

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

Wednesday 16 November 2016

PRESENT

Committee members: Councillors Larry Culhane (Chair), Iain Cassidy, Charlie Dewhirst and Steve Hamilton

Other Councillors: Sue Fennimore and Wesley Harcourt

Officers: Karen Ashdown, Richard Buckley, Jardine Finn, Ullash Karia and Ann Ramage

18. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2016 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

19. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Sharon Holder.

20. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Item 5 – Revised Community Sport and Physical Activity Strategy

Councillor Charlie Dewhirst explained that he was an employee of the Rugby Football Union and that he therefore had contact with Sport England, the organisation which it was hoped would fund some elements of the Council's Community Sport and Physical Activity Strategy. This was not a pecuniary interest.

Item 6 – Safety at Sports Grounds

Councillor Larry Culhane explained that he was a fan of Fulham Football Club which was subject to control by the Council's Environmental Health team.

21. URBAN ECOLOGY AND BIODIVERSITY IN H&F

Richard Buckley, Head of Environmental Health (Residential), explained that biodiversity meant the variety of plants and wildlife in an area. He explained that biodiversity was important as species relied upon each other for survival as part of ecosystems. There were a number of laws which promoted biodiversity and protected habitats and species, as well as placing various duties on local authorities.

The council had undertaken a biodiversity survey in 1988 which showed that 14 percent of the borough was green space, and that 60 percent of that space was parks, sports pitches and amenity grassland under council control. There were also 13,000 trees on streets and housing estates.

The air quality commission had made a recommendation for an Urban Ecology Plan to be drafted as well as for changes to the local plan and improvements to the way that the council managed its trees and planting. A number of other improvements were also going to be made to the Local Plan's sections dealing with biodiversity as a result of its ongoing revision.

The council was already doing lots of work to improve biodiversity, for example, banning the use of glyphosate weed killers, encouraging community planting schemes, building sustainable urban drainage schemes on highways and putting in green roofs and other environmentally friendly measures on its housing estates. The council was also supporting a campaign to protect fish living in the tidal Thames; the improvements in water quality had led to the Smelt fish now spawning in the Thames near to Hammersmith Bridge.

Richard Buckley explained that the council now planned to draft an Ecology Policy based on these key principles: building a robust ecological network through the Local Plan and Air Quality Action Plan; putting people at the heart of biodiversity by engaging with local residents, schools, volunteers and environmental groups; reducing environmental pressures by creating new habitats, green corridors and stepping stones, and managing existing habitats well, and; improving our knowledge and understanding of the current position. He suggested that the council might wish to develop a specific biodiversity action plan and explained that there were opportunities to provide more, bigger, better and joined habitats, noting that housing controlled 45,000sqm of flat roofed buildings.

Councillor Dewhirst suggested that a new biodiversity survey needed to be undertaken as the previous one was nearly 30 years old. He was also concerned that residents might unwittingly break the law by cutting back hedges at the request of highways officers and asked that letters to residents ask them to check if there were nesting birds in them before undertaking the work. Richard Buckley agreed to look into the issue of hedges being cut back.

Councillor Dewhirst felt that the council needed to do more to deal with the effect of glyphosate no longer being used as he had received complaints from residents regarding weeds growing in pavements. Councillor Harcourt explained that the council was trialling a number of different methods to control weeds in order to identify which worked best. The results of these trials would be available in a few months' time, however, officers were working hard to ensure that the boroughs streets looked good in the meantime. Councillor Hamilton asked how Japanese Knotweed was dealt with if not by glyphosate. Ullash Karia, Head of Leisure and Parks, explained that glyphosate would continue to be injected into Japanese Knotweed; this did not cause the same contamination problems as spraying and was far more effective.

Rosemary Petit, Chair of the Air Quality Commission, explained that she felt the new focus on biodiversity was very important. She echoed Councillor Dewhirst's view that a new survey was needed and suggested that citizen scientists could be used to help carry it out. Another resident suggested that community organisations, such as the urban studies centre, be asked to help engage schools in the project.

Councillor Cassidy noted that the friends of Margravine Cemetery had recently received an award from London in Bloom for their work and that they had been very positive about the support they had been given by the council. He felt that good work such as this needed to be spread across the borough and that the council needed to develop a plan to join up habitats. He knew that residents felt strongly about biodiversity issues and felt that the council's policies needed to reflect this.

A resident said that urban guerrilla gardening might be a good way to engage residents. Richard Buckley explained that the council had given permission to residents to plant in various locations across the borough. He felt that a key part of the council's role for the future would be to work out how to engage more residents in biodiversity.

Ullash Karia asked whether the council had sufficient staff working in the area to ensure that biodiversity was promoted. Richard Buckley explained that there were many other pressures on council budgets so it might be difficult to fund a dedicated officer; there was however a great amount of experience amongst staff who worked in related fields. Rosemary Petit suggested that the council might be able to attract sponsorship for projects to improve biodiversity.

The Chair explained that the administration had decided to set up a Residents' Commission on Biodiversity to guide the council on how best to improve biodiversity. He explained that Morag Carmichael, Chair of Hammersmith and Fulham Friends of the Earth, had kindly agreed to lead the commission.

Morag Carmichael said that she was both excited and a little daunted by the task of chairing the residents commission. She had already started discussing the idea in the community and there were lots of brilliant ideas and

enthusiastic people. There were also a fair number of challenges but she felt these could be overcome and that it was important that these were tackled for the sake of improving biodiversity. She hoped that the commission could bring biodiversity to life for residents and engage lots of people. She noted that the commission was indebted to the Air Quality Commission which had already started to look at ways in which biodiversity could be improved. Morag Carmichael explained that the council would be seeking more members of the commission over the coming weeks and encouraged anyone who was interested to apply.

Councillor Wesley Harcourt said that the creation of a commission was an important step towards the administration's aim of being the greenest council. He said that there was already great work being done to improve biodiversity in various council departments but that the residents commission could join the work up and identify where, perhaps, more could be done. He gave the commission his very best wishes for their work.

The Chair thanked all present for their contributions to the debate and, on behalf of the committee, wished Morag Carmichael and the new commission every success.

22. REVISED COMMUNITY SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY STRATEGY

Ullash Karia, Head of Parks and Leisure, explained that sports and physical activity were great ways of enjoying yourself and getting fit at the same time. He explained that the council had drafted an ambitious strategy which aimed to engage residents as well as being a document which required action.

Jardine Finn, Sports Development Manager, said that there was already great work on engaging people in physical activity being done in Hammersmith and Fulham. He noted particularly the St Mungo's scheme to get homeless people to take part in sports and the recent disability tennis tournament staged in the borough. Mr Finn explained that the purpose of the strategy was to show the council's commitment to involving more people in physical activity and to help the council to target its resources. Action plans would be developed to implement the strategy.

The cost of supporting people who were not physically active was high and increasing whilst Public Health England had suggested that if being active was a pill, doctors would be rushing to prescribe it. There was already a good level of participation in physical activity in Hammersmith and Fulham but this needed to be increased further. Sport in school needed to be supported as 24 percent of children living in the borough were classed as obese on leaving primary school. Breaking down barriers to disabled people participating was also important.

The strategy's priorities were:

- Tackling inactivity
- Ensuring that every child enjoys being active
- Helping people to remain active, affordably
- Supporting residents to develop grassroots sports

- Creating better physical activity environments
- Developing evidence based approaches to improving participation

The Community Sport and Physical Activity Network had been consulted on the strategy and had contributed to the current draft. The strategy was currently being consulted on via the council's website. Ullash Karia explained that officers were keen to hear views from residents and stakeholders as the strategy needed to engage them.

Councillor Dewhurst said that he was impressed with the strategy's focus on inactive people; not only would inactive residents get a lot out of sport, there was also likely to be considerable funding available to help get them doing physical activity. Jardine Finn agreed and explained that partnerships with charities would also be important in securing grant funding.

Natascia Bernardi, Action on Disability, explained that the charity had been working with the council and Sport England on a project to help disabled young people get into sport. They were doing this by working with local clubs to remove any barriers to participation, although there were some barriers such as specialist equipment which were difficult to overcome without sufficient funding. She said that the charity wanted to extend the scheme to adults and wanted to work with the council to bid for funding to do this.

The Chair asked whether there had been a shift away from regular sport to more ad-hoc physical activity such as park runs. Jardine Finn said that this was certainly true nationally, although there was no local data on the trend. Funding from Sport England had been directed towards ad-hoc events which were likely to encourage inactive people to take part.

Councillor Sue Fennimore explained that physical activity had the potential to improve a great many areas of people's lives; it was good not only for physical wellbeing but also mental health. She hoped that socio-economic reasons for people being inactive could be tackled so that everyone could feel the benefits of being active.

The Chair thanked officers for their presentation and work on the strategy, and those present for their contribution to the discussion and increasing activity in Hammersmith and Fulham.

23. SAFETY AT SPORTS GROUNDS

Ann Ramage, Head of Environmental Health (Commercial), explained that the council was responsible for ensuring safety at sports grounds in Hammersmith and Fulham. There were a minimum of 65 fixtures in the borough each season, although cup competitions and European games could increase this number to well over 100 in some years. This meant that there was a significant amount of work for officers to do to keep fans safe.

Most of what the council did was collaborative work to point out potential problems and get those responsible to deal with these. All involved generally understood the importance of safety and the potential impact if things went

wrong so it was relatively easy to make improvements. Resident concerns were also dealt with by officers and all three clubs seemed keen to ensure that their neighbours were not adversely affected by games any more than necessary.

There were also a number of formal mechanisms such as the Safety Certificate which allowed officers to set the number of spectators permitted in each stand. The capacity was determined by both the physical capacity of the stand and the safety management arrangements in place. Other formal aspects of the work included arranging and holding Safety Advisory Group (SAG) meetings which got all agencies and the club together to discuss the operation of the stadium and resolve any issues. It was not possible to invite fans into these meetings as some of the discussions were confidential, however, fans were now being involved in the work of SAGs by sharing the agenda with recognised groups and allowing them to put their views forward, either in writing, or if necessary in particular circumstances, in person.

The main challenges to ensuring safety had been:

- The attitudes of television companies and national and international governing bodies, in particular in relation to match scheduling.
- The reduction in police support inside stadiums and the support needed by clubs to take on more responsibility for managing crowd behaviour.
- The need to understand and respond to the different football cultures which existed outside of the UK when their teams came to play in the borough.
- The difficulty of getting large numbers of fans into the stadium in a short period of time.

The Chair asked what the cost of providing this service was. Ann Ramage explained that it was difficult to calculate the cost, as whilst there was a core team of three officers, there was also a lot of time spent by other officers from across the council on ensuring safety. She noted that Hammersmith and Fulham was unique in having three professional football teams within its boundaries. She also explained that the clubs were generally willing to pay for improvements which officers thought were necessary.

Councillor Dewhirst asked how residents had responded to the extended closure of Fulham Road on Chelsea FC matchdays. Ann Ramage explained that the changes and the reasons for them had been well communicated and so very little feedback had been received. It had also simplified traffic management which had been welcomed by many, including London Buses. Vehicular access for residents was generally allowed even during closures, which was welcomed.

Councillor Harcourt said that the amount of work done by officers to keep fans safe was impressive. The Chair thanked officers for their presentation and their work to keep fans, including himself, safe.

24. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS AND WORK PROGRAMME

The date of the next meeting was noted to be 30 January 2017.

The work programme was noted.

Meeting started: 7.00 pm
Meeting ended: 9.05 pm

Chair

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