

London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham

Social Inclusion and Community Safety Policy and Accountability Committee Minutes



Wednesday 7 February 2024

PRESENT

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

Other Councillors:

Councillor Rebecca Harvey (Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion and Community Safety)

Councillor Rowan Ree (Cabinet Member for Finance and Reform)

Officers:

Bram Kainth (Strategic Director of Environment)

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

Kellie Gooch (Head of Finance – Environment)

Matthew Hooper (Director of Public Protection)

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

Yvonne Okyio (Strategic Lead for Equality Diversity & Inclusion)

Mo Basith (LET Manager)

Debbie Yau (Committee Coordinator)

Guests:

Jamie Hilton (CEO, Fulham Good Neighbours)

Malcolm John (Founder, Action for Trustee Racial Diversity)

Dalton Leong (Independent Chair, Surrey VCSE)

Shad Haibatan (Deputy CEO, SOBUS)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Sally Taylor.

Councillor Trey Campell-Simon joined the meeting remotely.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED

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

4. 2024 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

Councillor Rowan Ree (Cabinet Member for Finance and Reform) gave an overview of the 2024 Medium Term Financial Strategy. He remarked that despite the financial and economic constraints faced by local government, this Council was able to put together a balanced budget that not only protected core services that residents valued and relied on but also protected those extra services that only Hammersmith and Fulham (H&F) delivered like free breakfast for primary school children, free home care services, council tax support scheme and the local Law Enforcement team. This was made possible because of its ruthlessly financially efficient approach adopted for budget management and a continuous process of reform. Councillor Ree took the opportunity to thank officers in the finance team who had helped put together this budget and those across the service departments like the Environment who, together with the Cabinet colleagues like Councillor Rebecca Harvey, Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion and Community Safety had done an excellent job in managing their budgets throughout the year and identified savings.

Councillor Ree remarked that the LGA estimated that this year, one in five local authorities might issue a section 114 notice, which essentially meant that they were not able to meet their financial obligations. He reassured those who relied on council services that this Council had managed its finances well, having run a budget surplus last year and adding this to the reserves when most councils were taking money out of theirs. H&F had been able to offer the same services despite the funding from central government had been cut by 56% in real terms since 2010/11. The budget setting this year had started with a budget gap of £23m from which savings had to be found. In terms of reforms, Councillor Ree highlighted the technology reform which used artificial intelligence (AI) for the adult social care service and the revenue and benefits team. Under organisational reform, more savings across the council would continue to be identified through the four large corporate savings programmes. The Council was also funding new policy reforms to improve service delivery, notably the commissioning of the family hubs where residents might access childcare, housing, social care services and so on under one roof.

Andre Mark (Head of Finance – Strategic Planning and Investment) presented the Corporate Budget Strategy 2024/25. He outlined the strategic operating environment, objectives of the Council’s financial plans, the strategy to deliver the financial plans, plus the proposed budget for 2024/25, including a summary of proposed revenue budget 2024/25, savings and investment proposals a summary of the reserve position and a medium-term forward look. The budget would be considered by the Cabinet on 12 February and approved by Full Council on 28 February this year.

Bram Kainth (Strategic Director of Environment) presented the Environment Department revenue budget 2024/25. He outlined a wide range of universal services delivered to residents, the recent achievements relevant to social inclusion and community security, the budget breakdown under the three service directorates of Climate Change and Transport, Public Realm and Public Protection, key budget changes and future strategic budget issues.

The Chair sought elaboration about core spending power (page 16) and its impact on budget. Councillor Ree noted that core spending power was central government’s assumption of the Council’s funding as part of the local government financial settlement. He said that the Chancellor’s Autumn Statement in November 2023 had provided an increase in core spending power of 6.7% (the level of CPI inflation in September) which was made based on the assumptions that the Council Tax and social care precept would be increased by the maximum amount. As the Council was acting far from the assumptions, there was a shortfall in terms of core spending power. Separately, Councillor Ree expressed his grave concern about central government’s ways of allocating the financial settlement. First, it only allocated one-year settlement for the past six years instead of multiple settlements. Also, the final figure only arrived as late as 18 December last year. The late arrival plus just an one-year settlement had made the setting of a budget incredibly difficult.

Councillor Omid Miri sought examples of using AI and asked if it was aimed at delivering better service or saving staff costs. Councillor Ree noted that it was proposed to deploy £0.25m for Adult Social Care to use AI in processing the return of equipment on loan and in strengthening the system interface and hence communications between the Council and those residents receiving home care services. The revenue and benefits team also used automated processing to make things easier for residents such that they only needed to update their details once and for all by the system. He said that the Council was always looking out for opportunities to utilise new technology. Councillor Miri was pleased to note that there were both front line and back-room applications of AI.

Councillor Miri enquired whether the anticipated growth in properties could be implied as growth in the population. Andre Mark clarified that while major capital projects would contribute to the growth in property households, such growth could also be seen in the context of the council tax system. For example, a resident no longer eligible for the single person discount or other exemption cases would be counted as growth in terms of number of households.

Noting that income under the Public Protection directorate amounted to £9.4m, Councillor Andrew Dinsmore asked what constituted the income. Kellie Gooch (Head of Finance – Environment) noted that the sum included environmental health income in respect of food safety inspections, pest control, and a small amount of fine income. She said that these incomes would be re-invested in enforcement functions, such as the Law Enforcement Team (LET) and Gangs Unit.

Councillor Dinsmore was concerned whether the provision of equipment, vehicles and uniforms for LET was a one-off start-up cost or an ongoing investment. Councillor Ree advised that while the equipment and vehicles were broadly in place, the Council was constantly investing in new equipment to ensure the LET had updated equipment to keep the streets safe.

Given the use of AI could possibly reduce crimes, Councillor Dinsmore was concerned whether the increased deployment of AI and CCTV would lead to the reduction of LET officers such that the generated savings could be spent on policing. For example, camera possessing the technology could automatically call the police if it recognised weapons obviating the need for a patrol officer to make the call.

Councillor Ree noted it was fundamental for the Council to keep people safe and invest as appropriate. He considered it was worth investing on both AI/CCTV and LET, which had worked well together to make the borough safer and cleaner. He was pleased to note that according to a recent report, the borough had the biggest decrease of 33% in fly tipping across London. That was partly achieved through the investment in CCTV and partly due to the LET's work. While agreeing to the continual investment in CCTV camera to keep the streets safe and clean, Councillor Ree considered the use of AI camera for the entire borough might lead to other problems.

The Chair expressed concern about the withdrawal of funding for Prevent which was an important service and asked about the implications. Bram Kainth clarified that despite the withdrawal of central government funding from 2024/25 (£150k), the Council had reprioritised the budget to maintain the existing Prevent service.

Councillor Miri asked whether the Prevent programme would be implemented in the same way after the withdrawal of government funding. Matthew Hooper (Director of Public Protection) noted that the government had stopped funding Prevent service for certain boroughs/parts of the country. The Council had found alternative sources to continue funding the programme which would be maintained at the current level. Councillor Ree considered it bizarre that the government had cut the funding based on an assessment that there was no risk of extremism in H&F. The Council would continue this valuable service.

Replying to the Chair's enquiry about green bond, Councillor Ree said he was proud of this green investment which aimed at raising £1m and was by far the largest local government climate investment scheme. It was an all-win scenario where residents could participate in a long-term and low-risk investment with return pitched at 4.85%, the Council could borrow at a more competitive rate while the environment be protected. The aim was to raise £1m by 13 February but the target was hit on 7 February.

In response to Councillor Miri for more information about family hubs, Councillor Ree noted that in addition to providing good quality services, the Council also aimed at making them more accessible to residents. The family hubs would enable the residents to obtain the services they needed under one roof, from childcare, housing, benefits to the full range of services expanding over time.

RESOLVED

1. That the Committee noted the budget proposals and recommended them to Cabinet as appropriate.
2. That the Committee noted the proposed changes to fees and charges and recommended them as appropriate.

5. TRUSTEE DIVERSITY IN THE THIRD SECTOR IN HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM

The Chair welcomed Jamie Hilton, Malcolm John, Dalton Leong and Shad Haibatan to the meeting. He thanked particularly Jamie who alongside Councillor Campbell-Simon had suggested to look at an issue that some H&F charities would like to diversify their trustee boards. The Council committee might be a good forum to bring people together for exchanging ideas and sharing the good practice.

Yvonne Okyio (Strategic Lead for Equality Diversity & Inclusion) gave a presentation on trustee diversity. She outlined the protected characteristics, national trustee diversity context, sector standards, benefits of diverse trustee boards, some approaches taken by charities and what the council could do.

Malcolm John (Founder, Action for Trustee Racial Diversity (ATRD)) noted that he had founded the organisation about 4 to 5 years ago after witnessing related challenges for over 20 years. He had completed a Guide on Completed Diversity about two years ago. He shared his work of recruiting Black and Asian trustees and diversification of volunteers but sometimes people left after they had joined because of the non-inclusive environment. Malcolm said that ATRD had acted proactively to fill the big gap by looking at challenges and barriers, raising awareness and taking complete actions. However, limited progress had been made since 2017 as reflected in the statistics he shared (page 36), and about 92% of the charity boards were composed of older educated white people which did not reflect the population they served. These boards tended to recruit successors from their own networks of similar background and hence could not be diversified even if intended to. To tackle the issue, Malcolm highlighted their database of over 500 Black and Asian people from network organisations having different skills who might help their boards to become more diversified and providing peer support/signposting advice to their own fellows. He further noted that last year, Black and Asian Future Chairs Academy was set up with a view to grooming future chairs who shall set the culture and influence the board composition by highlighting the benefits of diversity (page 36).

Dalton Leong (Independent Chair, Surrey VCSE) presented the case study where practical steps Surrey VCSE had taken to address under-representation at trustee boards. Under his present role after retirement from banking and charity work, he had brought together about 16,000 VCSE organisations in Surrey for their voice to

be heard. He had also chaired the Surrey EDI Steering Group formed after the murder of George Floyd to look at the issues around equity, diversity and inclusion within the charity sector. They had recently worked with ATRD and brought together a programme funded under the Surrey County Council's equity, diversity and inclusion strategies and called "Transforming Trustee Board" with the aim of enabling at least 30 people of diverse backgrounds to join the boards of 19 VCSE organisations in Surrey. The latter had finished the programmes of 6 modules including delivery of inclusive recruiting practices, and group coaching during and post the appointment process. The trustee application process was underway and recruitment was expected to happen around April time with outcome to be known by July. It was encouraging to note that according to the programme organiser, the 19 VCSEs were the most engaged group of organisations.

Shad Haibatan (Deputy CEO, SOBUS) referred to his involvement with the borough's Minority Ethnic Mental Health Landscape Research and noted not much change had been made since the black mental health project he had helped set up some 30 years ago. He also shared his experience in running a national positive action programme and its impacts. One of the recommendations in the research report was for the providers' staffing to reflect the community they served and there was a response committing a target of 40% of the senior management to be from minority ethnic communities. At a subsequent meeting with the board after receiving a complaint about its lack of minority and female representation, the trustees just acknowledged they did not discriminate and treat everyone equal. Shad stressed that's why a trustee ward with ultimate power was indispensable to steer policy direction and reflect community needs. He added that a dynamic diversity in terms of ethnicity, gender, disability and age could bring in new ideas and challenges to meet the community needs.

Jamie Hilton (CEO, Fulham Good Neighbours) noted his organisation was led by a committed and capable board which however was nearly fully white, mostly were born in this country, church-going and able-bodied such that the board did not represent the community it was serving. He said the guest speakers attending this meeting all felt passionately about this issue and welcomed any commitment that the councillors could do to support them.

Councillor Andrew Dinsmore was concerned if a charity targeted at multiple protected characteristics, how did the board work and be represented. Malcolm John pointed out intersectionality was key so most charities did not target at just one protected characteristic, for example, it could be Black Asian disabled with a sexual orientation. He and Dalton Leong noted in identifying suitable trustees, the board should start with skills gap analysis to see what skills and experience it needed, for example, fundraising or HR, to carry out its function and achieve the mission, rather than just box ticking matching some of the characteristics. Dalton confirmed Councillor Dinsmore's understanding that it was more about representing the systems and the beneficiaries. For example, for a charity for children brain injury, a parent who had supported the child now serving in the board could influence at a government's level.

Councillor Omid Miri was concerned about economic diversity as working-class people might not be able to join board meetings held in daytime. Also, people from an economically deprived background and/or had not received university education might feel out of place. As he observed, there was a general lack of economic diversity across the board for charities.

Dalton Leong responded that there were different ways of incentivising those less well-off and in recent years, it became more possible to pay a trustee or reimburse their expenses in honour of their contribution. For example, youth trustees who looked at things differently and brought a refreshing dynamic might not be in the same economic status as other board members yet as they just started their careers. Malcolm John advocated for a more flexible system/structure for charities in terms of pay and day off for trusting work so that the role of board trustees would be more accessible to the majority and not mainly those retired people who could afford it. Jamie Hilton added that this was partnership beyond the third sector such that trustees could have time off from their full-time job with the private/public sector to compensate for their time in serving the boards.

Councillor Miri believed that unless the system/structure changed, some people would still be kept out. Malcolm John remarked that more experienced charity chairs would be able to bring about diversity for a board of trustees with specific skills. Dalton Leong added that mentoring and reverse mentoring were also brilliant and important ways to coach the new trustees.

Shad Haibatan noted that there was an increasing trend for start-up charities to begin as a Community Interest Company (CIC) so that the trustees could get paid for doing the work. While big charities did pay their chairs, the smaller ones were behind and something needed to be done to address the difficulty in trustee recruitment. Jamie Hilton suggested upscaling and making the trustee role of interest to people who, through the training found the board more accessible without feeling stepping into the dark. Dalton Leong said that in addition to CIC, there was also Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) which could receive income, not for profit, social sector and civic bodies etc. Shad noted that there were some charities who had a minority representation but were still marginalised. The local authorities were expected to give policy advice to the sector and address the recruitment issues.

Councillor Rebecca Harvey (Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion and Community Safety) appreciated the work that had been doing by the guest speakers. Referring to previous request for recommending someone from her network as charity trustees, she was pleased to note that there were organisations set up for the purpose. Echoing her views about networks, the Chair shared his experience of serving as a trustee for a charity board. As there might be many other local charities experiencing the same situation, he considered it might be opportune to bring the discussions together and review how the local authority could support trustee diversity.

Councillor Miri asked about local authorities' guidance or good practice guidelines, if any, for trustee diversity. Jamie Hilton remarked that in theory, it was strategically helpful to have the guidance although they might already be out there. However,

with charity commissioning and campaigns launching by organisations like ATRD, things should be taken forward in partnership on a local level by appealing to the under-represented in the local community and understanding their concerns. Shad Haibatan said the local authorities might consider giving support when necessary to guide the boards to become more dynamic whereby the trustees felt involved and would contribute to the charity in general. Malcolm John said the local authorities' guide should be specific.

RESOLVED

That the Committee noted the report.

6. ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR THE LAW ENFORCEMENT TEAM

Mo Basith (LET Manager) presented the report which provided the Committee with an update following the last February meeting focusing on work of the Law Enforcement Team (LET) between 01 March and 30 November 2023. Detailed information and statistics including patrol data, the number of service requests, the types of work involved and so on were available in the report.

Mo Basith outlined the background of the LET's Tasking Enforcement Group (TEG) set up with the Police. He said that the Council had always attended the BCU's Tactical Coordination Group (TCG) held by the Police whilst the latter had been attending the monthly TEG meetings to resolve a lot of issues that arose in the borough. Since last November, the TEG meetings were co-chaired by Superintendent Craig Knight and Neil Thurlow, the Assistant Director responsible for community safety to better align the priorities and actions for wider level of services across the borough.

New forums for more localised intervention had also been set up in the north, south and central of the borough. The LET's senior and community safety officers had worked together with the four police sergeants at the fortnightly Tactical Coordination Group meetings to deal with ward level issues. The LET would help address the top three priorities brought by the Police whilst the latter would join the LET's coordinated patrols to meet the service demands of the residents. The two parties had worked closely to tackle drug abuse and car crimes as well as deal with assault cases in the borough.

Replying to Councillor Andrew Dinsmore's question about LET officers being assaulted, Mo Basith recalled the incidents he had come across as an officer and confirmed that the risk of physical threat was there for LET officers. He mentioned about a case in which the LET officer had been subject to racist remarks and assaulted twice. The Council worked to support the officer and worked with the Police to ensure action was taken – the offender was identified, charged and imprisoned for it. There was a more recent case with racial abuse directed at two LET officers who had intervened due to a reported nuisance. That person was going to court in a few months' time.

In response to the Chair's concern about the support available to LET officers, Mo Basith noted the good support network for staff like the employee assistant programme and the forums that staff might attend to get the mental health support

they needed. As regards internal support, the LET seniors might modify the patrol schedule and move officers among wards so that the victimised officers might stay away from the abusers. In response to a question around lone patrols of female officers, Mo advised that any female officer who felt the need to conduct patrol with another officer would always have that support.

Councillor Omid Miri asked about measures in place to deepen the cooperation of the two separate bodies, the Police and LET, outside their regular meetings, such as an emergency direct line. Neil Thurlow (Assistant Director of Community Safety, Resilience and CCTV) highlighted the emergency function of the LET radios and body cameras carried by the officers during the 24/7 patrol. Once the emergency button was hit, the signals would go through the CCTV control room. The LET would have direct access to the police radio through Airwave (the Met Police radio network) to request support. The LET body cameras could also stream live footage in that emergency situation which went to CCTV. These images could then be patched through to police where/if needed.

In terms of sharing information and intelligence, Neil Thurlow noted local TCGs provided a fortnightly meeting and these helped shape delivery to tackle “on the ground issues”. These meetings, with TEG, would be developed and built over time allowing more work to be done jointly on bigger challenges such as gang crimes or violence, through partnership and strategic assessment of shared priorities for actions. Councillor Miri appreciated the hard work done to reduce the anti-social behaviour reports by 22%.

The Chair asked about the number of police officers allocated to H&F following the central government’s announcement of putting more police officers on the streets. He also asked about the impacts on operation. Neil Thurlow said that while the official number of additional police officers deployed to H&F was not available, he observed that H&F got an increase from one inspector to two and to a total of 8 sergeants who shall take up the neighbourhood function of the north and south of the borough. In terms of operation, the LET’s senior and community safety officers would undertake shared operations with the sergeants to tackle the shared priorities. Neil noted the increase in police capacity had enabled more problem-solving opportunities between the LET management and police inspectors who shall work to shape each other’s thinking in respective work. Matthew Hooper (Director of Public Protection) remarked that while the absolute number of police officers in London had been uplifted, the population of London since the last marco crime statistics published in 2010 had also increased which meant the police per 1,000 Londoners was now less than that time so the challenges remained. He confirmed Councillor Miri’s understanding that even the police numbers were increasing, they were not increasing at a rate that was proportional to the rising population.

The Chair recalled at the November meeting, Superintendent Craig Knight had mentioned about the difficulties in recruiting police officers to fill the established positions and encouraged those suitable to come forward and apply. Councillor Rebecca Harvey (Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion and Community Safety) said she learnt from Superintendent Knight one to two weeks’ ago that they were still struggling to recruit the right number of officers and this seemed to be an ongoing problem. In this connection, Mo Basith noted the interest of serving police officers in

working for the LET, with one of them starting in March and several enquiries made directly with the LET offices about the application process. Councillor Dinsmore remarked about the changes in police numbers and recruitment.

The Chair thanked the report and LET's success in meeting the challenges of the past year. He invited the officers to share changes of the services looking forward. Matthew Hooper expected that there would be much closer working with the police in tackling issues such as drug dealing, violence and anti-social behaviour, and officers from both sides would focus daily on identified hotspots over the next 12 months. The LET would also continue the success in tackling the environmental crime in which LET officers had responded to large number of reporting on fly tipping and reduced them significantly to improve the borough's look and feel.

RESOLVED

That the Committee noted the report.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Members noted that the next meeting would be held on 24 April 2024. The Chair suggested discussing Prevent at the next meeting.

Meeting started: 7.05 pm
Meeting ended: 9.14 pm

Chair

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