

London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham

Social Inclusion and Community Safety Policy and Accountability Committee Minutes



Wednesday 26 July 2023

PRESENT

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

Other Councillors: Councillors Stephen Cowan (Leader of the Council), Ben Coleman (Deputy Leader), Rebecca Harvey (Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion and Community Safety), Jacolyn Daly (Chair of the Housing and Homelessness Policy and Accountability Committee), Frances Umeh (Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness), Genevieve Nwaogbe (Deputy Whip), Rory Vaughan (Chair of The Economy, Arts, Sports, and Public Realm PAC), Wesley Harcourt (Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Ecology), Emma Apthorp and Laura Janes

Met Police

Superintendent Craig Knight
Detective Chief Inspector Scott Ware
Detective Chief Inspector Anne Linton

Community Representatives

Sharon Tomlin (SOBUS)
Shad Haibatan (SOBUS)
Sarah Lumgair (People Arise Now)
Niki Scordi (Advance Charity)
Melissa Altman (Advance Charity)
Sonia Dore (Standing Together & Impact Project)
Tanya Allen (Standing Together & Impact Project)

Officers

Bram Kainth (Strategic Director of Environment)
Matthew Hooper (Director of Public Protection)
Neil Thurlow (Assistant Director of Community Safety, Resilience and CCTV)
David Abbott (Head of Governance)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 March 2023 were agreed as an accurate record.

4. POLICING IN HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM FOLLOWING THE CASEY REVIEW

The Chair, Councillor Nikos Souslous, addressed the meeting and thanked the police, representatives from local community organisations, and residents for attending. He explained that the meeting had been called following the publication of the Baroness Casey Review into the standards of behaviour and the internal culture of the Metropolitan Police Service. He noted the main headlines of the report, that the Metropolitan Police as an organisation was institutionally sexist, homophobic, and racist. That it had lost the public's trust, that it was underfunded, and it let down and left behind the most vulnerable members of society.

The Chair said the Administration wanted to bring together the police, the local authority, and the community to have an open and honest discussion about policing in the borough. He said the Council recognised the important role the police played in the community and was committed to working together to improve the situation. He noted the Council planned to provide a comprehensive response to the review, following further public meetings.

The Chair then welcomed Superintendent Craig Knight, Detective Chief Inspector Scott Ware, and Detective Chief Inspector Anne Linton from the Metropolitan Police and asked them to give a short presentation on the New Met for London Plan. The plan was available to read in full online: <https://www.met.police.uk/notices/met/a-new-met-for-london/>

Presentation on the New Met for London Plan

Superintendent Knight gave a brief overview of the structure of policing in London and explained that his role was to ensure the police response was 'truly local'. He said the Casey Review came about due to a number of significant incidents across London. The review had been commissioned by the previous Commissioner of Police and all 16 recommendations had been accepted in full. He said the report was stark and made for 'horrible reading'. He agreed that fundamental changes were required. He noted that a turnaround plan had been introduced before the Casey Review report had been published.

The New Met for London Plan came after an extensive community engagement process and contained a wide range of recommendations to deal with the impact of austerity, recruitment and standards, changing demographics and demands, returning to policing by consent, cultural change, and fixing the fundamentals around pay and conditions, training, and internal processes.

Superintendent Knight then discussed some recent changes to policing in the borough aimed at tackling sexual assault, taking a more robust approach to violence against women and girls (VAWG), and reducing response times. Finally, he discussed the budgetary issues the service faced, noting that police officers had received a real terms pay cut since austerity, and the recently announced 7% pay increase was only partly funded, leading to difficult decisions about further service reductions.

Detective Chief Inspector Scott Ware and Detective Chief Inspector Anne Linton introduced themselves to the meeting. The Chair then invited questions on the presentation.

Questions on the presentation

Councillor Andrew Dinsmore noted he had been a victim of robbery and thanked the police for their swift response time and follow up, leading to the perpetrators being imprisoned. He also thanked them for being open to change following the Review. He asked Superintendent Knight if he was surprised that the Council had withdrawn funding for police officers following the Review and asked if criticisms of the police made their jobs easier or harder.

The Chair reminded participants that the purpose of the meeting was to facilitate an open discussion with residents to discuss how the police could work with the community and improve outcomes for everyone. The Chair added that it would be doing a disservice to residents to focus on political point-scoring and lose track of the meeting's main purpose.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Stephen Cowan, addressed the Committee and thanked Superintendent Knight and his colleagues for attending. He explained that the meeting had been arranged to discuss policing in the borough, following the Casey Review. He said the Council had a close working relationship with the police – noting the important role the Council's extensive CCTV operation had in convicting offenders, the innovative Gangs, Violence and Exploitation Unit, and the Council's Law Enforcement Team (LET). He said the Council had not criticised the police, but as partners it was the Council's duty to support the police to improve when something went wrong. He noted that in the past the Council had funded 48 additional police officers in the borough, but due to the new Basic Command Unit (BCU) structure, those officers were mostly being committed to Westminster. Rather than paying for officers in other areas, the Council used the money to fund more officers in the local Law Enforcement Team to serve Hammersmith & Fulham. Those officers were mostly being committed to the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea and City of Westminster.

Superintendent Knight agreed that the decision to move funding from police officers to the LET was about value for money. He said the LET officers provided valuable support and he welcomed their presence. He also noted that the Met accepted criticism when it was deserved.

The Chair noted that the Met was recruiting additional Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) and asked how many would be allocated to H&F. Superintendent Knight said it wasn't possible to say yet, work was being done to identify how many would be sent to each borough, but H&F would benefit. It had been confirmed that all 21 wards in the borough would have at least two PCSOs and one Police Constable (PC), an uplift from the current position.

Councillor Omid Miri asked if the New Met for London Plan came with additional devolved powers over training and recruitment. Superintendent Knight said the local BCU did not have direct responsibility over the commissioning of training, but there were opportunities for local involvement. Detective Chief Inspector Linton gave the example of safeguarding training and said she was keen to get local councillors and partners involved and taking part in that training. She said it was important that officers were as well trained and well informed as possible.

Detective Chief Inspector Ware added that a range of specialist capabilities would be available through the new arrangements and would improve practice and outcomes across the force. He gave the example of the Flying Squad (a branch of the Serious and Organised Crime Command within the Metropolitan Police) becoming available to support the local BCU.

Councillor Miri asked for clarification that, although training was commissioned at a high level, there was scope for doing more with local partners. Superintendent Knight confirmed there was and discussed how they supplemented the generic training with local cultural awareness training by bringing in specialists and members of various communities to speak to officers about how to interact respectfully. He also highlighted technological solutions that could give officers more information about cultural practices.

The Chair asked the police to provide an update by the next meeting showing some tangible results from the New Met for London Plan and changes to local operations.

ACTION: Superintendent Craig Knight

Councillor Emma Apthorp thanked the officers for their presentation but questioned Superintendent Knight's earlier statement that he hadn't met an officer who didn't want to change. She said there would inevitably be some officers who would resist the changes required. Superintendent Knight agreed that there would be some individuals who didn't but said they shouldn't be police officers. He said the vast majority had read and agreed with the Plan.

Councillor Apthorp recounted some training she had attended recently around how local businesses could support the work on violence against women and girls. She felt the training, despite being delivered by two female officers, focused on victim

blaming – advising women to change their behaviour rather than focusing on the problem itself. She also asked what advice there was for local businesses. Detective Chief Inspector Linton said there were a range of initiatives including Operation MakeSafe (designed to empower businesses which encounter instances of child sexual exploitation), Ask for Angela (a programme whereby people who felt unsafe at bars and clubs could discreetly seek help by approaching venue staff and asking them for ‘Angela’), and domestic abuse programmes. She invited Councillor Apthorp to contact her about the training so it could be updated and improved.

Councillor Dinsmore asked if the additional PCSOs being recruited meant there was less need for the local LET officers. Superintendent Knight said there wasn’t a reduced need, and he would like to see more uniformed guardians in society.

Councillor Rebecca Harvey gave her experiences of being flashed on the tube which she reported but nothing happened. Since then, she had been stalked and sexually harassed on several occasions but didn’t have the confidence to report the incidents because nothing was done the first time. She asked how the police could give women confidence to report crimes. Detective Chief Inspector Linton said a key part of the safer streets work was ensuring victims were contacted and followed-up. She noted they were using intelligence in a more innovative way to tackle VAWG issues. She also discussed Project Vigilant, where plainclothes officers were trained to recognise potential targets and could deal with them at the time. She agreed messaging was important and said there was more work to be done.

Councillor Trey Campbell-Simon noted that public confidence in the police had fallen significantly in recent years and for black and ethnic minorities it had fallen even lower. He asked if confidence had been damaged further by the recent viral video showing a black mother being wrongly arrested on a bus in Croydon. Superintendent Knight said the incident had been referred to the Independent Office of Police Complaints. He agreed that there was a great deal of work to do to rebuild confidence. He said some communities were over-policed and under-protected.

Councillor Campbell-Simon noted there was a community meeting on 27 July to discuss the New Met for London Plan and asked if more were planned in the rest of the borough. Superintendent Knight said they had committed to holding meetings to engage with the community at least quarterly – in addition to the regular ward panel meetings.

Councillor Campbell-Simon noted the Plan estimated the cost of implementation at £363m and asked if the Met had received notification about when that funding would be provided. Superintendent Knight said they hadn’t.

Comments from residents and community groups

The Chair invited residents and representatives from local community groups to give their experiences of working with the police and the changes they would like to see.

A resident said she found the police to be racist and did not seem to have a duty of care for women. She discussed her experiences of living in a shared block where she had been attacked by neighbours but found the police response to be lacking.

She reported the assaults but had to wait three days for a visit from an officer. She said her young son was terrified by the experience. She also questioned the statistics provided, saying people had lost faith in the police and no longer reported many crimes.

Superintendent Knight said he was sorry if some people didn't have the confidence to report crimes. He said it may not be possible to investigate every reported crime for a variety of reasons but it was important to report incidents because the way the Met policed areas was based on reported incidents. He apologised to the resident if the service had let her down and gave reassurances that they were pushing hard for the best possible service. He added that VAWG was now a national priority for the police and they were doing everything possible to improve systems and processes to respond more quickly to calls.

Shad Haibatan (SOBUS) asked about the police's decision to stop responding to mental health incidents. Superintendent Knight said the decision around mental health was part of a national framework change agreed by the Government and health services. It would be taken in a staged way to allow the police to focus on areas where they could make the biggest difference. When dealing with mental health calls it could take ten or more hours to hand someone over to a trained medical professional, keeping two officers off the streets at a time. He noted they would still respond to dangerous calls.

Sarah Lumgair (People Arise Now) discussed some positive examples of working with the police including a programme where young people who had been subject to stop and search met with police officers to have conversations and play football to allow them to develop real relationships. She said they were looking for funding to replicate the programme in H&F.

Sarah Lumgair also discussed their work in H&F with vulnerable individuals. She spoke about mothers of children groomed by gangs who had worked with the police and the gangs unit sending them texts and intelligence but became discouraged when the police built cases against their sons, rather than the adults who had groomed them. She said word spreads in those communities, shutting down future cooperation. She also spoke about the young boys and men who had been victimised and felt as though their lives were over at the age of 22 and felt there should be specialist counsellors available to support with them.

Detective Chief Inspector Linton said there was a review looking at the wider picture of exploitation to ensure they could target the right offenders. They also had initiatives to engage with the families of gang members and were looking at them as victims instead of just offenders. She said she would like to discuss further offline.

Sharon Tomlin (SOBUS and Chair of the local Safer Neighbourhood Panel) spoke of her positive experience being part of the Safer Neighbourhood Panel and said it had taught her a lot about the way the police were structured. She felt if people had greater knowledge it would help. She also stressed the importance building trust between communities and the police and raising awareness of the issues people faced.

Superintendent Knight said it was important for local people to have a voice in policing. Ward panels were one way to do that, and he felt they should be representative of the local community. He noted the other ways to have an input, including writing to the police online, taking part in one of the advocacy schemes, and becoming a special constable. He said the police force was not as diverse as the community, but they were actively recruiting PCSOs and officers from minority backgrounds.

Niki Scordi (Advance Charity) discussed domestic violence, noting that while reporting had increased by around 40% since 2015 the conviction rate had reduced by 36% over the same period. She asked what target the police would like to see in this area. She also called for greater resources committed to tackle domestic violence, to match the ratio of calls made. Superintendent Knight and Detective Chief Inspector Linton said the goal was to eradicate domestic violence and abuse and they were putting additional resources in place. They were focusing resources on the top 100 offenders then as they were convicted, they would move down to the next 100 and so on.

Sarah Chambers (Ward Panel Chair) commented on the funding situation, suggesting it should be raised with Central Government. The police didn't have the number of officers it once did. She said retention and recruitment was a major issue, which meant there were a lot of inexperienced officers. Pay was a major retention issue with fewer and fewer officers being able to afford to live in London. She also noted workload issues played a major factor. She asked how the ward panels could help the Met deliver their new goals. Superintendent Knight said the best way to help was for people to get involved in whatever way they could, whether through the ward panels or other routes. Regarding funding, he said there were positive signs, but all public services had suffered over the past 10-12 years.

Detective Chief Inspector Ware agreed that retention was an issue in policing and across the public sector due to low pay. He made the point that junior officers who did dangerous work could be paid less than a new starter at McDonalds.

A written submission was provided by Al Hasaniya Moroccan Women's Centre. They recommended improvements to recruitment and vetting processes, better training around domestic abuse and 'honour-based' violence, resourcing, translation services, and the need for a violence against women taskforce, amongst other suggestions. The full submission was sent to the police for consideration.

Tony Boys addressed the Committee and said there was a crisis in his ward, with cars being broken into every day. He said he had expected to see the Council and the police united and asked for less talk and more action to reduce crime.

The Chair thanked everyone for attending the meeting and their valuable contributions. He summarised the key points, noting that a number of people had mentioned poor response times or no follow-up from the police. He said he would like to see more from the police about how they were being proactive and improving response times. He also asked the police to consider how to ensure residents were fully aware of the policing structures and processes in place to support them.

Superintendent Knight thanked everyone for attending and said the messages were being heard. He said there was still a lot to do but the police were committed to working alongside the Council and the wider community to improve the service for everyone.

5. DATE OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The following dates of future meetings were noted:

- 22 Nov 2023
- 7 Feb 2024
- 24 Apr 2024

Meeting started: 7.07 pm
Meeting ended: 9.50 pm

Chair

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