

London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham
**Children and Education
Policy and Accountability
Committee
Minutes**



Monday 26 November 2018

PRESENT

Committee members: Councillors Alan De'Ath (Chair), Alexandra Sanderson, Asif Siddique and Mark Loveday

Co-opted members: Vic Daniels, Nadia Taylor, Eleanor Allen

Other Councillors: Councillor Sue Fennimore (Deputy Leader of the Council) and Councillor Larry Culhane (Cabinet Member for Children and Education)

Officers

Steve Miley (Director of Children's Services)
Jan Parnell (Assistant Director of Education)
Bev Sharpe (Assistant Director of Family Services)
Alison Sabaroche (Head of Youth Offending Services)
David Abbott (Scrutiny Manager)

The meeting was attended by 28 other guests, including members of the public and representatives from local organisations, professional bodies, charities, schools, youth groups, and residents' associations.

1. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED

The minutes of the previous meeting, held on 3 September 2018, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Lucy Richardson, Nandini Ganesh, and Matt Jenkins.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. KNIFE CRIME AND YOUTH VIOLENCE - DISCUSSION ITEM

The Chair introduced the item and asked officers to give a short introduction to give context to the discussion.

Alison Sabaroche (Head of Youth Offending Services) gave an overview of the key issues in Hammersmith & Fulham:

- The borough was ranked fairly low for serious youth violence (24) and the percentage rise is the lowest in London.
- The 87s were the most concerning gang - based in Shepherd Bush on the White City estate.
- The majority of violence was between the 87s and Ladbroke Grove gangs clashing.
- H&F has a knife crime action plan and an 'ending gang violence' strategy.

Members asked if there was a breakdown of when these events took place. Alison said there was a peak after school. She added that the British Medical Journal had suggested staggering school times to mitigate this.

Members asked for more information on restorative interventions. Officers said it was a new approach involving mediation between victims and offenders. Officers were beginning to contact businesses, charities, local churches and mosques, and other local organisations to raise awareness about the process. They were considering some form of reparation – the goal was to make young people who committed crimes aware of the consequences of their behaviour. It was noted that Hackney have done good work in this area, including introducing safe spaces for young people to go if they are being attacked or under threat.

A resident asked what 'youth disposals' meant in this context. Officers explained that this was a court term – when a case was 'disposed' it was finished and removed from a court's docket. 'Disposal' might mean a caution, community order, custodial sentence etc.

The Chair asked representatives from the boroughs estates for their key concerns. They made the following points:

- Anti-social behaviour was more of an issue than knife crime.
- The Safer Neighbourhoods Team were good and carried out regular knife sweeps.
- Estates were worried about crime coming into the estates - some were looking to have security gates installed to protect their residents.
- There was crime on some estates but it wasn't violent. Residents were more aware of drug dealing etc.

Jan Parnell (Assistant Director of Education) noted that headteachers in H&F wanted to do some work collectively around anti-social behaviour as they felt it was increasing. She added that in recent years a lot of support roles (PSHE support, mentors etc.) had been removed from schools due to budget pressures and the impact was being felt.

Representatives from local secondary schools noted a recent report on mental health that said 13 percent of children aged between two and four years old had mental health problems. These issues started early and needed to be addressed early.

One of the co-optees said as a parent of a teenage son they worried about his safety in the evenings. They asked what should parents be looking for – how can parents reduce the risks for their children? The Chair asked if there was provision to support parents? Officers noted that there were a number of services that the Council provided for parents – giving advice to parents either in their home or in one on one sessions. Though these tended to focus on high-risk young people. There was also West London Action for Children that offered a range of counselling and therapy services for children in need and their families. The Chair made the point that many of the existing interventions were at a high level and perhaps we needed more preventative, early interventions.

A representative from the Parks Police informed the meeting that they were doing early intervention work with young children. They had put a package together for junior schools on the dangers and consequences of knife crime.

Many attendees noted that some primary-school-age children were exposed to concerning behaviour through their siblings and increasingly through social media. Interventions needed to be put in place as early as possible.

A general point was made about the link between violent behaviour in young people and domestic violence. Many perpetrators of violence were themselves the victims of trauma or secondary trauma. The Chair made the point on domestic violence that while there was so much media coverage of knife crime in the capital – there were as many women murdered in their own homes as there were young people murdered on the streets.

A representative from the National Union of Teachers noted that just last week there were concerns raised by teachers about youth provision. Over the past eight years there had been a dramatic decline in youth provision - where could young people go now? Gangs had stepped into the void and have become the social centre of some young people's lives.

A resident said they had observed a playground being used to sell drugs - so the children had to play directly outside their houses in view of their parents. The Chair asked where the safe spaces were in the borough – were parks safe spaces for young people?

A representative from one of the borough's Ward Panels agreed that there was a lack of facilities for young people (e.g. scout groups, youth centres, municipal pools). They also noted that in the past schools stayed open for sports. Officers highlighted that the football clubs in the borough (QPR, Fulham, and Chelsea) did a lot of work with young people – providing not just sports but a range of activities. There was also the volunteer police cadets and the combined cadet force. The Lyric Theatre had popular arts activities – and the scouts still operated in the borough. There was a wide range of youth provision but perhaps it needed to be publicised better.

Alison Sabaroche was asked what she felt would improve things in the borough. She answered that detached youth work was key – youth workers could go to hotspots, working out of hours to engage with young people and divert them into positive activities. Some people felt White City needed additional dedicated resource.

An officer noted the link between school exclusion and the increased likelihood of becoming involved in crime. Members noted that there were more exclusions now because of knife crime as a number of schools had zero tolerance policies.

A grants officer noted that there were 58 youth facing charities in the borough and they were doing a lot of great work. The Council was now trying to coordinate, support, and signpost to them.

The Chair asked, once vulnerable or high-risk children had been identified – how did we support them? Officers said they were working with schools now to map out the provision available.

The Chair said parents were often not aware of what's on offer. The meeting heard from an officer who said there's over 500 organisations operating in this space in the borough. We needed to find a way to raise awareness about the provision that's available to parents and schools.

A co-optee asked for more information on the preventative work being done with families. Bev Sharpe (Assistant Director of Family Services) said there were a number of interventions offered through the new Family Support Service. The majority (around 80 percent) of referrals to Family Services were around domestic violence. Children's Services had started to think more about trauma-based intervention. There were a lot of overlapping challenges – poverty, education, housing etc.

The Founder of the Violence Intervention Project addressed the Committee and made the case for more therapeutic work. He made the point that shame was almost always the catalyst for violence. Many young men have a mindset where if someone confronts them they can't back down so situations can quickly become violent. His organisation helped young people manage their emotions and taught them about resilience. Because his organisation was separate from the Council's statutory services they found it easier to work with some people.

Councillor Mark Loveday wanted to understand the scale of problem in more detail. Alison Sabaroche informed the Committee that in 2017 there were, on average, two victims of knife crime a week in the borough and that was an increase from 2016. Councillor Loveday asked about the geographical spread of perpetrators. Alison said the data showed that the majority of offenders came from White City - W12 and W10. Councillor Loveday felt there needed to be more analysis of where offenders and victims were so the Council could formulate a data-driven strategy. Provision should be targeted where it was most needed – the Council shouldn't have generic answers for the whole borough.

Councillor Mark Loveday, noting the vibrant community youth organisations in the borough, asked of the Council brought it all together in one place. Steve Miley (Director of Children's Services) said there was a comprehensive catalogue of activities for young people in the Summer in the City programme. He made the point that publicising activities wasn't the real issue – it was the engagement work to divert children who were on the cusp to the activities.

A representative from the Young Hammersmith Foundation noted that activities were being mapped this on their website (aimed at social workers, council workers etc.).

Members asked if any work was being done on cross-borough infiltration by gangs. A representative from the MET Police said work was being done on this – and the move to the Central West BCU (a shared police force that covered Hammersmith & Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea, and Westminster) made this easier.

The Council's SE and County Lines lead informed the Committee that her team would map out high-risk individuals peer groups to look at how they could make that space safer. They worked across multiple agencies and boroughs – sharing information – to do this effectively.

Representatives from the boroughs Ward Panels noted their disappointment that they were not invited to sit on the Police and Crime Commission. Officers said they would provide them written information about the commission.

The Chair asked attendees – what more can the Council do in this area? Recommendations included:

- Having more mentors in schools.
- Start talking with young people about domestic violence and the impacts.
- Find ways to bring community to young people.
- Offer free counselling and mental health support.
- Offer support from trained specialists in trauma management.
- Have independent domestic violence advocates.

The Chair then added the following recommendations:

- Primary schools needed support to get early interventions in place as early as possible.
- Schools needed further training and advice in the area – they needed to know what to look for and what support was available.
- Where parents had English as a second language – more needed to be done to ensure they understood what services were available to them.
- Schools should get together to share ideas and best practice.

Nicola Ashton (Public Health Commissioner) highlighted the Scottish approach – treating knife crime as a public health issue. It took time but ultimately saw a dramatic reduction in knife crime across the Country. The approach couldn't be transferred directly but there were important lessons to be learned. Members suggested this be raised with health partners at the Health & Wellbeing Board.

The Chair thanked everyone who attended the meeting. The contributions made would be fed into the resident-led Police and Crime Commission to inform their recommendations.

RESOLVED

1. That the contributions to the meeting be sent to the Police and Crime Commission for consideration.
2. That the Committee ask the Health & Wellbeing Board to consider a public health approach to knife crime – including lessons learned from the Scottish model.

5. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Committee noted that the next meeting would be held on 28 January 2019.

Meeting started: 7.00 pm
Meeting ended: 9.00 pm

Chair

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