

Housing, Community Safety and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission

MINUTES of the OPEN section of the Housing, Community Safety and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission held on Tuesday 23 July 2024 at 7.00 pm at Ground Floor Meeting Room G01B - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

PRESENT: Councillor Sam Foster (Chair)
Councillor Emily Tester (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Barrie Hargrove
Councillor Esme Hicks
Councillor Sunny Lambe
Councillor Jane Salmon
Ina Negoita (Co-opted member)

OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillor Helen Dennis
Councillor Natasha Enin

OFFICER SUPPORT: Amit Alva Scrutiny Officer

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Cris Claridge (Co-opted member) and Councillor Ketzia Harper.

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 March 2024 was approved as a correct record.

5. FORMAL CONSULTATION PLAN (DRAFT) FOR THE HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

The commission first heard from Councillor Helen Dennis on the following points

- Need for a co-ordinated joint action plan from government based on benefits and evictions from the private rented sector
- Rough sleeping and homelessness numbers higher than last year; increase in temporary accommodation numbers
- Draft strategy agreed by Cabinet in March 2024; consultation starting August 2024 for 12 weeks; draft survey open to public; pro-active approach to homelessness forum and external partner organisations for feedback and experiences
- Five objectives- Homelessness prevention, delivering high quality advice and support, improving accessibility of services, working to end rough sleeping, improving outcomes through housing placement, temporary accommodation (TA), minimise out of borough placements, new procurement framework for TA and tackling systemic housing insecurities; Housing allowance and discretionary payments

The commission then asked questions on the following topics

- Financial constraints and unsustainability of council financing and its impact on homelessness strategy objectives
- Progress on clear channels of communication with external partner organisations; housing for young people under 25; government priority of building 1.5m homes over 5 years and mitigating impact on the homelessness strategy
- Provisions for care leavers in housing policy

The commission heard Karen Shaw, Head of Housing Solutions that there is a need to influence central government policy changes in funding to achieve the objectives in the homelessness strategy. The action plan seeks to look at operational changes locally to improve the procurement of social housing. Furthermore, strategic meeting with partners to improve services. London has seen a 70% increase in shared accommodation for families such as Bed and Breakfast and even higher numbers for families in shared accommodation for over six weeks, Southwark's numbers are at zero. Rough sleeping numbers have seen an overall increase from last year, the council is working to reduce rough sleeping.

The commission then heard from Hakeem Osinaike, Strategic Director for Housing that the homelessness strategy has been produced after considering the needs of partner organisations, council's objectives and political priorities. Southwark is better at managing TA and its associated costs when compared to other Local Authorities across London and even nationally.

Councillor Dennis explained to the commission that the homelessness strategy needs to be comprehensive, especially considering the recent issues with home office asylum application decisions, where in a positive decision would mean the termination of their hotel stays and the council then having a duty to provide housing for refugees. However, it is important to remember that the primary objective is prevention of homelessness.

Karen informed the commission that some progress has been made in areas of delayed discharges for housing, there are instances where the council is not able to offer a solution due to varying needs of individuals. The housing solutions team is looking at areas where communication and co-ordination with external partners could be improved.

Furthermore, the council is working on a new offer to cater for young people in need of housing, current offer needs to be improved to deliver high quality customised advice on housing options available, including support in the private rented sector.

The commission learned from Hakeem that the consultation on the homeless strategy will include feedback from the under 25 age group; in addition to working with partner organisations to provide young people composite advice and support in areas such as future housing needs.

Councillor Dennis explained to the commission that models such as Centrepoin in Peckham which is a stepping stone accommodation at discounted rates for young people to get into employment have been successful working examples, however the need across the borough is a lot broader. Broader work is needed in understanding the other issues such as friends and family evictions, implementation of the housing allocations policy is an opportunity to do a deep dive into the needs of housing for young people.

On building houses, there is a clear lack of supply, so increasing supply would help reduce the prices of private rented sector and should increase the access for young people for housing in the private rented sector. The council aims to provide more affordable social rented housing as defined by the planning policy and legislation by looking at community trust lands and key worker housing.

Karen informed the commission that care leavers do get priority for housing and very few go through the homeless route, more work needs to be done through allocations policy to support care leavers. There have been conversations between the Corporate Parenting Group, Councillor Jasmine Ali (Cabinet Member for

Children Education and Refugees) and council officers focusing on care leavers; how we could support them better through housing allocation policy and in the private rented sector.

Councillor Jane Salmon (commission member) discussed with officers suggesting that the survey would receive more responses from organisations such as church groups and external partner organisations, and also that question 6 in the survey could be more specific to get an ideal response. Furthermore, co-living spaces would be beneficial for young people and adults and perhaps the council should approach developers to build a few of those kinds of residences.

Councillor Dennis explained to the commission that new legislation for housing in London has made it essential to make provisions for co-living spaces and schemes such as Canada Water and Ilderton Road are in the pipeline.

The commission then asked further questions on the following themes

- Single point of contact; Homelessness in LGBT community (protected characteristics in survey); Homelessness focus groups to feedback into consultation.
- Out of borough placements not mentioned in the survey; Discussions with families on under-occupancy; Anti-social behaviour; Non-violent relationships breakups and homelessness
- Inner London homelessness at 1400 and Southwark level 3600; High demands in private rented sector

The commission learned from Karen that some partner organisations do have a single point of contact within the council, and the team will look into areas where a single point of contact is needed especially in case of hospital discharges. The survey would be amended to include protected characteristics such as gender reassignment and sexual orientation ensuring LGBTQ+ community is included. The engagement with the corporate parenting board and young people (care leavers) through 'Speakerbox' has helped highlight the needs of young people, young people living with their families in TA, this needs to be explored further with specialist support. Focus groups such as rough sleepers have been done in the past and its powerful tool for community engagement and homelessness and such work will continue.

Furthermore, out of borough placements are avoided where possible to ensure that people are closer to their community and support systems, however the back log of 3900 in temporary accommodation makes it difficult to avoid out of borough placements in reality.

The commission discussed with officers the need to be more transparent in the survey by mentioning that the housing crisis due to lack of supply, cost-of-living and high renting costs, and also that this could mean that a less than ideal solution of out of borough placements is considered in certain instances. Consultation will include detailed plans and covering documents that have been submitted to this

commission meeting. The commission also noted that as part of the consultation there would be open and honest conversations with the consultees giving them the opportunity to feedback on the council's responses to their comments during consultation.

Karen explained to the commission that friends and family evictions is the single biggest reason for homelessness in Southwark. Overcrowding in families could often result in young people/family members having to leave their homes, conversations with families in such situations are essential to prevent homelessness. Non-violent relationship breakdown is not a large cohort within homelessness but is one of the reasons for some homelessness. Historical demand and a number of other previously mentioned reasons are responsible for high homelessness numbers in Southwark. Homelessness numbers in Southwark stabilised in 2022 post-Covid and began rising in the years after due to cost-of-living and high private renting costs. The strategy aims to target prevention in homelessness to avoid more number of people going into TA. Private rented sector was a viable option pre-Covid, post-Covid there has been a lack of supply and difficulties in sourcing affordable private accommodation which has led to an increase in costs in the private sector. However, the rising costs and the reasons for increase costs in the private sector are now starting to slow, post-Covid and there is some hope that it would be more affordable in the near future.

The commission then asked further questions on the following topics

- Readability of survey; feedback information from mediation service for homelessness due to family relationship breakdown
- Reporting of numbers of in-person surveys conducted by council; Impact of homelessness prevention in easing financial pressures and its inclusion as an aim of the strategy

The commission learnt from Karen that feedback received by the council's housing solutions team from mediation work carried out, is a tried and tested method, and this information is also used to help public with future housing options. On readability of the survey, officers will feed back to the commission. The commission also learnt that in-person surveys have specific numbers thresholds to create the group and these will be reported back to the commission.

Hakeem informed the commission that homelessness prevention was not just a legislative priority but also a service wide priority. Furthermore, the biggest pressure on the housing revenue comes from overpriced poor quality TA and the homelessness prevention also aims to finding reasonably priced good quality TA. However Southwark Council when compared to other London Boroughs and Local Authorities (LA) nationally, pays less for TA.

Cllr Dennis explained to the commission that some LAs' have had to use Bed & Breakfast nightly paid accommodation for families, which has had an impact on

children, comparatively Southwark relies on existing housing stock to avoid this including housing options in some of the regeneration projects. Housing solutions team within the council is working on different models on how the existing housing can be used for TA efficiently, in addition to expanding the current housing stock within Southwark.

The commission agreed to have an update on the formal consultation plan once it has been implemented in the coming months.

6. SOUTHWARK INDEPENDENT POLICING OVERSIGHT BOARD TERMS OF REFERENCE

Southwark Independent Police Oversight Board (SIPOB) Terms of Reference (ToR) and Southwark Trust & Confidence Plan

The commission then heard from Cllr Natasha Enin, Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Neighbourhoods on the following themes

- Thematic ideas – purpose; Southwark Trust & Confidence Plan – More trust, more community engagement, reduce crime by more policing visibility, targeting repeated offenders and higher standards of policing and training
- Board's remit- challenging key areas of policing interaction (e.g. use of Tasers), formulating measures in these areas; membership of board reflective of demographic of Southwark, 6-10 members on the board excluding external consultants as advisers to the board, fresh voices from the community being recruited, starting the board in September 2024
- Separate board from London Policing Board (Pan-London Board – Casey Review); Southwark IPOB looking at local issues and response from the Police

The commission then heard from Neighbourhoods Superintendent Jim Brockway on the development of the board covering the following points

- Fresh and new way of policing accountability in neighbourhoods covering the Casey review, focusing on holistic approach and evolution of plan as local demands change
- Scrutiny and the Southwark Trust and Confidence plan gathering feedback from key challenge areas and being developed further

The commission then asked questions on the following topics

- Work of the IPOB and its feedback to be implemented by the Police; Membership and make-up of the board
- Difference in remits of the various boards London Policing Board, Southwark IPOB and Neighbourhood policing board and their interactions.
- Public attendance at Southwark IPOB meetings; Process and

communication of recruitment of members from the community and members from specialist areas; Options and process for the members of the public to approach other policing boards in case of grievances at SIPOB over handling of policing matters

The commission learned from Cllr Enin and Supt Jim that the board will have a direct relationship with the police and actions taken in the challenging areas would be decided by working with the police and the LA. There will be regular reporting on the challenging areas with aim of providing tangible results/ improvements by the police ensuring accountability, and also some of the areas could be listed as recurring themes that need monitoring over several meetings of the board. The membership of the board would have 5 established members and an additional 6-10 members would be appointed from the community and specialist areas.

The commission heard from Supt. Jim that the board will have thematic topics for which the Police will be held to account. For e.g. Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) Board Chair would be invited to report to the Southwark IPOB and Neighbourhood Policing would be reported to the SIPOB by the Supt. Jim himself. The Police would endeavour to invite Subject Matter Experts on Policing matters to address the board where requested by the Cabinet Member for Community Safety.

Stephen explained to the commission that SIPOB meetings will be publicly attended meetings with wider coverage in the community, and there will also be a communications plan on the role and function of the SIPOB.

Cllr Enin informed the commission that recruitments packs for the SIPOB have been created and the board is looking to recruit from a wide range of community areas, specialist areas and young members of the community. Furthermore, the Trust and Confidence Plan that has been presented to this commission for pre-scrutiny would enable officers to include some of the feedback into the evolution of the plan.

The commission requested that a further update be provided on the recruitment process be provide with more detail such as recruitment packs.

The commission then asked further questions on the following points

- Any areas of difficulties during the development of the Southwark IPOB and the Trust & Confidence Plan
- Differences between Safer Neighbourhoods Board and Southwark IPOB; Ward Councillors interaction with the Board

The commission learnt from Cllr Enin that the process so far in developing the Board has been collegiate, with some discussions around themes that the board would like to be discussed. Participation from members of the public in contributing to these meetings is critical to the Board's success. However it is also important that these meetings adhere to themes discussed and derived from public feedback

from the communities whilst ensuring there is no random disruption at these meetings. Overall the feedback from the members of the public is that there is increased policing visibility in their communities.

The commission understood from Cllr Enin that the Southwark IPOB is an independent body from the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) and the Ward panels for Policing, and although the IPOB can aspire to be an intermediary between MOPAC and the ward panels in the future, the current structure provides a much need independence for policing accountability in Southwark. The commission consider this point with regards to amending the Scrutiny recommendations it made for policing in the previous council year 2023-2024 to the Cabinet. Safer Neighbourhood boards are a MOPAC function and not a part of the IPOB, as the aim of this board is to have fresh, vibrant and diverse voices.

Supt. Brockway informed the commission that Safer Neighbourhood Boards are a MOPAC function and Safer Neighbourhood Panels in wards work with Local Safer Neighbourhood Teams (SNT) of policing. There could a cross-over of some topics between such panels and teams with SIPOB. However, such topics would be discussed independently by the SIPOB ensuring accountability.

Cllr Enin explained to the commission that there is some merit in the SIPOB considering discussing the progress and effectiveness made by SNTs' and Ward Panels for policing at a later stage. The SIPOB would also welcome proposals to discuss areas of concern in policing from Ward Councillors when backed up with evidence from the community.

It was agreed with the Cabinet Member that a mechanism for feedback from the Southwark IPOB to ward councillors would be developed. In addition the submitted paper on SIPOB to the commission covers the 'right care, right person' approach in the use of Tasers.

The Chair explained to the commission that the membership of the Southwark IPOB is key to its success, in addition to providing constructive challenge and accountability to policing in Southwark.

The Cabinet proposed that the commission revisit the progress of the Southwark IPOB by the end of the year 2024.

7. PROPOSED WORK PROGRAMME 2024-2025

The commission agreed to postpone the 17 February 2025 meeting to 24 February 2025 due to diary conflicts within the commission membership.

The commission agreed to add the following topics on its work plan for 2024-2025

- Electrical Safety Testing (TBC)
- Excessive Gas consumption residents of North Peckham, including prohibitive costs for residents and leaseholders (18 September 2024 meeting)
- Contract Management and Procurement Process in Housing repairs (TBC)
- Housing Associations (TBC)
- TRAs' and TMOs' in Wards (18 September 2024 meeting)

Meeting ended at 9:25 pm

CHAIR:

DATED: