

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

Monday 20 November 2017

PRESENT

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

Other Councillors: Councillors Stephen Cowan, Sue Fennimore, Welsey Harcourt and Harry Phibbs

Officers: Nick Austin - Director for Environmental Health, Paul Baker - Lead Environmental Policy Officer, Richard Buckley - Head of Environmental Health (Residential) & Corporate Safety, Hashith Shah - Trading Standards Manager, Valerie Simpson - Head of Environmental Health (Licensing and Trading Standards), Peter Smith - Head of Policy and Strategy.

Members of the Biodiversity Commission: Morag Carmichael (Commission Chair), John Goodier, Vanessa Hampton, Alex Laird, Cathy Maund and Moya O'Hara

Hammersmith and Fulham Resident Representative on the London Heliport Consultative Group: Christina Smyth

16. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 18 September 2017 be approved as an accurate record.

17. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Charlie Dewhirst.

18. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

19. **REPORT OF THE HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM BIODIVERSITY COMMISSION**

Members of the Biodiversity Commission gave a presentation outlining the Commission's work and the key findings and recommendations of their report.

The Chair thanked the Commissioners for their report; he said that receiving the report was one of the highlights of his Chairmanship of the PAC as it was a very impressive piece of work and because it exemplified the success which could come from the Council's policy of doing things with residents rather than to them.

Councillor Hamilton said that he felt the Biodiversity Commission had been overly negative about the UK's environmental policy after Brexit; he felt that the UK should be seeking to have better protection for the environment than current EU law gave it. He said that he was concerned about proposals that roads should be closed between parks and schools owing to the likely traffic impact, especially as those examples in his ward were private rather than state schools. Councillor Hamilton was also concerned that wildflower meadows were not introduced to the detriment of space for children to play in and also said that Astroturf might be appropriate in some cases to allow sport to be played all year round. He also said that the use of herbicides might be appropriate, for example, on pavements where the likelihood of their affecting other flora and fauna than weeds was low. Councillor Hamilton also said that he did not feel that the suggestion that advice on how to be greener should be sent out in a paper form, which was in itself not very environmentally friendly.

Councillor Harcourt said that he was very impressed by the work of the Biodiversity Commission and said that he felt Councillor Hamilton had been overly negative about the report. He disagreed with Councillor Hamilton's suggestion that the UK Government might deliver better protection for the environment than the EU, saying that he did not believe that it would be a priority for the Government. Councillor Harcourt said that it might well be possible to close some roads between schools and parks, noting that if a road passing a school was so heavily used that it could not be closed, it was likely to be a safety risk for pupils. He added that the body of scientific evidence against the use of herbicides and pesticides was significant and that the Council's banning of Glyphosate was the right thing to do. Councillor Harcourt said that it was the Council's ambition to be the Greenest Borough and felt that the report gave many useful suggestions on ways in which this could be achieved. He also praised the work of the Commissioners and all of those who volunteered their time to make the borough a greener, more pleasant place to live, such as the friends of groups in parks.

Morag Carmichael said that the report required only that the level of protection afforded by the EU be maintained; she would be very happy if the Government wished to extend these protections further, but the Commission had felt it useful to include the current protection as a baseline considering the uncertainty surrounding environmental policy.

Councillor Phibbs said that he felt that the Commission ought to have also recommended that Thames Water cancel the Tideway project and instead spend the money on SuDS Schemes. He felt that the Council ought to do more to promote guerrilla gardening in tree pits and encourage children to grow food at school. He added that he felt that incentives could be introduced into the planning system for returning land to horticulture, for example, a more flexible approach being taken to a change to a building if an area of hardstanding were turned back to a lawn.

Councillor Cassidy asked how the tension between some residents demands for tidy cemeteries and greater wilding of these could be managed. John Goodier explained that London's oldest cemeteries had been planted with great biodiversity which had to some extent been lost over the years. He said that, by maintaining clear boundaries between wilder areas and highly maintained but less biodiverse areas, and by providing information about the environmental value of wilder areas, most residents could accept more unkempt areas in the cemeteries. He said that existing work at Margravine Cemetery proved this to work, especially where areas with no recent burials were chosen to be left to grow.

Councillor Holder asked whether there was something which all residents could do to improve biodiversity. Morag Carmichael said that the best thing that residents could do would be to plant pollinators, even if they could only do so in a window box, it would make a big difference. It was noted that the internet held a wealth of information about what residents could do to improve biodiversity.

The Chair asked whether the Commission had a vision for the ecology centre they proposed. Morag Carmichael said that the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea had an Ecology Centre in Holland Park which provided a base for environmental education; the Commission wanted something similar for Hammersmith and Fulham.

Members of the Commission thanked the officers who had supported them in their work and said that they had really enjoyed the process.

20. HELICOPTER NOISE ISSUES

Paul Baker gave a presentation outlining why helicopter noise was a problem in Hammersmith and Fulham, what noise controls existed to limit this and what the Council could do to reduce the impact on residents.

The Chair thanked Mr Baker for his report and explained that the Council had appointed him as a member of the London Heliport Consultative Committee. He said that the Committee lacked any real power, and had previously been fairly unsuccessful, however, recently it had started to take a firmer line with the Heliport; this had resulted in the commissioning of a Helicopter noise survey. The survey was the first to be carried out in the history of the heliport, and the results were expected in December 2017.

Christina Smyth said that there was an issue with the legislative regime being very light touch, with the impact of helicopter routing not being scrutinised adequately. She felt that the Mayor and the UK Government needed to be lobbied to get power devolved to London and to try to encourage dispersal of flights in built up areas. She also noted that the Heliport had been uncooperative and seemed focussed only on maximising profits rather than on ensuring that residents were not unacceptably affected by their operations.

A resident asked who the main users of the heliport were. Councillor Culhane said that the main users were wealthy individuals going to and from London, but that helicopter tours of London were also increasing in popularity. There were peaks in usage on some event days where lots of people travelled by helicopter to events such as the British Grand Prix or Ladies Day at Royal Ascot. A resident asked whether high levels of tax were charged. Christina Smyth said that she would look into the level of tax associated with helicopter flights.

A resident said that they had been very concerned by a significant increase in helicopter noise over the summer; he had been unable to find out why this was and feared that a flight path had been developed over his neighbourhood. He suggested that better information from the Heliport might ease residents' concerns. Christina Smyth said that the Heliport made it deliberately difficult for residents to get information.

A resident noted that most recent helicopter crashes had involved twin engined aircraft, which were currently allowed to fly away from approved safe routes; he said that he thought that this should be changed to ensure that a helicopter did not crash into residential areas of London.

Councillor Phibbs asked whether the Mayor of London could do anything to improve the issues identified with helicopter flights. Paul Baker explained that the Mayor currently had no powers which could be used to control aviation, however, as it seemed appropriate for the issue to be dealt with regionally it had been suggested that the Mayor should lobby to get additional powers.

Councillor Phibbs asked whether the 1,000 feet minimum height for helicopter flights could be enforced. Paul Baker said that the CAA could take action however it was difficult to do as lots of information was needed. The possibility of using RADAR to identify helicopters flying under 1,000 feet was discussed although it was not known if this was technically possible. Councillor Phibbs asked whether the minimum height could be raised and Paul Baker explained that the current limit had been introduced to bring the UK into line with the internationally recommended minimum and that shared aviation rules were desirable in their own right.

Councillor Hamilton said that he was concerned that the Heliport could still increase its usage by 25-30%. He also said that the impact of routes should be considered as it was possible that these might cause some residents significant disruption, whereas point to point flights might cause a little disturbance to lots of people a little of the time.

Councillor Hamilton asked whether there was any information on the percentage of complaints about helicopters which related to the operations of the heliport. Paul Baker said that it was not always possible to say what a complaint related to, as insufficient information was sometimes given by residents. He said, however, that the vast majority of complaints were about helicopters flying to and from the heliport.

Councillor Hamilton asked whether there was anything that could be done to reduce the amount of noise made by each helicopter. Paul Baker said that the noise study might identify helicopters breaching the decibel limits set on each movement to and from the heliport which could allow enforcement action to be taken.

Councillor Cassidy asked whether the psychological impact of helicopter noise had been considered. Paul Baker said that he wasn't aware of a study of helicopter noise.

21. LONDON TRADING STANDARDS WEEK

Valerie Simpson explained that the mission statement of London Trading Standards week was 'Protecting Consumers and Safeguarding Businesses'. The campaign had focussed on a different theme each day and Hashith Shah explained that these themes had been: Underage Sales of Knives, which had been broadened to include sales of corrosive substances, Lettings Agencies, Scams and Doorstep Sales, Support for Businesses, and Product Safety. Valerie Simpson said that the week had promoted the work of trading standards and had also been good for staff morale as they had enjoyed working with and learning from officers across London. She said that the service was trying to work more closely with businesses and was also trying to commercialise its advice service.

Councillor Hamilton said that he felt that the Council needed to take a strong stand against the sale of Acid and Corrosive Substances. Valerie Simpson agreed that it was a very important emerging issue but noted that legislation made it difficult for the Council to do as much as it would like as it was not yet illegal for shops to sell corrosive substances to those under 18.

Councillor Hamilton asked what the requirements were for businesses selling second hand electrical goods. Hashith Shah explained that goods should be tested by a competent person and a new plug should be fitted unless the product was expected to be permanently connected to fixed wiring.

A resident asked how residents could contact the Trading Standards team. Valerie Simpson said that residents could call 020 8753 1081 or email trading.standards@lbhf.gov.uk. The Chair suggested that the team try to get their phone number changes to 020 8753 7226, meaning that the last 4 digits would be scam.

Councillor Cassidy asked how the team dealt with online scams and fraud. Valerie Simpson said that it was very difficult to catch those committing these types of crimes, as they were often based abroad; there were national

agencies which did attempt this type of work but Council trading standards teams did not have the resources needed to investigate these offences. The Council instead focussed on educating residents so that they did not fall victim to online scams. Hashith Shah said that the Council was looking to develop a social media profile which could help them get information about scams out to residents quickly.

Councillor Holder asked how many resident meetings the service attended. Valerie Simpson said that officers visited sheltered accommodation very regularly and also went to other meetings on request from residents. There was also a scheme called 'Friends Against Scams' which was intended to ensure that everyone knew someone who had been given training on avoiding scams and this helped to get the service's education message out to the public.

The Chair asked how the business community had responded to the London Trading Standards Week. Hashith Shah said that the response had generally been very positive, with businesses pleased that the Council was engaging with them, although some of those who had failed test purchases were unhappy at first. He explained that the Council gave advice to national companies, as a primary authority, and that these companies were generally very satisfied with what the Council did.

Councillor Harcourt thanked officers for their report and their hard work both in London Trading Standards Week and throughout the year.

22. WORK PROGRAMME AND DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

A resident noted that at previous meetings he had been assured that he would be given the Council's reasoned position on self-funding litter patrols; he explained that whilst he had been sent a response, it did not explain why the Council had not taken up the suggestion of introducing patrols. Councillor Harcourt said that the issue had been discussed by officers and members of the Council's Cabinet, but that there were fears that the Council would not have sufficient control over the actions of staff, especially if employed via a private contractor. He said that the Council continued to monitor the scheme in other areas and agreed to provide a full response to the resident.

Councillor Hamilton asked that an item on the placing of litter bins be added to the work programme.

Meeting started: 7.00 pm
Meeting ended: 9.40 pm

Chair

Contact officer: Amrita Gill
Assistant Committee Co-ordinator
Governance and Scrutiny
☎: 020 8753 2088
E-mail: amrita.gill@lbhf.gov.uk