



London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham

Community Safety, Environment and Residents Services Policy and Accountability Committee Minutes

Tuesday 13 January 2015

PRESENT

Committee members: Councillors Iain Cassidy, Larry Culhane (Chair), Steve Hamilton, Sharon Holder and Harry Phibbs

Other Councillors: Councillors Stephen Cowan, Sue Fennimore, Wesley Harcourt, Andy Jones and Max Schmid

Officers: Craig Bowdery (Scrutiny Manager), Tom Conniffe (Principal Policy & Strategy Officer), Hitesh Jolapara (Bi-Borough Director for Finance), Mark Jones (Director for Finance & Resources, ELRS & TTS), David Page (Director for Safer Neighbourhoods), and Jane West (Executive Director for Finance & Corporate Services)

32. MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the minutes of the meeting held on 4th November 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair

33. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Michael Cartwright.

34. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

35. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Chair invited members of the public to make any comments in relation to issues on the agenda as part of that item.

36. THE RESIDENTS' COMMISSION RESPONSE TO THE AIRPORTS COMMISSION CONSULTATION ON ITS SHORT-LISTED OPTIONS FOR ADDITIONAL RUNWAY CAPACITY IN THE SOUTH-EAST OF ENGLAND

The Chair welcomed Christina Smyth, Chair of the Hammersmith & Fulham Commission on Airport Expansion (HFCAE), an independent, resident-led investigation into the proposals to expand Heathrow Airport. Ms Smyth explained that HFCAE would be submitting its findings and conclusions to the Airports Commission separately from the Council, which may choose to include some, all or none of the HFCAE findings into its own submission.

Ms Smyth presented the HFCAE draft final report to the Committee and described how the members of the commission were drawn from local resident groups who worked hard over the Christmas period to analyse large quantities of technical data and to question expert witnesses. The Commission also received support from Council officers. Ms Smyth highlighted three main points from the report and the conclusions of the HFCAE:

1. Information about local impacts of Heathrow expansion was imperfect. There were gaps, for example, on air quality and precise flight paths, and unrealistic assumptions on noise mitigation. It was felt that these gaps have undermined the value of the Airports Commission consultation process.

2. However, the residents' commission worked very hard within these limitations and reviewed all available evidence, including questioning Heathrow Airports Limited and Heathrow Hub at an oral hearing, and their conclusions are based on this evidence.

3. The report concluded that, if Heathrow were to expand under either of the options, Hammersmith & Fulham would enjoy some economic and leisure benefits, although economic developments elsewhere in the borough mean it is not dependent on them. In any case, these benefits would be far outweighed by the adverse effects of additional flights overhead, additional flight paths over the borough, additional noise, road and public transport congestion, worse air quality and uncertainty about precise impacts for many years. The HFCAE therefore opposed expansion in the interest of residents' health and quality of life.

Ms Smyth also stated that whether or not expansion goes ahead, the community should try to work with Heathrow to encourage them to bring in the noise and air quality mitigations which were mentioned in their submission

to the Airports Commission. It was the ambition of HFCAE to get those enhancements without an additional runway.

The Chair thanked Ms Smyth and all of the members of the HFCAE for their hard work and for giving up their time to produce a response in line with the tight submission deadlines of the Airports Commission.

A member of the public asked if the report considered whether a new parallel runway that spanned the M25 and the reservoir would have a different impact on Hammersmith & Fulham. Ms Smyth explained that the investigation focussed only on those proposals that were included by the Davies Commission, so principally looked at the planned new runway to the north-west. However it was not considered that either option would have different effects on the borough.

Concern was voiced by a member of the public regarding safety and in-flight near misses over the borough. It was suggested at the previous Committee that a Freedom of Information request be submitted to obtain data on the frequency of near misses and it was asked whether this had been done. Ms Smyth stated that a request had not been submitted due to the tight timescale which required a response to the proposals before 3rd February 2015. With regard to safety, the Commission learned a lot from witnesses and were satisfied that safety was a primary concern for the authorities. It was felt that if there was a significant safety risk from the proposals, then any other benefits would be discounted. Ms Smyth also highlighted the recent incident in which the National Air Traffic Services (NATS) system went offline for 35 minutes, and described her concern that any increase in air traffic could lead to more such incidents.

A member of the public disagreed with the report and argued that the comparison with the NATS incident was scaremongering. He voiced the opinion that as the report was based on incomplete data, its conclusions could not be considered sound. He also suggested that the economic benefits of Heathrow airport should not be over-looked. Ms Smyth explained that the economic benefits were highlighted in the report and argued that whilst the evidence sources were imperfect, the report's conclusions were based on all available evidence. She also emphasised that the report did not recommend or consider whether Heathrow airport be closed in its entirety, as it only looked at the expansion proposals that were part of the public consultation.

Members of the public and the Committee discussed whether the proposals might have an effect on indicators such as house prices and whether the noise of planes overhead was a concern for potential buyers. A member of the public highlighted that many luxury developers were still buying and building properties in the area. Ms Smyth explained that this was a very indirect indicator and house sales depend upon a wide range of different factors. The key objective was to preserve the borough and the reasons why it was loved by residents.

The meeting discussed the types of aircraft that could be used following suggestion that newer planes were substantially quieter when flying

overhead. A member of the HFCAE explained that the assumptions made by Heathrow Airport regarding the make-up of their fleet was thought to be very optimistic by the Davies Commission, which argued that due to the long lives of aircraft any benefit from newer planes would not be felt for some time.

The Committee also highlighted its concern regarding air quality. It was argued that air quality in the borough is already quite poor and as it was hidden from sight it was easy to forget. Ms Smyth agreed and explained that air quality was a key point of interest for the commission. She also explained that there had been no detailed air quality dispersal model available. The airport suggested that there would be limited increases in car journeys as a result of any expansion, but the HFCAE disagreed with this assessment and felt that the increase would further harm air quality in the borough.

The Chair thanked Ms Smyth and her colleagues on the commission for their hard work producing the report.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted.

37. THE POLICE IN HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM

The Chair welcomed Supt Mike Hill to the meeting, who gave a verbal report on the key Policing issues in Hammersmith & Fulham. He explained that in June 2013 a new local Policing model was imposed upon the force with a defined officer structure. This change reduced the size of teams responding to 999 calls and to the CID, but increased the numbers of Police working in a neighbourhood role. The priorities for the Police in Hammersmith & Fulham were set out by MOPAC (the Mayor's Office for Policing & Crime), which demanded a significant reduction in certain crimes. The progress made in the borough for each target crime over the preceding four years was:

- burglary – 27% reduction
- criminal damage – 20% reduction
- robbery – 53.1% reduction
- theft from motor vehicle – 32% reduction
- theft of motor vehicle – 10% reduction
- theft from person – 39% reduction
- violence with injury – increased by 7%

Supt Hill explained however that if the same crimes were measured over just the preceding twelve months, the picture was less positive:

- burglary – 3% reduction
- criminal damage – 17% increase
- robbery – 36.3% reduction
- theft from motor vehicle – increased 1%
- theft of motor vehicle – 31% increase
- theft from person – 23% reduction
- violence with injury – 13.8% increase

Giving context to these statistics, Supt Hill explained that the increase in violence with injury was a result of new reporting standards which now included domestic abuse in this category. Reported instances of domestic abuse were increasing approximately 16% year on year. Supt Hill saw this as a success however as it demonstrated that victims of domestic abuse were increasingly prepared to report the crime. He explained that the Police had invested energy towards establishing trust with residents and encouraging the reporting of such crimes, so the increase was a sign that this was working. The figures were also skewed by the decision to consider every instance where blood is drawn as GBH, which meant that even if the harm was only a scratch it was now included in this category.

With regard to the criminal damage increase, Supt Hill explained that the hotspot where most instances took place was Hammersmith Police station due to suspects damaging cells. He also reported that 40% of all criminal damage was committed within the home, which made it hard to target or patrol.

The increase in the instances of theft of motor vehicles was a recent occurrence and the Police were now targeting it as a priority. Motor vehicle theft in west London was different to the rest of the capital with motorbikes targeted more often than expensive cars. Piaggio scooters seemed to be particularly at risk so the Police was contacting registered owners.

Members of the public asked about the gender split of victims of violence with injury. Supt Hill reported that around 90% of domestic violence was men on women. Excluding domestic abuse, the victims were more varied with occurrences in a wide range of scenarios and at all occasions, although the majority of suspects and victims were male. Supt Hill also highlighted that the borough did not have a problem with its pubs as a result of partnership working with the Council's licensing team. For example the Walkabout pub was closed down for persistent cases of violence. Members of the Committee asked for information on the conviction rate for cases of domestic violence, which Supt Hill undertook to provide.

Action: Supt Hill

Supt Hill also reported that the force measured public confidence and satisfaction with the Police. For people who had not been involved in a crime, 76% viewed the local Police as either good or excellent. For those that had had recent experience with the Police, this figure was 83%.

The Committee also heard about issues for the force in the future. Supt Hill described how more officers were moving into posts with a greater focus on terrorism, which would likely necessitate a reduction in neighbourhood policing. He also highlighted the ongoing cuts to all public expenditure and the anticipated further reductions in funding. Given that 80% of the force's costs were wages, he anticipated that the borough would be required to reduce officers in the future.

The meeting discussed the relationship between the Police and the Council, with Supt Hill reporting that it was among the closest he knew of. There had

been a long history of productive cooperative working whereby each partner was able to act as a critical friend for the other. The Committee noted that the Council would be funding eight new officers and an inspector from 1st April 2015. The officers would be tasked with eliminating crimes that resulted from social exclusion.

A member of the public asked about how the borough's parks were policed and how environmental factors were considered. The Council's Director for Safer Neighbourhoods reported that the Council had a dedicated Parks Police, which Hammersmith & Fulham and Kensington & Chelsea were two of only three London boroughs which did. All crimes detected by the Parks Police were reported to the Metropolitan Police who then investigated and charged offenders. The Council worked with resident groups to address factors such as lighting or landscaping, however the ability to make any changes was sometimes dependant on available finances. The meeting was also informed that there was a network of Neighbourhood Wardens and this was the only London borough with a lawyer embedded with the Police to help tackle domestic violence and improve conviction rates.

A member of the public asked for statistics on rape and sexual assault, which Supt Hill undertook to provide.

Action: Supt Hill

The Committee identified that many members of the public found it frustrating to see Police officers patrolling in pairs and travelling by private car rather than being visible on public transport. Supt Hill explained that the default patrol in the borough and across London was for single officers to increase spread and visibility. He recognised that this didn't always happen, but it was the Metropolitan Police policy. Members also heard how officers had now been issued with iPads to encourage them to complete their paperwork in public places such as cafes to increase visibility.

The Committee thanks Supt Hill for his attendance and for the ongoing work of the Police.

38. 2015 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

The Committee received a report from the Executive Director for Finance & Corporate Services and presentations from the Bi-Borough Director of Finance and the Director for Finance & Resources for ELRS and TTS. Officers presented the anticipated budget gap (expected to be £86.7m by 2021/22) and the measures taken in the Medium Term Financial Strategy to deliver a balanced budget in 2015/16.

Members of the Committee welcomed much of the proposed budget, particularly where service improvements had been delivered such as the increased opening hours for sports bookings following the outsourcing to Quadrant. However some members expressed concern at some of the increases in charges. It was argued that the announcement earlier that day that interest rates were now 0.5% should be reflected in the charges

increased in line with inflation, rather than the 2.4% rise reported. The 2.4% increase was based on the Retail Price Index (RPI) in August 2014, which some members felt was now outdated. Cllr Schmid explained that the 0.5% rate was the current Consumer Price Index, which the Council had always used the RPI when determining any fee increases. He highlighted that the latest RPI rate had decreased to 1.6%, but that it was not possible to keep constantly revising the budget each month. He also reminded the Committee that the previous Council administration had followed the same practise of using the RPI in August of the preceding year as its set interest anniversary date.

Cllrs Culhane, Harcourt and Fennimore declared interests as Governors of the Phoenix School

The Committee asked for further information on what the funding from public health would be used at the Phoenix School. Officers explained that the public health money would allow the leisure centre at the school to operate for a further year while the Council reviewed options for how to get the most from the facility. In order to make the site viable in the long term, the leisure centre needed to attract more users.

Councillors asked about the Cecil French Bequest and expressed concern that council tax income was being spent on preserving an art collection worth £17.8m that was not publicly displayed. Cllr Harcourt agreed that the art should be displayed and reported that options for display were currently being considered. He did not however agree that the Council should consider selling the collection.

It was also asked whether the Council policy on debt reduction had changed, with councillors noting that the debt reduction proposed was less than under the previous administration. Officers explained that whilst the authority could pay off more debt, doing so before payment was due would incur substantial premiums. Cllr Schmid confirmed that paying debts before they were due was not seen as prudent due to the premiums involved.

The Committee also discussed the Council's property within the ELRS portfolio such as cemetery lodges, with some members suggesting the Council explore selling them. Cllr Harcourt explained that all of the cemetery lodges were currently let to long-term stable tenants. Sale of these properties would therefore render the tenants homeless, which he would not advocate in light of the ongoing housing crisis in the capital.

It was noted that the New Homes Grant had decreased from the preceding year and it was asked whether this was a result of fewer homes being built. Officers explained that the reduction was as a result of the top-slicing of the Grant to fund the London LEP, which the Council had lobbied against.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted.

39. WORK PROGRAMMING

RESOLVED –

That the work programme be noted.

40. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The following dates were agreed:

- Tuesday 3rd February 2015
- Tuesday 21st April 2015

Meeting started: 7.00pm
Meeting ended: 9.09 pm

Chairman

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