

Operation and Function of the Hillingdon First Card



Report of the Corporate Services & Partnerships Policy Overview Committee 2011/12



Members of the Committee

Cllr Richard Lewis (Chairman)
Cllr Michael White (Vice-Chairman)
Cllr Beulah East
Cllr Neil Fyfe
Cllr Robin Sansarpuri
Cllr Raymond Graham
Cllr Shirley Harper-O'Neill
Cllr Richard Mills



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Chairman's Foreword

This Council's Hillingdon First Card was introduced to provide our residents with a privilege card to enable them to get preferential parking rates and discounts in local shop and businesses within the Borough. This has of course been extended to act as a library card and to give our resident's access to the Council's Waste Centres.

The Card has been hugely successful and very popular amongst residents. Our review provided an opportunity to revisit some of the functions and operations of the Card, and to look at any areas which could be improved to enhance the use of the Card.

The review found that the time was right to re-promote the benefits of the Card, and to have a re-look at the business element of the scheme, recommending minor amendments and suggestions for officers and our business partners to jointly work on.

I would like to sincerely thank the witnesses who gave evidence to the Committee and to the officers who so ably supported us during this review.

I am pleased to submit the review's recommendations to Cabinet for its endorsement.



Councillor Richard Lewis – Chairman of the Corporate Services & Partnerships Policy Overview Committee

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "R.A. Lewis".

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RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1: That the Council's webpage for the Hillingdon First Card be redesigned during the general redesign of the Councils' public website.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Officers investigate the use of notice boards around the Borough, such as in town centres, shopping areas, sports centres, libraries to publicise the Card and the businesses which were part of the scheme.

RECOMMENDATION 3: That a re-promotion of the Business Directory part of the scheme take place, with officers working closely with the Hillingdon Chamber of Commerce.

RECOMMENDATION 4: That when undertaking their annual review, Drek Associates be asked to investigate whether businesses on Industrial Estates, self employed businesses such as plumbers, electricians, painters and decorators etc, could be included in the Hillingdon First Card scheme, and report back to the Cabinet Member for Improvement, Partnership & Community Safety.

RECOMMENDATION 5: That officers be asked to investigate whether the Borough's estate agents could be asked to provide home buyers and people looking to rent within the Borough, with information on the Hillingdon First Card scheme.

RECOMMENDATION 6: That officers be asked to look at businesses having the option of promoting offers, rather than discounts as part of the business element of the scheme.

RECOMMENDATION 7: That Hillingdon Chamber of Commerce be requested to consider using their Members' pages on their website for the promotion of the Hillingdon First Card.

RECOMMENDATION 8: That officers, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Improvement, Partnership & Community Safety be given flexibility on the ideas and suggestions on promoting Hillingdon First Card, to ensure that these added value and were contained within existing budgets.

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RECOMMENDATION 9: That officers be asked to look at introducing Quick Response (QR) codes on marketing material to increase the profile of Hillingdon First Card. This could include the use of QR codes on public notice boards, libraries and sports centres.

BACKGROUND

The Hillingdon First Card was launched in June 2009 and the Card gives residents of the Borough preferential rates for Council parking and leisure facilities, access to libraries and the Council's Civic Amenity sites and offers discounts in local participating businesses.

From December 2009 to February 2010 a survey of residents was carried out which looked at how residents used the card and what they liked and did not like about the scheme. The findings of the survey were that overall residents liked the Hillingdon First Card, with the Council being praised for listening and looking after residents. However there were comments that there were not enough businesses involved in the scheme.

The review used the data received from this survey of residents as a starting point to look at the operation of the Hillingdon First Card and to look at further ways of promoting the benefits of the Card for residents of the Borough. Included in the review was a look at increasing the number of businesses who were part of the scheme which would benefit residents, and also benefit those businesses financially.

The review was undertaken during difficult economic times and therefore it was an opportune moment to explore possible measures which could be introduced with the Hillingdon First Card which would provide extra help to both residents and to local businesses.

The review was carried out with the understanding that any recommendations to Cabinet for any possible enhancements or additions to the card, would involve no additional extra costs to the Council. In addition, any possible enhancements and additions to the function of the Card, should not involve any cash handling due to security issues this would raise.

OBJECTIVES

To review the operation and function of the Hillingdon First Card and to look at other possible areas and opportunities for the Card, which would further increase the success of the Card for residents, and also for those businesses who were part of the scheme.

The **Terms of Reference** of the review were as follows:

- To examine the operation of the Hillingdon First Card since it was launched in June 2009.
- To review the services which the card is used for and to analyse data on usage of the card.
- To examine the possible expansion of the card into other areas, particularly in relation to businesses
- To investigate the uses of other multi-application local authority smart cards and whether there were any uses which Hillingdon could consider
- To explore with the Borough's Chambers of Commerce, local businesses, residents' groups, national companies and public utilities how the Hillingdon First Card could be used to help local businesses and residents during these difficult economic times
- To review the publicity for the Hillingdon First Card, particularly in relation to local businesses who provide discounts
- To explore with the business sector the concept of a business to business card which could provide discounts for businesses
- To look at further ways of modernising and improving access to Council services through further utilisation of the Hillingdon First Card
- To make recommendations to Cabinet based on the outcome of this review with the proviso that any proposals maintain the simple card administration and avoid any additional capital expenditure

Supporting the Cabinet & Council's policies and objectives

The purpose of the Hillingdon First Card is 'First for residents, first for business, first for Hillingdon' which is central to this Council's vision.

To achieve the above objectives, Members held three meetings on 18 January, 6 February and 20 March when background reports and evidence were received to help Members in formulating the review's findings.

The information, evidence and findings of the review are set out in the next sections.

INFORMATION AND ANALYSIS

The Committee's first meeting took place on 18 January 2012 when the Committee was provided with a presentation from the Council's ICT Strategist on the background to the Council's Hillingdon First Card Scheme.

The Purpose of the Card and why was it introduced?

The Council launched the Hillingdon First Residents' Card in June 2009, giving residents preferential parking rates and discounts in local shops / businesses (over 335 outlets around the Borough).

The Card also acts as a library card and gives residents access to the Council's waste centre. To be eligible for a Card a person needed to be a Hillingdon Resident, aged 18 and over, although drivers who were 17 years old could also request a card.

Hillingdon's First Residents' Card is the most extensive multi-application local authority smart card in the UK and one which other local authority's used as an example of excellence. The Card has won and been shortlisted for several awards which included:

- Local Government Chronicle ICT initiative of the Year Award 2010
- British Parking Association Innovation Award
- Government to Citizen Award 2010
- UK Ceed National e-Wellbeing Award

One of the main reasons for introducing the Card was to give residents greater satisfaction and a sense of belonging and a buy-in with the local community. From the findings of the Hillingdon First survey in February 2010, residents were full of praise for the Council for listening to and looking after residents by providing the privilege card.

Residents found that it was convenient having everything on one Card. The original publicity for the Card was very effective, as there was a high awareness of the Card. 42% of people who had been spoken to as part of the survey had recognised the Hillingdon First Card posters on the J C Decaux boards and about a third had seen articles in Hillingdon People.

More than half the residents spoken to, used their card more than once a week (61%) and of those, 84% used it when parking. This was very impressive.

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Other reasons for the Card's introduction included giving privileged rates to local residents for parking and leisure services, helping to promote local businesses during a difficult economic time, the promotion of 'well being' through increases in leisure facility and library usage, modernising and improving access to Council services

The Committee was informed that the tag line for the Card was 'First for residents, first for businesses, first for Hillingdon' and the Committee felt that this summed up perfectly the intention behind the Card.

How does the scheme operate?

The review was informed of the technical detail of how the Card operated.

- The card was a MiFare 4K Classic contact-less multi-application smartcard which had a small chip, segregated into pre-defined sections or 'applications'.
- The card chip contained data in each section that allowed access to a service. For example the parking section application communicates with the parking machine, via the card reader, to authenticate access to the tariff.
- The cards were encoded to a Local Authority Smartcard Standards e-Organisation profile which meant it was inter-operable with other Local Authority cards
- Overall scheme management was carried out using the ONYX Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. This system had an interface with the library system and dedicated card management system.
- Requests for new cards, replacement cards and to cancel cards were carried out via the CRM. This could be done by residents online themselves, through the contact centre by phone or when visiting a library.
- There was also a dedicated Card Management System called Smart Connect that issued the card numbers, card history, stored the encoding data and processed the 'hot-list' of cards reported lost/stolen.
- Other systems linked to the Card Management System and involved in the scheme were the leisure management system and the parking management system.

Implementation of the Scheme

As parking is a key application of the Card, and potentially every adult resident is a car driver, it was important to ensure all residents were either

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sent a Card or had the opportunity to apply for one before parking rates increased. The merging of Council Tax and Library records created an initial data set of 143,000 residents.

The review was informed that the Council's data controller had advised that the use of the electoral register would breach the Data Protection Act because most residents when returning their electoral registration forms, opted not to allow their details to be used for other purposes.

The existing library membership number was switched by overnight interface on the library system to coincide with the delivery of the Card. This ensured the Cards would be recognised when presented at libraries.

The Council's card management system had a hot-list of stolen / lost / cancelled cards that it communicated to the parking system which was communicated to each parking machine daily.

When a Card was used for a parking transaction, the place, date and time of its last use was written back to the Card to prevent more than one customer using it.

Usage and the success of the Hillingdon First Card

The Committee was made aware of the wide usage of the Hillingdon First Card scheme from its introduction to the start of the review:

- 130,800 residents had presented their Hillingdon First Card to a card reader which represented two thirds of the adult population of the Borough
- 3,685,000 times a Card had been used for preferential parking rates at Council car parks
- 785,000 times a Card had been used in a library
- 154,000 times a Card had been used to access leisure services since April 2010
- 255,000 times a Card had been used to access civic amenity site

Outcomes and Benefits to the Council

The Committee was given a brief summary on the outcomes and the many benefits to the Council of the scheme which included:-

- Local branding and sense of local identity
- Increased parking revenue (increase in usage among non-cardholders as well)
- Free Christmas Parking in Uxbridge for Card Holders (flexibility)

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- Efficiencies through combining existing card schemes (Library + Leisure)
- Reduction in landfill waste
- Modernising access to Council services – 24/7
- Solar powered parking equipment which has reduced the use of electricity
- Improved quality of data for the Council's customer relationship management
- Scheme designed for resident self service online – low annual cost to run with few resources
- Supporting local businesses during difficult economic times
- Directory of 335 local business contacts that the Council could access
- Infrastructure in place to add more Council services and applications at low cost as and when required

At the first meeting of the review it was acknowledged that the Hillingdon First Card had been introduced for Hillingdon residents and that this should remain the main focus of the Card. The Committee noted from the outset that there would be no scope for extending the scheme to non-residents of the Borough and this included employees of businesses within the Borough.

To assist Members during the review they were provided with details of the survey which took place on the Hillingdon First Card in February 2010, and information on a similar scheme which was operated by Bracknell Forest Borough Council. For the final witness session, the Committee was provided with a presentation which had been provided to Bracknell Borough Council by Synthaeum Ltd, on Mobile Apps in relation to their privilege card.

EVIDENCE & ENQUIRY

For the witness sessions held on meetings on 18 January, 6 February and 20 March 2012, the Committee received evidence from:

- Darryl Wallace (ICT Strategist – ICT, Highways and Business Services, LBH)
- Ozan Hassan (Customer Focus Project Officer, LBH)
- Emma Hallett (Marketing Consultant – Drek Associates)
- David Holdstock (Ex Head of Corporate Communications, LBH)
- Mike Langan (Chairman of Hillingdon Chamber of Commerce)

Promotion and publicity for the Card

The Council's previous Head of Corporate Communications provided the Committee with the background to the consultation which took place before the Hillingdon First Card was introduced, together with details on the publicity campaign around the scheme.

In 2007 the Council undertook formal and informal consultation with residents and local businesses to find out views on a residents' privilege card. Three focus groups were held to see what the Card should offer, what the Card should be called, its appearance and so on. This gave residents an input into the design and shape of their Card scheme.

There was a three phased marketing and promotional campaign for the card.

Council's Public Website

Reference was made to the Hillingdon First Card's webpage on the Council's website, which provided residents with details of how to apply for a card, managing the card, how to use the card and also details on the Hillingdon First Directory. This was an interactive site but the review was made aware that the Council was in the process of redesigning its public website, and this could present an opportunity for officers to have a look at the design of the Hillingdon First Card web page.

The website could include further information on the many benefits of the Card, together with updated information on businesses which accepted the Card and the offers / discounts which were available.

<p>RECOMMENDATION 1: That the Council's webpage for the Hillingdon First Card be redesigned during the general redesign of the Councils' public website.</p>

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Members discussed with the Head of Corporate Communications other options which could be used in a re-publicising of the Hillingdon First Card. The Committee noted that any suggestions for the re-promotion for the Card, would have to be, as far as possible, within existing budgets, and be subject to there being value added to the scheme.

Re-promotion of the Card

A simple and effective way of promotion of the Card could be the use of a poster campaign, using the many notice boards around the Borough. There were notice boards in town centre and shopping centres throughout the Borough, as well as within Council facilities and establishments such as libraries, sports and leisure centres. A poster campaign could include information about the Card, together with details of the businesses who were part of the business element of the scheme.

Information on businesses participating in the scheme would remind residents of the many benefits which the Hillingdon First Card offered them, as well as showcasing those businesses who took part in the scheme.

Reference was made to the three phased marketing and promotional campaign which took place when the Card was introduced. The Committee felt that the time was now right to re-promote the Card and to keep residents up to date with the benefits of the Card.

In addition to using notice boards, reference was made to a leafleting campaign, which could include libraries, sports centres and shopping areas. The Head of Corporate Communications reported that marketing material had previously been sent to all signed up businesses but there had been varied levels of usage of this material and this could be an area which could be revisited.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Officers investigate the use of notice boards around the Borough, such as in town centres, shopping areas, sports centres, libraries, to publicise the Card and the businesses which were part of the scheme.

Business Element of the Scheme

The Committee received evidence from Emma Hallett, Marketing Consultant of Drek Associates who were responsible for the recruitment of business members to the scheme.

The business element of the scheme was introduced around the time of the down turn of the economy, so the recruitment of businesses had proved

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challenging, due to businesses trying to maintain their turnovers. However, the flip side of this was that residents did look at the benefits which the Card brought, to find the best value deals and offers which were out there. Ultimately this would benefit some businesses.

Businesses were included in the Hillingdon First Card scheme to get residents to shop locally, which would be beneficial for local traders, and hopefully for residents.

A Hillingdon First Card Business Directory was produced as part of the scheme. This was welcomed by residents as the Directory provided details of the 330 plus local business that offered discounts and offers to residents.

It was acknowledged that further work should be carried out on the Directory to enable residents to find out where the latest offers and discounts were and to have a re-look at the categories which businesses were put into. This work could take place in consultation with Hillingdon Chamber of Commerce and could be tied in with the redevelopment of the Council's Hillingdon First Card web pages.

RECOMMENDATION 3: That a re-promotion of the Business Directory part of the scheme take place, with officers working closely with the Hillingdon Chamber of Commerce.

Drek Associates, from their research, found that in these challenging economic times, residents would look for some benefit in owning the Hillingdon First Card. Predictably the major use of the Card was for discounted car parking charges, and this was hugely successful.

Of the current uses of the Card, the use of the Card by residents in local businesses was the least used. This did not constitute a failure as the business element of the card was not the primary use of the Card, but it was acknowledged that further work could take place around this area to increase usage for the benefit of residents, and local businesses.

In relation to businesses that were part of the scheme; the Committee was informed that they were generally appreciative of the initiative and many would like to support it. However, some businesses held back from either committing to a fixed term incentive or giving a too good an incentive, as this may only be giving a benefit to existing customers. This would not attract additional business or footfall to compensate for the loss profit from discounts given. In the present economic climate, this was even more of an issue to local businesses.

An area which the Committee felt could be looked at could be linking the business element of the Hillingdon First Card scheme with Council wide events, such as family fun days which took part throughout the Borough. Local businesses could be showcased, which could possibly increase the footfall for these businesses. Linked into this could be the organisation or promotion awareness days to jog residents' awareness of the benefits and uses of the Card.

The Committee was informed that Drek Associates had spoken to over 1,000 Hillingdon businesses and of those 1,000, over 300 businesses in the High Street, trading areas and small shopping parades had signed up to the scheme. This was classed a successful return by the review and the work of Drek Associates was praised by Members.

Reference was made to a previous review on the Borough's Industrial Estates and it was felt that this could be an area of opportunity to get those businesses involved in the Hillingdon First Card scheme, as some of the businesses supplied goods and services to directly to residents.

Another possible area which could be given consideration was self employed businesses, such as plumbers, painters and decorators and electricians, who lived in the Borough. These businesses were not part of the Card scheme, so there could again be opportunities for these small businesses and for residents of the Borough.

Self employed businesses such as driving instructors could also be a possibility and could be included in Drek Associates' planned work on the possible recruitment of self employed businesses within the Borough.

<p>RECOMMENDATION 4: That when undertaking their annual review, Drek Associates be asked to investigate whether businesses on Industrial Estates, self employed businesses such as plumbers, electricians, painters and decorators etc, could be included in the Hillingdon First Card scheme, and report back to the Cabinet Member for Improvement, Partnerships & Community Safety for any decision</p>

Business owners' comments on the scheme

Business owners overall made positive statements about the scheme but there were also some negative comments. These included:

- There was a need for the continual promotion of the scheme
- The internet was important but many business owners recognised that customers responded best to visual promotions in shops

- In many businesses total flexibility of offer was needed to reflect changing economic times and seasonal footfall
- Some businesses on the Borough's boundaries had expressed concern that their existing customers from adjoining local authorities were aggrieved at not receiving discounts and they may decide to shop elsewhere

The representative from Drek Associates reported to the Committee that as part of their annual review they could have a re-look at this area. Within the existing budget and resources there could be further opportunities to raise awareness and appreciation both for the businesses and residents

The Committee explored other possible areas of the business element of the scheme such as whether the Card could be applied to businesses such as insurance, car breakdown services, driving instructors and estate agents.

The advice given was that generally national businesses such as Insurance Companies, motor vehicle breakdown services were generally not receptive to joining the scheme because the Card would result in regional differentials in terms of price. This also applied to national chain stores, such as the many retailers in the Borough.

Another possible avenue of information could be the Borough's Estate Agents, supplying new home buyers and people renting property in the Borough, with information regarding the Hillingdon First Card scheme. This could be supplied in their sales and lettings packs.

RECOMMENDATION 5: That officers be asked to investigate whether the Borough's estate agents could be asked to provide home buyers and people looking to rent within the Borough, with information on the Hillingdon First Card scheme.

Hillingdon Chamber of Commerce

Mike Langan, Chairman of Hillingdon Chamber of Commerce, provided the Committee with his organisation's perspective and view of the Hillingdon First Card in relation to the business element of the scheme.

He reiterated the comments made by the representative of Drek Associates that the businesses which were part of the Hillingdon First Card scheme were mainly High Street businesses.

He agreed that there should be a further drive to get more businesses involved in the scheme and he endorsed the suggestions made by Drek Associates to achieve this.

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Reference was made to the Business Directory which he said was a very useful tool but further consideration was needed on the categories which businesses were listed under. This would make it easier for residents to identify all businesses who were part of the scheme, as it was not always clear.

Under the present economic climate with local businesses struggling, the business discounts which the Hillingdon First Card offered, did not suit all businesses and a request was made for some flexibility on this. Consideration could be given to changing the emphasis from discounts to offers, which would bring some flexibility for individual businesses, and possibly entice more businesses to get involved in the scheme. The present discounts given, did not generally give local businesses financial benefit, as the residents who produced the Cards were generally regular customers. Offers may change this, and increase the level of business.

RECOMMENDATION 6: That officers be asked to look at businesses having the option of promoting offers, rather than discounts as part of the business element of the scheme.

The Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce informed the Committee that the Hillingdon First Card website was very useful but this should not be the only means of promoting the Card. Not all residents had access to the internet so visual physical promotion of the scheme was additionally important to residents.

A discussion took place regarding the Card being solely for the benefit of residents and the Committee noted that the logo on the card did state 'the privilege card putting residents first'. Benefits for businesses would come from increased custom, although the Committee acknowledged that this was not always the case in the present economic climate. Particular mention was made in relation to those employees of local businesses who were not Borough residents, and the Chairman of the Chamber expressed the view that perhaps consideration could be given to these people having access to the car parking privileges that Hillingdon First Card residents had.

It was emphasised by the Committee that the onus should be on the businesses to provide cheaper car parking for its employees, and not the local authority, although the point was made that the privilege card was primarily a privilege card for residents.

The Chamber of Commerce had started a Members' pages on their website which contained information on all businesses which were Members of the Chamber. The Committee felt that this could be linked into promoting

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businesses which were part of the Hillingdon First Card Scheme, together with details of what offers, promotions or discounts they were currently giving Hillingdon First Card holders.

RECOMMENDATION 7: That Hillingdon Chamber of Commerce be requested to consider using their Members' pages on their website for the promotion of the Hillingdon First Card.

The Committee was informed that other possible measures which could be looked at, including looking at case studies of businesses who had found participation in the scheme, beneficial to them and to residents. The Chamber of Commerce offered to facilitate this if required.

Other areas which the Committee believed could be looked at as part of a communications campaign included continuing to use Hillingdon People to publicise the Card and the benefits the Card brought to residents. Case studies could be included in the publicity as a means of highlighting the advantages of the Card for residents and for the participating businesses.

As previously mentioned, the promotion of the Hillingdon First Card could be linked into Borough wide events such as Family Fun Days which could showcase local businesses that were part of the scheme. The organisation of promotional awareness days which would jog residents' awareness of the benefits of the Card, and what it can be used for. There could be a focus on district and local shopping area promotions, working closely with the businesses which were part of the scheme. .

All the promotional suggestions which had been discussed during the review, would involve a significant communications and promotional campaign, and the Committee noted that this should be flexible to enable officers to decide on the best approach to ensure that ideas and suggestions added value and were contained within existing budgets.

RECOMMENDATION 8: That officers, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Improvement, Partnerships & Community Safety be given flexibility on the ideas and suggestions on promoting Hillingdon First Card, to ensure that these added value and were contained within existing budgets.

The use of ICT technologies for promotion

The Committee was provided with a session by the Council's ICT Strategist on possible telecommunications measures which could be used to market and promote the Card.

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Areas looked at included:-

- **Quick Response (QR) Codes** – These were essentially a compact barcode which were read by a barcode scanner, typically on a mobile device such as a smart phone or tablet. When QR Codes were read, the code displayed promotional material or can take the smart phone user to a specific webpage. This could be used to take people through to the Hillingdon First Card webpage
- QR Codes could be generated at zero cost and be included on websites and printed in promotional literature
- QR Codes could inform residents which shops and businesses were participating in the Hillingdon Card scheme
- The Hillingdon First Card QR Code could be displayed on public notice boards, in libraries and other Council establishments or even be displayed by businesses
- Reading this QR code takes the customer straight to the Hillingdon First directory webpage.



- **Mobile application (Apps)** was a term which was used to describe software that ran on smart phones and other mobile devices, often as a stand alone programme.
- Reference was made to Bracknell Forest Borough Council who had developed a mobile app for both Apple and Android devised to promote their local privilege card. Members were informed of the costs of this which would be prohibitive for the Hillingdon First Card at this time
- **SMS Text messaging** was used by the Council as a communication channel between the Council and residents. For example parents were informed of the confirmation of children's school places via SMS text rather than by post
- Businesses often used text messaging for marketing activity with messages including QR and other promotional codes
- The Council's current SMS Text contract costs were 4p per outbound message and 2p per inbound message. As an example, if 20,000 residents have provided a mobile phone number and indicated they would like to receive SMS Text updates, the cost would be £800.

The Committee again was made aware of the costs of some of the described initiatives and most of these were prohibitive because of budgetary constraints. However the use of QR codes was seen as an excellent

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initiative which would promote the Card and businesses at virtually zero cost to the Council.

RECOMMENDATION 9: That officers be asked to look at introducing Quick Response (QR) codes on marketing material to increase the profile of Hillingdon First Card. This could include the use of QR codes on public notice boards, libraries and sports centres.