

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny Sub-Committee held on Thursday 19 April 2012 at 7.00 pm at Ground Floor Meeting Room G02C - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

PRESENT: Councillor Gavin Edwards (Chair)
Councillor Graham Neale
Councillor Michael Bukola
Councillor Rowenna Davis
Councillor Michael Situ
Councillor Martin Seaton
Miriam Facey
John Nosworthy

CO-OPTED MEMBERS PRESENT: Miriam Facey
John Nosworthy

OFFICER SUPPORT: Andrew Beland, Divisional Business Team Manager
Neil Brown, Head of Area Management
Shelley Burke, Head of Scrutiny
Angela d'Urso, Commissioning & Service Improvement Manager
Shaun Holdcroft, Area Housing Manager
Haleema Khalid, Solace Women's Aid
Jain Lemom, Mayor's Office for Police and Crime
Mary Mason, Chief Executive of Solace Women's Aid
Jonathon Toy, Head of Community Safety & Enforcement
Sally Masson, Scrutiny Project Manager

1. APOLOGIES

- 1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Tim McNally and Jane Salmon, Homeowners' Council.

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

- 2.1 The Chair informed the Sub-Committee that the report on Leaseholder Charging had received a positive response at the Cabinet meeting on the 17 April 2012.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

- 3.1 There were no disclosures of interests or dispensations.

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 March 2012 be agreed as a true and accurate record.

5. SOUTHWARK'S RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC ABUSE

- 5.1 The Chair felt that it was important for Southwark to keep in mind the following three key areas, as officers continued to develop the work to tackle the problems of domestic abuse:
- No recourse to public funds for women with indeterminate immigration status
 - Monitoring the settling in process of Solace
 - Strengthening the relationship between Southwark Council and the Courts
- 5.2 The Chair invited Jain Lemom, from the Mayor's Office for Police and Crime (MOPC) to say a few words about her work and to share any thinking that could be helpful for Southwark to take the work forward.
- 5.3 Jain Lemom told the sub-committee that she had been working on the Mayor's integrated strategy on all forms of violence against women and girls which included incidents of rape, sexual assault, honour based violence and female genital mutilation.
- 5.4 The Mayor's office strategy on domestic abuse covered a range of issues including refuge provision, the police and encouraging witnesses and victims to go through the court system, to help bring the perpetrators of domestic abuse to justice.
- 5.5 Jain Lemom went on to inform Members of some of the problems she had encountered during her work on the issues of domestic abuse. She said that the London Council budgets had been reduced to help tackle this problem and that the Home Office (HO) was streamlining its service by encouraging women who might be experiencing domestic violence to go to the HO website to find information and support. However, Jain Lemom said that this service might not be able to offer much to women who did not speak English or did not have access to the internet. This possibly was not the best approach to encourage vulnerable women to come forward.

- 5.6 Jain Lemom went on to say that there needed to be better training for the police when dealing with call outs and that more needed to be done to look after witnesses and victims going through the court system to help support them through a stressful time. Work also needed to be enhanced with all partner agencies and all boroughs to help raise awareness and improve the working of the systems overall.
- 5.7 Jain Lemom felt that the way society viewed women had a detrimental effect on the way women were treated by the statutory services. The current system seemed to put the onus of responsibility for crimes against them, unfairly with the female victims. These views were at the heart of why a change in attitude was still difficult to bring about.
- 5.8 Jonathon Toy, Head of Community Safety & Enforcement, remarked that the pan London independent domestic violence advocacy groups had experienced cuts and that women were no longer getting the service that they once had.
- 5.9 Members echoed the need for a more integrated service including the police, councils and the development of a dedicated court service to deal with domestic abuse problems. Currently, perpetrators were aware that if they pleaded not guilty to a crime, the likelihood that the victim would go through with court action resulting in a trial, was not high. Perpetrators understood that the further ordeal of a court case was not something that victims wished to face and that they often dropped out of any prosecution. Members and officers felt that it was very important that something was done about this.
- 5.10 Jain Lemom responded to Members' and officers' concerns by saying that the London crime reduction board, the police and the Mayor were all looking at what could be done about the perpetrator attrition rate. She was happy to work with Southwark in the future and offered to supply examples of good practice from other boroughs to the scrutiny sub-committee. The Chair thanked her for attending the meeting.
- 5.11 Officers highlighted that, although the police could be called to investigate alleged incidents of abuse, these cases might not result in an arrest or a conviction. Occasionally the police would investigate incidents without it being immediately apparent as to who the perpetrator and the victim were. This was something that the police needed additional support with.
- 5.12 Officers told the sub-committee that often it was the victim who was removed from his/her home, the abusive situation, to be re-housed in less than adequate accommodation. A proportion of those victims found themselves on the streets eventually as a result of delays in the processes of obtaining a conviction. Once the victim had been removed from what was perceived as immediate danger, the process tended to slow down and take less of a priority.
- 5.13 Officers also highlighted the importance of partnership work and strengthening the referral pathways. It was acknowledged that the Housing department lacked the partnership working structures to take issues forward.

- 5.14 It was also noted that interventions had to be swift and appropriate in the cases where children were present and vulnerable to the actions and atmosphere of abuse. Officers said that children who were brought up in abusive situations often went on to either become perpetrators or victims of abuse themselves.
- 5.15 The sub-committee received a presentation from Shaun Holdcroft on the data requested by the sub-committee at the end of January 2012.
- 5.16 Mary Mason, Chief Executive of Solace Women's Aid, spoke briefly about the new service which had been up and running in Southwark for two weeks.
- 5.17 Members felt that the service was a very positive asset to Southwark. Some Members felt that the Community Safety department could provide a breakdown of figures for each ward and that breakdowns of the statistics could then be provided to each of the ward councillors. This would be to ensure ward councillors knew the extent of the problem in their areas.
- 5.18 Officers within the Housing department discussed the difficulties of acting on cases of reported incidents, as this often required cooperation with private landlords, other boroughs, legal services and had to be in accordance with legislation. Currently measures included in legislation impacted badly on women with indeterminate immigration status. They had no recourse to public funds to aid them, and officers and Members acknowledged that this situation needed urgent change.
- 5.19 Officers said that strengthening the pathways to Solace could help to resolve some of the housing issues for victims but that the need for temporary accommodation would increase in any case. This was problematic as the overall need for housing was increasing along with a growing population which was compounding the current problems with overcrowding in private, council and housing association homes. It was felt that the housing situation and the economic constraints on individual families could trap some victims in abusive situations as no viable alternative was open to them.
- 5.20 The Chair thanked Mary Mason. The Chair and the sub-committee went on to make some possible recommendations:

There should be more development work on:

- Specialist domestic abuse courts
- Development of a partnership forum (cross agency work)
- Communication and publicity to signpost Solace
- Looking at and pulling out examples of good practice to be provided by Jain Lemom
- A site visit to Solace at some time in the future
- The temporary housing situation where the priority for cases is not so strong
- Building links with other community groups to get the message out
- Building trust between community groups, the council and other partners to raise awareness and increase reporting and related actions

- 5.21 Both officers and Members were keen to highlight that the impossibility of recourse to public funds was still a very big issue for some women, especially for those women with indeterminate immigration status and more needed to be done to bring about change.
- 5.23 The Chair thanked all and said that he would be drafting a report to submit to the next sub-committee meeting for approval and agreement.

6. ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR ON SOUTHWARK ESTATES

- 6.1 Neil Brown, Head of Area Management, gave a presentation on low level anti social behaviour (ASB) on Southwark's housing estates.
- 6.2 The discussion between Members and officers highlighted several areas of action:
- Housing to look at ways of tackling low level ASB to free up Community Safety to deal with more serious, higher level ASB problems.
 - Officers and partner agencies need to be realistic with victims about the possible outcomes of reporting cases of ASB.
 - Residents on Southwark's estates need to be more aware of the ASB service that the Housing department can provide.
 - More thought was needed on how the council engages with partners in this time of economic constraints and how best to utilise the service with the resources already in place.
 - To look at Community Safety working in a way similar to that of a Multi Agency Risk Assessment style.
 - Housing and Community Safety need to look at how to increase legal action in disputes on overcrowded neighbourhoods and how to deal more effectively and speedily whilst enhancing the legal aspects of support to deal with cases.
 - To look at current policy development to deal with the various categories of ASB from low level (noise and loitering), to medium (cannabis smoking) and higher level (verbal and physical harassment)
- 6.3 Officers felt that there were two strands of work that needed to be explored further:
- Face to face interactions with officers, community groups and other agencies.
 - More work with all agencies in the investigation and actions to resolve neighbourhood disputes
- 6.4 Managing residents' expectations was seen as an important factor in any work undertaken and officers and partner agencies needed to be clear about what could

realistically be achieved to improve situations. There needed to be reliable advice given to all those concerned.

6.5 Members wanted officers to come back to the sub-committee in the near future. They wanted to hear about the department's situation in relation to ASB work, detailing how their service was improving and what areas still needed to be worked upon.

6.6 The Chair thanked Neil Brown and Officers.

7. WELFARE REFORM: COMMITTEE TO AGREE LETTERS

7.1 The sub-committee provisionally agreed the letters with a slight amendment to the wording regarding families being encouraged to live in appropriately sized accommodation.