



Brent

MINUTES OF THE RESOURCES AND PUBLIC REALM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Wednesday 3 July 2019 at 6.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Kelcher (Chair), Councillor Kansagra (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Gbajumo, Kabir, Mashari, Nerva and Stephens

Also Present: Councillor Tom Miller (Lead Member for Community Safety and Engagement) and Councillor S Choudhary

1. Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Aden, S Butt (substituted by Councillor Stephens) and Johnson.

2. Declarations of interests

No declarations of interests were made.

3. Deputations (if any)

None.

4. Minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting held on 15 April 2019 be agreed as an accurate record of the meeting.

5. Matters arising (if any)

The following matters arising were raised in relation to the minutes of the last meeting:

Item 7 – Economic Impact of Wembley Stadium

Responding to members' concerns about providing feedback on the recommendations made at the previous meeting and ensuring continuity of agreed actions, Amar Dave (Strategic Director Regeneration and Environment, Brent Council) stated that officers from the Regeneration and Environment Department would be meeting with Wembley Stadium and Quintain representatives to discuss a number of key areas stemming from the report, including future regeneration of Wembley Park area, utilisation of resources and ways of working beyond Euro 2020. He assured the Committee that the matters raised in the minutes of the previous would also form a part in the discussion. With regards to members' comments on ensuring that information/insights provided in the report be taken into account and monitored going forward, it was explained that such reports were commissioned at the end of an entity's period of economic development in order to

provide an extensive, in-depth analysis on lessons learned and inform future projects. Due to the significant time and cost involved in commissioning such pieces of work, however, it was unlikely that further research would be commissioned by the Football Association in the near future. Nevertheless, Members were assured that any actions requested by the Committee were taken into account and discussed by the Council's Chief Executive and Senior Officers at their weekly meetings to ensure actions were followed through.

The Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee requested that, following the joint meeting between the Council, Wembley Stadium and Quintain representatives:

- i. An update on the outcome of the above meeting and specific feedback on the actions agreed at the previous Committee meeting be shared with Members, and that
- ii. A follow up meeting between committee members and council officers to discuss the committee's priorities and agree on timelines for obtaining further information on the agreed actions be organised.

Following this item, the order of the agenda was amended as follows below:

6. Air Quality Scrutiny Task Group

The Chair introduced the item, proposing that Councillor Thomas Stephens be appointed to lead on this investigation. Councillor Stephens provided a brief outline of the report which detailed proposals for the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee to establish a Task Group on Air Quality. Referencing the broad remit of the task group's terms of reference, Councillor Stephens proposed that the group would focus on five strategic areas, encompassing both Brent as a whole but also other communities and neighbourhoods concerned about air quality. Adopting an evidence based approach, the group would seek to review examples of best practice, engage with a range of stakeholders and carry out analysis on the level of air quality in the borough. The group would have a wide membership, consisting of elected and co-opted members (including individuals from the wider Brent community) to ensure adequate representation and sharing of expertise on air quality. In particular, the group would be seeking to engage with young people and schools to ensure that their concerns were given sufficient prominence and acted upon.

Members unanimously welcomed the establishment of the air quality task group and pledged offers of support and contributions to the work of the task group by sharing information, providing evidence and facilitating visits in their respective wards. In the ensued discussion, they emphasised the overarching role of regeneration plans in this project, alongside strong leadership and accountability in order to ensure there was adequate structure in place to spearhead the implementation of any subsequent actions/recommendations to the Council. Members commended the idea for a wider membership composition and in particular the proposals to include the voice of residents on air quality, as set out in the task groups' terms of reference.

The Committee was particularly mindful of the fact that whilst overall air quality was improving, issues remained about the pace of change, inequality and compliance

around where improvements were taking place. In noting the important function task groups performed in general, the Committee expressed the view that, given the likely cross-cutting approach required covering areas beyond just environment, the work of the Air Quality Task Group in particular be prioritised from an early stage and an agreement for cooperation from the Local Authority be sought. Despite assurance given by officers that the project had already been discussed with the leadership team and some work had been done on exploring ways for embedding it within the relevant strategies, Members reiterated that significant consideration should be given on how wider Council plans such as the Council's Air Quality Plan 2017-2022, fit within the work of the task group to ensure that impact of the task group's work was maximised and that any actions resulting from the report were implemented in a timely manner.

RESOLVED:

- i. That an Air Quality Task Group be established in accordance with the terms of reference set out in the report and the following membership:
 - Cllr Thomas Stephens (Chair)
 - Cllr Elliot Chappell
 - Cllr Lia Colaccio
 - Cllr Janice Long
 - Cllr Michael Maurice
 - Cllr Neil Nerva
 - Fiona Mulaisho – co-opted Member (Clean Air for Brent)
 - Sue Caro – co-opted Member
 - Sylvia Gauthereau - co-opted Member (Campaign Coordinator, Brent Cycling Campaign).

- ii. That the senior leadership of the Council be asked to publicly buy into the work of the Task Group and see the Air Quality Task Group as a top priority and that, to this end, the Chief Executive of the Council emails all departments and partners to let them know that the work is happening and their full cooperation is expected.

7. The Safer Brent Partnership and Annual Report

Councillor Tom Miller (Lead Member for Community Safety and Engagement) introduced the item, which included the annual Safer Brent Partnership Report for 2018/19. The Annual Report provided the priorities of the Safer Brent Partnership 2018/21 and included a number of key priorities such as reducing domestic abuse, knife crime, vulnerability, number of offenders, anti-social behaviour and increasing safeguarding. The overall performance for the past year had been good, due to liaison and support between the Police, Local authority and community partners, with Brent's crime rate remaining below the London average of 94 crimes per 1000.

Karina Wane (Head of Community Protection, Brent Council) highlighted that amongst the main achievements for 2018/19 outlined in the report had been the decrease in domestic abuse offences with injury by 8%, the overall reduction in knife crime offences by 13% and a reduced risk of Community MARAC referrals by

53%. However, areas for further development remained and included early intervention of domestic abuse, reducing the impact of gangs/knives, more partnership working, more intervention for individuals exploited/ at risk of county lines and addressing issues of repeat ASC callers by utilising existing powers further and working proactively with neighbourhood managers.

The Chair thanked the Lead Member and Officers for the introduction to the report and subsequently invited questions from the Committee:

In noting reference in the report to domestic abuse women/men identified as “victims”, Members queried whether they should be portrayed as “survivors” instead, in order to help build their confidence. Referencing information in the report on the delivery of services to Brent’s diverse community, it was further queried whether any consideration for victims of social media abuse had been given. In response, Karina Wane stated that a number of services existed which were trying to reduce levels of victimisation. While acknowledging that subjects to domestic abuse were indeed “survivors”, she explained that from a Council perspective those individuals entered the service as “victims”. In terms of social media and hate crime, she explained that further work was needed in the area. Commissioning services had to adapt around the services provided and social influences had developed. The Council was working with a number of organisations which specialised in domestic abuse and child sexual exploitation.

Members further questioned the impact on partnerships, which intervention method had been the most successful and steps undertaken to increase prevention. Karina Wane advised that an annual strategic assessment had been completed, which provided a good way of measuring through an action plan and strategy. Whilst the plans were “top heavy”, the Safer Brent Partnership had a number of operational priorities and was being held to account by the strategic boards under Safer Brent Partnership. Specific training in working with victims and risk-assessing had also been carried out. Non-crimes were also addressed through early intervention and the Council was aiming to identify problems before they escalated. It was noted that the Council was working with nearly 300% more victims which had affected the balance of injury statistics. Nevertheless, Ms Wane confirmed that working with a larger pool of victims would continue and the Council had applied for more funding to home office to get more resources. The project was still on track and would aim at offering even further intervention.

Discussion moved on with Members spotlighting on the performance dashboard, set within the report. Referencing the priority on reducing gang related offending which required further work, the Committee enquired on common trends in gun crimes, further questioned how Brent compared to other boroughs, sought clarification on the number of repeated incidents and how they were recorded. In response, Karina Wane advised that it was difficult to have specific indicators around gang related offending and this was new trend seen in 2019. She noted that whilst flagged as “red” category, the numbers quoted were not considered high and there was an overall downward trajectory.

Supt Smith added that the number of cases referred to in the dashboard was considered small (31 cases for 2018/19) compared to crimes in other local authorities. He assured Members that measures were in place and criminals with guns, in particular street guns, were being targeted by the Police. In addition, Brent

had one of two available violent crime task forces. Actions taken may not necessarily lead to a percentage decrease but it was expected that overall trend line would decrease. Expressing his understanding of the gravity of issues at stake, Supt Smith assured members that guns were generally difficult to obtain in the UK and there was no gun culture. Councillor Miller clarified that the dashboard represented a flat rather falling under a specific statistic and the priority would be monitored.

A key line of enquiry for the Committee was the increase in ASB-related calls to the Brent Police and reporting of such behaviour across the borough. Members questioned the principle of reporting and stated that it may mislead the public who would expect specific actions to be taken. Councillors were mindful that by encouraging people to report the Council was raising expectations, without the ability to guarantee that specific actions would be taken, which in turn may result in complaints. Therefore, it was felt that further consideration should be given on how expectations were managed. Members further questioned why measures which are so flawed in principle are used and queried whether other, more targeted Key Performance Indicators could be used.

The Committee was assured that ASB was a priority for the Police across all boroughs. The number of high risk individuals committing ASB was relatively small, with the authorities focusing on personal ASB cases as a way of addressing long-standing/unresolved problems. Over the past 12 months the community in Brent had been actively encouraged to report more and in doing so allowed the Council to develop an evidence base as a way of resolving local issues. Nevertheless, it was explained that definitions of ASB were not universally agreed upon and with London expanding in size, issues were becoming more complex. While the rationale behind reporting of ASB was largely a political matter aimed at addressing increasing public pressures, the aim was to reduce the number of areas people were reporting on rather than the number of reports received. Members were advised that ASB served as a useful proxy measure for describing a wide range of behaviours, which were gathered under one statistics to demonstrate to the public what was being done about less serious crimes and communicate what was going on but was not always sufficient to describe the real world.

With regards to indicators used in the report, officers advised that these were included information to allow for a general oversight. However, they noted that crime related indicators were subjective and directly related to the level of cooperation between the LA and the Police. KPIs used in the report were seen as a baseline for comparison but the wider service had additional, more specific KPIs which were used for commissioning services and contract monitoring and could be disclosed if necessary.

Spotlighting further on the issue of ASB, the Committee suggested that the Police explores the possibility of applying a decapitation strategy by targeting gang leaders and getting them off the streets an example of implications of ASB and as a way of addressing issues of persistent ASB. In welcoming the suggestion, Louis Smith stated that any actions taken need to be evidence based. He advised that the police were working on a series of operations and trying to engage with the community and advise them on taking back control of their areas. Councillor Miller stated that the Council was nominated for an award last year for the joint actions taken with the Police. He noted that the most effective method so far had been the

utilisation of behaviour orders. The Committee heard that overall public confidence in the Police was at 75% approval rating with 67% customer satisfaction in relation to dealing with anti-social behaviour. Although it was on the right track further improvement was needed including review of the website and simplification of the processes.

Responding to question from a Member on whether statistic on burglaries had been included in the Annual Report, Karina Wane explained that while the Annual Report focused on 5 nominated priorities based on the strategic assessment carried out, the service would continue to take into account other areas including burglaries and monitor them. Supt Smith added that the Police was actively monitoring certain individuals/gangs involved in burglaries and assured Members of the high conviction rate. Although Brent a lower number of burglaries compared to Harrow and Barnet, Members were cautioned about the importance to avoid any displays of affluence and take measures towards guarding wealth and valuables. A point was raised by officers that going forward a different approach needed to be adopted when dealing with crime such as burglaries which focused not only on resolving the crime itself but also seeking to understand the needs of the person who had been burgled.

Discussions moved on to supporting sex workers and addressing the negative impact of criminalisation on them. Members were mindful of ongoing issues in the borough and felt that more could be done to support sex workers through further consultation and exploring alternative options such as “AA-style” meetings, installation of street lights, removal of phone boxes and identifying blind spots. Karina Wane stated that the Council commissioned an outreach service through MOPAC, which actively sought individuals who may need help through an intelligence approach. Sex workers were seen as vulnerable individuals – the intention was not to criminalise them but to engage with them through positive behaviour, raise awareness and help them develop a longer term plan. Majority of sex workers were women but there were some male workers as well. Through an audit-model approach it had been established that wider issues existed such as drugs and alcohol leading to the need to support such people and move them away of negative environment. In terms of sex workers in Brent, Karina Wane stated that there were a number of engrained issues and would take years to fully engage with these individuals. She noted that majority of sex works were not trafficked but were mostly local residents with local issues. The idea of carrying out a consultation on best approach had been considered but no specific actions had yet been taken. Whilst further work could be done, it was likely that it would be resource heavy task which needed to be offset by impact on available budget.

Data requests:

- Figures on net increase/decrease in total number of lethal gun crime be shared with committee members

RESOLVED:

The Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee recommended:

- i. That data on: police performance; public satisfaction in policing; and confidence in partnerships be included in the next SBP Annual report

- ii. That the Council participate fully in the national debate and supports a Nordic legislative model for the sex industry to criminalise purchasers and protect workers by responding to Home Office consultations where possible.
- iii. That the Council undertake a borough-wide review of street furniture and makes every effort to “design out” parts of the street furniture that allows sex work to happen, for example by removing public phone boxes.

Following this item, the Committee adjourned for a short break. The meeting resumed at 7.40pm.

8. **Police Tri-borough BCU Reconfiguration (presentation)**

The Chair welcomed Louis Smith (Neighbourhood Superintendent, Met Police) to the meeting, noting that the Committee had before them an update on the Police Tri-borough merger and communication of Basic Command Units (BCU) reconfiguration. Introduced in November 2018, the changes resulted in the Met bringing together policing in Brent with Harrow and Barnet to form the North-West Area and deliver emergency response and safeguarding to residents through the sharing of police staff, buildings and resources across the three boroughs. The Committee subsequently received a short presentation highlighting a number of key points since the merger, namely the impact of the changes and communication with the local authority and the public.

Three main impact areas resulting from the merger were brought to members' attention:

- **Operational**: From an operational standpoint, a key problem was bringing together expertise and balancing the workload of BCUs. The introduction of the BCU had led to a number of changes such as decrease in number of police stations, the merging of safeguarding teams, carrying out more efficient investigations and expanding the remit of officers' responsibilities/areas of expertise. In addition, the post of a “borough commander” had been replaced with that of a single “BCU commander” responsible for all three boroughs and a new post of “inspectors” had been created. Amongst the most significant changes had been in the Central Records Division (CRD) which now included a much bigger safeguarding wing combining a range of difficulties and vulnerabilities response policing was no longer done along borough boundaries, with the A5 road serving as an approximate dividing line.
- **Partnerships**: - A further unintended consequence of the merger was liaison with the authorities and other partnerships, which had become more complicated due to the varying needs and lack of a clear linear progression
- **Performance**: - Supt Smith advised that there had been a number of structural changes, resulting from a nearly 40% reduction in the overall police budget and the need to reassess how policing was done. However, impact had been minimal and overall performance was stable with a reduction of knife crime between 0.2 and 7.5% compared with 12 months ago.

Presentation moved to communication between the Police, councillors and the Local Authority. A key measure in improving communication had also been the

establishment of Designated Ward Officers posts (DWOs). Amongst the main responsibilities of DWOs was to act as the default contact for all elected members on all policing related matters in the borough, maintaining regular contact with councillors and providing updates on any issues within their respective wards. In terms of communications with the public, the Committee heard that a decision following local consultation had been made to adopt a soft approach in order not to confuse the public with the move to BCUs, while also considering what should be communicated to the public and how. Finally, members were informed of the Online Watch Link (OWL) initiative, which had proven a popular approach and offered a platform for opportunities important to local residents.

The Chair thanked Supt Smith for his presentation and invited members' questions.

Members expressed their understanding of the impact of austerity on police but noted that problems of communication between the Police and Council remained. They were mindful of the need to improve communication further and enable councillors access to information on major incidents in a timely manner. It was noted that councillors often found out about events, particular knife crime or other serious assaults, through social media instead of directly from the Police which put them in a difficult position when dealing with residents' questions. Members also questioned the level of information the Police was allowed to share and their expectation from members – an area which they felt needed clarification. The Committee questioned officers over how they envisioned their partnership with councillors and challenged existing perceptions by reminding officers of the wealth of local knowledge and information members were exposed to and source of. Whilst members were understanding of the balancing valuable police resources, they requested that a better way of communicating with them be found in order to improve the process going forward.

In response, Supt Smith stated that there was a daily briefing between the LA and the Police with an opportunity for officers/councillors to dial in and be briefed on any issues around the borough. Robust processes and close cooperation was also in place between the Community Safety team and the Police, including daily risk management meeting to gather the latest local intelligence, alongside a monthly task-in meetings which provided an opportunity to note any trends and share information as partnership. However, it was stated that it would be challenging to take officers away from operational duties in order to ask them to do more administrative work/communication. In terms of social media, he stated that this was a sensitive platform to utilise when communicating on crimes and referred members to the DWOs as a first point of contact and added that they should have the mobile numbers of the sergeants. In terms of what can or can't be shared with members, Supt Smith stated that personal data could not be given until charges had been made and the case was in the public realm. Officers advised that a refresher of all DWOs numbers would be included in the next Member bulletin for information. Supt Smith explained that the Police seeks the role of councillors as part of the community safety partnership. However, he noted that these partnerships were different and did not share the same boundaries any more. Regardless of the size of the borough he reiterated the need for both police and councillors to work as partners. He emphasised that the answer to this closer partnership would be closer liaison with the DWOs.

Discussions moved on to the matter of local ward meetings, with members enquiring whether it was a requirement for every ward to have Senior Management Team (SMT) meetings with councillors present and noting that some wards had no such provision at all. The general view of the Committee was that ward panels had to be more uniform in their format and centrally accountable to the Police. It was explained that a key challenge for the ward meetings had been attendance by the Police, in particular sergeants, as well as knowing what the relevant report mechanisms were. It was added that some meetings were geographically well represented but more need to be done to promote this consistently across other wards in order to involve more people. A suggestion was also made that some ward meetings be held at Police stations or alternatively utilise existing Brent Connects meetings by asking police officers to attend and answer residents' questions. Supt Smith explained that the SMTs did not have a statutory membership and served as a consultation forum, intended to find solutions to local concerns. While ward meetings were generally Police-led, officers were open to the possibility of involving councillors and local community in shaping the discussions. He added that while each London ward had a panel meeting, the format often varied from face to face meetings to WhatsApp messaging groups which provided a degree of flexibility and opportunity to involve a range of people. Supt Smith further explained that there was no budget to utilise police stations for such meetings as room availability was limited. Instead, he advised that a broader approach was needed, one which made use of other spaces which came free of charge. He further emphasised the role of DWOs as key contacts for each ward but encouraged members and residents to engage with the directly. He stated that a balance between attending meetings where Police's input was required and addressing operational issues across the borough had to be found in order not to compromise on officers' duties.

Data requests:

- i. Details on designated ward officer numbers be shared with all councillors.

RESOLVED:

The Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee recommended:

- i. That the Lead Member for Community Safety and Engagement request the Police to review the existing communication arrangements between the Police and elected representatives in order to ensure more effective liaison and sharing of information. That the result of this meeting is fed back to the committee in writing.
- ii. That the Lead Member for Community Safety and Engagement reviews and shortlists appropriate ward panel models in Brent and sets up a meeting to discuss best model to replicate.

9. **Knife Crime Scrutiny Task Group Interim Report**

Councillor Kabir introduced the item, which presented an interim report on the knife crime scrutiny task group for adoption by the R&PR Committee. She stated that 14 recommendations were being considered to be made to the Council, the Safer Brent Partnership and the NHS. Amongst some of the common issues raised as part of the research was the need for more collaboration between residents and the

police; between community and community organisations. Report findings provided reassurance about the progress made by the Police since work started on the task group but a more safeguarding approach towards knife crime was needed to break down some of the existing barriers.

Members and officers welcomed the interim report and its recommendations and provided the following comments.

- Referencing Recommendation 3, Supt Smith stated a safeguarding approach to knife crime was possible only on a case by case basis in order not to lose focus from policing itself. Instead, further work on effective risk management was needed.
- Referencing Recommendation 7, Supt Smith stated that establishing a single point of contact on knife crime would be challenging to implement, unless it was clear what the intention was and reminded Members that an internal leadership team on knife crime already existed.

Cllr Kabir stated that the Task Group would be sharing the draft recommendations with all parties involved and asking for their feedback. She commented on the good level of participation and thanked officers who had been involved in the project.

RESOLVED:

- i. That comments/feedback on the Knife Crime Scrutiny Task Group interim report be sent to the Chair of the Knife Crime Scrutiny Task Group via the Senior Policy and Scrutiny Officer Michael.Carr@brent.gov.uk by 15 August 2019.

10. Annual Overview and Scrutiny Report 2018-19

RESOLVED that the contents of the Annual Overview and Scrutiny Report 2018/19 be noted.

11. Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Work Programme

RESOLVED that the contents of the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Work Programme 2019/20 be noted.

12. Any other urgent business

None.

The meeting closed at 8.50 pm

M KELCHER
Chair