



Brent

MINUTES OF THE RESOURCES AND PUBLIC REALM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Wednesday 10 November 2021 at 6.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Mashari (Chair), Councillor Kansagra (Vice-Chair) and Councillors S Choudhary, Conneely, Johnson, Kabir, Long, Miller, and Shah

Also Present: Councillors McLennan (in remote capacity) (Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources) and Knight (in remote capacity) (Lead Member for Community Safety and Engagement)

1. Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members

Apologies for absence were received from:

- Councillor Hassan
- Councillor Hylton

2. Declarations of interests

None.

3. Deputations (if any)

None.

4. Minutes of the previous meeting

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 14 September 2021 be approved as a correct record.

5. Matters arising (if any)

None.

6. Topical Issue - Flood Risk Management

The Chair explained that this topic had been brought forward by Councillors Conneely and Hassan following residents in their ward being affected by flooding. Councillor Conneely advised that a significant number of residents in Kilburn lost their homes and were still without permanent homes due to the flooding, which had a damaging impact on people's lives. She had brought a resident to the meeting to speak on her experiences.

The member of the public relayed her experience of flooding in her home, highlighting that she had lost all her possessions during the flood. She had contacted her Housing Association during the incident but had not been able to get a response to calls or emails, so she had spoken to Councillor Hassan who got her

a food voucher, and she was able to speak with the Council out of hours crisis line who got her a night residence at a hotel at around midnight. She had since been put on the locator list as she could not stay at her flooded property, and had remained in the hotel since with her family. In response to queries from the Committee, she advised that the most important issue was for someone to be at the end of the phone. She had called 999 who had advised it was not an emergency, and it was very late at night before authorities were aware of the impact of the flooding and she was able to communicate with the Council to get accommodation.

Those present thanked the speaker and expressed sorrow to hear about the experience she had. Carolyn Downs (Chief Executive, Brent Council) was disappointed her Housing Association had not fulfilled their statutory responsibility to respond in an emergency situation and offered to speak with the Housing Association in question.

The Chair thanked the speaker and invited colleagues present to introduce the report.

In introducing the report, Chris Whyte (Operational Director for Environment, Brent Council) advised that Brent was the lead flood authority in London with a number of obligations to fulfil. Brent maintained a Flood Risk Management Strategy on a regular basis and was responsible for the management, upkeep and maintenance for the service water gully network across the borough. There was also a requirement to maintain a Flood Management Asset Register. Brent Council had a clear responsibility for investigating flooding issues, alongside relevant partners including the environment agency and Thames Water. The Flood Management Team in Brent Council also played a role in planning proposals for developments. Chris Whyte concluded by highlighting that, with climate change, there was a very significant risk that flooding would become more frequent and serious, so flood risk management was a priority for highways teams.

The Committee was then invited to raise questions on the information provided, which focussed on a number of key areas, as highlighted below:

- Regarding Brent Planning Policy, it was confirmed that there were plans to review the current vehicles crossing policy to include opportunities for action against climate change. Depending on the size of a front garden, the current Planning Policy required between 30-50% of soft landscaping, such as grass or planted areas, in order to increase soakaway areas for surface water, as well as encourage biodiversity. For larger developments, the Flood Planning Act required a betterment, achieved through sustainable drainage design (SuDs). Developments were required to provide evidence of how they would achieve that to pass planning stages, with the Flooding and Drainage Engineer analysing proposals and making recommendations where necessary. In regards to training on flood risk management, the Planning Committee did not currently receive any but this could be looked in to.
- In relation to enforcement action that took place around front gardens that did not contain the required 30-50% soft landscaping, the Environment Enforcement Team could not take action against someone concreting their front garden, but could influence if they were illegally crossing the footway.

The Enforcement Team looked at reports of illegal crossovers, where people opened up their gardens, concreted them and drove across the footway to access them, which damaged public pathways. Where a resident refused to stop crossing over, the Council could put physical barriers in place to stop that crossing. In the instance that someone concreted their garden in a way that caused surface water to flow onto the public highway then action could be taken.

- The Committee were advised that by maintaining Brent footways in asphalt and concrete blocks the Council were not providing any further surface water than there would be with slabs or bricks. The overall carbon impact for both asphalt and concrete paving was high in terms of the manufacturing of the materials, but over the course of its lifespan asphalt was more environmentally friendly. The asphalt was laid at an angle sloping towards gullies in the curb side. Porous materials were also provided around tree bases to allow water seepage there.
- In relation to whether there were plans to replace the old Victorian drainage system within Brent, the Committee were advised that Thames Water had a very large programme of demand throughout London for sewage replacement which they looked at on a priority basis and cost benefit ratio. Brent did not currently have any priority areas for Thames Water, but Thames Water had been doing further studies around London recently to update their programme. Officers advised that it may not be something that was done within the next 2-3 years, and in that period intermittent flooding would continue and the Council had to act to mitigate that as best it could.
- In relation to future projections and climate change, the Council were aware there would be much longer spells of rainfall in London in the future and that London had suffered immensely. In accordance with the Flood and Water Management Act the Council were required to check that all drainage implementations were in accordance with climate change requirements.
- The GLA were working on a climate change document. Officers agreed that there should be a plan borough by borough to put in place remediation, but were happy with what had been implemented in Brent developments to offer flood risk remediation. Chris Whyte added that the Council were obliged to review and update the Flood Risk Management Strategy regularly and one was now required which could include content around climate change and a commitment to communicate around climate change in a better way.
- Officers confirmed that the Council did not currently do any work to ensure homes in higher flood risk areas were receiving information about home insurance, but the Flood Risk Strategy could make recommendations around that and provide contact numbers and information, ensuring to be impartial. Councillor McLennan advised she could take the issue offline and look into whether this was something that could be offered through community hubs.
- In response to what the protocol was for the Council's out of hours emergency response, Alan Lunt (Strategic Director Regeneration & Environment) advised that, in the event of heavy rainfall, information was provided on the website

about yellow warnings of heavy rain received from the Met Office, but it was very difficult to predict precisely where rain would fall and lead to potential flood threats. In the event of flooding the Council sought to maximise the number of out of hour's lines available and if someone could not get through the line they would be directed to other appropriate agencies which were also detailed on the website. He emphasised the need for individual households to take responsibility and the council website set out what families needed to do to protect themselves and their property in an emergency. He explained that the Council were a category 1 responder but its role in dealing with emergencies was limited to protection of key services and also to protect against risks to human life and wellbeing. The council would have a role, for example, in ensuring power supplies to critical services such as hospitals were protected, working with the relevant partners. However, Brent, like all other councils, could not deploy sandbags when heavy rain occurred due to the difficulty in pre-empting where rainfall may be severe. The council played a role during the events of July 12 2021 in temporarily re-housing those whose homes were rendered inhabitable as a result of flooding and ensured they had access to food vouchers during this difficult period, reflecting the council's role as a category 1 responder.

- The Committee felt that, in the instance of the public speaker's experience, there were unfortunate delays in information regarding the situation in Brent being made available to out of hours services not based locally and for external agencies. They acknowledged that once services were up to date on the situation the Council responded very efficiently and quickly, but advised there may be an opportunity to explore what could be done better.
- There was a planned cyclical programme for gully maintenance. The gullies were priorities geographically, based on silt levels. Where there were individual issues with gullies, such as leaf fall during autumn, there was a reactive programme to address those issues with a target turnaround time of 48 hours. There were instances where the gullies were inaccessible, meaning a return visit may cause that time to lengthen.
- In relation to holding Thames Water to account, the Committee were advised that the relationship with other third party organisations who had a stake in managing flood risk in Brent was something the Council took very seriously. There were a series of meetings set out in the calendar with Thames Water. More recently, the Leader of the Council and Cabinet had taken an interest in the relationship between the Council, the community and Thames Water and had established a series of liaison meetings at a senior level.
- In response to how the Council could help Housing Associations and Registered Providers (RP's) acknowledge their statutory responsibility to respond in an emergency, Chris Whyte advised that he would be keen as part of the revision of the Flood Risk Strategy to give better focus on the role and involvement of RPs and other associations in managing flood risk. There was a role for the Council to play in terms of ensuring RPs had the right guidance and support to inform their policies and procedures for responding to flooding.

It was **RESOLVED**:

- (1) That the following area for improvement in relation to the Council's flood risk management be noted:
 - (i). To include more emphasis on climate change and RPs when reviewing the flood risk management strategy within the next 12 months.
 - (ii). That the out of hour's emergency crisis response process is reviewed.
 - (iii). That the Planning Committee be given training opportunities on flood risk management.
- (2) To note that there were currently no locations in Brent identified as a priority by Thames Water for structural configuration of the sewage system.
- (3) To note that Councillor McLennan (Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources) would take forward a recommendation on promoting home insurance products to areas of high flood risk, and improve knowledge of home insurance opportunities.
- (4) To note Carolyn Down's offer to write to the residents Registered Provider regarding the flooding incident the public speaker relayed to the Committee. The Committee would receive a copy of the letter sent to the RP.

The Committee made the following information requests;

- (i). To receive customer service data related to gully cleaning.
- (ii). To receive the data for numbers of enforcement actions taken against illegal crossovers.
- (iii). For the Committee to receive the Planning Policy changes for front gardens once it was completed.

7. Safer Brent Partnership Annual Report 2020-21

Carolyn Downs (Chief Executive, Brent Council) introduced the report as Chair of the Safer Brent Partnership. She advised that the year ending 2021 was the first time Brent had become an average crime borough, having previously been in the top 3 boroughs for crime, which was very positive. There were still areas of concern, including anti-social behaviour and gang related offending. Both were a priority of the partnership. In relation to anti-social behaviour, the increase was a reflection of the way issues relating to Covid-19 were reported, such as lack of social distancing and hanging out in parks. In relation to gang related offending, there had been some serious violent gang related offenses in the borough during the reporting year, but throughout the summer there had been a 12% decrease in gang related incidents. This decrease was despite predictions that the reopening of society would mean an increase in gang tensions. Councillor Promise Knight (Lead Member for Community Safety and Engagement) and Supt Tania Martin (Met Police) also highlighted the reduction in gang related offending. For the coming year, the partnership would focus on violence against women and girls (VAWG), violent crime including youth related violent crime, and anti-social behaviour.

The Committee was then invited to raise questions on the update provided, which focussed on a number of key areas as highlighted below:

- The Committee noted that Brondesbury Park had a low crime rate compared to its neighbouring wards, querying whether there was a correlation between affluence and lower crime rates. Colin Wilderspin (Head of Community Protection, Brent Council) agreed to provide the Committee with a breakdown of crime and the type of crime in each ward. He advised that with regard to locality of crimes there was connectivity to high footfall areas such as football in Wembley, making it difficult to confirm the correlation behind crime rates in certain geographical areas.
- The Committee asked about stop and search statistics and the percentages of stop and searches across ethnicities. Officers advised that the most recent meeting of the Safer Brent Partnership had received a report on stop and search disproportionality and had drilled down on that topic. Tania Martin advised that the Basic Command Unit (BCU) monitored stop and search extremely closely. The amount of stop and searches conducted had decreased but the number of fines had remained the same, meaning, as a percentage, more stop and searches were effective. In terms of the monitoring of disproportionality, the Met Police were subject to a significant amount of scrutiny and used Community Monitoring Reference Groups to look at disproportionality and the use of force. The groups were able to sample videos of body worn footage to see how a stop and search interaction had played out and provide direct feedback to officers and supervisors. It was agreed further information on stop and search could be provided to the Committee.
- The Committee were advised that CCTV did not prevent crime but made people feel safer, helped to detect crime occurring, and was often used as evidence during trials. The technology used in Brent provided a very clear picture which made it easier for police to identify suspects and continue their investigation.
- It was highlighted that there had been a decrease in the number of reports of domestic violence with injury, and the Committee queried whether this was due to the implementation of Independent Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVAs) and early intervention. Officers advised that the IDVA service was currently provided through Advance and there had been a large awareness raising piece across Brent and nationally during lockdown with regard to domestic abuse. In Brent, the Council tackled domestic abuse through support to the victims, and also through a programme working directly with perpetrators around behaviour change. The early intervention service had continued and received additional grant funding, and its impact was reflected in the reduced reporting of those incidents. The approach had helped with early identification of domestic abuse, allowing safeguards to be put in place.
- In relation to the take up of the IRIS offer for GPs, the take up from GPs since the publication of the report had since been improved and was now at 65%. The Violence Against Women and Girls Forum had a range of partners that had worked hard with the IRIS offer to get it into GPs. In addition, the uptake

of training around domestic abuse had dramatically increased in the last 6-8 months.

- Carolyn Downs advised that the Safer Brent Partnership had not prioritised 'inquisitive crime' despite a push to do so from MOPAC. The focus for the partnership was on issues of violence against women and girls and serious violent crime amongst young people.
- The Committee noted that the report indicated a high proportion of gang members were Black and asked whether any resource from the Black Community Action Plan would be directed to supporting people away from gang related activity. They were advised that there was already significant resource within the Community Safety Team, Youth Offending Service and Children and Young People's department, targeted towards gang affiliated young people. Brent had a gang worker and the Young Brent Foundation had received a significant grant from the violence reduction unit at City Hall to work with young black men. Work around the impact of gangs on girls where they had been groomed had also received funding. Specifically in relation to resource from the Black Community Action Plan, the Committee heard that community safety issues and gang crime had not been identified for investment during the first year but work would soon begin to develop priorities for year 2 of the delivery plan, with suggestions welcome.
- Committee members noted that the figures of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) were going up and asked what the Council were doing to bring that down. Officers advised the increase was a reflection of the fact partners were getting better at spotting the signs of CSE, allowing the Council to support more victims. Officers were happy to return with colleagues from Children and Young People to explain the figures in more detail. In relation to the police response to CSE, Tania Martin highlighted that all officers were trained to spot the signs of CSE and to look at the wider context of any incident they responded to. The Data Quality Board in Brent looked at themes around CSE on a monthly basis, reviewing processes and quality and sampling types of work done in the past.
- In considering Brent's response to CSE, the Committee queried what conversations or partnership work happened between the police, TfL and the Council regarding taxi licensing. Officers present agreed to take this away and ensure those conversations were happening.
- Regarding the boundary changes for the following year, Tania Martin the Met Police were prepared. The police had put considerable resource into Church End for the following few months, which had been selected by the Met to have a Town Centre Team and extra PWO resourcing. She advised that the BCU was not necessarily dissected into specific components and whilst officers worked at ward level they also liked to look at the totality of an area and consider crime within an area as a whole. She added that the crime profile in Brent was not changing with the changing ward boundaries and there were systems and processes that worked and were already in place.

It was **RESOLVED**:

(1) That the following areas for improvement be noted:

- (i). For the police, TfL and Council to be in regular dialogue in relation to taxi licensing.

(2) The Committee made the following information requests:

- (i). To provide details of crime and its correlation to wealth in the borough
- (ii). To provide details of stop and search statistics broken down by ethnicity
- (iii). To provide details about CSE across the borough, including details of training for police and the frequency of the training.

8. **Knife Crime Scrutiny Review**

Councillor Promise Knight (Lead Member for Community Safety and Engagement, Brent Council) introduced the report which provided an update and highlighted the actions partners had taken to ensure the issue of knife crime was addressed in the borough. She hoped the Committee were assured that the 13 recommendations from the Scrutiny Task Group had been implemented sufficiently and had enriched the continuing focus on knife crime.

The Committee was then invited to raise questions on the update provided, which focussed on a number of key areas as highlighted below:

- In relation to the recommendation on the out of hour's use of schools, there was a continuing conversation with schools and children's services. Some schools had been able to offer additional provision and prioritised having that space and community offer, but affordability was a factor. There had not been a great uptake of funding from MOPAC for the delivery of afterschool activities and that budget had been rolled over. Some schools offered afterschool services within their financial remit, and the Safer Neighbourhoods Board had used funding to support some of those activities.
- Considering recommendation 9, the Committee were advised that probation now operated in a new format going back to a national probation service. Brent had benefited from this as there was a service within Brent overseeing caseworkers in Brent. The commitment to partnership operations had improved in the 6 months since it had been operating that way, and the probation service had been a huge benefit to the Summer Nights Programme which targeted known offenders of concern to the borough.
- In relation to Community and Voluntary Sector (CVS) and smaller local community groups, it was highlighted that the Global Thinking Project was a consortium of smaller local community voluntary organisations, underpinned through the Young Brent Foundation, who had been successful in delivering a localised project. This was an area Community Safety had pushed on, trying to strengthen the network to enable more positive chances for those organisations to be successful in contract bidding. From a Strategy and

Partnerships Perspective, the voluntary and community group work in the area of community safety was very specialist, with a limited number of organisations working with a defined cohort, such as victims of CSE or VAWG. There was crossover in the organisations Community Safety and Strategy and Partnerships worked with, but many of the specific organisations were likely to be micro. Councillor Knight added that there was a model of collaboration for the work done with CVS, supporting one another to be intersectional.

- Considering the increase in gun crime, officers advised that gun crime was recorded every time a lethal barrel gunfire was released, so where 4 gunshots were released 4 incidents would be recorded. The statistics for gun crime had decreased in Brent compared to 5-6 years ago, but it was an issue. The Committee heard that early intervention was key. Supt Tania Martin (Met Police) added that it was an area the police took particularly seriously, with any intelligence received assessed very quickly and dealt with as effectively as possible. Over the summer the police had been able to attract additional resources from the wider Met Police to assist with trying to make sure gun crime did not cause any further issues. This area was monitored continually throughout the course of 24 hours each day.
- Focusing on reoffending gang crime, officers advised of the Violence Vulnerability Programme. Of a cohort of 253 individuals, 72% had not been known to re-offend during the reporting period. When officers considered the vulnerable lifestyles those individuals led, a 72% non-reoffending figure was very good compared across London. In terms of the Reoffender Management Programme, made up of prolific high offenders, the report detailed the cost of crime and total number of offenses prior to support from the programme, and compared that to the reduction in cost of crime and number of offenses during that support period. For example, during the reporting period prior to support there was a total number of offenses of 2,789, compared to 585 following intervention and support.

The Committee did not make any recommendations in relation to the item discussed, but made several requests for information, recorded as follows:

- i) For the Committee to be provided with statistics for reoffending from the probation service.
- ii) For the Committee to be provided with the number and names of schools who were currently fulfilling the Knife Crime Task Group Recommendation around out of hours opening.

9. Information Report: Brent Climate & Ecological Emergency Strategy Update - Year one delivery plan (2021-2022)

While the report provided to Committee was for information only, the Committee made several information requests in relation to the report, recorded as follows:

- i) For the Committee to receive information on what the Council was doing to support schools to effectively insulate their buildings.

- ii) For the Committee to receive information on the use of food caddies in Brent Housing Management properties, and what other Registered Social Landlords were doing about food waste.
- iii) For the Committee to receive information on what the Council was doing to make the current road network in Brent more pedestrian friendly.
- iv) For the Committee to receive information on what the Council was doing about corporate polluters, including what engagement the Council would have with private sector organisations to reduce their emissions.
- v) For the Committee to receive information on what the Council was doing to encourage people to consume less meat and dairy.

10. Progress Report

The Scrutiny Progress report, outlined the issues previously considered at the Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee. The Chair noted that future iterations of the report would include an accessible table which included the status of information requests and recommendations put forward to departments.

11. Forward Plan of Key Decisions

The Forward Plan of Key Decisions was noted.

12. Any other urgent business

The Committee were advised that this was Michael Carr's (Senior Policy & Scrutiny Officer, Brent Council) last meeting at Brent Council. The Committee thanked Michael for his work on the Committee and wished him well for the future.

The meeting closed at 8:20 pm

Councillor R. Mashari
Chair