

MINUTES OF THE SAFER STRONGER COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 16 January 2024 at 7.00 pm

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Liam Shrivastava (Chair), Hau-Yu Tam (Vice-Chair), Mark Jackson and Ayesha Lahai-Taylor.

ALSO JOINING THE MEETING VIRTUALLY: Councillors Coral Howard and Oana Olaru.

ALSO PRESENT: Sherene Russell-Alexander (Director of People and Organisation Development), James Lee (Director of Communities, Partnerships and Leisure), Claudia Menichetti (Head of Employee Services), Jannet Hall (Head of Safer Communities), Courtney Richards (Head of Organisational Development), Desmond Zephyr (Crime and Violence Reduction Service Manager) and Benjamin Awkal (Scrutiny Manager).

ALSO PRESENT VIRTUALLY: Ceri Jacob (Lewisham Place Executive Lead – NHS South East London Integrated Care System), Superintendent Charlene Pavitt (Neighbourhoods Superintendent Lewisham – Metropolitan Police Service) and Lucien Spencer (Head of Service – Bromley & Lewisham Probation Delivery Unit).

NB: Those Councillors listed as joining virtually were not in attendance for the purposes of the meeting being quorate, any decisions taken or to satisfy the requirements of s85 Local Government Act 1972

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 2023

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of 7 November 2023 be agreed as an accurate record subject to the correction of Cllr Campbell's role to Cabinet Member for Communities, Refugees and Community Safety.

2. Declarations of interest

There were none.

3. Workforce Equalities

Witnesses

Sherene Russell-Alexander, Director of People and Organisation Development
Claudia Menichetti, Head of Employee Services
Courtney Richards, Head of Organisational Development

Key points from discussion

The Director of People and Organisation Development introduced the report. Key points raised included:

- 3.1. The increases in staff disclosing their disability status or sexual orientation could indicate increased confidence in the Council.

- 3.2. The mean age of Council employees was 48 years, not 47 as stated in the report.
- 3.3. The Council voluntarily produced the ethnicity and disability pay gap data in the report.

The Committee put questions to the witnesses. Key points raised included:

- 3.4. The view of the Young Mayor and Advisors was being sought regarding how working for the Council could be made more attractive to younger people. The local government offer was being reviewed by the Local Government Association to understand why it did not appeal to younger people.
- 3.5. The Council was considering how it promoted itself as an employer to younger people, such as by attending job fairs and promoting the breadth of local authority functions. A proposal to offer work placements to 15- and 16-year-olds was being developed.
- 3.6. The Economic Development service was working in partnership with local employers re jobs and skills. The Council was working with Job Centre Plus and the Department of Work and Pensions to attract residents; for example, ten apprentices were about to join the Council's Revenue and Benefits function.
- 3.7. It was noted that the data on the representation of disabled people in the workforce was based on population data which did not differentiate those who were able/unable to work due to their disability.
- 3.8. People and Organisational Development worked closely with the Disabled Staff Network. The process for acquiring reasonable adjustments was being reviewed to identify and address any barriers. The Council was adopting recommendations made by the Lewisham Disabled People's Commission, including to employ a disability policy officer. The Council was a Disability Confident employer and seeking to become a Disability Leader. Job adverts clearly communicated the Council's flexibility and desire to receive applications from people of all protected characteristics.
- 3.9. Surveys had found some disabled staff to have outstanding reasonable adjustments. Reasonable adjustments were to be audited annually. A reasonable adjustments passport enabled self-selecting staff (not just disabled ones) to port their adjustments between roles. The creation of a central record of reasonable adjustments was being considered.
- 3.10. The Disabled Staff Forum's general view was that the Council's existing policy of providing reasonable leave for staff to attend any specialist appointments was sufficient, and specific disability leave could be more restrictive.
- 3.11. It was too early to say how anonymised shortlisting, which had launched in the summer, was impacting bias in recruitment. The new system had better reporting functionality. The talent pools available in different professions affected the Council's ability to recruit diverse staff in certain areas.
- 3.12. A review of the Council's pay and remuneration package was being commissioned.
- 3.13. Development centres were targeted at ethnically diverse staff regardless of their seniority; it was focused on enabling career progression as representation fell off at senior grades.

- 3.14. As the number of grievance cases was low, it was hard to draw conclusions regarding why certain groups were more likely to raise grievances. For example, while Asian staff were the most likely to raise grievances, the most recent staff survey had found them to be the most satisfied group. The tendency of certain groups to raise grievances could indicate their confidence that their concerns would be heard.
- 3.15. The new agency managed service provider, Matrix, would be able to provide ethnicity data on new agency workers. They had been asked whether they could also do a retrospective audit of agency workers' characteristics.
- 3.16. Development centres were to focus on where participants currently were, where they aspired to be, navigating the recruitment journey, and the everyday external and internal challenges people faced in moving forward.
- 3.17. The Chair of the Corporate Equalities Board was to host monthly meetings regarding equalities, diversity and inclusion with Trade Unions.

ACTIONS

1. Director of People and Organisation Development to provide the age profile for Council apprentices.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

4. Safer Lewisham Plan and Serious Violence Duty

Witnesses

James Lee, Director of Communities, Partnerships and Leisure

Jannet Hall, Head of Safer Communities

Desmond Zephyr, Crime and Violence Reduction Service Manager

Ceri Jacob, Lewisham Place Executive Lead – NHS South East London Integrated Care System

Superintendent Charlene Pavitt, Neighbourhoods Superintendent Lewisham – Metropolitan Police Service

Lucien Spencer, Head of Service – Bromley & Lewisham Probation Delivery Unit

Key points from discussion

- 4.1. The public health approach to reducing violence was to be relaunched towards the end of the 2024/25 municipal year, following a delay resulting from the work required by the introduction of the serious violence duty by the Police, Crime and Sentencing Act 2022. The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime's Violence Reduction Unit was also requiring the production of a local violence and vulnerability assessment, which would also inform the relaunched approach.
- 4.2. Committee members welcomed the consultation exercise undertaken.
- 4.3. To safeguard young people following specific incidents, multi-agency case conferences were held, which increasingly involved community voices. Under a Youth Justice Service programme, youth workers engaged young people in police custody. More-preventative work was being delivered in education settings by the Violence Reduction Team. A trauma-informed approach was being embedded in Safer Communities.

- 4.4. Longer-term strategic work to understand and prevent violence was conducted via a range of fora and meetings under, and outside, the Safer Lewisham Partnership governance structure.
- 4.5. The Partnership was alive to the risks of disproportionately criminalising and targeting certain groups. There was a balance to be struck between informed enforcement, the risks of unnecessary targeting and criminalisation and the risks association with not responding to risk indicators. A significant review of tools used by the Police, such as the Gangs Matrix, had been undertaken and new approaches adopted. Community based reports regarding disproportionate policing had been commissioned.
- 4.6. There was a misalignment between the ethnic identity codes used by, and geographic boundaries of, different partners. Inter-agency collaboration and communication addressed such challenges.
- 4.7. The requirement to hold ward panels remained. However, Safer Communities was working to be more proactive, visible and accessible in the community and reach groups who were less likely to engage with the Council via the ordinary channels. Recent initiatives included community-organisation facilitated conversations with parents and workshops with pupils, a fathers' group, and workshops and surgeries in family hubs. It was using Violence Reduction Unit funding to engage proactively where tensions were present in communities.
- 4.8. The Council and Police were discussing reintroducing police stations in the borough, as the Police's rationalised estate presented a barrier to the implementation of the New Met for London Plan's aspirations regarding community policing. Locations were likely to be selected on how far they were from existing police stations.
- 4.9. Because Lewisham had a persistently high domestic abuse offence rate, a deep dive was being undertaken why the borough was an outlier.
- 4.10. The low sanction detection rate for sexual offences was a national issue.
- 4.11. Police resources were deployed based on need in relation to crime types. There was a delay between resources becoming technically available and being deployed.
- 4.12. Statutory partners were well-informed in relation to the support available to the victims of domestic abuse. The Iris training programme had, however, not run for several years and could be rerun.
- 4.13. The Athena service was run by Refuge, a victims-first organisation. The service's contract was in its final year; the service would be reviewed and new one commissioned for April 2025.
- 4.14. The proportion of Athena referrals accepted was low due to factors including people receiving initial advice but choosing not to become a managed case or third-party referrals where the referred person did not wish to engage or was erroneously referred.
- 4.15. The significant contribution of systemic social and economic factors to violence was noted.
- 4.16. The Council was taking a leadership role across the South East Basic Command Unit regarding tackling the supply of illegal drugs – an element of the National Drugs Strategy.

- 4.17. A modern slavery conference was to be held to help the correct identification of modern slavery victims and perpetrators and raise awareness of the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). Under a pilot scheme, the Council was undertaking NRM assessments for young people; this would avoid victims being erroneously treated as perpetrators.
- 4.18. The Multi-Agency Child Exploitation Panel conducted bespoke assessments of the young people referred to it, usually following specific incidents. Assessments focussed on static and dynamic risk factors associated with exploitation. It was recognised that the presence of risk factors did not necessarily equate to the presence of risk; the process was about considering all relevant information. The Panel did not proactively scan for individuals who were at risk of exploitation.

ACTIONS

1. Superintendent Pavitt to provide the sanction detection rate for sexual offences in comparator boroughs.
2. Superintendent Pavitt to provide an overview of the work and impact of the stop and search Community Monitoring Group and Independent Advisory Group during the last 12 months.
3. Head of Safer Communities to share MACE quality assurance processes.
4. The Director of Communities, Partnerships and Leisure to arrange the provision of information on the support available to victims to voluntary, community and faith organisations.

RESOLVED

To recommend:

1. That the use of Domestic Violence Protection Orders and Domestic Violence Protection Notices be reviewed.
2. That an update be provided on the impact of the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) local case review pilot and the journey of people referred under the NRM, including the support provided to them by the Council, at the conclusion of the pilot.

5. Select Committee work programme

- 5.1. The Chair noted he had written to the Cabinet Member for Communities, Refugees and Community Safety at the end of 2023 requesting an update on how the concerns raised by Committee in relation to the proposed public spaces protection order presented to it in June 2023 were being responded to. Once that was received, the Committee could determine whether further engagement with the topic was required.

RESOLVED

To replace 'Lewisham Disabled People's Commission response implementation' with 'Multi-agency response to child exploitation' in the work programme; and recommend the Committee review the Lewisham Disabled People's Commission response implementation in the next municipal year.

The meeting ended at 9.24 pm

Chair:

Date:
