

London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham

Audit, Pensions and Standards Committee

Minutes



Wednesday 6 December 2017

PRESENT

Committee members: Councillors Iain Cassidy (Chair), Vivienne Lukey, PJ Murphy, Guy Vincent, Michael Adam, Nicholas Botterill and Mark Loveday

Officers: Peter Smith (Head of Policy and Strategy)
Louise Raisey (Strategic Head of Communications)
Kim Dero (Chief Executive)
Nick Austin (Lead Director for Environmental Services)
Richard Buckley (Head of Environmental Health)
Mike Boyle (Director for Strategic Commissioning and Enterprise)
Sarah Thomas (Director for Delivery and Value)
Steve Miley (Director for Children's Services)
Rachael Wright-Turner (Director for Public Service Reform)
Mark Grimley (Director for HR)
Michael Hainge (Commercial Director)
David McNulty (Programme Manager)
Graham Coupar (Consultant)
Hitesh Jolapara (Strategic Finance Director)
Peter Worth (interim Director of Treasury and Pensions)
Phil Triggs (newly appointed Director of Treasury and Pensions)
Emily Hill (Head of Corporate Finance)
Geoff Drake (Senior Audit Manager)
Mike Sloniowski (Principal Consultant – Risk Management)
Andrew Hyatt (Head of Fraud)
David Hughes (Director of Audit, Risk, Fraud and Insurance)
David Abbott (Scrutiny Manager)

1. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2017 were approved and signed by the Chair.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors David Morton and Donald Johnson.

Apologies for lateness were received from Councillor Guy Vincent.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. H&F COUNCIL'S EMERGENCY RESPONSE TO MAJOR INCIDENTS IN JUNE AND SEPTEMBER 2017

Peter Smith (Head of Policy and Strategy) introduced the draft report and noted that in 2017 there were two major incidents in and around Hammersmith & Fulham that required the authority to implement its emergency planning procedures – the fire at Grenfell Tower in June and an explosion on a tube train in Parsons Green in September. The report reviewed the Council's response to those incidents at both strategic and operational levels and considered the views of local businesses and community organisations that participated in a 'hackathon' event convened by the Council to examine the views of partners.

The report identified action taken to improve the Council's readiness and response to major incidents and made recommendations for additional action for further improvements. The Committee was invited to discuss the report's findings and consider the draft recommendations. Following the meeting, the Council's five Policy and Accountability Committees would also be consulted before the report was finalised for Cabinet agreement in February 2018.

Communications

The Chair asked about the Council's social media strategy in the face of a major incident. Louise Raisey (Strategic Head of Communications) said the focus for the Communications team was to get consistent messages out to reassure the public. There was a detailed plan in place for that which worked well during the Parsons Green incident.

Kim Dero (Chief Executive) added that the Council also recognised the importance of working with the community and partners to build community resilience. The Council was looking at using the community to get its messages out through the use of WhatsApp groups and dedicated websites. The Council was also providing training for community outreach responders so we could give key people in local communities the right information and they could spread it through their networks.

Councillor Vivienne Lukey asked if the Hammersmith & Fulham Nextdoor website could be used to communicate with residents. Louise Raisey said Nextdoor could be

used to feed in messages but because it was a closed local network it posed some challenges.

Councillor Nicholas Botterill commented that it was important to get clear, coherent messaging out as widely as possible – through as many channels as possible. Most people wouldn't think to go to a council's website in a time of emergency. He added that recent events had highlighted the need for the Council to have a strong communications department.

Councillor PJ Murphy suggested each committee consulted on the report should have sight of any previous discussions so points weren't repeated.

Councillor PJ Murphy asked what contingency was in place if the mobile phone network went down (3.7 in the report).

Councillor PJ Murphy said it was good that the website would be regularly updated (3.11) but did it have the necessary reach? What would the Council do to get the message out wider?

Councillor PJ Murphy asked how long before H&F communications staff were providing support to RBKC after the Grenfell incident (3.14 of the report).

Councillor Murphy recommended that there should be specific point people in the communications team to deal with questions from the public, press, and government.

Louise Raisey said capacity was an issue – councils had small communications teams so it was hard to mobilise to answer the vast quantity of requests that come through in an emergency situation. Kim Dero added that there were weekly orders lists which had named contacts and roles in each department in case of an emergency – including communications. The Council had also sought crisis communications advice and was looking into upskilling key officers in this area. Officers would consider Councillor Murphy's proposal for point people.

Councillor Mark Loveday questioned the balance of the report between the Grenfell fire and the Parsons Green attack. Peter Smith said that was due to the scale of the Grenfell incident and the lasting impacts – there were still over 40 Grenfell families residing in the borough and being supported by the Council.

Councillor Loveday also noted that when he arrived at the scene of the Parsons Green incident there wasn't a Council representative at the Kelvedon Road exclusion barrier. There were a number of very concerned parents whose children were in lockdown in local schools – but the senior police officer on the barrier wasn't able to provide them with the information they needed. He advised that there should be a pool of Council officers available who could be allocated to handle communications at exclusion barriers. Louise Raisey advised that the Police were responsible for on site communications in emergency situations but officers would consider the proposal.

Councillor Mark Loveday said he had asked a police officer on the scene what he could do to help as a local councillor and was asked to source a Council building for

a rest centre. He identified Lancaster Court but struggled to reach relevant Council officers. He suggested that in times of emergency the website and phones should switch to an emergency mode - with clear messages about who to contact for emergency enquiries.

Kim Dero said the work mentioned earlier about using community networks better should include councillors as community leaders. The Council was also reviewing training for members around crisis communications and emergency response.

Councillor Michael Adam highlighted the importance of effective crisis communications. He felt the Council should consider how to respond to more existential scenarios – e.g. a major safeguarding issue. The Council also needed to get the very best advice possible – top professionals had signalled that they were willing to help Councils in the wake of Grenfell and those offers should be taken up.

ACTION 1: Alistair Ayers / Louise Raisey

The Chair asked about the resilience of the mobile phone network as so many people relied on their smartphones for access to the internet now. He asked if officers knew where the phone masts in the borough were and what happened if some went down during a major incident. Nick Austin (Lead Director for Environmental Services) said there were lists of strategic assets in the borough that were regularly reviewed by the Police.

Councillor PJ Murphy asked for a timeline of when the Council offered help to RBKC following the Grenfell Tower fire and when that support was formally accepted. Kim Dero said there was still an ongoing public inquiry into the fire and she had worked with legal officers to ensure the report wouldn't prejudice that process. For that reason there were certain details that couldn't be released until the inquiry concluded. Nick Austin added that there were complications because of shared services. Staff were initially deployed to help through local work contacts rather than a formal agreement between organisations. Councillor Murphy wanted to know when the two organisations formally started talking to each other.

Kim Dero noted that the report did highlight that the shared arrangements complicated matters. She also fed back to London Councils, the LGA, and London Gold that neighbouring boroughs should be treated differently in coordinated efforts – proximity and shared services should be taken into account. Councillor Murphy asked for that element to be clarified in the report.

Councillor PJ Murphy asked about the Weekly Orders (2.11 of the report) – how was that communicated in an emergency and how often was it refreshed. Nick Austin said there was a rota for who leads but in an emergency it was updated hourly. Councillor Murphy asked how staff knew who was dealing with what. Nick Austin said the rota was sent out to all staff on the list. Councillor Murphy said it would be useful if all staff had access to it so they could signpost people.

Councillor Mark Loveday asked how many members of the Cabinet had emergency response and communications training. He suggested members of Cabinet should be given training and be given a defined role. Kim Dero said training was offered in

the past as part of their induction but the recommendation now was for training to be offered to all Councillors.

Councillor Vivienne Lukey asked what was meant by bystander management on page 34 of the report. Kim Dero said that referred to being a 'bystander' in local authority terms – i.e. H&F was treated as a bystander authority in relation to Grenfell despite our close relationship and support.

Councillor Mark Loveday noted that there had been some difficulties using the Lancaster Court facility as a rest centre on the day of the Parsons Green attack. Access to the building was a particular problem – he asked that consideration be given to how we can get access to facilities in emergency situations. Perhaps a list of key-holder contacts.

ACTION 2: Alistair Ayres

Housing

Councillor PJ Murphy asked for more detail on the people housed in H&F to be added to the report (final numbers, how many children, adults etc.).

Councillor Murphy also noted that the report said key-workers were with every family within 48 hours of the Grenfell fire – what could we do to shorten that?

Councillor Murphy noted that Grenfell families were afraid to take on temporary accommodation for fear of losing permanent housing in RBKC. Could the Council give a guarantee that a similar emergency situation wouldn't affect our residents' housing rights in future? Kim Dero said the Administration fully supported providing a guarantee and the Council could formalise that in a policy document.

Councillor Mark Loveday asked who was responsible for providing temporary housing for residents in private accommodation. Nick Austin said for people in private accommodation it would be their insurance arrangements but the Council would keep respite and rest centres open and would try to identify any vulnerable residents that needed extra support.

Note: Councillor Guy Vincent entered the meeting at 8.09pm

Councillor Loveday noted that after the Shepherd Court fire it was very difficult to find large numbers of hotel rooms to house people temporarily (5.6 of the report). Hotels wanted the Council to provide a credit card and book like anyone else but could we not make arrangements with them for these types of situations? Glendine Shepherd said we had a business account with Premier Inn but other hotels wouldn't allow that. Councillor Loveday said we should name and shame hotels who refused to provide emergency accommodation which the Council would pay for. He asked officers to go back to hotels to try to engage with them.

ACTION 3: Glendine Shepherd

Welfare

Councillor Vivienne Lukey noted that some people were unable to get the medication they required after the Parsons Green incident. She asked what the arrangements were in the NHS – could they free up a GP or pharmacist to fulfil these requests?

And what support did they provide for counselling after these events? Mike Boyle (Director for Strategic Commissioning and Enterprise) said the CCG was responsible and if that didn't happen at Parsons Green he would take it up with their Chief Executive. He added that the West London Mental Health Trust had plans to respond to people's support needs in terms of counselling etc. Sarah Thomas noted that health partners were invited to the hackathon and a local GP, some mental health professionals, and a pharmacist attended.

Councillor PJ Murphy asked that the second to last bullet point on page 39 was amended - if people volunteered, the Council should have the same duty of care as it did to its own staff.

Donations Management

Councillor PJ Murphy noted that there was no mention of how donations were distributed. Sarah Thomas (Director for Delivery and Value) said they were distributed through RBKC as they already had a network in place for their own donations. Perishables were sent to local foodbanks and some items were kept back for the families that were placed in our borough.

Councillor Guy Vincent asked about the process for financial donations. Kim Dero said the Council directed people to a JustGiving web-page that was set up by RBKC. There were some cash donations and officers developed a policy on this as this was a new area. It was a new experience for the Council, hundreds of people and thousands of items arrived in just a few days. Now we had clear guidelines on what to give and what not to give.

Training

The Committee felt training should be given to all Directors - not just some (8.2) - and all Councillors.

Mutual Aid

Councillor Michael Adam asked what the interface with Transport for London was like during the Parsons Green incident. Nick Austin said the Police and Transport Police took control of the cordon. Kim Dero added that she received a lot of intelligence through the London Gold group.

Councillor Michael Adam asked if the Council was liaising with the three major football clubs in the borough on these issues. Nick Austin said the Council was responsible for issuing the clubs with their safety certificates - they worked closely throughout the year, carrying out formal exercises, debriefs, Safety Advisory Group meetings etc. The Council had good working arrangements with all of the clubs.

Councillor Guy Vincent noted that an issue with Grenfell was that RBKC didn't seem to think they needed support. Was there an override in those cases? Kim Dero said London Gold and DCLG would take a leadership role if necessary.

Councillor Nicholas Botterill felt London required a pan-London disaster response set up on par with New York or other leading world cities. Kim Dero said there was a London Strategic Emergency Plan and London Gold sat underneath that. Councillor Guy Vincent agreed with Councillor Botterill - there needed to be an overarching support system that could take control in emergency situations. Kim Dero agreed that it needed to be considered, but she said that during Parsons Green she was in regular contact with London Gold and the fire, police and military services. They were very hands-on and she felt supported by the group.

Work with Communities and Businesses

Councillor Michael Adam asked what the implications of these incidents were on the Council's insurance programme. David Hughes (Director of Audit, Risk, Fraud and Insurance) responded that the Council was looking to increase its liability limit of indemnity from £50m to £175m per incident. Officers were also reviewing property insurance cover.

Councillor Michael Adam asked if that included the cost of providing temporary housing and associated costs or could those be reimbursed from Central Government. Emily Hill (Head of Corporate Finance) said the Government would reimburse additional emergency costs.

Councillor PJ Murphy said it would be important to regularly review this work every few years - it should be woven into the DNA of the Council.

The Chair thanked officers for their contributions to the report.

RESOLVED

That the Committee discussed the findings and recommendations of the report and made suggestions (above) for the Council to consider in its response.

5. UPDATE ON THE FIRE SAFETY PLUS PROGRAMME AND HOUSING COMPLIANCE

David McNulty (Programme Manager) and Graham Coupar (Project Manager) presented the report that provided an update on actions taken since the report to the Committee in September 2017 on the Fire Safety Plus programme and health and safety compliance in residential properties. David McNulty highlighted that all blocks requiring a fire risk assessment had them in place.

Councillor Mark Loveday commented that the Fire Enforcement Notice for Robert Gentry House had been outstanding for some time and the expected resolution date was February 2018 (8.1 of the report). David McNulty replied that the notice concerned the replacement of front doors and while they were in the process of being ordered and fitted it would be a lengthy process due to long waiting times for any quantity of fire doors since Grenfell.

Councillor PJ Murphy asked for a timeline for resolving this issue. Graham Coupar said ordering the doors could take three to four months then fitting them on site could take time as it was difficult to get access to certain properties.

Councillor Mark Loveday felt the Council wasn't treating this as an urgent issue. He asked for reassurances that the Council was making this a priority. Graham Coupar said work was progressing, officers had met the fire service on the site. All of the 'quick wins' had been completed and the longer works were in progress. There was no way to accelerate the delivery and fitting of the doors. Councillor Guy Vincent asked for a timeline of dates to be circulated to members.

ACTION 4: David McNulty

The Chair asked if Adult Social Care were engaged on this – working with vulnerable residents to ensure access to their properties for fitting the new doors. David McNulty said there were issues with access. Where the Council had information about vulnerable residents, solutions were put in place.

Councillor Nicholas Botterill noted that the portable appliance tests (PAT) (6.1.5 of the report) were not a very efficient way of testing electrical goods – they were only useful if everyone took part and if they were carried out regularly. He also expressed surprise that the Council would be replacing white goods free of charge if found to be faulty. David McNulty said the PATs were part of a package of testing and review where all elements of fire safety would be looked at including electrical appliances, smoke alarms, alterations, doors etc. As far as take up of the offer – officers were doing all they could to encourage take up.

Councillor Mark Loveday asked if there was a reason the asbestos register couldn't be made publicly available to residents (8.2 of the report). David McNulty said it wasn't currently public but there was no reason it couldn't be. Councillor Loveday asked if there was a programme for asbestos removals. David McNulty said it was risk based – each case was assessed as it came up.

Councillor Mark Loveday asked if the gas safety post-inspection checks had unearthed any further issues with the checking process (8.3 of the report). Graham Coupar said there hadn't been any significant failures in the QA process.

Councillor Mark Loveday asked for an update on the performance of electrical safety checks (8.4 of the report) as it has been a particular area of concern for the Committee in the past. Graham Coupar said the checks were broadly on track for the first six months and he hadn't been advised of any concerns about the quality of the work. Councillor Loveday asked for more detailed figures in this area.

ACTION 5: David McNulty

Councillor Guy Vincent asked whether the Council was actually going to put sprinklers in its tower blocks (5.5 of the report). Graham Coupar said there was a scoping strategy conducted by Colin Todd Associates. This was a high-level and detailed strategy identifying the most logical places to invest, alternative considerations and ongoing maintenance liabilities. Sprinklers were just one of a number of measures – they weren't the best option for every block. For the 10 storey

and above, block feasibilities were being undertaken at Edward Woods and Charecroft estates, which should conclude in February 18.

Councillor PJ Murphy asked when a final decision would be made on sprinklers. Graham Coupar said a feasibility study report would be available in February 2018 and following that, decisions would be made block by block.

RESOLVED

The Committee noted the contents of this report and the actions taken to date by officers.

6. CORPORATE HEALTH AND SAFETY UPDATE - APRIL TO OCTOBER 2017

Nick Austin (Lead Director for Environmental Services) presented the report which provided an overview of the performance of the organisation regarding compliance with its health and safety duties for the period April 2017 to October 2017.

Councillor Mark Loveday asked, in relation to 7.4 of the report, if the Council should be more proactive and going in and inspecting rather than just writing to owners. Nick Austin said the Council was still in an investigatory phase. Richard Buckley added only four landlords hadn't been in contact. Five have had samples of building materials sent off for testing. One had already reported back that they were safe.

Councillor Loveday said the report referred to private buildings with potential cladding issues but what about other fire safety issues in private buildings - what were the Council's responsibilities? Nick Austin said the fire brigade was responsible for any other issues. Councillor Loveday said the Council shouldn't be seen to be taking our eyes off our obligations to the private sector.

Councillor PJ Murphy asked what an acceptable compliance rate was for fire safety and when we would reach it. Nick Austin said for fire issues our target compliance rate was 100 percent and the Council had put in additional resources to reach this goal within four to five months.

Councillor Nicholas Botterill asked if the Council's facilities management had taken a backwards step in recent years. Nick Austin said, before the point of hand over to Amey (the contractor) there had been a lot of work across the estate – with complete asset registers that were regularly updated and readily accessible. The current position was that that didn't exist anymore. Contractual performance, reporting, and contract management were all sub-standard at present.

Councillor Vivienne Lukey pointed out a mistake in 8.1 of the report – there were four nursery schools in the borough.

RESOLVED

The Committee noted the report.

7. TREASURY MID-YEAR REVIEW 2017-18

Peter Worth (interim Director of Treasury and Pensions) and Phil Triggs (newly appointed Director of Treasury and Pensions) presented the report that updated the Committee on the delivery of the 2017-18 Treasury Management Strategy approved by Council on 22 February 2017.

Councillor Michael Adam asked why cash balances were increasing. Peter Worth said there was a peak in the middle of the year due to the collection of Council Tax and Business Rates.

Councillor Michael Adam, referring to 4.4 of the report, said while there had been some restructuring of the investment profile, it was still not moving to longer-term maturity investments to increase yield. This had been discussed for a while – when would the Council put this in place? Phil Triggs said this was a major priority and would start within the next month or so.

Councillor Michael Adam asked if officers were confident all the MiFiD compliance work would be completed by the January deadline. Peter Worth said he was reasonably confident – officers were chasing counter-parties this week. Phil Triggs added he would be making phone calls this week to ensure it was complete.

Councillor Nicholas Botterill, referring to Appendix 1 of the report, asked if there had been a change in policy allowing the Council to deposit money in foreign banks. Peter Worth said the current policy permitted overseas domiciled investments. Councillor Botterill asked if officers felt it was wise to have 15 percent of the Council's holdings with a single foreign bank. Phil Triggs said the investments were made with institutions on an approved counter-party list with very high set criteria. There were many good quality banks overseas, often with greater credit quality than UK banks. Hitesh Jolapara (Strategic Finance Director) said officers would carry out further due diligence and would make changes if there were any concerns raised.

RESOLVED

The Committee noted the Annual Treasury Strategy 2017-18 Mid-Year Review.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT UPDATE

David Hughes (Director of Audit, Risk, Fraud and Insurance) presented the report which updated the Committee on risk management within the Council and presented the Corporate Risk Register for consideration.

Councillor Mark Loveday asked for more information on Risk 21 – Coroners Office. Nick Austin said the senior coroner had been suspended pending disciplinary action, leading to a backlog in cases. There had also been general performance issues. To resolve this the Council had appointed a temporary senior coroner and would be appointing four assistant coroners. An action plan was in place to reduce the backlog and improve customer service and officers were meeting regularly to review with the MET Police and Chief Coroner.

The Committee asked officers to review Risk 23 – King Street Regeneration Programme following the recent consultation on the new development.

ACTION 6: Jo Rowlands/Michael Hainge

RESOLVED

That the Committee noted the report and reviewed the Corporate Risk Register.

9. CORPORATE ANTI-FRAUD SERVICE - HALF YEAR UPDATE REPORT - 1 APRIL 2017 TO 30 SEPTEMBER 2017

David Hughes (Director of Audit, Risk, Fraud and Insurance) presented the report that provided an account of fraud related activity undertaken by the Corporate Anti-Fraud Service between 1 April 2017 and 30 September 2017.

RESOLVED

The Committee noted the fraud work undertaken during the year to date for the period 1 April 2017 to 30 September 2017.

10. INTERNAL AUDIT QUARTERLY REPORT FOR THE PERIOD 1 JULY - 30 SEPTEMBER 2017

David Hughes (Director of Audit, Risk, Fraud and Insurance) presented the report that summarised internal audit activity in respect of audit reports issued during the period 1 July to 30 September 2017 and the performance of the Internal Audit service. He noted that there were no outstanding recommendations and no outstanding reports awaiting a management response.

Councillor Guy Vincent asked how this had been achieved. David Hughes attributed this quarter's performance to the Committee's consistently strong challenge and Kim Dero's new approach to audit matters with the Senior Leadership Team.

RESOLVED

That the Committee noted the report.

11. FINAL AUDIT REPORT - ADULT SOCIAL CARE CONTRACT MANAGEMENT - CARERS HUB 2016-17

Mike Boyle (Director for Strategic Commissioning and Enterprise) presented the report and noted that the new Carers' Hub contract had incorporated all of the report's recommendations.

Councillor PJ Murphy asked what actions had been put in place to ensure this didn't happen again. Mike Boyle said there were monthly contract monitoring meetings with Carers Network and they also met quarterly with the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care.

RESOLVED

That the Committee noted the report.

12. ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT ACTION PLAN AND OUTSTANDING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EXTERNAL AUDIT

Geoff Drake (Senior Audit Manager) presented the report that summarised progress implementing recommendations arising from the 'External Audit Report 2016/17' and the Annual Governance Statement. He noted that three recommendations arising from the External Audit Report 2016/17 had now been reported as implemented.

RESOLVED

That the Committee noted the report.

13. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting was scheduled for 14 March 2018.

Meeting started: 7.00 pm
Meeting ended: 9.55 pm

Chair

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