

Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee - 26 January 2023

Minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on 26 January 2023 at 7.30 pm.

Present: Councillors: Kay (Chair), Ozdemir (Vice-Chair), Chowdhury, Jackson, Clarke, Chapman, Heather, Staff, McHugh, Pandor, Weekes, Ibrahim and Russell

Also Present: Councillors: Ward and Woolf

Councillor Jenny Kay in the Chair

59 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item A1)

Apologies were received from Councillor Graham, Nargund and Nathan.

60 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item A2)

None.

61 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Item A3)

None.

62 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Item A4)

Further to Minute 56, a member noted that a representative of Cally Energy had attended an informal working group of the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee, to discuss how the council can work with such organisations to help to achieve its net zero carbon targets.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 5 December 2022 be agreed as a correct record and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

63 CHAIR'S REPORT (Item A5)

The Chair advised that the food projects invited to provide witness evidence under Agenda Item 11 were not able to attend, and this would be rescheduled for a future meeting.

The Chair invited members to consider the Scrutiny Response Tracker document circulated in the second despatch of papers.

A member noted point 19 in the Scrutiny Response Tracker, which advised 'it had been agreed not to continue with the detailed sickness and agency reports but to cover any key points as part of the quarterly Use of Resources performance report where the data is published.' The member commented that this was not an accurate summary of the committee's position and the committee had not taken a decision on this matter. The Chair

Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee - 26 January 2023

advised that a meeting would be sought with officers to discuss the outstanding HR issues, and the officers present confirmed agreement with this approach.

A member noted point 24, on the development of equalities-related performance measures, that an update was not yet available. The Chair advised that once an update was available it would be circulated to members of the committee.

In relation to point 21, previously agreed savings now considered undeliverable, the Chair advised that she had received a further update from officers earlier that day, however there were some outstanding questions that the Chair wished to discuss on this point.

In relation to point 11, the processing time for voids, it was advised that this was being progressed by the Housing Scrutiny Committee.

In relation to point 21, the previously agreed savings now considered undeliverable, the Chair noted that a summary document was appended to the tracker, however had asked officers for a more detailed summary of why savings were no longer considered deliverable, and had asked for details for the past six financial years.

64 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item A6)

None.

65 EXTERNAL ATTENDEES (IF ANY) (Item A7)

None.

66 PRESENTATION FROM THE BOROUGH COMMANDER - ANNUAL CRIME AND DISORDER REPORT (Item C1)

Chief Superintendent Andy Carter, Borough Commander for Islington and Camden, presented to the committee on local crime and policing issues.

Councillor Woolf, Executive Member for Community Safety, was also in attendance for this agenda item.

The presentation included local crime statistics; details of police operations in the key areas of Finsbury Park, The Angel, and Old Street; detail of local stop and search activity; work underway to improve public trust and confidence in the police; work to tackle drug crime; work to address violence against women and girls; and the local response to the Casey Review into the standards of behaviour and internal culture of the Metropolitan Police Service.

The Committee made the following main comments:

- Referring to a comment made in the presentation, a member asked if the local police had an effective grip on performance and strategic oversight. In response, the Borough Commander commented that a new performance framework was being implemented that would allow better monitoring of progress against targets and priorities. The Metropolitan Police had focused on reducing violence over recent years and this had resulted in local reductions in homicide and serious youth violence, however there was now a recognition that the police needed to focus on a broader range of priorities.
- A member noted that violent crime had reduced nationally and asked if any local actions in Islington had contributed to this decrease. In response, the Borough

Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee - 26 January 2023

Commander considered that strong partnership work between local agencies had contributed to the decrease in serious youth violence.

- A member noted the impact of drug-related crime in the Finsbury Park ward, expressing concern about drug dealers targeting users of a local homeless shelter. It was asked how the police were addressing such issues. It was also suggested that further community engagement through local policing panels would help to build trust in the Metropolitan Police. In response, the Borough Commander emphasised the importance of reporting crime so hotspots can be mapped and police resources can be deployed as required. In relation to neighbourhood policing panels, it was recognised that the panels did not always reflect the diversity of local communities, and a plan was being developed to increase representation on such panels.
- A member expressed concern about 'cuckooing' and the exploitation of vulnerable people through drug crime, and asked if the police had sufficient intelligence to tackle this problem effectively. In response, the Borough Commander emphasised the importance of reporting such crimes and summarised the work with local housing providers to identify these properties and to take action as required. Councillor Woolf commented on the role of the Cuckooing Panel and the importance of interventions to support vulnerable people.
- A councillor expressed concerns about school muggings and pupils being targeted outside of schools, noting recent incidents around St Mary Magdalene Academy. It was queried if the Police was deploying resources to address this, and how the council could work better with the police to keep these young people safe and improve confidence in the police. In response, it the Borough Commander noted the role of the Police's Schools Officers and the importance of the community reporting these crimes to the police promptly to enable action to be taken.
- A member queried how many schools did not have Safer Schools Officers and asked if there was a local commitment to providing this resource to schools. In response, it was advised that not all schools had a Safer Schools Officer; this role needed an individual with the right skills, and the Borough Commander did not support posting officers to schools if they were not committed to the role. There had been open vacancies in these positions for some time and the Borough Commander commented on the role of all local agencies to help prevent crime and safeguard young people in schools.
- A member noted that the police budgeted to provide safer schools officers in schools, and asked if the funds allocated to these vacant posts could be distributed to other organisations to help promote safety in schools. In response, the Borough Commander advised that it was not possible to divert police funds in this way.
- A member highlighted the concerns of local parents about their children travelling to and from school. The Borough Commander advised that he was reviewing patrol patterns to ensure that officers were deployed on these routes where needed. The Borough Commander also commented on the services available to victims of crime, particularly young people affected by crime.
- A discussion was had on the role of Safer Schools Officers and how the police had unique powers that were not available to security staff, teachers or social workers. The Committee also noted concerns about a safeguarding incident involving a safer schools officer elsewhere in London and the Borough Commander summarised the work to reassure schools and the process for vetting police officers.
- A member noted recent media reports about a number of ongoing criminal investigations against service police officers. The Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police had advised the London Assembly that two or three Police officers a week were facing trial for criminal offences. It was queried how many local officers were the subject of disciplinary proceedings and if it was expected that local officers would be charged with offences over the coming weeks and months. In response, the Borough Commander commented on the work to raise professional standards in

the police, and the importance of identifying conduct issues at an early stage. The Borough Commander was not able to share details of ongoing disciplinary or criminal investigations in a public meeting, including details of the number of officers suspended or the number of misconduct complaints received. The Borough Commander advised that local partners would be briefed on these matters at the appropriate time and he would be able to provide an update to a future meeting.

- A member queried the stop and search statistics relating to drug possession and if Project Adder would result in stop and search activity being carried out in a more targeted way, and more referrals to health and addiction services, rather than the criminal justice system. In response, the Borough Commander commented on the proactive police activity to disrupt the supply of drugs, and the police would work with other agencies to support those with addiction issues.
- A discussion was had on the disproportionate impact of stop and search on people from Black communities. The Borough Commander summarised how stop and search incidents are reviewed and scrutinised and how the feedback received is incorporated into training for officers.
- A member expressed disappointment in the tone of the report which referenced everyday sexism existing among a 'small minority of the organisation' and contrasted this to the more systemic problems referenced in recent comments by the Mayor of London and other senior officials, which had called for root and branch reform of the Metropolitan Police, following the serious issues identified in the Casey Review. The member asked how many women were employed by the Metropolitan Police in Islington, if the police was facing any particular issues with the recruitment and retention of women, and if the low number of prosecutions for rape and domestic abuse offences contributed to the lack of confidence in the police, particularly among women. In response, the Borough Commander advised that he did not have statistics to hand on the number of female officers employed locally, but advised that representation among women and black and minority ethnic communities had improved over recent years. The Borough Commander acknowledged that there could be retention issues for women and officers from minority ethnic communities; suggesting that some officers felt unsupported by their families and communities. It was also suggested that front line officers faced a considerable workload and pressures and some had preferred to transfer to specialist roles. The Borough Commander commented it was important for the police to support these colleagues so they wanted to remain working for the Metropolitan Police; and highlighted recent initiatives to recruit officers from under-represented groups and the support resources available to police staff. A member suggested that the current culture of the Metropolitan Police may also be a contributing factor, as officers may have experienced sexual and racial harassment from their colleagues and may feel that the Metropolitan Police has not dealt with this effectively, as outlined in the Casey Review.
- In relation to prosecutions for rape and domestic abuse, it was recognised that police forces needed to improve performance in this area; a national review had made a number of recommendations that the police were working to implement.
- The Committee emphasised the need for real change in the Metropolitan Police, asking what change would look like at a local level, how the committee could review progress against this, and how these changes would lead to increased confidence in policing. A member noted that the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police had accepted the findings of the Casey Review, however commented that it was not yet clear how this would translate into tangible action, rather than rhetoric. The Borough Commander offered to attend a future meeting to update on progress in this area.
- The Committee commented on the importance of the police reflecting the diversity of local communities and requested workforce data for the local police service.

Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee - 26 January 2023

- A member noted the low attendance at Ward Panel meetings and suggested that these could be publicised better. It was suggested that combining police Ward Panels with council Ward Partnership meetings may be a method of increasing attendance. Councillor Woolf offered to look at this further outside of the meeting, although other members noted the differences in these meetings and suggested that this may not be an appropriate solution.
- Councillor Woolf commented on his work in providing critical challenge to the Metropolitan Police on local safety issues and reflected on the impact of government austerity on police and local government budgets, noting the need to develop strong working relationships between agencies to ensure that local safety issues can be addressed effectively.
- A member asked if it was possible to increase the number of police officers patrolling the streets, and also asked about relationships between the police and local authorities across borough boundaries, as a cross-borough approach may be appropriate to address issues such as anti-social behaviour. In response, it was advised that police patrol routes were prioritised to have the greatest impact, and the Borough Commander emphasised the value of cross-borough collaboration on crime and safety issues.
- Following a question, the Borough Commander could not commit to increasing the number of Safer Schools Officers, but advised that the police would review the safety issues identified around local schools.
- Following a question on hate crime, the Borough Commander emphasised the importance of reporting these crimes to the police.

The Committee thanked the Borough Commander for his attendance.

ACTIONS:

- The Borough Commander be invited to attend a future meeting to provide an update on the matters set out above.
- The Committee requested workforce data on the local police service.
- The Executive Member for Community Safety offered to work with the police and council officers to review the feasibility of combining police Ward Panel meetings with council Ward Partnership meetings.

67 COST OF LIVING CRISIS SCRUTINY REVIEW: WITNESS EVIDENCE (Item C2)

Robbie Rainbird, Assistant Director - Community Financial Resilience, and Stephen Biggs, Corporate Director – Community Wealth Building, introduced the report setting out possible future options for the council tax support scheme. The report included different models for increasing the council tax discount to 100% for some groups, and summarised how this would impact on the scheme overall.

A discussion was had on which groups would benefit most from such a scheme, and which groups would receive less support as a result. Such considerations would need to be discussed by members ahead of the budget process for future years.

It was noted that any change to the scheme would be subject to public consultation and could not be implemented until 2024/25.

It was suggested that a banded scheme would be easier to administer and may result in cost savings as a result.

The proposals were still being developed and officers advised that members would be updated as this work progressed.

68

SCRUTINY OF BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR 2023/24 (Item C3)

Councillor Ward introduced the budget proposals and highlighted the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on local residents, and how this year's budget sought to prioritise help for those most in need. The Budget Proposals included a £1 million hardship fund in addition to the existing resident support scheme. The budget retained free school meals for all primary school children and included additional investment in the Income Maximisation (IMAX) service that helped local people get back into work and training, as well as continuing to support the childcare bursary to support working parents.

In relation to the council's housing services, the council was investing £1 million into a new damp and mould action team, and the council was also continuing to invest in fire safety works and retrofitting homes on estates with energy efficiency improvements. Councillor Ward also highlighted the continued investment in the council's ambitious new build programme.

The budget included a £5.1 million investment to upgrade and expand the borough's CCTV network, and additional funding was being allocated to the Contact Centre to improve customer service for Islington residents. Councillor Ward also commented on the work to expand the Safe Havens network and the continued investment in services to tackle violence against women and girls.

Councillor Ward commented on how budget would contribute to the council's net zero carbon programme. The Budget included a £15 million investment over three years to electrify the council's vehicle fleet. The budget also included provision for the installation of solar panels and other energy-efficiency measures in public buildings.

Councillor Ward reflected on the impact of cost pressures on the council's budget. The council faced a real-terms funding cut from central government and this year's budget included £12.4 million in savings. It was proposed to increase council tax by the maximum possible amount; this was the same position taken by 27 other London Boroughs. Councillor Ward also noted that social rents would increase; this was a difficult decision however increased funding was needed to manage the council's housing stock effectively. It was reiterated that help was available for the residents most in need of support.

The Committee made the following main comments on the budget proposals:

- In relation to the £1 million hardship fund, the Committee noted that applications would open before the end of March. It was commented that this was a relatively short period in which to develop a new fund, and it was queried when further information would be available on eligibility criteria. In response, it was advised that officers were working to finalise the scheme and the council was particularly concerned about people who were not in receipt of benefits but would experience a significant increase in rent, either in housing association properties or the private rented sector. Councillor Ward advised that he would provide an update to members of the committee as soon as further information was available.
- The Committee welcomed that the council was continuing to focus support on those most in need, particularly in the context of the cost-of-living crisis, however it was acknowledged that many residents would experience a fall in living standards over the coming year as a result of the current economic climate. The Committee expressed concern at the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on vulnerable people.
- The Committee discussed how council tax was a regressive tax based on historic property values that did not reflect residents' ability to pay. It was also noted that the council had experienced real term funding cuts from central government over recent

years. The Committee queried how the council could best lobby for the reform of local government finance. In response, Councillor Ward advised that public sector unions and others continued to campaign against central government austerity, and he would favour reform of council tax and local authority funding.

- A member noted that some councils may not increase council tax, and asked what alternatives were available to local authorities other than increasing council tax. In response, it was advised that different boroughs had different priorities, and some administrations had made manifesto commitments not to increase council tax. Raising council tax was a political choice and the council must take ownership of this decision, however if Islington did not increase council tax then very difficult choices around prioritising frontline services would be required. Councillor Ward was proud that the council was prioritising funding for frontline services and was expanding the support available for those experiencing hardship.
- The Committee considered the cost-of-living crisis and queried if the £1 million hardship fund was enough to support residents struggling with the cost of living, and if there was flexibility to increase the value of the fund in future. In response, Councillor Ward commented that demand for the scheme would certainly exceed the funding available, however the council was doing it all could to support residents experiencing financial hardship. The council's resident support scheme was one of the most expansive in the country; the council had a generous council tax support scheme, and continued to fund the IMAX service, childcare bursary, and administered £4.4 million through the household support fund. The £1 million hardship fund was a one-off decision, and the value of future support schemes would be a decision for future years, considering the financial position of the council at the time.
- A member welcomed that the council was able to give a pay rise to its workers in the last financial year. Councillor Ward noted the importance of positive working relationships with trade unions on these matters.
- A member queried what was included under "central costs" in Table 2 of the report. In response, it was advised that this line primarily comprises levy payments to external organisations such as the North London Waste Authority and TfL concessionary fares.
- A member noted the creation of the council's energy and inflation reserve and queried if this was sufficient to cover the risks from increased inflation and energy costs. In response, Councillor Ward commented that the council had arranged a number of contingencies, and the council had done its best to mitigate against these risks, while recognising that it was difficult to predict how inflation and energy costs would develop over the next twelve months.
- Following a question on the cost of on-street cycle parking and if it was possible to bring down the cost to residents, Councillor Ward advised that the cost of bike hangars was not subsidised by the council, and any subsidy would needed to be funded by cuts to other services. In return, it was suggested that increases to car parking charges could subsidise cycle parking, and the provision of additional cycle parking could generate income for the council. It was commented that this matter had recently been discussed at the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee; officers would be responding on this soon and providing an update to members.
- In relation to the £1 million investment in tackling damp and mould in council homes, the committee asked if this was fund was sufficient given the scale of the problem, and at what point the funding would be reviewed. In response, Councillor Ward advised that due to the energy crisis and fuel poverty, he expected the problem to get worse before it gets better, and the Executive Member for Homes and Communities was working with the Interim Corporate Director of Homes and

Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee - 26 January 2023

Neighbourhoods on addressing this issue. The Committee suggested that a mid-year review mechanism may be appropriate to ensure that sufficient funds are allocated to address the problem.

- The Committee noted overspends in Adult Social Care, issues in delivering previously agreed savings in the service, and demographic pressures. It was queried to what extent this was considered when developing the budget proposals. In response, it was advised that the budget proposals were based on assumptions about the latest data and in-year budget monitoring position. Cost pressures in Adult Social Care continued to rise and the council sought to plan for short-term, medium-term and long-term demographic pressures and mitigate against these over time. Contingencies were available if needed.

RESOLVED:

That the comments of the Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee on the budget proposals be submitted to the Executive.

69 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT (Item C4)

The report was noted.

A member noted that the report indicated that the parking service was forecast to break even, whereas a previous update to the committee indicated that the service generated a surplus. Officers advised that they would review this further and provide an update to a future meeting.

70 MONITORING ITEM (Item C5)

On the scrutiny response tracker, a member noted point 26, on how risk management is considered in decision-making processes, the response did not summarise what could change to make the scrutiny of risk more effective, but instead focused on the current arrangements for the oversight and scrutiny of risk through the Audit Committee and scrutiny process. It was requested that the response be reviewed, and the Executive Member for Finance, Planning and Performance agreed to consider this further.

The meeting ended at 10.15 pm

CHAIR