**FINAL REPORT   
The One Norbiton-RBK Trial of**  
**Community Halls’ Administration.**

1/1/2019 TO 1/1/2021

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**SUMMARY**

At the start of 2019 One Norbiton undertook a two-year trial to explore the value of a Community Group looking after the three Norbiton Community Halls on behalf of the Council.

During 2019 the overall use of the three Halls significantly increased and there were over 15% more bookings by new paying organizations. During this first year there was also an associated rise in income for RBK which came to £ 25,801.99 i.e., (over £5,000 more than the contractual payment of £19K paid to One Norbiton.) There was also a marked rise in ‘free’ use by RBK Officers thanks to the new ease of access. If this had charged for it could have generated a further £800 of income.

Nearly all Users twice reported high satisfaction levels with the service. Furthermore, One Norbiton met all its social targets and provided new opportunities to the disabled and disadvantaged on the estate to undertake rewarded Volunteering close to their homes. Thus, by all criteria during this first year, this trial was highly successful.

Unfortunately, it was clear that most of this success had been achieved by an unsustainably heavy workload. One Norbiton realized that if it was to continue into 2020, it needed to reduce the specified hours and to pay for extra help. However, the RBK contract that had been constructed by officers previously doing the job, specified that the recompense for 2020 should be *reduced* to just £9,547.96. Senior Officers and Councilors agreed this was unfair and should be changed.

In the event, the contract could not be changed but at the start of 2020, the Covid pandemic intervened and prevented any further letting of the halls but One Norbiton continued its supervisory role in these very stressful circumstances on the presumption that a revised contract was in place. The trial then came to an end on

1st January 2021.

Our conclusions are that to allow not-for-profit Community organizations to manage Community Halls could be very beneficial for residents and users. Furthermore, the Borough budget for this activity could be reduced by as much as 60%. However, to set contracts with unrealistic hours and attempt to use volunteer goodwill to reduce costs as low as 20% of current rates is not viable.

**Aims of the Trial**

In January 2019, at the invitation of RBK, One Norbiton began a trial to test the idea that a Community group could successfully run the Council’s Community Halls. Our aims were to see if we could

a) increase their use and

b) reduce their chronic cost-deficit to RBK and

c) extend their role in community support e.g., by affording part-time employment opportunities for volunteers

**Progress of the Trial**

In 2018, prior to drawing up a Contract, we had regular meetings with Theresa Meyers to set up the trial. Because this involved ensuring the proper use of public money, this needed to avoid any local political objections. Therefore, One Norbiton took the title of “Administrators” rather than Managers and, as this was to be a short-term *trial*, we were not obliged to put the contract out to tender.

Before starting we were required to set up a separate “Hall’s bank account” and a “Stripe” payment system and a new on-line booking system linked to our website.

**Contract Pricing and Hours**

RBK officers, previously managing the Halls, decided that the hours to be worked and pricing of the trial contract was not to be based on its previous budget of £50K+ per annum. Instead, the various council employees who had previously doing the job each worked out what proportion of their time and salary the Halls management involved. Apparently, the total amounted to less than £20k p.a. However, they also decided that the contract should require One Norbiton to work many more extra hours than they themselves, had been working. The final contract was constructed by adding in these extra hours yet leaving its pricing at less at £20k then £10k p.a.\*

*\* One Norbiton’s recompense was calculated on a completely new basis: in 2018 Halls management was being done by four different RBK officers working on four different pay grades viz £25,746 p.a., £23,00 p.a. and £47,100 p.a. These officers declared they were covering the whole 365 days of the year by working only 101 days of it. i.e. 12 days, +73 days, + 8 days + 8 days. Thus, the sum of only £9,887.94 p.a. was offered to One Norbiton to do all their tasks (and more). This represented a huge reduction of 66% from the published previous budget. However, the contract also provided an additional £10k in 20019 to assist the recruitment of local volunteers. Understandably, One Norbiton assumed that about £20k would be provided for each of the two years representing a big but manageable cut of 60% off previous year’s budget. We later were to learn that we were to be paid only 9,887.94 in 2020 (a cut of 70%.!) As if not bad enough the hours required to be worked by us were increased to 365 day DAILY on-call presence including weekends and evenings and had to respond within 15 minutes, do hazard management, promote Hall use, Monitor User satisfaction, maintain user databases, Liaise with RBK staff, Stock check and order furniture, ensure appropriate use of storage space etc. etc. and these extra tasks were not to be covered by any extra funding*

**Did we Increase Hall use and User Satisfaction?**

The numbers of new organizations booking Halls increased by at least 15%. We did two formal measurements of user satisfaction with our services and all, but one user scored us as an improvement on previous management.

**Workload**

In 2019 One Norbiton found that its three paid staff “rewarded volunteers” required 216 Days per year, just to cover the Weekdays and this did not include the weekend requirement even though as word spread about favorable rates for children’s parties, the Halls were used more and more by residents at weekends. i.e., our work time was 100% more than the predecessor RBK officers.

**The Social Impact of the Trial**

The bulk of the work of administration of the Halls was done by one resident rewarded volunteer, Jill Preston, who is registered disabled. She was extremely stressed by the volume of work required to do a good job. Two other residents helped by looking after the three Halls also for small rewards that did not interfere with their eligibility for benefits. However, to relieve the burdens of our principal worker, we found two suitable and reliable resident young mothers prepared to work on a rewarded volunteer basis and in February 2020 we met with the acting Head of Housing and Councilor Emily Davey (Portfolio holder for Housing) to discuss recent revelations that our contracted fees would be reduced by 50% and requested them to grant us a reasonable increase in fees and modification of the hours we were required to work. Both accepted our arguments and agreed to alter the contract for 2020 so that we could engage our young mothers. We agreed to continue working if our contract could be altered on that basis. However, this agreement was completely overruled by Nazeya Hussain (Executive Director of Place) on the grounds that it would be ‘too difficult to change contracts mid-term.’

Since we could no longer afford to engage new support, we would have had to withdraw from the trial in Spring 2020. In the event the Pandemic rendered all this unnecessary because after the Covid lockdown all Hall lettings ceased. (Piper Hall has since been kept open solely for CREst and One Norbiton to provide hot meals to the local indigent and to act as a Food Bank outlet.) This might have temporarily solved the problem of unreasonable working hours but has prolonged the hall supervision situation. Of course, given the national crisis, we have continued to look after the Halls’ safety in the knowledge that the contract had been changed.

**Our Financial Performance for RBK**

In 2019 the HALLS EARNINGS ROSE BY 48.25% to £24,379.84\* compared with £16,445.30 in 2018 i.e. £7,934.54 extra.

However, there was a BIG rise in non-paid use of the Community Halls throughout 2019 by RBK and Polling staff the Enterprise Club etc. This “free use “amounted to 684 hours or £13,680 in lost earnings at our standard hourly rate. Allowing for only £6,840 (50%) of this to be included, then a fair estimate of 2019’s earnings would be £30,000. Thus, One Norbiton’s 2019 performance registered an 80% rise: earning the Borough £13,554.7 extra.

**One Norbiton’s own Costs in 2019 (NB separate from Halls costs)**

Outgoings for ON Office costs: Internet service, Mobile and Land-line Phone service, Insurance, Computers, and other equipment office cleaning etc. As well as Direct Rewards and Pension reserves to Volunteers came to £18,216.

In 2019 we received payment from RBK of £19,094.96 so we were able to add to our reserves however in 2020 the RBK payment was halved to just £9,547.96. This projected a deficit of £8,669. In retrospect, we should not have accepted this as it may have set a precedent that might disadvantage other voluntary groups attempting similar work.

**Final Comments**

This was a successful trial. It is sad that some of the RBK officers who advised on it should have thought that it was in the public interest to frame our original contract so unfairly. The danger now being that the net outcome could be a decrease in community trust at this crucial time when residents are being threatened with the stress of regeneration. The development of effective collaborative relationships between volunteers and RBK officers remains an important challenge that has yet to be adequately met.

Regeneration will require the integration of new owner-occupiers with our existing resident population. If this is to “Level up” and improve community spirit, then maintaining a good Halls Service could become a prerequisite.

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**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This trial was the initiative of Cllr Emily Davey, Liberal Democrat portfolio holder for Housing.) who was very supportive throughout its duration. One Norbiton worked with Senior Officer Theresa Mayers to set it up. We worked well together establishing the on-line booking arrangements and the Skeeda System for handling the fees. Theresa provided day to day RBK management, and she played a considerable part in its success. It should be noted that her time has not been included in these costings