their ideas.

For those working in complex, multi-disciplinary, services:

- Try something similar!
- Get a better understanding of causes and effects of life choices, develop knowledge and insight, and then the money to get real joined-up evidence
- Make a concerted effort to really focus on prevention
- Establish “purposeful activity” for people and ensure it exists systematically, not just in pockets
- Aim to make people self-sufficient rather than keep “propping “ them up.

