

MINUTES OF THE SAFER STRONGER COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 3 December 2014 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Pauline Morrison (Chair), David Michael (Vice-Chair), Andre Bourne, Colin Elliott, Alicia Kennedy, Pat Raven, Eva Stamirowski and James-J Walsh

Apologies: Councillors Luke Sorba and Paul Upex

Also present: Timothy Andrew (Scrutiny Manager), Gary Connors (Strategic Community Safety Services Manager), Sam Kirk (Strategic Waste & Environment Manager) and Barrie Neal (Head of Corporate Policy and Governance)

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2014

Resolved: to agree the minutes of the meeting held on 3 November as an accurate record.

2. Declarations of interest

2.1 There were none

3. Responsible dog ownership

3.1 Geeta Subramaniam-Mooney (Head of Crime Reduction and Supporting People) and Sam Kirk (Strategic Waste and Environment Manager) introduced the report; the following key points were noted:

- The report provided an overview of activities in the borough to deal with nuisance dog fouling and encourage responsible dog ownership.
- This work included: implementation of the borough's Dog Control Orders, community activities, micro-chipping, targeted campaigns, work with Lewisham Homes and initiatives with young offenders.
- The Council had also recently supported a community day of action to tackle dog fouling as well as 'operation Big Wing', which was led by the metropolitan police service and targeted a range of anti-social behaviours.
- Lewisham had a BARK project (Borough Action for Responsible K9s), which included representatives from the Council's housing, environment and community safety teams as well as colleagues from housing associations, Glendale Grounds Maintenance, Battersea Dogs and Cats Home and the RSPCA.
- Officers had reviewed the data relating to dog attacks in the borough, including information from accident and emergency. This information did not indicate that there was a problem with dangerous dogs or dog bites in Lewisham.
- Data collection relating to dog bites was not always robust, so it was possible that there was a degree of underreporting. In some cases bites were not reported at all.
- Identification of dangerous dog breeds was an expert process, which was carried out by specialist vets and officers from the Status Dogs Unit of the Met Police.

- There had been a recent high profile case of an officer being bitten by a dog. The dog had been killed in the attack. However, it was not clear whether or not the dog was a banned breed.
- The attack highlighted the risks for officers in dealing with dogs. All officers working with the public needed to understand the potential dangers.
- The borough's Dog Control Orders had been put in place in 2007.
- Over the past 18 months, there had been 8 enforcement notices issued and 2 prosecutions under the Dog Control Orders.
- The number of enforcement notices issued seemed low, because authorised officers were required to witness contraventions taking place (either a dog fouling or being off its lead, for example) and had to give owners an opportunity to remedy the problem before they could issue a notice. When approached by authorised officers, almost all owners were happy to comply with requests to clean up after their dog or put it on a lead.

3.2 Geeta Subramaniam-Mooney (Head of Crime Reduction and Supporting People), Gary Connors (Crime Reduction Manager) and Sam Kirk (Strategic Waste and Environment Manager) responded to questions from the Committee, the following key points were noted:

- The borough's Dog Control Orders required dogs to be on leads on the public highway. There were designated parks and green spaces where dogs were not allowed, or had to be on leads and there were parks where dogs could be off their leads; no more than 4 dogs could be walked by one person and an authorised officer could request that a dog be put on a lead in any area.
- Signage was in place to inform dog owners of the Dog Control Orders for that particular place.
- Officers were not aware of any specific work taking place with families with babies, or families expecting babies, to educate them about the potential risk posed by dogs to young children.
- Officers would discuss the issue of dog ownership and young children with colleagues who were responsible for health visiting and the community mid-wives team.
- The recent change in the law regarding dogs meant it was now an offence to allow a dog to be 'dangerously out of control' anywhere, not just in public places.
- Any dog could be a 'dangerous dog'.
- Legally defined dangerous breeds of dogs (Pit Bull Terriers, Japanese Tosas, Dogo Argentinos and Fila Braziliensis) were recognised to have physical features which increased their levels of aggression; however a dog's temperament was also dependent on its environment and on its owners.
- Dogs should be judged by their deeds and not simply by their breed.
- When a problem with dog fouling or dog behaviour in parks was identified in a particular area, the Council worked with the Battersea Dogs and Cats Home to carry out targeted advice and support.
- Focused work had been carried out in Downham, where there had been a number of complaints about irresponsible dog ownership.
- It would be inappropriate for people to contact the police every time they saw a dangerous looking dog, however, in cases in which people felt that

they were threatened and felt as though they were in immediate danger, then they should call the police.

- Where specific problems were reported in an area, officers could work with the police to target anti-social behaviour.
- Officers also worked with the RSPCA to carry out educational work in schools and to enforce the Animal Welfare Act.
- On-going monitoring was not carried out on the effectiveness of dog stencils (a depiction of a dog fouling with the words 'Bag It & Bin It', which was sprayed on the pavement to encourage people not to allow their dogs to foul) however, when the scheme was first introduced, monitoring was carried out and it found that there was a drop in fouling in areas which had the stencils.
- In order to request a stencil, members of the public should call the Council and request a stencil in their street. Requests were determined on the basis of locations of other stencils, availability of the painting team and/or the number of complaints received in a particular area.
- Numbers of requests to clear up dog fouling by members of the public in 2012/13 was 506; in 2013/14 it was 400 and there had been 187 in the year to October 2014.
- Street sweeping teams should clean up dog fouling. Where it was clear that this was not happening, it should be reported.
- The new 'community trigger' did not provide any additional powers for the Council to deal with anti-social behaviour; rather it put an imperative on the Council to respond to repeated reports about the same issue.
- The borough had three cameras for enforcement - which had to be deployed to tackle a range of different crimes. Where it was clear that persistent dog fouling was a problem then officers would consider the option of using mobile camera, if there was evidence to corroborate complaints.
- When a complaint about dog fouling was made, officers sent a response letter, with information and leaflets to the person concerned. Information was also available on the Council's website.
- The Environment Service also had a blog and a twitter account to share information and raise awareness.
- Councillors would be included in the new 'Green Dog Walkers Newsletter', when it was published.

3.3 The Committee also discussed the reasons for people allowing their dogs to foul in public places. Some Members felt that the problem had increased with the rise in the ownership of 'status dogs', other Members felt that the problem was mostly down to laziness on the part of some dog owners.

Resolved: to note the report.

4. Violence against women and girls review

4.1 Geeta Subramaniam-Mooney (Head of Crime Reduction and Supporting People) introduced the report; the following key points were noted:

- The Committee had previously received information about the approach being taken in Lewisham to reduce violence against women and girls.

- Following the update at the meeting in September, it had been agreed that the Committee would focus more closely on awareness raising and prevention work.
- Anecdotal evidence indicated that there had been an increase in the numbers of young women and girls who were actively involved in gang related activities.
- It was also clear that there were instances of grooming of young women and girls by men and boys for gang-related activities and sexual abuse.
- The majority of gang related activity involved men and boys as perpetrators or victims.
- Lewisham used the youth Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) as the central means of supporting young victims.
- Information from the MARAC indicated that approximately a third of cases being dealt with involved child exploitation or sexual violence.
- The MARAC included representatives from more than 30 agencies, who were able to share information about potential victims.
- The MARAC approach helped to stop young people from becoming re-victimised by ensuring that agencies were aware of the risks faced by young victims.
- This approach to sharing information and ensuring that there were clear referral routes in place to enable a multi-agency response had been used in Lewisham for a number of years.
- The Jay report (into child sexual exploitation in Rotherham) had highlighted the importance of organisations sharing information about possible cases of abuse.
- Furthermore, it demonstrated the importance of acting on that information.
- Lewisham multi-agency safeguarding hub reviewed reports (called Merlins) from all organisations, in order to share information about victims and potential victims.
- Lewisham had initiated a project, which helped fund specially trained youth workers in A&E to support young victims. The project had now been adopted by the Mayor of London and NHS England in four major trauma centres in London.
- 18 months ago the Lewisham Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE) forum had piloted an approach, (with a similar pilot working in Camden), to look at issues of sexual violence and exploitation in a strategic way.
- No prosecutions had been carried out in Lewisham for child sexual exploitation. This was for a number of reasons, including: the difficulty of taking cases through the court system; the danger posed to victims by the associates of perpetrators and the dysfunctional relationships between abusers and victims, in which victims were groomed to be in fear or to assume that violent and exploitative behaviour was normal.
- For victims of domestic violence, there were Independent Domestic Violence Advisers to support them through the court process but this was not the case for young victims.
- In cases where there is abuse in families, or through familiar connections, it could be difficult for young people to break these connections.
- Some work was taking place in schools, including work around healthy relationships. Lewisham had piloted schemes in the past to work with young victims and perpetrators.
- Professionals had to be equipped with the right skills to ask the right questions.

- Officers were concerned about the potential risk of online grooming, which it was clear, was a serious problem, to which there were very few answers.
- The Council would be using funding from the European Daphne project to conduct further work with young people about the risks of online exploitation.

4.2 Geeta Subramaniam-Mooney (Head of Crime Reduction and Supporting People) and Gary Connors (Crime Reduction Manger) responded to questions from Committee; the following key points were noted:

- Officers could not disclose exact figures about the number of young women and girls in the borough affected by gang-related violence as this information was retained by the Police.
- Because of the nature of violence against women and girls associated with gang-related activity, it was likely that there was a significant degree of underreporting.
- It was clear that there had to be an imperative on partners to be proactive and continue to prosecute perpetrators.
- Evidence from the evaluation of the borough's healthier relationship project indicated that 80% of the participants did not identify examples of unacceptable behaviours between partners.
- It was often the case that people didn't realise that they were victims until they encountered professionals or until something serious happened to them.
- For these reasons, it could be the case that people were unwilling to become involved in prosecutions.
- 'Grooming' was the most appropriate word to use in the majority dysfunctional relationships, in which there may be a cycle of violence and gift giving, as with other forms of domestic violence.
- Securing convictions could be difficult because of the precarious position of victims.
- Some young victims did not want to go through the court process.
- Girls might be living in the same neighbourhood as boys who had abused them.
- There might be community or family ties which meant that young women and girls would be at risk if they raised their concerns with the police.
- Victims did not always want to go through the courts process in order to achieve a conviction.
- There was a danger that even if a young women or girl took their case to court – it could collapse due to lack of evidence.
- Further thinking would be required about the court process in order to ensure that the potential for conviction was not limited.
- In the case of child exploitation, the most predominant victims were 14 year old girls.
- A mix of girls and women from different ethnicities were involved.
- Where specific instances of violence had been identified, work had been carried out to concentrate enforcement activities.
- Where issues were identified in specific schools, it was most frequently the case that there had been a particular catalyst to the increase in referrals, such as a visit from officers.

- All girls and young women were potentially at risk of grooming and inappropriate relationships, not just those young people known to be vulnerable.
- The information available suggested that there was a mixed picture in Lewisham, and that people from all classes could be victims.
- It was difficult to develop a clear demographic picture of exploitation and grooming because of the complex nature of the relationships involved and the levels of underreporting as well as low levels of conviction.
- The national findings about child sexual exploitation were still in the process of being gathered and analysed; this information would soon be available.
- The police work on tackling 'county lines' had provided a lot of information about how young people were being exploited.
- Young people could be particularly at risk because of their vulnerability.
- There were cases in which young people were entrapped by being asked to carry drugs or money – and then robbed by other people associated with the gang they were carrying for in order to indebt them and embroil them in further gang related activity.
- Some young men under the age of 18 had been involved in gang related grooming and violence. There had been cases of prolific young offenders grooming other young people with lures of money and status.
- The demographic profile of victims in other places was not necessarily a useful guide for profiling victims in Lewisham because of the different sets of circumstances in different places
- Prosecutions had been achieved in the Oxford, Rochdale and Rotherham cases.
- Lewisham had mentoring programmes for young men and a domestic violence programme for perpetrators of domestic violence.
- Unpicking issues in young people's lives and family was important – targeted programmes existed to work with whole families.
- Officers needed to consider what further work could be done to support the male victims of sexual exploitation and violence. At present the majority of work was centred on young women and girls, but further consideration could be given to the grooming and exploitation of young gay men.
- It was clear that there was an issue with online grooming and exploitation, but it wasn't clear what work should take place to stop this from happening.
- Work as on-going to achieve prosecutions in the recent county lines cases.
- Further information would be provided about the number of children who went missing from care.
- Young people in care were a vulnerable group but they should not be singled out as troublemakers or as the source of problems because this was not the case.

4.3 The Committee discussed the evidence and noted that, whilst there was clearly work taking place in Lewisham to raise awareness and prevent young women from becoming associated with gang violence, it was difficult to develop a clear picture of what was occurring, due to the lack of available data.

Resolved: to note the report, and to accept the information from officers for the review.

5. Select Committee work programme

5.1 Timothy Andrew (Scrutiny Manager) introduced the report. The Committee discussed the following key points:

- Invitations for the next evidence session of the Violence Against Women and Girls awareness and prevention review should include: an officer to talk about online protection of children and young people, an ex-gang member who mentored young people.
- The Local Assemblies report should cover three areas:
 - An annual update on progress which included data on outcomes, attendance and achievements
 - Governance and management arrangements for assemblies, which included an overview of the ways in which assemblies managed roles and responsibilities; information about the constitutional structure of the assemblies programme and details about the way in which the guidance for co-ordinating groups is devised, managed and scrutinised.
 - Details about assembly funding: to include the protocols for allocating assembly funding and monitoring of the delivery of assembly priorities - as well as a follow up on the previous questions raised at Committee about plans to involve assembly coordinating groups in the awarding of the main grants programme money for ward development agencies.
- An invitation would be sent to the borough police and fire commanders to update on the information provided for the emergency services review. The information from the fire service should include an update about attendance times, fire safety visits and calls to incidents outside of the borough.

Resolved: to agree the work programme, noting that there were a number of substantial items to scrutinise before the end of the municipal year.

6. Items to be referred to Mayor and Cabinet

The meeting ended at 9.00 pm

Chair:

Date:
