

London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham

Social Inclusion and Community Safety Policy and Accountability Committee Minutes



Tuesday 19 July 2022

PRESENT

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

Other Councillors: Jacolyn Daly, Chair of Housing and Homelessness PAC (T); Victoria Brocklebank-Fowler, Conservative Leader of the Opposition; Rebecca Harvey, Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion and Community Safety; and Rowan Ree, Cabinet Member for Finance and Reform

Officers: Mohammed Basith, Law Enforcement Manager; Detective Inspector Debbie Field, The Metropolitan Police; Sergeant Seb Golding, The Metropolitan Police; Matthew Hooper, Chief Officer for Safer Neighbourhoods (T); Bram Kainth, Strategic Director of Environment (T); Roy Morgan, Head of Prevention and Wellbeing (T); Neil Thurlow, Assistant Director of Community Safety

(T) – Attendance by Teams
The meeting was not livestreamed.

1. APOLOGIES

None.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

3. WELCOME BY THE CHAIR

Councillor Nikos Souslous welcomed everyone to the first Social Inclusion and Community Safety and Policy and Accountability Committee meeting. The Administration manifesto promises to make the council 'ruthlessly inclusive' and compassionate, bringing communities and people together and to do as much as possible to make H&F a kind and happy place to be. It also places public safety front and centre and keeping resident's safe will be a top priority for the new Administration. Councillor Souslous set out his expectations to balance community

safety and social inclusion themed items on the agenda and invited members of the committee to consider and suggest areas for inclusion within the committees work programme, Agenda Item 6.

4. REFUGEE UPDATE

Councillor Souslous introduced the refugee verbal update on council activities supporting refugees from Afghanistan, and more recently from Ukraine. Roy Morgan (Teams) gave a PowerPoint presentation outlining a comprehensive range of activities and support services being provided to refugees hosted in the borough, as well as sponsors for Ukrainian refugees, working with local voluntary sector organisations. The council continued to work with the Home Office to co-ordinate the resettlement of Afghan refugees. The council was also lobbying actively against the government's inhumane proposals to send asylum seekers to Rwanda and advocating for open, safe routes for asylum seekers. A final aim as a compassionate council was to work to prevent people trafficking and exploitation and to be designated as a borough of sanctuary for refugees and asylum seekers.

Support services were currently being provided for 780 refugees in the borough, with donations and wrap around support services co-ordinated through local faith groups (mosques, churches) community and voluntary health and social care providers. This also included support in obtaining housing and providing advice on tenancy agreements. The council had also worked with the Department for Work and Pensions to help navigate benefit pathways, obtain national insurance numbers and personal independent payments. Officers had worked closely with the North West London Health colleagues to ensure that families had been registered with local health providers. Due diligence had been undertaken around children's safeguarding, with free school meals and uniforms also provided. Detailed figures were given on the number of individuals and family units being supported by nationality and the ways in which they had been supported. A slide deck of the presentation would be circulated following the meeting.

Councillor Omid Miri sought clarification about the direction of travel and an update about the city of sanctuary application process. The borough offered safety, assurance, and support for refugees, learning from examples of best practice from other boroughs, for example Lewisham. Roy Morgan explained that the designation highlighted the wrap-around provision offered, ensuring that all refugees were treated with equity and were able to have parity of access to services. Parity of provision was important as there had been notable differences in the response to Afghan refugees, compared to Ukrainian. The council was working with voluntary providers to ameliorate this.

Councillor Andrew Dinsmore sought assurance that refugee children were not being placed in private fee-paying schools. Councillor Rebecca Harvey confirmed that the council was not placing children in private schools however, some had offered places to sponsor families. All other children had been placed in state schools. Councillor Dinsmore reported that he had also received an email from a resident who described their poor experience of a "welcome" session hosted at the Quaker centre, with no school places and vouchers that had not initially worked and the absence of other welcoming provisions. Councillor Dinsmore sought an assurance that the

council would primarily focus on school provision and the provision of vouchers. Councillor Rebecca Harvey assured the committee that all children had been placed in local schools. Approximately £72k in vouchers had been issued and although there had been some one-off issues due to the speed of the scheme being established these had now been resolved, with frequent checks and monitoring to ensure tight management. Councillor Harvey commented that she was very proud of the support provided, including the Paddington Bear gift given to all Ukrainian refugee children, and that refugee week had offered a series of well-run events, including a range of arts and healing activities. Foster carers had been brought together and the council was working with Lord Alf Dubs to advocate for the rights and protection of unaccompanied children and child refugees. Positive feedback from the Home Office had indicated that H&F was one of the best council's supporting Afghan refugees placed in bridging hotels

Councillor Souslous noted that a member enquiry had been lodged by Councillor Dinsmore on 6 July and encouraged him to contact Councillor Harvey to follow up any further concerns about the issue to see if the council could provide any further assistance. It was also noted that there was support available from a council team for sponsor families, particularly where there was a breakdown in communication. Councillor Harvey outlined some of the provisions which included drop-in sessions and reported that council officers worked hard to support families and their sponsors.

Councillor Souslous commended the support provided by the council and the success of the refugee week activities and events. He asked what funds or support measures had been put in place to support any future refugee crises. Roy Morgan responded that there was a council team that was ready to be mobilised, with officers from across the council, including housing and children's services. There was also a dedicated refugee management team ready to provide wrap around support services for the next cohort.

RESOLVED

That the verbal update was noted.

5. LOCAL ENFORCEMENT TEAM

Neil Thurlow briefly described the role of the Local Enforcement Team (LET) established in December 2020, formed part of the Community Safety Unit and was one of the largest teams in London. Reflected in a budget of £4.5 million this represented a significant investment placing highly visible customer service and the accessibility of staff at the heart of the local community. Covering 21 wards, including the newly created additional wards, this was a 24/7 service working closely with the police, supported by the corporate communications unit. LET officers came from a range of diverse backgrounds and experience (including the police) and the LET Team Manager, Mohammed Basith had significant experience in leading such teams. There had been significant and exponential growth since the team had been established, maintaining and sustaining services with strong management.

Councillor Andrew Dinsmore enquired how many weapons had been recovered through active searches. Neil Thurlow confirmed that there had been 1237

searches, recovering 17 weapons (a range of knives), drugs (12 cannabis bags in a recent search) all of which had been safely removed, processed, and disposed. The methodology of a structured weapons sweep was described including how a site was identified and where searches were regularly undertaken. Mohammed Basith explained that LET ward officers routinely visited ten housing blocks each day and undertook patrols in two parks (minimum) as it was recognised that criminals commonly secreted weapons in communal areas and shrubbery.

Councillor Dinsmore noted the number of weapon sweeps and the number of items recovered calculating a low outcome rate. He enquired how this could be improved. Neil Thurlow responded that residents were aware that they could not secrete weapons in communal areas and that the LET was in regular communication with DI Debbie Field. The LET and Metropolitan police officers worked closely together and in tandem, maximising opportunities for sharing intelligence. Matthew Hooper added that 2019 had seen a significant number of youth attacks and violent incidents. Of the weapons sweeps undertaken so far, 17 weapons had been removed which, had they been used for criminal purposes, could have resulted in tragic loss and significant impact on the community. The social impact and removal of such weapons was balanced against the cost to the public purse.

Councillor Trey Campbell-Simon asked what the LET was doing to reach out to groups that had been more challenging to engage with. Mohammed Basith outlined the relationship with local tenants and residents' associations (TRAs). The LET, as a public facing council service, connected with residents through TRAs to reach entrenched communities, breaking down barriers and offering help to signpost or access support services. Sergeant Seb Golding explained that Metropolitan police officers were increasing the number of community engagement events (pop ups and ward panel meetings) that they attended to assist with crime prevention, offering higher police visibility and presence. Neil Thurlow added that residents can contact Mohammed Basith and his team through ward surgeries.

Councillor Sally Taylor provided some feedback with a proposal that the Mund Street offices in her ward of West Kensington could be refurbished and made to be more welcoming. The LET was a highly visible presence, but residents did not appreciate that the office did not offer access to a "drop-in" space, although the office was used as a base for the LET. The office lacked signposting about what residents could do to report incidents or concerns and this was particularly difficult for residents who were digitally excluded. A drop box for messages or easy to remember contact details were suggested, together with posters. Neil Thurlow recognised that whilst there were digital and phone routes to contact the service there were no drop ins offered. He agreed that alternate ways to engage would be further explored. Mohammed Basith added that the aim had been to align LET shifts with ward surgery opening hours but the variation in officer hours did not always make this feasible. It might, however, be possible to run LET surgeries. Exploring the feasibility of this it was recognised that digitally excluded residents were often a rich source of local intelligence and should not be overlooked.

ACTION: That information about the LET officers and their work be made more visible, communicated more accessibly in print and at the LET office; and that easy to recall contact details be made more readily available for residents to contact LET.

Councillor Dinsmore asked about the LET authority to arrest individuals, for example, someone in possession of a weapon or a person being attacked. Mohammed Basith explained that the immediate LET response would be to call in the incident to the police incident room. However, the presence of the LET served to deter such behaviour and discouraged incidents from occurring or escalating. DI Fields added that this was a two-way communication process, and that the LET could be called by the police to attend, where appropriate. Following a question from Councillor Dinsmore, DI Field confirmed that attendance at an incident reported through the LET could be marginally quicker than a response requested through dialling 999 because CCTV coverage was linked to the Metropolitan Police incident room. Councillor Rebecca Harvey clarified that CCTV-recorded evidence could facilitate a quicker response as this was closely monitored in real time.

Councillor Campbell-Simon commended the level of engagement work undertaken by LET but highlighted the importance of gaining trust in some sections of the community, for example, the homeless and he asked about the powers of the LET in removing homeless people from a sheltered housing site. Mohammed Basith replied that the LET worked very closely with local sheltered housing officers and reported that there had been a significant increase in unauthorised access. The LET signposted support services but where sites had been unauthorised trespass or damage to property, the LET officers would engage and encourage people to leave, signposting to help or housing outreach workers or contact the police. In some cases, a fixed penalty notices might be issued, with a lower penalty for early payment.

Councillor Omid Miri sought further information about the relationship between the police and LET. Councillor Jacolyn Daly (Teams) also welcomed the LET as a fantastic resource and enquired about how the LET safeguarded green or park areas where people had congregated during the summer, and where there had been an increase in casual “rough” sleeping because of the heat but not necessarily from those who could be regarded as homeless. Mohammed Basith confirmed that contrary to perception, not all those who were sleeping on green areas were rough sleepers but had decided to sleep outside because of the warm weather. Exploring the issue, it was noted that [Thames Reach](#) provided support to rough sleepers, however, it was recognised that breaches of law and order resulting in local residents being disturbed were a concern and that the optics did not look good for the wider homeless community. Areas where there was street activity that resulted in disturbance were prioritised by patrols and there was a list of known “hotspots”. Shepherds Bush, for example, was an area that was routinely visited each night to help prevent anti-social behaviour. Any non-compliance would lead to a referral and police intervention.

Councillor Souslous asked if LET officers had ever felt unsafe at times. Mohammed Basith explained that he had not been aware of any recent incidents that had given rise to fear for personal safety. Citing examples of incidents such as barbeques in public areas, officers had asked individuals to remove them (due to the threat of fire on dry grass) and they had complied with the request. It should be noted that many of the LET officers were from non-enforcement backgrounds but who were well trained and made good use of civil powers of restraint.

Councillor Miri asked if there were any plans to increase the number of officers within the LET from current 72. He also asked about the length of time it took to train LET officers, what the competency framework consisted of, and how this varied from the training received by metropolitan police officers. Neil Thurlow explained that exponential growth of the LET had been included in the Administration manifesto and was currently being costed. Training for newly recruited officers began with an intense period of internal training where they were informed of the frontline and high public profile of their community-based roles, with visible engagement. Six weeks of training began with two weeks desk-based training on enforcement regulations, training on casework and dispute resolution followed by an assessment with a minimum pass criterion to be met. Once the theory test had been completed, further training was undertaken with Mohammed Basith with on the ground training, working with other services (e.g., waste collection, licensing) followed by a six-month probationary period. A suggestion from Councillor Souslous to undertake mental health awareness training was welcomed.

ACTION: Officers to contact West London Trust to explore how mental health awareness training for LET could be included as part of formal training

DI Field outlined the training undertaken by police recruits, the level of support and intense scrutiny of progress throughout the training period and at every stage, from going out on patrol for the first time to evidence and intelligence gathering. Mentoring was provided throughout the street duty phase, with evidenced based appraisal and assessment.

Councillor Campbell-Simon asked how often the council's mandatory training was refreshed, for example General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), and whether there were training opportunities for personal development. It was confirmed that the intention was that the council offered a well-rounded package of training ensure that individuals were able to develop professionally into their roles and supported throughout. DI Field added that police had worked with the LET from its establishment. Their presence had offered a rich source of visual intelligence through camera footage. Illustrating this with an incident of drugs being openly sold at a local café, intelligence gathered by LET officers had led to the eventual imprisonment of two people. DI Field added that the LET was also invaluable in the enforcement monitoring of communal open spaces such as in Shepherds Bush Green and offered support to residents to mitigate the impact of violence against women and girls (VAWG). In respect of VAWG, two have-your-say events had been held with residents being able to speak to female police officers. The events had been actively promoted and offered support and advice. Walk and talk events had been held in areas where people did not feel safe to point out danger areas and the LET officers had supported these initiatives. Sergeant Golding explained that key advantages of working with LET was the service was operational 24/7 and had access to response teams such as sheltered housing, as had been discussed earlier in the meeting. In this context, where an offence had not been committed, this was not regarded as a priority event and LET officer were better positioned to respond. This had the effect of extending the coverage provided by the police.

Councillor Souslous highlighted the occurrence of anti-social behaviour during the Queen's Platinum Jubilee weekend in some of the Borough's parks. It was noted that the LET was able to respond when the police were unable to and act as a visible deterrent.

Councillor Miri asked if there were any incidents where a person had contacted 999, and this had been referred to the LET. Sergeant Golding explained that when a call was made to the 999 service that was not an emergency it was assessed and triaged. Calls that came through the neighbourhood teams could be responded to by a LET patrol. The breakdown of police officers was compared to the LET. Each neighbourhood ward had two police offices, two police special constable officers, across the old 16 ward boundaries. The switch to new ward boundaries was in progress but a new computer system would need to be operational before coverage was adjusted to reflect the new ward boundaries.

Councillor Dinsmore enquired about the base salary costs of a LET officer, compared in broad terms to a Metropolitan police officer. Neil Thurlow explained that LET officer salary range commenced on Principle Officer Grade 1, with a day shift enhancement of 14%, increased to 20% for night shifts, so approximately £32k. A Metropolitan probationary police officer received a starting salary of £29,600 (excluding London weighting) per annum. Matthew Hooper (Teams) highlighted that oncost were higher and that a comparison of the two salary scales was unhelpful given that the cost of training a police officer or special constable was significantly higher. Sergeant Golding agreed and clarified that it was more helpful to note that the cost of supporting a police officer on a street patrol was about £100 per hour, and therefore considerably more expensive than maintaining a LET officer.

Councillor Souslous asked for further guidance on the LETs 24-hour operations in estates across the borough. He noted that police officers in Fulham Reach had mentioned that they had not been given sufficient advance notice of an operation in Bayonne Estate that took place in June. Sweeps were planned where possible but was reliant on intelligence received. Advance notice of sweeps was communicated to members who could be invited to view the process through the Communications Team however, the Bayonne estate sweep had been set up at speed and with urgency following reports of ASB in the area. This had not allowed sufficient time to share details with all stakeholders

Councillor Souslous pointed out that due to the mismatch between police ward boundaries and the LETs operation based on new ward boundaries, some members may be confused. He also asked for local LET officers to reach out to their respective ward councillors and offer to meet with them.

ACTION: LET to proactively reach out to members because of the adjustment to new ward boundaries to help ensure that they were notified in advance and were able to attend local meetings, subject to LET shifts. This would also help LET officers get to know ward members. LET would also arrange to attend ward panel meetings as appropriate.

In terms of future VAWG events Mohammed Basith confirmed that another event was held along the river, and one near Fulham Broadway (travel hub). It was

acknowledged that there was scope to run more events. Councillor Harvey welcomed the positive feedback about the LET and their complementary enforcement role with the police. It was noted that there were approximately 32 police officers across the borough, compared to 72 LET officers. Councillor Harvey confirmed that the Administration's current focus was in supporting and expanding the LET, to complement and improve on the Met Police's actions on community safety. Neil Thurlow further confirmed that there were currently four Council officers dedicated to supporting the gang's unit.

ACTION: In future meetings, the LET will be asked to provide data on the service to help contextualise outcomes.

RESOLVED

That the report and actions were noted.

6. WORK PROGRAMME

The committee noted that LET updates would be a standing item for future meetings, supported by input from the police.

The following topics and themes were explored for inclusion in future meetings and a long list of work programme items:

- Cost of living, in the context of community safety. There was a clear link to increased crime during economic uncertainty. It would be helpful to include the perspective of different community groups and communities.
- VAWG, to coincide with the 16 days of activism campaigning against domestic and sexual violence. This year, the campaign coincided with the Men's football World Cup, an event that unfortunately also saw a corresponding and significant increase in domestic violence (November).
- Gang violence and the exploitation unit. The Gangs Unit had been established for two years and would be a complementary item to the VAWG piece (November).

7. DATE OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Tuesday, 22 November 2022.

Meeting started: 7pm
Meeting ended: 8.53pm

Chair

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