

Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny Commission

MINUTES of the OPEN section of the Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny Commission held on Wednesday 15 February 2023 at 7.00 pm at Ground Floor Meeting Room G02A - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

PRESENT: Councillor Ellie Cumbo (Chair)
Councillor Jane Salmon (Vice- Chair)
Councillor Sam Foster
Councillor Esme Hicks
Councillor Portia Mwangangye
Councillor Emily Tester
Bassey Bassey (Co-opted member)
Ina Negoita (Co-opted member)

OTHER MEMBERS

PRESENT: Councillor Dora Dixon-Fyle

OFFICER SUPPORT: Amit Alva, Scrutiny Officer

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Barrie Hargrove and Cris Claridge (co-opted member).

2. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMS URGENT

There were no items of business which the Chair deemed urgent.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS.

There were no disclosure of interests and dispensations.

4. MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting held on 21 November 2022 were approved as a correct record.

5. INTERVIEW WITH CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY

The commission first heard from Councillor Dora Dixon-Fyle on the following topics

- Council Delivery Plan setting out community safety priorities, commitments and objectives
 - Upgrade street and estate lighting
 - Tackle misogyny and violence against women and girls (Through Her Eyes' campaign)
 - Make Southwark safe for young people
 - Make it clear that there is no place for hate in Southwark
- Council's successes in tackling 'Cuckooing' by working with the police

The commission then asked questions on the following points

- Measuring success of the anti-misogyny education campaign
- Reasons behind the high levels of homophobic hate crime at 18 % compared to national levels of 13%
- Safe spaces for people to communicate thus evaluate the success of the community safety campaigns against domestic violence, misogyny and hate crime
- Dedicated Liaison officer for Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG)

Councillor Dixon-Fyle informed the commission that the measure of success in anti-misogyny educational campaign would be reduction in cases of domestic violence, name-calling and wolf-whistling. The educational campaign received quite positive responses and feedback from the young men and boys in the schools.

Stephen Douglass, Director Communities, Environment, Neighbourhoods and Growth explained to the commission a good measure was the number of online views of the anti-misogyny video and also that there will be a full evaluation of the educational campaign before we roll out further stages. On homophobic hate crime Stephen informed the commission that Southwark has a high number of people who identify as LGBTQ compared to other London Boroughs and majority of such incidents go un-reported, spreading awareness throughout the community is an important step in tackling this issue.

Stephen informed the commission that there is a wide-network of safe spaces and havens across the borough where women can discuss wider issues with regards to their safety.

On having a dedicated Liaison Officer for VAWG Councillor Dixon-Fyle explained that she wasn't aware that such a gap had occurred and it could be filled by working in partnership with the police.

Domestic Abuse (DA)

The commission then heard from Sharon Ogden, Safer Communities Team Manager on the Transition of Domestic abuse service providers from Solace to Refuge;

The commission then asked questions on the following points

- Crossover of services at Women's Safety Centre due to the change in contract
- Council planned changes to communication with domestic abuse sufferers under the new contract with Refuge
- Collaboration with other Local Authorities like schools, to spread awareness of domestic violence.
- Changes in delivery mechanism and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Sharon explained to the commission that 70 referrals have been crossed over from Solace to Refuge and this new contract with Refuge is for a period of 18 months with the same service options, referral mechanisms and contact number also remaining the same as Solace with a slight change in delivery mechanisms; from August 2024 there will be a new holistic service in place for the Women's safety centre with a staggered approach to the launch of services.

Sharon informed the commission that changing providers is an opportunity to communicate with domestic abuse sufferers through road shows with some key partners in the police, children services, housing and the voluntary sectors. In addition there will also be communication going out about the new Refuge service on International Women's' Day. On awareness in schools; there is a misogyny campaign, breakfast meetings with Head teachers which is a forum attended by the council to spread awareness of the new Refuge service. The Council plans to look at the wider community by involving young people, identifying key areas of need with partners and also looking at diversity and cultural aspects of the service.

Furthermore, the council plans to have 40 Safe Havens' for women across the borough and also rolling out training in sexual harassment on streets to door security staff in partnership with Lambeth council.

Sharon also explained to the commission that some minor changes have been made to delivery mechanisms moving from Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVA) to Independent Gender Violence Advocates (IGVA), survivor group work which is now a peer led group and Own My Life program delivered over a 12 month period by Refuge and the perpetrator program moving from group work to one to one model. Child therapeutic service through Beat House, Iris working with General Practitioners (GPs) and mental well-being services remain the same as it was with Solace.

On KPIs the commission learned that in domestic violence survivor support it is about reducing the risk and increasing their well-being, expectation is of around 1500 referrals a year with 60% accepting help. Officers are having weekly meetings with Refuge to set expectations on KPIs.

The commission then asked further questions on the following themes

- Solace's performance leading to change in service providers to Refuge
- Reaching culturally diverse community groups
- Financial implications in changing service providers

Sharon informed the commission that through the contract monitoring process of Solace some issues were identified with inconsistency in data calculations in different areas and are now subject to an audit process, this had led to a higher management decision of changing service providers to Refuge.

Sharon explained to the commission that there are many other organisations such as Latina America women's group, Refuge has outreach and training programmes and also the council has been focusing on LGBTQ groups accessing council services.

Sharon also informed the commission that there are no cost implications in changing service providers.

Sharon then briefed the commission on Cost of living crisis and its effects on domestic abuse cases:

- Early data collection ongoing in the new contract with Refuge on cost of living impact
- More people being directed to food banks due to financial hardship
- Domestic abuse cases having Non-molestation orders costing £900
- Domestic abuse perpetrator's using non-payment of utilities bills as a means of control (economic abuse)
- No overall increase in domestic abuse levels due to cost of living

The commission then asked questions on the following points

- Increase in seriousness of domestic abuse cases that are high risk, Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)
- Council response rate and strain on its Domestic abuse service due to 118% increase in referrals during Covid
- Other models for the Women's Safety Centre

Sharon informed the commission that there was a 21% increase in council referrals with increased levels of high risk cases during the first lockdown of the Covid pandemic, which went up from 25-30 referrals to 40 referrals fortnightly. With regards to MARAC it has gone back down to pre-Covid levels and although there were slightly higher than average referrals but there was no visible impact of cost-of-living on seriousness of domestic abuse cases. The council in 2013-2014 was the 5th highest volume borough in London reporter of domestic abuse cases and now ranks 15th which has been a significant reduction in Domestic Abuse (DA) levels.

Sharon informed the commission that the Council added additional resources to the DA service (Solace) during Covid, the council also monitored cases thoroughly and will continue to under the new contract with refuge, there is an expectation of 1500 referrals annually thorough IGVA for DA survivors. Under the new contract with Refuge there are service delivery requirements and standards with regards to first contact within 24 hrs and a first risk assessment within those 24 hours and a further assessment to be completed within 5 days.

Councillor Dixon-Fyle added that there is a need for DA survivors to be tracked and provided permanent housing with the council after completion of the initial offer of temporary accommodation.

Sharon and Councillor Dixon-Fyle explained to the commission there are on-going discussions and initial research work being carried on models for the Women's Safety Centre one of the models being discussed is the Orange House in Amsterdam replicated in Sussex, Little Hampton.

Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)

The commission then heard from Stephen Douglass on Anti-Social Behaviour on the following themes:

- Similar trend in ASB as in DA with early collection of data on-going
- Increase in reporting of noise and neighbour issues during Covid

The commission then asked questions around the following points

- Categorisation of ASB's wide range, covering of varying issues from physical violence to fly-tipping
- Working with Local partners particularly schools

Councillor Dixon-Fyle explained to the commission that categorisation of ASB issues and its seriousness would have a bearing on response rates.

Councillor Dixon-Fyle agreed to provide the commission with statistics based on categorisation of ASB with varying levels of severity and also confirmed that a low category ASB case such as graffiti but with racist or homophobic element would be category 1 (highest priority).

Stephen informed the commission that there is work on-going with schools and local partners such as youth providers across the borough; providing positive youth activities which are funded.

6. INTERVIEW WITH THE BOROUGH POLICE COMMANDER FOR THE LONDON BOROUGH OF SOUTHWARK

The commission noted that Chief Supt. Colin Wingrove, Borough Police Commander for Southwark would be leaving this role after 3 years in the job and will be succeeded by Chief Supt. Adjei Addoh. The commission then heard from the Borough Police Commander on the following points:

- Plans under new commissioner for London Met undergoing consultation with the objectives of creating more trust, less crime, raising policing standards and culture change in the Met
- Focus is on Policing within the community and Neighbourhood policing with sign off from Mayor of London for an additional 500 PCSO's, dedicated ward officers and partnership working arrangements.
- Additionally there would one neighbourhood policing Superintendent per London Borough supported by a Chief Inspector.
- Prioritising VAWG- commitment to strengthen community Safety, Operation Vigilance in hotspots and support to survivors provided by Refuge that are measured in KPIs
- Improving practices by police officers, better interviews of victims and use of body cameras, Domestic Abuse Prevention Orders
- Increase in criminal charges per trace for DA gone up from 7% in 2022 to 15% in 2023; best performance levels in London on sanctions detection outcomes by working with Crown Prosecution Services (CPS) from 2.3 % to 10 %
- Organising and appointing LGBT engagement officers in an effort to curb hate crime in LGBTQ community

The commission then asked questions on the following points:

- Concerns on whether the scale of unrecorded less serious misogynistic cases are not being assessed because it's not considered a hate crime as compared to a protected characteristics
- Absence of a dedicated liaison officer for VAWG
- Cultures and failings in the Met police with regards to the murder of Sarah Everard and other high profile cases, changes being made within the Met to build trust and successes

Chief Supt. Wingrove agreed with the commission that the environment we live in, should not tolerate individuals exhibiting misogynistic, sexist and racist behaviour; public attitude surveys are an important method of getting such data to gauge trust in policing in different areas and splitting that data among gender, race, sex and age. The Met police is committed in striving to improve women's safety through walking talks conducted by neighbourhood officers and feeding this data back into partnership conversations; this would eventually help tackle male perpetrators of violence against women and girls.

Chief Supt. Wingrove explained to commission that a lot of work is being done in the area of VAWG, sign-posting, outreach, partnerships stalls at London Bridge stations, campaigns by London Met around DA and also public protections services such as Gaia, Solace and Refuge. There may be some benefits to having a dedicated VAWG Liaison officer but it needs a bit more thought in terms of added value it could bring, however the current structure in place to provide support in VAWG has; a senior lead, a proper action plan, the working groups aligned to community safety and officers working with partners doing a range of activities.

On culture issues and failings in the Met Police, Chief Supt. Wingrove informed the commission that the Met Police commissioner has discussed setting out ways in which such police officers can be rooted out of the service and also preventing such individuals from joining the Met by addressing structural issues and having processes in place. The commissioner has also talked about investing more in setting up the new Corruption and Abuse commands, giving the public the ability to report corruption and also officers with integrity identifying, challenging and reporting such misconduct. Leaders in the Met police are responsible for setting the tone by speaking to their officers and creating an environment where such instances can be reported and also ensuring action would be taken. Some areas of concern are around the wider social media culture and involves working with external organisations to identify those individuals.

Then commission then asked further questions around the following themes:

- Reporting of Missing Girls, Violence against Persons and Child exploitation and measures taken to tackle such crimes.
- Use of victim support police user satisfaction surveys
- Nature of misogyny in society and racism; structural and cultural elements

of the Met police that cause resistance to quality control of officers brought into the Met

- Strengthening Ward Panels

Chief Supt. Wingrove explained to the commission that hundreds of missing person cases are recorded every month with the help of a dedicated team and are classified into low, medium and high risk based on risk factors, for e.g. a young person would be medium to high risk. The team would then carry out investigations, this also involves working with the council to better our understanding of exploitation of young people with regards to drug dealing, human trafficking, unconscious bias, cultural factors, county lines, gang violence and violent crimes. These investigations would then be fed into a multiagency approach with partner organisations.

On approaches to tackling such crimes, this involves equal treatment for young black girls and young white girls, ensuring that there is no bias and there is an appropriate response, this is done through training, supervision and leadership and also working with various partners and organisations. The Met also has ride along schemes where the public can come along and chat to officers in the missing persons unit to learn how the process is carried out, also provide the Met Police feedback at the end of the session.

Chief Supt. Wingrove informed the commission that 65% of victims of various crimes have fed back that they have received a good or excellent service by officers in Southwark and this looks at a range of crime types such as violent crime, DA, robbery, burglary, vehicle crime and this is also compared across BAME communities to identify differences in service areas. Victim cases that have been let down by policing are identified in the monthly performance meetings and are used to discuss and implement improvements in these areas.

Chief Supt Wingrove explained to the commission that majority of officers are good, hard working officers with a lot of integrity and courage. There are a small numbers who have committed crimes or have responded inappropriately or made sexist or racist comments, some examples of officers from Southwark and Lambeth do exist and investigations of misconduct have been carried out.

Chief Supt. Wingrove recommended to the commission that location based problem solving could play a major role in resolving issue of drug dealing and ASB, especially in areas of regeneration in the borough, this could be achieved by working with the council and partnership organisations. Looking at demands of policing in a local area would also help in having those conversations with the council to help deliver some of those local needs in constructive way especially through the Southwark 2030 event.

Chief Supt. Wingrove agreed with the commission that the input from ward Panel is invaluable especially in terms of local knowledge that is not available on police or council databases. Furthermore, ward panel meetings with safer neighbourhood teams and other partner organisations are hugely beneficial to community safety.

7. WORK PROGRAMME 2022-2023

The commission noted the Work Programme for the year 2022-2023.

Meeting ended at 9.02 pm

CHAIR:

DATED: