

Minutes of the Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee

Tuesday, 17 January 2023 at 7.00pm

In Attendance: Councillors Ayesha Lahai-Taylor (Chair), Liam Shrivastava (Vice-Chair), Mark Jackson, Hilary Moore, Rachel Onikosi and Hau-Yu Tam

Also joining the meeting virtually: Councillor Bill Brown

Also present: Councillor Chris Barnham (Cabinet Member for Children's Services and School Performance) and Timothy Andrew (Scrutiny Manager)

Also present virtually: Kathryn Duncan (Station Commander, London Fire Brigade), Pinaki Ghoshal (Executive Director for Children and Young People), Jannet Hall (Head of Safer Communities), Gemma King (Programme Manager), Trevor Lawry (Detective Chief Superintendent, Borough Commander, Metropolitan Police Service) James Lee (Director of Communities, Partnerships and Leisure), Dr Catherine Mbema (Director of Public Health) and Desmond Zephyr (Safer Communities and Crime Reduction Service Manager)

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 3 November 2022

- 1.1 **Resolved:** that the minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2022 be agreed as an accurate record.

2. Declarations of interest

- 2.1 There were none.

3. Responses from Mayor and Cabinet

- 3.1 There were none.

4. Update from the Borough Commander for Police

- 4.1 Detective Chief Superintendent Lawry introduced a presentation – noting key crime statistics (particularly in relation to the impact of the pandemic) as well as highlighting areas of focus and concern; he also responded to the Committee's requests for information about: serious violence reduction orders; stop and search; ongoing investigations into the Metropolitan Police Service; the London gangs database and ZEN city software.
- 4.2 DCS Lawry responded to questions from the Committee – the following key points were noted:
 - Figures for robbery in Lewisham were showing a reduction – this was opposite to the trend across London and in neighbouring boroughs, where there were significant increases.
 - The majority of knife crimes occurred during robberies.

- The numbers of victims of crime corresponded to the figures reported in the presentation – but this did not provide insight about those who were repeat victims of crime.
- A process was in place to identify repeat victims of some types of crime (including domestic abuse) to consider their level of risk.
- The number of suspects was not recorded on an individual level. The numbers of those charged with crimes was.
- Body worn cameras; dash cams; bus CCTV and Ring doorbell cameras were all being used to gather evidence.
- Reports of cases of misconduct and poor practice would always be an issue in an organisation the size of the Metropolitan Police Service (with 44,000 officers).
- Recent reports in the news highlighted cases of officers who should have been stopped much earlier.
- In Lewisham there was an extremely capable professional standards unit – with which DCS Lawry worked very closely.
- Trust and confidence in the police may decline as a result of recent news reports and high-profile cases of misconduct.
- The police had the ability to prosecute its own officers and bring them to justice.
- One of the things introduced in the borough's force was 'proactive scanning' of complaints against officers against a range of metrics. This process had picked up officers who were the subject of repeated complaints (and resulted in their suspension).
- Strip searches of people detained by the police required different levels of senior officer level authorisation. Strip searches of people who had been arrested were carried out by MET detention (which was a separate command from the borough police force). Officers from the detention service could be invited to a future meeting.
- It was clear that there needed to be changes to the ways in which investigations against police officers were carried out. Some investigations took up to a year to complete. Additional resources were being put towards professional standards to bolster this process.
- The positive outcome rate for stop and searches in Lewisham was higher than the London average – but approximately 70 percent of stops resulted in no further action.
- Further consideration could be given to the 'no further action' figures – however- without stop and search the police would be likely to arrest more people – and take them in to custody, where they could use different powers to search them.
- A strong message had been sent out to all officers about the importance of professional conduct. The channels for people to report impropriety had been strengthened and additional training (particularly on misogyny) had been provided for all officers in the South East London command.
- All officers were trained on stop and search – which included: officers' legal powers; unconscious bias and input from a member of the community who had experienced stop and search. Refresher training was provided as part of regular 'officer safety' training.
- One of the issues DCS Lawry had been keen to address was about the number of officers carrying out searches. Officers were being asked to consider the minimum number of police needed to carry out a search effectively, in order to minimise distress to people being searched.
- Public order offences did not relate to protests.

- There was very little protest in the borough – it mostly took place in central London (or the M25). As with any new legislation – it would be tested in the courts and would find a level at which it would work in practice.
- Further information could be provided about any cultural competency training provided for officers (which was not likely to be at the level described by members in their questions).

4.3 In Committee discussions the following key points were also noted:

- Members were concerned about recently publicised cases of misconduct and criminality by police officers and emphasised the need for Lewisham's community to feel it could be certain about the professional conduct of the police force.
- There were concerns about the culture within the police force and the seeming acceptance of discriminatory language and behaviour.
- It was recognised that there were many good officers in the police force but that there were also a number of 'bad apples'.

4.4 **Resolved:** that the report be noted.

5. Update from the Borough Commander for Fire

5.1 Station Commander Kathryn Duncan (London Fire Brigade) introduced a presentation. Kathryn outlined the Brigade's key areas of work in the borough and highlighted its priorities – including: the transformation delivery plan; the Brigade's aims and objectives and Lewisham's incident statistics.

5.2 Kathryn Duncan responded to questions from the Committee – the following key points were noted:

- The Brigade used different forms of communication to engage with the community – including social media, however, there was an awareness about communicating with people who did not have access to devices or online connectivity.
- Work was taking place with Lewisham Community Connections (social prescribers) to engage with local communities and seldom heard groups.
- The fire cadets engaged with schools in the borough – there was also a programme to target young care leavers living in supported accommodation (although it had not been entirely successful).
- The 'stay put' policy should be effective in buildings that were designed with this as part of their safety strategy. Each building had its own risk assessments and evacuation policies.
- The Brigade regularly visited buildings in the borough where residents had concerns about fire safety – and carried out fire safety checks. Members' questions about buildings in their wards would be welcomed.
- Kathryn welcomed the Council's approach to supporting local people and responding to its responsibilities.

5.3 In Committee discussions the following key points were also noted:

- Members highlighted some of the confusion around the 'stay put policy' for some buildings following the removal of blanket guidance for high-rise buildings.
- Members would welcome a further visit to Lewisham Fire Station – in order to see engagement with the community and understand the process of fire safety sessions.

5.4 **Resolved:** that the update be noted.

6. Safer Lewisham Plan

- 6.1 James Lee (Director of Communities Partnerships and Leisure) introduced the report – noting the key requirements for the development of the Plan – as well as the responsibilities of the Safer Lewisham Partnership.
- 6.2 Desmond Zephyr (Safer Communities and Crime Reduction Service Manager) addressed the Committee – highlighting: the key elements of the report; the importance of community engagement and the prioritisation of a public health approach to violence reduction and community safety.
- 6.3 James Lee, Jannet Hall (Head of Safer Communities) and Desmond Zephyr responded to questions from the Committee – the following key points were noted:
- Local authorities were required to carry out a strategic needs assessment in order to meet the requirements of the serious violence reduction duty.
 - It was intended that there would be constant review and revision of the work of the Safer Lewisham Partnership in its deliver of the Plan.
 - Schools and other education providers were key partners in the delivery of the Plan.
 - There were a number of safer schools police officers in Lewisham schools – who carried out a range of support activities and talks.
 - The importance of a safeguarding approach – and the rights of children and young people were of key importance to the Partnership.
 - All members of the Partnership were facing challenges from reductions in spending and competing priorities – however – they were committed to the delivery of the Plan for the benefit of the residents of Lewisham.
 - It was not immediately clear what the Council’s responsibilities would be from the drug reduction duties that were coming into force, but constructive work was taking place between partners to consider the best approach to implementation.
 - Further work would take place to develop the implementation and performance monitoring measures for the Plan. This would include an emphasis on co-designing approaches with residents and community groups.
- 6.4 In Committee discussions the following key points were also noted:
- Members emphasised the importance of avoiding the criminalisation of children and young people.
 - It would be important to clearly define what was meant by a ‘public health approach’ to violence reduction.
 - Consideration should be given to the role of safer schools officers – and the potential trauma experienced in some communities as a result of interactions with law enforcement.

6.5 **Resolved:** that the report be noted.

7. Cost of living crisis update and equalities screening

- 7.1 The Council’s standing orders for Committee proceedings were suspended by Members at 21:15 to allow for the completion of Committee business.
- 7.2 Dr Catherine Mbema (Director of Public Health) introduced the report – providing a short summary of the work the Council was carrying out to respond to the cost of living crisis. She also provided an overview of the

outcome of the equalities screening – noting that a full equalities impact assessment for the programme would not be carried out.

7.3 Catherine Mbema, Pinaki Ghoshal (Executive Director for Children and Young People and Joint Senior Responsible Officer for the Cost of Living Programme) and Gemma King (Cost of Living Programme Manager) responded to questions from the Committee – the following key points were noted:

- The Council was working with Citizens Advice Lewisham (the largest provider in the borough) as part of the income maximisation work stream in the programme to ensure that additional debt advice was available for households in difficulty.
- For smaller community groups – support was being provided as grant funding for the warmer welcomes scheme.
- Work was taking place through the Local Strategic Partnership to ensure that there was broad ownership of the Programme.
- The cost of living crisis was coming at the end of a prolonged period of government austerity – which meant that many community groups had lost funding and support. The Council was unable to fill all of these gaps and losses, but it could help target resources and efforts to the organisations and activities with the most impact.
- Some work was taking place to determine who was using the network of warm spaces. This was complicated by the speed with which the spaces were set up – as well as their distributed nature. It was also challenging to separate out those using sites as warm spaces rather than the other services on offer (in a library or community building, for example).
- Work was taking place to map the work taking place across the Local Strategic Partnership to support residents with the cost of living crisis.
- Consideration would be given to including information in communications about the importance of neighbours checking on each other’s wellbeing (particularly in the case of vulnerable residents).

7.4 **Resolved:** that the update be noted.

8. **Select Committee work programme**

8.1 The Committee discussed the work programme for its next meeting and agreed that items on the Borough Sanctuary, Borough of Culture and Single Equalities Framework would be on the agenda.

8.2 **Resolved:** that the work programme for the Committee’s upcoming meeting be agreed.

The meeting ended at: 22:00

Chair:

Date:
