

Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny Commission

MINUTES of the OPEN section of the Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny Commission held on Tuesday 12 July 2022 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 Barrie Hargrove
Councillor Esme Hicks
Councillor Portia Mwangangye
Councillor Emily Tester
Bassey Bassey (Co-opted member)
Cris Claridge (Co-opted member)
Ina Negoita (Co-opted member)

**OFFICER
SUPPORT:** Amit Alva, Scrutiny Officer

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Sam Foster.

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.

Councillor Jane Salmon and Councillor Esme Hicks disclosed that they are council leaseholders and Ina Negoita (Co-opted member) disclosed that she is the Chair of the Homeowners Northwest Area Forum and also the Leaseholders forum.

The Chair deemed that none of the above interests would prejudice the discussions at this meeting but have been noted as a matter of transparency.

4. SAFER NEIGHBOURHOOD TEAMS

The commission received a presentation from Chief Inspector Boswell from the London Metropolitan Police on Safer Neighbourhood Teams in Southwark. The commission heard from Inspector Boswell on the following topics:

- Overview of Neighbourhood policing
- Structure of Neighbourhood policing
- Partnership Arrangements
- Community Scrutiny

The commission then asked questions on the following points:

- Bicycle gangs during the pandemic and the improvement in policing them.
- Implementation and progress of the Race Action Plan
- Challenges in recruitment of police officers to close the gaps in some wards

Inspector Boswell explained to the commission that the bike group riding around Southwark during the pandemic are called the Pan London ride out bike group which are being monitored by the transport Operational Command Unit (OCU) and will report back to commission with regards to the specific engagement with this bike group. However the focus has mainly been on crimes committed on bikes rather than Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB).

On matters of the Race Action Plan, Inspector Boswell informed the commission that the Met Police have taken steps in recruitment, aiming to create a more ethnically diverse work force which is more reflective of the communities they police, this was supported by the Councils of Southwark and Lambeth and people in the business community and Southwark residents. The commission also heard from Inspector Boswell that as an organisation the Met Police are recognising and embracing the changes needed, to hold to account police officers responsible for inappropriate comments and behaviours. The commission also learnt that the Police officers are engaging with children in schools and the community by engaging them in conversations and participating in sporting activities such as cage football.

The commission also learned that the Safer Neighbourhood Team are working hard to bridge the gap in recruitment of police officers for the vacancies in some wards, this keeping in line with the London mayoral commitments. However the gaps are due to some officers leaving and that there have been ongoing internal recruitment processes to carefully ensure that the right officers be appointed, who are able to effectively engage with the community.

Inspector Boswell then answered the commission's questions on the following topics:

- Impact of the pandemic on neighbourhood policing and the changes arisen
- Impact of the death of Sarah Everard, policing and engagement with women and girls
- Partnership arrangements and Ward panel meetings, engagement with tenants and residents associations

The commission heard that during the pandemic there was a change in crime types and levels of crime. However this has returned to the pre-pandemic status with the increase in footfall of people returning to work and has not resulted in any changes to the policing structure.

The commission heard from Inspector Boswell on the detrimental ramifications of the trust within community on the police following the death of Sarah Everard, Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is a key aspect of the safeguarding strand of community policing and is a priority for the MET police, applications like Walk & Talk and Street Safe have been launched to engage with women and girls to feedback and report on areas where they feel unsafe. At present there is a lead officer within the Safeguarding team for VAWG, however a dedicated liaison officer for VAWG will be considered and reviewed by London Met after suggestions and feedback from this commission.

With regards to ward panels the commission learned that some ward panels are more effective than others, officers have been instructed to actively engage with Ward Panel Chairs. Social media, Met police website and emails are used as a method of circulating information on the work being carried out by the MET police and these processes will be reviewed to understand the differences among wards.

The commission then asked further questions on the following topics:

- Secretarial support for Ward Panels
- Neighbourhood Policing Officer numbers
- Schools team measures on policing youth crime and ASB
- Processes for removing police officers with a record of inappropriate behaviour and replacing them with officers who can engage with the community, especially recruiting Black and Asian Ethnic minority officers.
- Stop and search procedures

Inspector Boswell informed the commission that he would review if there was any secretarial support arrangements for Ward Panels. The commission also noted that there have been budget cuts and austerity measures when it comes to recruiting for neighbourhood policing.

The commission also learned that the Police Schools Team are looking to build relationships early in primary schools rather than just secondary schools, effectively engaging with kids in unsafe areas where they might be prone to crime and robbery. Police are asking schools and kids to use the Street Safe to report and feedback on such areas.

The commission heard from Inspector Boswell that members of the public can complain about police officers directly, there is also an anonymous telephone line to report to the department of professional standards, in addition there are also internal processes for complaints that police officers can lodge about their colleagues. The London MET has opened itself to change and welcome scrutiny from external organisations to resolve the issues around police conduct.

The commission also learned that recruitment of Black and Asian Minority Ethnic police officers is a big challenge and that there have been ongoing recruitment events within the community. The police service is endeavouring to be more reflective of the communities they serve.

The commission also heard that the Safer Neighbourhood teams approximately take 300 knives off the streets every year and the focus has mainly been on engaging with the community in a procedural and professional manner.

5. HOUSING REPAIRS CALL CENTRE

The commission received a presentation from Dominic Cain, Director of Exchequer on the Housing repairs call centre. Dominic informed the commission that the housing repairs call centre team has been mainly focused on repeat callers and emergency repairs.

The commission also learned that the Housing repairs team has taken on board the suggestions from the previous scrutiny commission meeting to have warm handoffs for scheduling repairs from the contact centre to the repairs team in the back office.

With regards to call handling from December 2021 to June 2022, answered calls has gone up from 82% to 95% and on average call waiting has gone down from 7.5 minutes to 1.5 minutes.

The commission then asked questions on the following topics.

- Progress on previous commitments to make the contact centre a specialist team under the new strategy for Housing repairs service and an update on key performance indicators
- Handling of Complaints from Tenant Management Organisations (TMO)
- Return to offices for contact centre staff
- High number of repeat callers for housing repairs

The commission heard that there is an ongoing feasibility study of the contact centre and its operations and also that there are performance management targets such as abandonment and call handling targets which are under constant review. TMO complaints will be reviewed and reported back to commission.

The housing repairs contact centre staff are on a gradual process of returning to office working subject to individual risk assessments. Repeat callers is one of the main focuses of the housing repairs team and is under review. Omni channel customer service strategies are also being developed.

6. WORK PROGRAMME 2022-2023

The commission proposed the following items for the work programme 2022-2023:

- Housing repairs service including contact centre service, multiple failures, repeated calls, contractors and the new strategy in development. (Interview with Cabinet Member on housing repairs in October 2022 and Dominic Cain to report back on contact centre in February 2023)
- Housing allocations - Empty homes and Overcrowding
- Trust and visibility of the policing in the community
- Interview with the Police Commander for London Borough of Southwark
- Interview with the Fire Commander for London Borough of Southwark
- Final Scrutiny recommendations

Meeting ended at 9:13 pm.

CHAIR:

DATED: