

London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham

Social Inclusion and Community Safety Policy and Accountability Committee Minutes



Tuesday 4 February 2025

NOTE: This was held as an informal meeting

PRESENT

Committee members: Councillors Nikos Souslous (Chair) and Lucy Richardson

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

Officers:

Sukvinder Kalsi (Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Services)
Kellie Gooch (Head of Finance – Place)
Bram Kainth (Executive Director of Place)
Neil Thurlow (Director of Public Protection)
Mark Raisbeck (Director of Public Realm)
Mo Basith (LET Manager)
Debbie Yau (Committee Coordinator)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Sally Taylor and Omid Miri.

Councillor Andrew Dinsmore who intended to join remotely could not do so due to technical issues.

The Chair noted that the meeting was inquorate and there was no livestreaming.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The approval of the minutes of the meeting on 20 November 2024 would be deferred to the next meeting.

4. SIX-MONTH PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR THE LAW ENFORCEMENT TEAM

Mo Basith (LET Manager) introduced the work of the Law Enforcement Team (LET) for the six months between June and December 2024, including the work of the borough-wide Street Harassment Public Space Protection Order (PSPO), the commissioning of drugs and alcohol treatment providers, tackling anti-social behaviour (ASB), prevention of knife crimes and joint enforcement against fly-tipping.

Neil Thurlow (Director of Public Protection) highlighted LET's engagement and work with H&F's residents and referred to residents' compliments (pages 14 & 16).

Referring to the graph on Street Population (Engagement/Referral) (page 24), the Chair asked about engagement with homeless people, in particular those rough sleepers around the Hammersmith border areas.

Mo Basith noted a trend where people who were expecting stamped documents from their embassy would sleep on nearby streets to obviate the need of travelling back and forth. The LET had worked closely with the Council's Homelessness Team and removed the homeless people from the streets to, for example, emergency accommodation according to Severe Weather Emergency Protocol or accommodation that met their individual needs. Neil Thurlow clarified that the figures on the graph did not represent the number of rough sleepers but the number of headcounts engaged in that month so there might be multiple counts for the same individual.

The Chair asked about actions taken to enhance the safety of Normand Park such as improvements to the lighting. Mark Raisbeck (Director of Public Realm) noted a recent survey had been carried out by an independent lighting specialist who looked at the safety and security of the Park. It was confirmed that there was a good level supply of lighting which had spread into most of the footpaths at reasonable levels. There was also extensive CCTV coverage. A review would soon be conducted in conjunction with the Police's crime unit to see if additional lighting and CCTV should be provided at specific locations or other measures such as re-designing the path and/or re-locating facilities needed to be done to reduce crimes.

On the big highlights of the past year, Neil Thurlow noted some of the key achievements including the increasing levels of drugs being removed and the number of knives being found. The LET had received other boroughs' enquiries about ways to manage the public space and requests for visits. Besides, LET officers would continue supporting the safety of colleagues working on the Hammersmith Bridge and enhancing the security of the streets near the football clubs.

Regarding the Chair's enquiry about staff recruitment and training, Neil Thurlow said the LET's staffing situation was now stable after experiencing some movement around the management at ward level. As a sizable service, it was natural for LET to always carry vacancies. The constant openings were promoted through more inclusive adverts and in social media. Besides strengthening vetting to recruit suitable officers, the LET also encouraged them to take on more works when there were opportunities so that their expertise and experience could be retained and built on in taking up more senior positions. Mo Basith added that there were retired police, current officers from other boroughs etc applying to join the LET which aimed at recruiting people with the right motivation to enable the LET to make continuous improvements.

In reply to Councillor Lucy Richardson's question about the DBS checks, Mo Basith remarked while adopting the same vetting standard as the police to ensure the new recruits got the right credentials to work, the LET was doing more in the process. For example, the LET would consider whether it was confident in entrusting the potential officer to enter the residents' premises and carry out duty in a caring way to help the residents at a time of need. Neil Thurlow highlighted the ruthless nature of vetting as the family was involved in the procedures. The vetting was very crucial since the new LET officers would be given additional powers to ensure community safety,

Noting that residents might watch this Committee's meetings online or walkabout with the LET, the Chair was concerned about other ways of residents' engagements with the LET. Mo Basith said the LET officers always made themselves available to attend the meetings of the Housing Tenants and Residents' Association (TRAs). In addition, residents might meet LET officers on the first three Mondays of every month in the Central Library or other libraries in the borough. Or residents could get in touch and the LET could set up separate meetings, including walkabouts, to cater for their needs.

Responding to Councillor Richardson's suggestion of providing LET's website information on a physical leaflet or a small card, Neil Thurlow agreed to review what could be done to address this further to the LET's updates in respect of community safety included in future e-news articles and advised that the LET featured in the twice-yearly printed Council's newsletter which was distributed to every household.

Noting an average of 209 patrols had been delivered by the LET per day during the reported period, Councillor Rowan Ree (Cabinet Member for Finance and Reform) considered this a huge amount of visibility given the small size of the borough. He also commended the work of the borough-wide Street Harassment PSPO which in his opinion was difficult to enforce yet highly complimented. In response to his comment, Neil Thurlow agreed to bring more updates to the next report.

Councillor Rebecca Harvey (Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion and Community Safety) noted from some residents' emails that there was an intention to scrutinise the LET which had yielded real credits for everything they were doing. Indeed, the BCU's Superintendent was impressed by the work of the LET and CCTV Team which had led to some successful arrests by the Police. The LET was very friendly and supportive that a resigned officer had rejoined the team.

The Committee noted the report.

5. 2025/26 REVENUE BUDGET AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

Councillor Rowan Ree (Cabinet Member for Finance and Reform) gave an overview of the 2025/26 Revenue Budget, including the operating environment, additional central government funding and objectives of the financial strategy. He also briefed members on the budget headlines, the provisional settlement of the draft budget and departmental service allocations, the investment and savings proposals, council tax considerations and residual risks in 2025/26. He further highlighted the earmarked reserves forecast and medium-term financial forecast showing the estimated budget gap until 2028/29 as well as the MTFS for 2026/27+. He said the Revenue Budget would be presented to the Cabinet and Full Council later this month having completed all briefings of the Policy and Accountability Committees and Policy Oversight Board. Councillor Ree expressed his gratitude to all Cabinet Members and officers who had worked professionally going through the budgets line by line to make sure every penny counted. Their brilliance efforts shall continue in maintaining the balanced budget in future statements of accounts throughout the years.

Kellie Gooch (Head of Finance – Place) gave a presentation on the budget relevant to this PAC, including the achievements in the past year, the key budget changes in investment (in respect of VAWG, LET, GVEU, digital inclusion strategy and inflationary uplift) and savings as well as the budget risks.

NOTE: The presentation slides are attached in Appendices A & B

The Chair asked the following question on behalf of Councillor Andrew Dinsmore:

“My key question is that I have not been provided with a copy of the full accounts so I cannot ascertain what has been cut from the general budget to feed into SICS PAC or whether all of the increase is due to additional revenue from the 2.99% increase in council tax? I would be grateful if a copy of the accounts and/or an explanation on this point could be provided.”

Councillor Ree noted that Cllr Dinsmore seemed to be a little confused about the process, as the budget was a forward-looking document for the financial year ahead, whereas the accounts were published at the end of the financial year. He pointed out the relevant budget information was all available in the report and presentation he had just given. He said he was happy to provide the information in writing if necessary. At this juncture, Councillor Lucy Richardson expressed her appreciation on the impressive balanced budget in particular the investment in housing.

Noting that the additional external income for CCTV services amounted to £30,000, the Chair sought elaboration. Councillor Ree remarked that the request of Westminster City Council to use the services did reflect the high regard of the current user of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC). He noted H&F's CCTV network was very impressive and recommended members to pay a visit to the control room when there was an opportunity. Councillor Ree said the Council was keen to explore and generate further revenue from the CCTV services.

Councillor Richardson referred to the efficiency savings and asked about how service effectiveness was assessed and monitored and who made the decisions. Sukvinder Kalsi (Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Services) assured that in addition to assessment by national or London-wide regulators, Council services were also scrutinised by the External Auditor and subject to internal audits benchmarking those spending in other councils. For services not applicable under the governance checks, they would be assessed based on residents' feedback.

In reply to Councillor Richardson's further question about digital inclusion strategy, Sukvinder Kalsi noted the new investment aimed at addressing digital barriers for residents and services by, among other things, strengthening infrastructure and operating systems to ensure residents were digitally engaged inclusively. He added that the strategy also aimed at reducing resident vulnerability to cyber security. While noting that digital inclusion was a regular item on the agenda of the Policy and Oversight Board, Sukvinder agreed to provide more details about the baseline survey conducted among residents.

ACTION: Sukvinder Kalsi

The Chair noted the additional budget investment included £250k investment in VAWG and asked for the use of the extra funding. Neil Thurlow (Director of Public Protection) highlighted the challenging position of the work around VAWG. As the most committed crime with rising number of victims, the cost for delivering the services was also increasing especially if refugees were involved like a number of them in this Council. The Council paid fairly to retain the best providers who sought to engage in special training to improve the outcomes. Neil also noted that some of the extra funding were used to meet the legal costs of the court cases, spiking inflation, rising interest and cost of living.

The Chair noted the previous reliance on external funding for LET and Gangs Unit would be removed from 2025/26 onward and asked about the other Council priorities that would be supported by the repurposed external funding. Councillor Ree said the fund in the pot would be for general use. Sukvinder Kalsi added that the fund might be used to meet needs arising outside the budget across the Council such as environmental programmes or community activities.

Responding to the Chair's enquiry, Sukvinder Kalsi noted that the Council's Local Support Payments scheme of £600,000 was designed to help the housing needs of residents facing emergencies or crises. This service was currently administered by RBKC, and a saving of £150,000 was included in the 2025/26 budget to be delivered by bringing this service in-house and reducing administration costs. Councillor Rebecca Harvey (Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion and Community Safety) recalled that the tri-borough arrangements in administering local social funds was a legacy agreed in 2013 by the previous Administration. She considered it much more efficient and effective by running the service in-house for vulnerable residents.

The Committee noted the report.

6. **DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

The Committee noted the Forward Plan:

- 30 April 2025
 - Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) spotlight
 - Gangs, Violence and Exploitation Unit (GVEU) spotlight
- 17 June 2025
 - Annual Report of Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act
- 18 Nov 2025
 - Drugs Strategy
 - Police Scrutiny
- 27 Jan 2026 (subsequently changed to 2 Feb 2026)
- 27 April 2026
- 16 June 2026

Meeting started: 7.03 pm
Meeting ended: 8.12 pm

Chair

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