

London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham

Social Inclusion and Community Safety Policy and Accountability Committee Minutes



Wednesday 1 February 2023

PRESENT

Committee members: Councillors Nikos Souslous (Chair), Omid Miri, Trey Campbell-Simon, Sally Taylor and Andrew Dinsmore

Other Councillors: Councillors Rebecca Harvey (Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion and Community Safety) and Councillor Rowan Ree (Cabinet Member for Finance and Reform)

Officers:

Mo Basith (Law Enforcement Manger)

Kellie Gooch (Head of Finance, Environment)

Matthew Hooper (Chief Neighbourhood Officer)

Bram Kainth (Strategic Director of Environment)

Craig Knight (Chief Superintendent, Metropolitan Police)

Andre Mark (Head of Finance –Strategic Planning and Investment)

Neil Thurlow (Assistant Director of Community Safety, Resilience and CCTV)

1. **APOLOGIES**

There were no apologies for absence.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Trey Campbell-Simon declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 4, Annual Performance Report for Law Enforcement Team as an employee of the Barons Court Project.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 22 November 2023 were agreed as an accurate record.

Change of agenda order

Members agreed a variation to the published order of business to take Agenda Item 7, Medium Term Financial Strategy first.

4. 2023 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

Cabinet Member Overview

Councillor Rowan Ree (Cabinet Member for Finance and Reform) introduced the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023 (MTFS) presentation by thanking member colleagues for their collective input, and commended officers for all their hard work and commitment to preparing the council's budget proposals. This was a remarkable piece of work as final figures from the Local Government Financial Settlement were released two days before the parliamentary Christmas recess. This was also the fifth consecutive year of having a single year financial settlement and many assumptions had informed the MTFS.

This was a balanced budget, in response to the difficult financial future predicted by the Bank of England, a 10.5% inflationary rate, and interest rates of 3.5%, all of which were expected to have a significant impact on council finances. Despite this, high quality services had continued with free home care, free breakfasts for primary school children, maintaining weekly refuse collection and the introduction of Law Enforcement Team (LET). These were significant achievements and continued to be part of a package of proposals designed to protect frontline services for residents. Approximately £1 million in ring fenced funding had been provided as part of the council's cost of living response to support residents.

Head of Strategic Planning and Investment - Corporate Finance Overview

Andre Mark provided a corporate overview of the 2023/24 MTFS strategic operating environment. The annual local government settlement had made it difficult to develop budget proposals, particularly given the demographic changes and an older population. Key principles underpinning the budget and shaping priorities against planned borrowing were explained. Demand led services such as school transport and social care had added further pressure and the strategy would protect frontline services and create resilience. H&F had one of the lowest council tax payments of £832 for a Band D property, meaning that a 1% rise for example, represented an increase of £8.30 per household. Savings of 2.9m had been proposed, and to place this in context, £40 million in efficiencies had been identified in the past of five years through better management of hospital discharges, and children's services commissioning. A new waste management contract had been implemented, and in addition £1 million was to be invested in homelessness services.

In terms of financial resilience, reserves were on par with the London average and in line with Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy recommendations. Earmarked reserves were ring fenced to protect business contingency planning and to fund a planned IT upgrade to ensure greater service resilience. Particular risk factors included demographic changes such as an aging population and the increased numbers of cases with complex needs. Additional pressures also included major regeneration projects such as the Civic Campus and free home care services, which could be impacted by the current financial climate.

About 53% of households paid full council tax, with the remainder benefiting from the council's generous council tax relief scheme. The local government financial settlement expected local authorities in England to increase council tax by 3%, and to levy 2% social care precept.

Strategic Director of Environment – Department Overview

Bram Kainth provided the committee with departmental highlights of the revenue budget for 2023/24 and described the range of services provided which included 5 million waste and recycling collections, dealing with 12,000 noise nuisance complaints, the provision of libraries, parks and leisure services and keeping clean over 18k miles of streets. The department had also led the council's response to address climate change by producing a net zero plan, independently commended as one of the best in London, by installing 2500 electric car charging points. Other key highlights included £4.7 million of investment in the LET to tackle gang crime and anti-social behaviour at no additional cost to residents with £2.2 million secured through developer contributions.

As part of the council's response to the cost-of-living crisis, £9 million in energy related grants had been paid, and £13 million in retail relief support. Improvements had also been made to the way in which residents access key council services. The department had received a significant commercial income of £12 million, for which a 10% inflationary uplift for 2023/24 was planned for non-statutory fees and charges. The Good Parks for London 2021 guide recognised that the borough parks had significantly improved, moving from 27th place in the previous year to 5th place. Future strategic budget issues included the repair work to Hammersmith Bridge, which was awaiting confirmation of funding contributions from the Department of Transport and Transport for London and there were significant national inflationary pressures such as the cost of energy and current service contracts linked to the cost-of-living crisis.

Councillor Andrew Dinsmore sought a breakdown of the £4.7 million investment in the LET and the proportion that was allocated to the Gangs Violence Unit (GVU), and also the breakdown of expenditure for equipment, vehicles and uniforms. Kellie Gooch explained that of the £4.7 million, £1 million was for the GVU and assured the committee that a more detailed response could be provided as an action. Focusing on the LET salaries, Councillor Dinsmore asked why these were as high as police officer salaries. Neil Thurlow responded that the salary scale was commensurate with the role and job descriptions, and as approved by Human Resources. It was also explained that police on costs were higher. Councillor Nikos Souslous reminded colleagues that this was not dissimilar to

a point raised at the July 2022 meeting of the committee and a response to this had been recorded in the minutes.

Councillor Dinsmore enquired about the proportion of the £4.7 million that was attributable to developer contributions and it was noted that this was £2.2 million. Enquiring about the impact of cancelled planning meetings, Councillor Dinsmore asked whether this would lead to decreased developer funding contributions. Bram Kainth explained that cancelled planning meetings were attributed to a decline in business which was not unusual at this time of year. Section 106 planning contributions that were currently being applied were historic and had accumulated during the previous five years.

Referencing Councillor Dinsmore's question about LET developer contributions of £2.2 million, Councillor Omid Miri sought clarification about whether this was funding that was anticipated or had already been secured. Bram Kainth explained that this was an annual cost and had already been secured for future provision. Contributions were negotiated as part of a continuous and on-going process and would depend on future funding agreements. Councillor Miri commented that a noted limitation of the LET was that the team could not be larger. He sought financial, strategic and operational perspectives from officers as to how this could be addressed. Kellie Gooch responded that it was not possible to increase the LET as the budget did not include an allowance for growth investment, although the council continually sought to improve contributions, applied in accordance with council priorities. From a strategic and operational perspective, Neil Thurlow explained that active resident engagement was strongly encouraged, and the work of the LET was widely promoted.

Focusing on the wider community safety context, Councillor Ree commented that the administration had invested £5.4 million in comprehensive CCTV coverage, requiring £765k in annual support costs, in addition to regular borough wide LET patrols. A Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) lead officer post was funded by the Greater London Authority and was included in the base budget, permanently going forward as part of a four-year strategy.

As chair of the Planning and Development Committee, Councillor Miri acknowledged that a decline in planning applications could lead to a downturn in developer contributions particularly given the cost-of-living crisis and asked what mitigation plans were in place to address this, particularly in the context of LET funding. Bram Kainth explained that the council was committed to supporting the LET service and if developer contributions declined, the department would identify alternative sources of funding to continue the service.

ACTIONS

1. For the Head of Finance (Environment) to provide details of the £3.7 million allocation to the LET and the breakdown of expenditure on service support costs such as equipment, uniforms and vehicles.

RESOLVED

That the proposals for the Medium Term Financial Strategy were noted.

5. ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR THE LAW ENFORCEMENT TEAM

Neil Thurlow presented the report which set out performance data for the Law Enforcement Team (LET). The report also included an update on actions arising from previous updates presented to the committee.

Councillor Omid Miri welcomed the update and thanked officers for a response provided to his request about the number of female LET officers recruited, and that this had increased by 2. He also welcomed the ongoing commitment to recruit more women to the LET. Councillor Dinsmore also welcomed the progress to increase female representation within the LET and asked what measures were being implemented to support this. Mo Basith responded that there was engagement work undertaken within the H&F community, encouraging the interest of residents who are keen and interested in the work by highlighting vacancies. There was significant value in recruiting officers with local knowledge and awareness.

Councillor Miri sought further details about the frequency of priority patrols, the localities in which they were deployed and the eligibility criteria that determined whether a priority patrol was warranted. There was a concern that the frequency and intervention of patrols depended on officer availability. Mo Basith explained that the priority patrol list consisted of a list of 20 locations, identified out of approximately 900-1000 roads in the borough, and which would increase by up to a maximum of about 25, when necessary. A daily report as to the locations on the list was provided at the start of the day shift, and the relevant ward officer paid particular attention to that area. Close working with council and police colleagues, and residents ensured that the priority list was well informed by reported intelligence on issues such as anti-social behaviour, housing or environmental concerns. This was included as part of the handover to the night shift at 8pm. An area remained on the priority list until officers were satisfied that any problem was resolved. It was confirmed that officers would share the list with members, with the caveat that it was subject to change.

The relevance and justification of implementing weapon sweeps was raised by Councillor Andrew Dinsmore, in relation to employment statistics set out at page 21 of the agenda pack. 864 weapons were conducted, removing 10 weapons, indicating just over a 1% efficiency rate. He asked how this could be improved, although he recognised that the weapons removed represented one less life that could be lost. A second question sought clarification about for example, screwdrivers and how it was possible that these were classified as weapons and assumed that they would be used for any purpose other than domestic. Matthew Hooper responded that items included in the weapons list had been concealed, in places and locations where it was known that weapons were likely to be concealed. It was a reasonable assumption that they could be regarded as weapons due to the nature of the concealment. Referencing his answer to the same point raised at the July meeting, he acknowledged that the find rate was not huge, which was welcome, however, any number of weapons found meant that one less person would be at risk and that there was an exponentially lower risk of impact and cost to police and health services. Weapons sweeps were intelligence led and the LET officers continued to work with the police to find weapons.

Councillor Trey Campbell-Simon referred to section 22 of the report and sought further information about the type of support being provided to the homeless community in the borough. He asked what had been done to reach out to rough sleepers and partners, and which organisations and services had been in contact with rough sleepers. Mo Basith explained that the LET worked very closely with organisations such as Thames Reach, an outreach team that routinely accompanied LET officers. Thames Reach staff often worked in isolation at night, and so the LET provided were an additional resource. A list of known areas where rough sleepers bedded down and intelligence about this was shared with LET officers. Officers would accompany outreach staff and assist by providing safeguarding support. Additional work was undertaken during severe weather, with an emergency protocol implemented ensuring that all known rough sleepers were found. To ensure that rough sleepers and the homeless were able to engage with services, the LET also co-ordinated with the council's Rough Sleeper Co-ordinator (Housing Services, H&F). Daytime intelligence about any newly identified rough sleepers was channelled through the rough sleeper team and Street Link.

Councillor Miri referenced Ashcroft Square, King Street and Shepherds Bush Green as examples of areas that had experienced anti-social behaviour and where a partial closure order had been implemented with some success. Councillor Miri indicated that he felt reassured that the LET continued to conduct patrols in the two areas and residents had responded positively. Councillor Miri explained that he had seen an email trail that indicated that officers were engaged and responsive to residents' concerns about reported anti-social behaviour and unauthorised access to their buildings. However, the situation has not entirely been resolved in Ashcroft Square and Councillor Miri asked if this was attributable to the partial closure. Mo Basith acknowledged that there had been offences taking place but that he was not yet in a position to corroborate the assertions of residents, without reviewing the available data and information provided by residents. A multi-agency team meeting was planned to address issues such as access to the buildings in Ashcroft Square to deter unauthorised access, together with the installation of additional CCTV cameras. There had been significant and ongoing consultation and engagement with residents including priority patrols, which residents had welcomed.

Councillor Miri asked a follow up question and using Ashcroft Square to illustrate his point, and asked that if the entry doors were in a state of disrepair, how would LET officers proactively engage with housing colleagues and how would a repair be facilitated with housing building repair services. Mo Basith responded that the LET would liaise with the community safety co-ordinator who would in turn, liaise with the different service areas. In addition, it was explained that walkabouts with the community safety co-ordinator allowed them to identify areas of concern that needed to be quickly and effectively addressed.

Councillor Campbell-Simon referenced the first meeting of the committee in July 2022 and discussions about how the LET engaged with underrepresented members of the community. He asked if there had been any further feedback to report. Mo Basith confirmed that a number of resident engagement events had been held with faith groups in addition to ward panel meetings. Neil Thurlow added that the LET are able to engage with the police, offering a point of contact for residents, and this would also allow them to gain a better understanding of work that the LET undertake.

He reported also that the council had worked with an organisation called Navy Lab in order to gain a better understanding of community connectors and engagement.

ACTIONS

1. For the LET Enforcement Manger to provide further business intelligence information and data about the LET outreach work with organisations such as Thames Reach to support rough sleepers in the borough and the number of rough sleepers.
2. Members to provide details about which communities would benefit from greater engagement with the LET, and for this to be reported back by the LET Enforcement Manager as part of future area of scrutiny for the committee as to how the LET undertake community engagement.

RESOLVED

That the Annual Performance Report and LET update was noted.

6. PUBLIC SPACE PROTECTION ORDERS

Charis Champness provided a statutory overview of what Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs) were and how they should focus on problem behaviours that must be evidenced as either persistent or detrimental to the community. There were four PSPOs in place across the borough and two PSPO consultations had recently taken place. The first concerned responsible dog ownership. The second concerned the use of bikes on the Thames towpath and had been extended following the concerns of residents that a restriction on the use of peddle bikes should not be included in the PSPO.

A member of the public explained that her daughter used a bike that included a carriage for her children, which added significantly to the weight of her e-bike. She asked officers and committee members to consider carefully the implications of any restrictions on the towpath as the impact on e-bike users was not uniform and unfair. In this case, her daughter would be unable to navigate pavements and roads due to the weight and width of the bike carriage, which was significantly easier as an e-bike, and safety issues in navigating parked cars.

Charis Champness explained that the purpose of the PSPO consultation was to ensure that all the views of residents were taken into account before any agreement on the parameters of the PSPO were reached. The results and analysis of the consultation would inform the PSPO. In addition, an Equalities Impact Assessment would also be undertaken to understand the impact of a potential PSPO on different user groups, particularly those with protected characteristics. If introducing the PSPO will create a negative impact, for example, increased car usage, this would be taken into consideration. Residents will be informed of the consultation outcomes and Charis Champness agreed to email the member of the public once the outcome of the consultation was known which would be widely communicated by the council to residents using a range of mediums including a resident newsletter. Neil Thurlow welcomed feedback from the member of the public about cyclists riding on pavements along Fulham Palace Road and also on the Peabody Estate. It was

explained that the aim of the PSPO was to address anti-social behaviour so parameters of any restrictions would be appropriately considered.

RESOLVED

That the report detailing an update on Public Space Protection Orders consultation activities was noted.

7. HARMLESS HEXAGONS

Chief Superintendent Craig Knight of the Metropolitan Police gave a presentation on the use of geospatial mapping to target violent crime reduction in the borough.

Councillor Omid Miri asked if the Shepherds Bush Green Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) had been effective and when it was set to expire. Chief Superintendent Knight said the PSPO was time limited, lasting 6 months and could be extended for a further 3 months. He said it had been effective, with crime and anti-social behaviour reducing. It had given the police additional powers, though if crime had reduced in that period, it would be hard to justify extending the order.

Councillor Miri asked if the hexagon activity zones were time limited and if they came with any additional police powers. Chief Superintendent Knight said the hexagon process looked at where the crime rate was highest across the three boroughs and was reviewed fortnightly. There were no additional powers, but the approach meant targeting of resources.

Councillor Miri asked if knife threats at and around Hammersmith station had led to a larger TfL police presence. Chief Superintendent Knight said knife related crime in the borough had reduced and the Met had been working closely with the British Transport Police (BTP) to improve safety at tube stations. He added that he was keen to work with any team that acted to reduce crime. High uniform visibility was an effective deterrent so alignment between the Met, BTP, and LET teams was critical.

Councillor Andrew Dinsmore said it would be useful if the police could provide additional LET training to target the key issues that the team faced. Chief Superintendent Knight said he was happy to offer advice and training to support the LET. Neil Thurlow added that the LET team had worked with the Met on carrying out weapons sweeps safely, improving radio training, violence against women and girls, modern slavery, ASBO powers, and problem solving.

Following a comment about the hexagon approach diverting resources away from other areas, Chief Superintendent Knight clarified that the hexagon process was a response to Home Office funding put in place to address consistently higher rates of crime in specific areas. It helped the police prioritise limited assets. Assets were applied based on the seriousness of the crime. The Mayor of London and Commissioner were looking to identify priorities over the next two to three years.

RESOLVED

The Committee noted the report and presentation.

8. WORK PROGRAMME

The work programme was noted.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting, 21 March 2023, was noted.

Meeting started: 7.00 pm
Meeting ended: 9.00 pm

Chair

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