

## London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham

**Report to:** Public Service Reform Policy & Accountability Committee

**Date:** 28/07/2020

**Subject:** H&F Resident-Led Commissions

**Report of:** Peter Smith, Head of Policy & Strategy

**Responsible Director:** Rhian Davies, Director of Resources

### Summary

H&F Council is committed to 'doing things with residents, not to them'. In delivering on this commitment the Council has established resident-led commissions to inform policy development and service change. There have been a total of 17 resident-led commissions launched since 2014, and this report summarises the purpose, process and achievements of those commissions to date.

### Recommendations

1. The report is for information and discussion and makes no recommendations for the Committee to consider.

**Wards Affected:** All

### H&F Priorities

<b>Our Priorities</b>	<b>Summary of how this report aligns to the H&amp;F Priorities</b>
Doing things with residents, not to them	Resident-led commissions exemplify the delivery of this priority as they directly engage residents in policy development.

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### Background Papers Used in Preparing This Report

None.

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## **Proposals and Detailed Analysis**

1. The key underlying principle of all H&F's resident-led commissions is to deliver on the Council's key policy priority of *"Doing things with residents, not to them"*. The commissions are key vehicles for engaging residents more fully in policy development and service design. They ensure that the Council's developing policies are directed by, and have the support of, H&F residents.

## **Establishing an H&F Resident-led Commission**

2. A resident-led commission is set up when the Leader and Cabinet have identified an issue of concern that requires detailed review in order to make informed policy decisions or service changes. The first step is to appoint a committed resident, or someone with strong connections to the borough, to chair the commission. This is done by the Leader and relevant Cabinet Member sponsoring the commission. The chair will then work with the Leader and Cabinet sponsor to determine the scope of the new commission's brief and to develop draft terms of reference and criteria for the selection of commissioners.
3. In announcing the appointment of a new commission's chair, the Council will issue an invitation to residents to submit expressions of interest (Eols) to sit on the new commission. These submissions will be required to identify skills, experience and expertise relevant to the commission's brief. Council officers are excluded from sitting on a commission to ensure the commission retains its independence. Councillors' are often in attendance at some commission meetings as Cabinet sponsors but are usually there only in an advisory capacity.
4. Over the years an increasing number of residents have been responding to the invitation to submit Eols to join a commission. The first commission to issue such an invitation was the Air Quality Commission in 2015, which attracted nine responses. Over the following 3 years there were steady increases in the numbers attracted to the new and emerging commissions and, in mid-2019, the Parks Commission received 23 Eols.
5. In late 2019 the numbers leapt, with the Women's Equality Commission attracting almost 50 Eols and the Climate and Ecological Emergency Commission receiving 65. The growth in the numbers of residents keen to get involved would indicate that the profile of these commissions, and the public recognition of their importance in delivering policy change is increasing over time.

## **A Typical Commission's Work Programme**

6. The commissions are independent of the Council and free to establish their own work programme but they are supported by council officers. Most commissions have followed a similar process in gathering evidence and producing their reports, beginning with a literature review of the subject area to

identify and assess current thinking on the issue and how recent research might impact on the commission's view of its brief.

7. Most commissions are also keen to know what other H&F residents think of the issue they have been selected to examine and will issue an open call for written evidence to gather this information. This is often followed by oral evidence hearings to gather the views of experts in the field and other stakeholders. Some commissions will follow this up with new research or surveys to fill any gaps in evidence. One example of this was the Rough Sleeping Commission, which commissioned fresh research into rough sleeping in the borough involving interviews with 104 people who were, or had recently been, sleeping rough in Hammersmith & Fulham. The Older People's Commission also conducted fresh research into the experiences of older people in the borough.
8. As a commission approaches the final stages of its deliberations and is formulating its findings and recommendations, it may choose to initiate public hearings or engage in consultation events to test out some of its proposals or examine, in more detail, areas that it is still undecided on. When it has completed its evidence gathering it will produce a draft report that will be submitted to the appropriate Policy and Accountability Committee (PAC) for discussion. The PAC will then refer the report on to Cabinet for consideration of its findings and recommendations.

### **Commissions to Date**

9. A total of 17 commissions have been launched over the past five years, with some 120 residents having sat on a commission and many hundreds more engaged in their work in other ways. This is a link to the H&F webpage detailing the work of each commission: <https://www.lbhf.gov.uk/councillors-and-democracy/resident-led-commissions>.
10. There are currently eight commissions in progress:
  - Policing and Crime Commission (launched 2018)
  - Civic Campus Commission (launched 2018)
  - Arts Commission (launched 2019)
  - Climate and Ecological Emergency Commission (launched 2019)
  - Women's Equality Commission (launched 2020)
  - Parks Commission (launched 2020)
  - Teaching Commission (launched 2020)
  - Cycling and Walking Commission (launched 2020)
11. The following nine commissions have all completed their work and have reported to the Council:
  - Commission on Airport Expansion (reported 2015)
  - Air Quality Commission (reported 2016)
  - Business Commission (reported 2017)
  - Poverty and Worklessness Commission (reported 2017)
  - Residents' Commission on Council Housing (reported 2017)
  - Disabled People's Commission (reported 2017)

- Biodiversity Commission (reported 2018)
- Rough Sleeping Commission (reported 2018)
- Older People's Commission (reported 2019)

## Success Factors

12. All of the commissions to date have been successful in engaging local residents in policy development and producing well-received reports. There are various factors that have contributed to the success of different commissions but there are also factors common to the most successful commissions.
13. The most successful commissions have been driven by a strong and committed chair but also one who is open-minded to the diversity of views that are brought forward during the evidence gathering process. They are not averse to hearing new ideas and testing new theories. The most successful commissions have also embraced a broad diversity of backgrounds among the commissioners, best representing the demographic diversity of the borough's residents. This has tended to elicit a broader range of views on the basis of varied experience. The most successful commissions have also had the benefit of officer support from across the Council, which has been followed up with strong political will to deliver the implementation of the final report's recommendations.
14. The **Air Quality Commission** (AQC) was particularly successful in relation to the scope of its influence. It targeted its recommendations at central government and regional government, as well as the Council. A year on from the Commission's final report, not only had the Council implemented the majority of the recommendations aimed at it but the Mayor of London had also implemented a number of the Commission's recommendations. The Leader of the Council wrote to the Mayor of London on 8 December 2016 promoting the AQC recommendations aimed at him, the GLA and its agencies. The Mayor replied on 9 January 2017 setting out his response to the AQC's report, including the take up of many of the Commission's recommendations.
15. The timing of the Air Quality Commission was one possible factor in its success – it reported at the time that the London Plan was being reviewed and at a time when air quality, especially in London, was high on the public's agenda and attracting media attention. The Commission was also well supported by officers from across the Council who shared its desire for change so it was well briefed on the areas where actions could make a real difference.
16. It is worth noting that the work of the H&F commissions is being recognised far and wide. In June 2020, H&F officers were contacted by the Government of Gibraltar, which was seeking advice on setting up its own Air Quality Commission and had been impressed by the work of the H&F AQC.
17. The **Rough Sleeping Commission** delivered bold recommendations that required the Council to focus on a 'Housing First' policy, in assisting people sleeping rough in the borough. The Council was equally bold in accepting the recommendations and the outcome has seen a continuing drop in the numbers of people sleeping rough in Hammersmith and Fulham, which is a reversal of

the London-wide trend where numbers were increasing, prior to the coronavirus pandemic and the emergency response. The 2019 snapshot survey of rough sleeping in England (published on 27 February 2020) found only 2 people sleeping out in Hammersmith & Fulham – by far the lowest number of any borough in Inner London and a reduction from 12 in 2018.

18. The success factors specific to the Rough Sleeping Commission were that experts with local knowledge of the issue were brought together to formulate recommendations and the Council listened to those recommendations and put them into practice. The Commission also carried out detailed research interviews with 104 rough sleepers to provide the evidence base necessary to support its recommendations.
19. The **Disabled People's Commission** (DPC) will, potentially, prove to have had the biggest impact on the way that the Council develops and designs services. The Commission quickly came to the conclusion that, whilst welfare benefit changes were the primary concern of disabled people in the borough (evidenced by public consultation), the focus of the Commission's recommendations should be on the Council, as there was little chance of a local commission influencing national government policy.
20. The key recommendation of the DPC's final report was to establish a framework for co-production of policy and service design across the Council, meaning that disabled people should be involved from the beginning in the development of any policies and the design of any services that might affect them. The Council embraced the ambition of the DPC's report and a co-production framework is now being put in place across the Council. This will bring about major changes in the way that the Council formulates policy and designs services and has already brought about changes to the design of the Civic Campus regeneration project on King Street West.
21. The success factors specific to the DPC were the fact that it was focussed on an ambitious objective to change Council practices and targeted its recommendations in a way that could have the biggest impact. This has been further backed up with additional resources allocated to the implementation of the co-production framework.

## **CONCLUSION**

22. The resident-led commissions have demonstrated a strong record of achievement and success and have gone a considerable way to informing the direction of Council policy in key areas. They have come up with new, innovative policy ideas to improve the lives of Hammersmith & Fulham residents.
23. The increasing number of residents who seek positions as commissioners provides further evidence of the fact that local people are seeing the commissions as providing a genuine forum to initiate and drive policy in many areas of public service. The engagement with the public undertaken by the

commissions, and the local expertise that this has unlocked, has been of great benefit to the policy making process.

24. On a broader front, the commissions provide a connectivity between local people and their local authority at a time when political policy making is all too often seen as being too remote from the public. In this sense, Hammersmith and Fulham is maintaining a clear commitment to doing things with residents and not to them.