



London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham

Community Safety, Environment and Residents Services Policy and Accountability Committee Minutes

Tuesday 2 September 2014

PRESENT

Committee members: Councillors Iain Cassidy, Larry Culhane (Chair), Steve Hamilton, Sharon Holder and Harry Phibbs

Other Councillors: Councillors Ben Coleman, Wesley Harcourt and Max Schmid

Officers: Naveed Ahmed (Parking Projects & Policy Manager), Craig Bowdery (Scrutiny Manager), Pat Cox (Head of Policy & Spatial Planning), Mark Jones (Director of Finance, ELRS), Janette Mullins (Principal Solicitor), Mahmood Siddiqi (Director of Transport & Highways), George Warren (Flood Risk Manager) and Jane West (Executive Director for Finance & Corporate Services)

11. MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the minutes of the meeting held on 7th July 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

12. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Michael Cartwright, Deputy Leader.

13. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

14. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Chair explained that members of the public present would have the opportunity to ask any questions they had as part of each agenda item.

15. PARKING ON FOOTBALL MATCH DAYS

The Committee received a report from the Parking Projects & Policy Manager outlining the existing parking controls that operated in the borough on football match days. Officers described the current restrictions which differed across each of the 27 zones, and highlighted that any new signs for new restrictions would first need to be approved by the Department for Transport, which had recently announced that it would not be authorising any non-standard signage while it conducted a large-scale review.

Following a public question asking why match day restrictions only applied to some zones, officers explained that a public consultation had taken place between December 2010 and January 2011. During this consultation there had been no public support for match day restrictions in these zones, and the arrangements had not been reviewed since. The 27 zones were each reviewed on a cyclical basis, with zones being prioritised if there were public complaints or evident parking stress. Officers described how there were always instances where some residents supported the restrictions and others didn't. For example when match day restrictions were introduced in zones Q and R following public demand, the Council received complaints from some residents who found it too restrictive. As such there was often no clear mandate to introduce parking policies that would be popular with all residents.

The Committee heard from officers that there were two types of match day restrictions currently in use. In the areas surrounding Stamford Bridge, there were blanket restrictions which applied at weekends even if there was not a match taking place. However around Craven Cottage the restrictions only applied when a match was actually taking place, with specially designed signage advising drivers of the restrictions in place on that particular day. The match day only controls around Craven Cottage were introduced following the 2010/11 consultation. In response to a public question, officers confirmed that as the Highway Authority, the Council had the power to change the controls in place, but that it would ultimately be a decision for the Cabinet, which would consider the levels of public support.

Members of the public questioned the use of consultations suggesting it was a flawed process that had too many non-responses and cost £30,000 each time. It was suggested that it would be more efficient to introduce the changes and then consult only if there was public opposition. Officers explained that the consultation exercises were the best way of gauging public opinion and that consultations regarding parking had a far higher response rate than on other subjects.

The Committee heard a suggestion from the public that a system should be introduced where one side of busy roads was reserved for residents, and the other was shared. Such a system would allow residents to have visitors without being inconvenienced. The Chair agreed that the idea had merits that the Council could look into.

It was noted that Kensington & Chelsea had a single zone covering the entirety of the borough so residents could park anywhere, however officers highlighted that this caused other issues. For example areas with high levels of parking need got worse with residents effectively encouraged commute in-borough by driving to tube stations and shops and use their resident permits to park. However this also had the advantages of convenience for residents. Like most London Boroughs, Hammersmith & Fulham had split the borough into the 27 zones as a way of addressing residents' concern, as the pressures in each area were different.

It was asked whether the Council took into account the addresses of respondents to parking consultations, as in some zones the issues varied road by road. Officers explained that all consultations had zonal mapping to help identify issues. This was apparent in zone CC, which was created in recognition of its different pressures to the rest of zone C. Noting the potential for the situation to vary road by road, the Chair suggested that a member task group might be established to look at parking restrictions in detail.

Some members commented that they were surprised that the new administration had not delivered clear recommendations regarding parking restrictions as it was such a large part of the Labour Party manifesto and campaigning. Other members responded to explain that the manifesto had a commitment to review parking arrangements and that the PAC meeting was the start of the process. The Council would therefore be developing new parking policies, but it would do so in consultation with residents.

Members discussed the cost of the specially designed signage used around Craven Cottage and it was suggested that section 106 funds could be used in future. Officers explained that increased permit costs and looking to use section 106 funds were just two early suggestions and that the report presented to the committee was exploratory in nature with no firm proposals at this stage. Members of the public asked how these costs had been met previously. Officers explained that as they were part of a trial scheme, the Council absorbed the costs in 2007 and that there had been no further changes since.

Members of the public expressed the view that residents with permits should not be given parking tickets and asked for confirmation of how much money was collected from match day parking restrictions. Officers explained that they didn't have the figures to hand, but agreed that the Council could adopt a more sympathetic approach, whilst recognising that there would be instances when cars would need to be removed for safety concerns. The Committee was informed by a member of the public that their vehicle had been towed by the Council and that on appeal the Appeals Court had recommended that the Council should refund the tow costs, which it had refused to do.

Cllr Harcourt described how he had been working on addressing parking issues for a number of years and had found that sometimes a consensus was not possible with many competing interests. However the new administration was keen to listen to residents to develop a 'bottom up' approach. He explained that whilst the Council might not be able to give everyone everything they wanted, it would listen and take into account all views expressed. For example he agreed that the Council should take a more sympathetic approach to parking enforcement.

RESOLVED –

That the Committee establish a task group to look at parking issues in the borough and whether existing match day restrictions should be revised.

It was suggested that the task group's work should not be compromised by a strict deadline, but that proposals would be developed in around six months. It was agreed that the Committee would receive regular updates of the task group's work.

16. RESIDENTS' VISITOR PARKING OPTIONS

The Committee received a report from the Parking Projects & Policy Manager which considered options for altering the system of parking permits for use by residents' visitors. There were currently 13,015 Smart Visitor Permits (SVPs) issued and the report described three options to improve the current system.

Noting the disadvantages of scratch cards detailed in the report, members of the public disagreed and explained that they had spoken to Camden Council, who had stated that they had a system to post replacement scratch cards without delay. The member of the public had also been informed by Camden that the scratch cards were not susceptible to fraud as indicated in the report. Officers explained that the identified delay referred to the time it took for new scratch cards to arrive in the post. The Committee was also informed that officers were in regular contact with colleagues from across London, and the overwhelming trend was for councils to move away from using scratch cards due to issues with fraud.

Members of the public also identified that some residents could be excluded if they were to be required to use internet-based methods of paying for parking. Officers reported that they received very few complaints regarding access to the SVP system, with more users complaining about the costs and the extent of the restrictions in place.

The Committee also noted the comment from the public that the reduced price for disabled users was still too expensive and put vulnerable residents at risk as carers could not visit as often. Officers explained that the half price for disabled users was initially trialled in 2007 and feedback was monitored. At the time there were some concerns that the price was prohibitive, but there had been no complaints about cost from disabled residents. The Council used resident feedback to make adjustments to the scheme, such as the number of

days that the reduced fee was applicable, but to date it had not received any. Members asked how visitors to disabled residents were charged prior to the SVP system, and officers explained that they were charged the same rate as other users via on-street ticket machines.

Some members of the public argued that paying for parking and having restrictions on visitor parking were one of the costs of living and driving in London, and that the current SVP system worked well. However the cost of the permits was recognised as being too high by members of the public present.

A member of the public suggested that the system should be modified to give Hammersmith & Fulham residents preferential access by allowing them to use their permits across the borough, regardless of parking zone. Officers explained that the Council was considering this alongside several other possibilities, and that all SVP users were to be surveyed to understand residents' experiences and preferences. The survey would include an open comments box and all responses would be captured and codified.

Members commented that the Council's complaints process seemed to be limited and that policies should not be based on whether complaints had been received, as many were not being accurately captured. The survey of SVP users should therefore capture accurate satisfaction levels and elicit responses from vulnerable user groups. Officers sought guidance on whether the survey should be better advertised and whether it should be open to all residents rather than just car owners. Members of the public and the committee agreed that as many responses as possible should be sought.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted.

17. 2015 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (MTFS) - UPDATE

The Committee received a report from the Executive Director for Finance & Corporate Governance, the Executive Director for Environment, Leisure & Resident Services and the Executive Director for Transport & Technical Services. The report outlined the anticipated budget gap for the Council and the pressures on the departmental budgets.

The Committee discussed the extent to which the budget pressures were the result of Government cuts. Officers explained that the austerity agenda generally sought to protect funding for health and education, leaving limited funds available for local government. Other reforms had also impacted on local government finances, such as reductions to the benefits paid by the DWP which increased the pressure on benefits paid by local authorities. Officers also confirmed that councils with areas of deprivation such as Hammersmith & Fulham had been disproportionately affected as they were more reliant on the grant funding, which is how most of the Government reductions were made.

Members noted that the costs of waste disposal were increasing and asked why this was. Officers explained that the trend of increased general waste tonnage and decreasing levels of recycled waste was common across London, but there was not a specific reason for this. It was suggested that levels of waste decreased during the recession, but as the economy recovers people have started buying more and so disposing more. Members highlighted a Government announcement that a fund had been established to financially reward councils which collected waste weekly rather than fortnightly. Officers were not aware of the scheme, but undertook to investigate further.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted.

18. REGULATION OF INVESTIGATORY POWERS ACT (RIPA)

The Committee received a report from the Principal Solicitor presenting the annual report on the Council's use of covert surveillance techniques and policies.

A member of the public asked whether the Council's CCTV cameras were really for the prevention of crime or for catching parking offences. Officers explained that across the borough, the Council had around 700 cameras and that only around 15 were used for parking enforcement, which were clearly signposted.

Members asked how many prosecutions had been made as a result of Council surveillance. Officers explained that they were not formally informed if prosecutions were made, but anecdotally they were aware that surveillance had been passed to the Police and that an ASBO and a possession charge had recently been made. Officers undertook to include further information in future reports to establish the value of surveillance.

A member of the public asked whether the Council intercepted telephone calls and officers explained that the Council could only get access to subscriber information and phone bills and that to do so required permission from a magistrate.

The Committee questioned the development of a bi-borough RIPA policy and asked whether it would deliver savings through fewer officers and whether it would impact upon the Council's sovereignty. Officers explained that the bi-borough policy wouldn't require fewer officers, but it would enable more people to authorise surveillance which would speed up and make the process more efficient. The Council's sovereignty was preserved as it was not required to have the same policy as RBKC so members could revise it if they wished.

A member of the public suggested that if a resident was under surveillance and it did not lead to a prosecution, then that resident should be informed.

The Chair highlighted that to do so could compromise future criminal proceedings and that he would not be in support of such a policy.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted.

19. SURFACE WATER MANAGEMENT PLAN (SWMP)

The Committee received a report from the Flood Risk Manager providing a summary of the Surface Water Management Plan. Officers explained that flood risk data was key to determining many planning applications, but that there was currently only borough-wide data provided by the GLA. The Council would therefore be preparing detailed mapping of all of the critical flood risk areas, although it was yet to be decided whether this should be in the public domain with possible impacts on property prices.

Members asked for further information on the £330,000 funding from DEFRA for flood risk management. Officers explained that this paid for officer posts and that the majority of it was spent on various projects such as at Goldhawk Road where surface water was diverted into tree pits. Other work including assessing the strength of the river wall and reports and modelling of future risks.

Noting the plans for more detailed mapping of flood risk areas, members asked whether households in higher risk areas would be written to to inform them. Officers reported that the intention was not to write to those affected, but that the data could be used to develop appropriate planning policy. For example the Council could limit the number of new extensions in high risk areas as they reduce the amount of surface water drainage.

The Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure & Resident Services welcomed the detailed mapping as it would provide an evidence base for effective planning policies, noting that the impact on surface water run-off had not yet been fully considered for new developments. He also advocated a more innovative approach to managing and recycling water to reduce flood risk and argued that permeable road surfaces should be explored further.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted.

20. WORK PROGRAMMING

The Chair informed the Committee that a Work Programme of future items was being developed, and invited members to suggest agenda items.

The Chair also noted that a Vice-Chair had not yet been appointed, and he nominated Cllr Hamilton.

RESOLVED –

That Cllr Hamilton be appointed as Vice-Chair of the Committee for the remainder of the municipal year.

21. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The following dates were agreed:

- Tuesday 4th November 2014
- Tuesday 13th January 2015
- Tuesday 3rd February 2015
- Tuesday 21st April 2015

Meeting started: 7.00 pm
Meeting ended: 9.23 pm

Chairman

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