



CITY OF WESTMINSTER

MINUTES

Environment, Highways and Public Protection Policy & Scrutiny Committee

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of a virtual meeting of the **Environment, Highways and Public Protection Policy and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Wednesday 7 October 2020**.

Members Present: Councillors Antonia Cox (Chairman), Barbara Arzymanow, Elizabeth Hitchcock, Ian Rowley, Paul Dimoldenberg, Aicha Less and Pancho Lewis.

Apologies: Councillor Tony Devenish

Also Present: Councillor Heather Acton, Cabinet Member for Licensing and Public Protection, Wayne Chance McKay, Head of City Operations, Mark Lawrence, Superintendent at Met Police, Elizabeth Barrett, Scrutiny Officer and Kisi Smith-Charlemagne, Senior Governance and Committee Officer.

1. MEMBERSHIP

1.1 The Chairman sought any absences, apologies or substitutions to the committee's membership. There were no changes to the membership of the Committee.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2.1 The Chairman sought any personal or prejudicial interests in respect of the items to be discussed from members and officers, in addition to the standing declarations previously made.

2.2 There were no declarations made.

3. MINUTES

3.1 Councillor Heather Acton requested paragraph 4.3 of the minutes to be amended to reflect that the BLM demonstrations were unsafe due to COVID restrictions.

3.2 **RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the City Management and Public Protection Policy and Scrutiny Committee held on 11 June 2020 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record of proceedings.

4. UPDATE FROM THE CABINET MEMBER FOR PUBLIC PROTECTION AND LICENSING

- 4.1 The committee received a portfolio update from Councillor Heather Acton, Cabinet Member for Licensing and Public Protection. Councillor Acton provided an overview of the portfolio, highlighting recent areas such as the consultation work carried out regarding the Street Entertainment policy and reviewing the council's Licensing Policy, as it was a statutory duty to do so, and this must be published by the first week of January 2021. Councillor Acton added that a Cumulative Impact Assessment was undertaken earlier this year which reviewed the cumulative stress that licenced premises cause on licensing objectives, looking at data from the past three years (pre-COVID). Councillor Acton advised the committee that work has continued towards the publication of a new Private Rented Sector Strategy. Following approval from the Cabinet Members for Public Protection and Licensing and Housing, the draft strategy went to consultation on 21 September 2020.
- 4.2 Members of the committee queried the change to the COVID legislation, how the City inspectors were responding to the increase of unlicensed music events and drug dealing operations linked to private properties. Committee members raised queries regarding the number of rough sleepers and the council's Tent Policy, specifically whether there had been any changes in the legislation. Members also raised queries regarding the number of homeless persons who were moved from the streets to hostel accommodation and then returned to being homeless. Members of the committee raised further questions regarding the reopening of theatres and whether Christmas tree lighting ceremonies would take place considering COVID. Members also queried the council's bulky waste collection, highlighting the need for a faster collections, flyers/poster to advertise the service and easy booking instructions for residents to follow.
- 4.3 Councillor Acton responded to the committee's questions advising that there had been a shift in working patterns for the City Inspectors due to COVID and that she believed that there were adequate resources. She also added that several e-mail addresses and phone lines had been set up for residents and service users to raise any concerns regarding COVID. With regard to unlicensed music events, Councillor Acton advised that some drug dealing had been observed, but that she was unaware of any specific drug dealing operations. Responding to the queries raised regarding tents and rough sleepers, Councillor Acton advised the tents can be removed if they are unoccupied or abandoned, however there was some risk involved due to drug paraphernalia.
- 4.4. Councillor Acton informed the committee that the council were changing the way in which it offered services to the homeless including finding accommodation. She added that of the 269 rough sleepers recorded on the streets of Westminster, most were EEA nationals with no recourse to public funds. Councillor Acton informed the committee that there was a small number of people who had returned to living on the streets, but that many others had been helped into employment and private rental accommodation. Councillor Acton advised that she would look into the arrangements for the Christmas tree lighting ceremonies and liaise with Councillor Harvey regarding flyers for the bulky waste collection.

5. UPDATE FROM THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND HIGHWAYS

- 5.1 The Committee received a portfolio report from Councillor Andrew Smith, Cabinet Member for Environment and Highways. It was advised by the chairman that any questions from the Committee were to be sent in writing and responses would be circulated after the meeting.

6. SAFER WESTMINSTER PARTNERSHIP

- 6.1 The Committee received a report from the Director of Public Protection and Licensing. Wayne Chance McKay, Head of City Operations, presented the report advising the committee that the purpose of this report was to provide an overview of the Safer Westminster Partnership and the 2020/23 Strategy, and also highlight some of the challenges faced. He informed the committee that a strategic assessment was produced annually as required by the Police and Justice Act 2006. Mr Chance McKay explained to the committee that Covid-19 had a significant impact upon crime levels in the borough, particularly in reducing crime in the West End as the opportunities to commit crimes have diminished due to COVID-19 restrictions. He added that conversely the most vulnerable in our communities have become at increased risk of domestic abuse, child exploitation and the elderly to fraud and scams.
- 6.2 Mr Chance McKay advised the committee that the 2019 Strategic Assessment was used as the evidence base for the 2020/23 Safer Westminster Partnership strategy and a workshop was held on 29 January for partners to help develop the 2020/23 Safer Westminster Partnership strategy. He explained to the committee that the workshop covered three thematic areas: Victims, Offenders and the West End. Mr Chance McKay informed the committee that the vision of the SWP remains 'Making Westminster safer by working in partnership to reduce the risk and harm of crime and ASB, focusing on protecting the most vulnerable within our communities'. He added that This highlighted the priority of the SWP to focus resources towards protecting the most vulnerable within Westminster.
- 6.3 Mr Chance McKay advised the committee that a joint vulnerable adult's task and finish group with the Safeguarding Adults Executive Group had been set up with key partners to address the increased victimisation risk older residents face, in particular to becoming victims of financial abuse. He informed the committee that although most people are not victims of crime, those who are victimised consistently face the highest risk of being victimised again and that 20% of victims who were Westminster residents, were repeat victims. Regarding the most problematic offenders, Mr Chance McKay advised the committee that half of all crime is committed by people who have been through the criminal justice system already and therefore a small proportion of offenders are responsible for a significant volume of crime. Concentrating resources on these offenders will have the greatest impact on reducing re-offending.

- 6.4 Mark Lawrence, Superintendent at Met Police, addressed the committee confirming that enhancing the partnership response to countering terrorism and focusing on what matters most to residents, businesses and visitors was also a priority to the Safer Partnership. Superintendent Lawrence confirmed that due to COVID Westminster has seen the biggest reduction in crime rates, down by 20,000 compared to this time last year. He confirmed that COVID presented the Police with different challenges, but that the Police was working and communicating with partners was better than ever. Superintendent Lawrence informed the committee that as a result of the COVID legislation 159 sanctions were issued, which was the second highest of the London boroughs.
- 6.5 Going back to the Assessment, Superintendent Lawrence advised the committee that there was a focus to reduce crime hotspots, confirming that 58% of all crime in Westminster occurred in just two of its twenty wards, the West End and St James's. These are not just hotspots of crime and disorder for Westminster but for London.
- 6.6 Members of the committee queried that targets behind the partnership's objectives and how the partnership intended to measure and track its successes or failures. The committee members request copies of the targets, specifically youth crime. Members also felt that young people aged 18-25 found it difficult to access services, and members queried if officers were lobbying for this cohort to receive additional support. The members also questioned the Police's 5% rate of solving crimes and asked if increasing this was a priority. Members were also concerned with anti-social behaviour (ASB) in light of COVID and asked what the partnership's plans is for tackling ASB. Finally, members queried the partnership's plans for Autumn Nights operation.
- 6.7 In response to the committee member's queries Mr Chance McKay advised the committee that an action plan was developed alongside the strategy which contained clear targets and measures; the committee members requested copies of the action plan and targets. Mr Chance McKay also confirmed that the partnership was indeed lobbying for the for the reconstruction of services for young people aged 18-25. Superintendent Lawrence informed the committee that the solving crime rate was between 5-10% in the last 6 months. He said they needed to do better and that they were continuing to work with the CPS encouraging victims to support prosecutions.

6.8 Mr Chance McKay informed the committee that the partnership was working alongside WCC housing and tenancy management teams to tackle ASB, including operation Autumn Nights. He advised the committee that there were some challenges with young people aged 18-25 due to unemployment. The chairman thanked officers for their report, she noted that the London Probation Service requires improvement and advised that victim satisfaction had decreased which was unsatisfactory.

7. WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKER

7.1 The Committee received a report from Director of Policy and Projects, the report asked the committee to agree topics for the 2020/21 work programme and to note the committee's action tracker. Members of the committee considered bringing forward the item on rough sleeping and queried how the committee will monitor and track the performance of services within its remit. The committee also wished to see 'High Level' COVID specific updates at each meeting going forward.

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

7.1 The was no other business

The Meeting ended at 8:30pm.

CHAIRMAN: _____

DATE: _____