

MINUTES OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 3 February 2021
(7:00 - 9:22 pm)

Present: Cllr Jane Jones (Chair), Cllr Dorothy Akwaboah (Deputy Chair), Cllr Toni Bankole, Cllr Donna Lumsden, Cllr Olawale Martins, Cllr Simon Perry, Cllr Ingrid Robinson, Cllr Paul Robinson and Cllr Phil Waker

Also Present: Cllr Saima Ashraf, Cllr Margaret Mullane and Cllr Maureen Worby

42. Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

43. Minutes - 6 January 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 January 2021 were confirmed as a correct record.

44. Report requested by recommendation 7 of A2020 Scrutiny Review

The Chair stated that this report had been deferred at the last meeting due to limitations on time and thanked the Head of Performance and Intelligence, Commissioning (HPIC) for her patience with this and returning to present the report.

The HPIC delivered a presentation on the Children's Social Care Workflow, which covered the following areas:

- Children's social care contact and referral flow chart (year to date as at end of October 2020/2021);
- Section 47 and assessment outcome chart (year to date as at end of October 2020/2021);
- Initial Child Protection Conference and child protection chart (year to date as at end of October 2020/2021);
- Children in need chart (year to date as at end of October 2020/2021);
- Looked after children flow chart (year to date as at end of October 2020/2021); and
- Care leaver flow chart (year to date as at end of October 2020/2021).

In response to questions, the HPIC:

- Explained the differences between the risk thresholds involved in deciding whether a child should be looked after by the local authority, placed on a child protection plan, placed on a child in need plan or supported via the early help function. The HPIC confirmed that in each of these circumstances, the child could be stepped up or down, depending on the level of risk they faced, following the initial intervention by social care; and

- Stated that a very small number of looked after young people returned to their family home when they became care leavers; however, this would be following an assessment, regulations, and a plan in place. She added that the Council had embarked upon a specialist intervention service, the 'lasting links' project, which would work with care leavers to support them with keeping their family links by reconnecting them to their culture and heritage, and community, where possible. She confirmed that between the ages of 18 and 25, the care leaver could live in semi-independent accommodation or with foster carers. Research she had carried out recently showed that a large proportion of the Council's care leavers chose to live in the Borough.

In response to comments that there had been reports of anti-social behaviour in the vicinity of a minority of premises accommodating care leavers, the Council's Commissioning Director (CD) stated that there were a number of semi-independent and supported provisions operating in the Borough which were independent of the Council, some of which were used by the Council, but others which were not. These provisions accommodated young people from across London and the South East of England predominantly, but not exclusively, and they were unregulated, leading to some incidences of anti-social behaviour around these provisions. The Council was supporting these providers to alleviate these issues, even though it had no legal obligation to do so. Other local authorities were also facing this issue and there was currently a national movement to lobby the Government to bring these providers under Ofsted regulation. The outcome of this lobbying was yet to be seen, but if successful, it would very much help these challenges to be overcome.

The Chair stated that the Borough's population was growing, and the Council was undertaking a large amount of regeneration to provide more and better housing. The Covid-19 pandemic had also had an impact on demand, and furthermore, the Committee had heard during its scrutiny review on Ambition 2020 that increasingly, families with complex needs were coming into the Borough from other areas, putting pressure on its services and budgets. She asked how the Council was managing this increasing and changing demand currently and going forward. The HPIC stated the number of children open to social care now was the highest it had ever been since the Council was required to record social care data and detailed the patterns the Council was seeing in demand since the lockdown began. The Council had enhanced capacity across teams, with additional service managers, for example. However, whilst these measures demonstrated the Council's commitment in addressing the issue, continuing this level of investment was not possible, and therefore more spending was not a long-term solution to addressing the rising demand. The CD stated that the Council was now starting to consider how to step down these additional arrangements, as the current growth in capacity was not sustainable due to the significant financial pressures on the Council. He assured the Committee that this would be done in managed steps and at the appropriate time. He concluded that the challenge the Council faced in commissioning resources going forward was understanding the full impact of the pandemic on families in terms of their long term socio-economic needs, which was complex. The Council had started to build this picture; however, it was very early days as the pandemic was not over, and this work would take time.

In response to a question regarding the deletion of personal records, the CD stated that every piece of information that came into the service was kept within

the Council's social care IT system and removed in line with specific legislation which stipulated how long certain categories of information could be kept, for example.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration, the HPIC and CD for the presentation, their time and attendance.

45. Response Times and Clear Up Rates with the Borough Commander

Superintendent (Supt) Parker, representing the Borough Command Unit (BCU) which provided policing across the boroughs of Barking and Dagenham, Redbridge and Havering on behalf of the Metropolitan Police Service, delivered a presentation on 'response times and clear up rates', which covered the following areas:

- Immediate & Significant (I&S) grade Calls: Barking and Dagenham Demand;
- I & S Calls: Borough Command Unit Target Time;
- Missing Persons;
- Total Notifiable Offences; and
- Sanctions Detections.

The Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Enforcement thanked the BCU staff for their hard work in keeping the community safe since the start of the lockdown that was imposed due to the Covid-19 pandemic in March last year. She acknowledged the work that had been undertaken to get the Borough's average response times to the current position. However, she felt that there was still further work to do, as from a resident perspective, certain types of crime such as drug dealing on the streets, were not always being addressed. She added that whilst the BCU was right in allocating a high level of resources to combat individuals who were orchestrating these crimes, it was important to address criminals lower down in the hierarchy so that the public felt safe. In response, Supt Parker stated that the BCU had made significant improvements to address this issue, resulting in 359 people being charged/ processed in relation to "possession with intent to supply" offences, which was an improvement from last year's figure of 245. Furthermore, a 'drugs focussed' desk had been introduced, which was providing immediate investigative support to officers when they made arrests.

In response to a question regarding the link between increases in the number of missing people and the Covid-19 lockdown, Supt Parker stated that anecdotal evidence suggested that during the start of the lockdown, people were reporting their household members as missing, for example, after an argument. Whilst this had reduced to a large extent, the overall number of missing people reported across the BCU was one of the highest across the Met Police. He stated that it was difficult to point to a specific reason behind this, although a potential reason could relate to the way these reports were being graded by the Met.

The Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration stated that the missing people figures referred to during the presentation were not ones she was familiar with. She stated that a possible explanation for the disparity was that perhaps the Police's figures included young people who were placed within the Borough, but were under the care of another local authority, who had gone

missing. Supt Parker clarified that the figure referred to during his presentation included missing children and adults and welcomed the opportunity to meet with the Cabinet Member outside of the meeting to understand the figures referred to and report this back to this Committee at a future date.

In response to a question, Supt Parker stated that the BCU provided a service across Barking and Dagenham, Redbridge and Havering and therefore did not have data which showed whether the levels of crime were in proportion to the three individual boroughs' populations. Resource allocation was based on demand levels which were determined through the number of calls coming into the BCU.

The Chair asked whether it could be concluded from the information that was presented that Barking and Dagenham needed more Police resources allocated to it because, whilst its crime figures were in between those of Redbridge and Havering, its response times were the lowest of the three boroughs. Supt Parker stated that he had carried out some work to establish why this was, which involved analysing levels of demand, the number of officers allocated, and the geography of the Borough, which had shown that:

- Barking and Dagenham used to share an inspector with another patrol base. This had been addressed as of 14 December 2020, as he had secured five new inspector posts, who were aligned to each of the Borough's response teams;
- The number of officers allocated to the Borough had been increased to teams of over 30 in recognition of the fact that the geography of the Borough was a factor in meeting response times, as the patrol base was in an awkward location; and
- The number of response drivers had been increased too, in recognition of the fact that getting from one side of the Borough to the other could be challenging. The BCU now had its own driving instructor, which made it one of only two in the Met Police to have this arrangement.

In response to a question, Supt Parker stated that the Met had a criterion that allowed it to categorise a crime as 'detected'. The phrase 'sanctioned detections' referred to cases where there was an outcome of the crime being dealt with, for example, a charge, a fixed penalty notice being issued, the perpetrator having to take part in a form of restorative justice, or a community caution being issued. He interpreted the relevant statistics referred to within the presentation as meaning that more crimes had been solved in Barking and Dagenham than the other two boroughs in the period in question.

Supt Parker then delivered a presentation on "Engagement on East Area BCU" on behalf of Supt Long, the Safer Neighbourhood Supt (who was unable to join the meeting).

The Chair stated that the presentation did not specifically mention the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) group, which was a particularly important group in the context of this Borough. Supt Parker stated that as he had delivered the presentation on behalf of Supt Long, he could not provide the specific details around how the BCU engaged with the LGBT community; however, he was confident that mechanisms were in place and he confirmed that across the BCU and amongst its senior leadership team, this group was regularly discussed and

considered. In response to further comments, the Cabinet Member for Enforcement and Community Safety stated that in light of the delay in commencing the Stephen Port murder victims' inquests, she felt it was necessary that Supt Long attend a future meeting of this Committee to deliver a report on this issue alone so it could be given the time and attention it deserved.

In response to a question, it was confirmed that the presentation was a general representation of how effective engagement was across the Borough and because of this, it did not reflect areas or wards which were an exception and had good levels of representation within their community engagement groups. In response to a comment by a Member, Supt Parker stated that he would be happy to check with Supt Long the extent to which the Independent Advisory Group within a specific ward was being utilised for engagement purposes.

Members referred to an occasion recently where the only way to access a ward panel meeting was via a BT call, which they felt was limiting in terms of accessibility and engagement. They encouraged the BCU to use a variety of virtual platforms during the lockdown to engage with communities to open up these opportunities to a wider group of people. The Chair, however, acknowledged the difficulty the BCU faced when choosing which virtual platforms to use, as certain platforms would inevitably be preferred by some groups, and not by others.

The Chair confirmed that the Committee would like to see, in approximately six months' time, the Borough's response time figures to establish whether there had been any improvement, a report on any further work undertaken to understand the potential reasons for the Borough's high missing people figures, and a report on how the BCU engaged specifically with those who were LGBT.

The Chair thanked Supt Parker for his time in updating the Committee on the Borough's response times and engagement review work.

46. Predictive Analytics; Approach to Ethics & Transparency

The Cabinet Member for Community Leadership and Engagement introduced the item, stating that the Council was leading the way within local government in demonstrating the importance of being ethical and transparent with residents' data. The Council had received awards for its innovative approaches to using data and technology to support residents and enhance services. She referred to the 'Borough Data Explorer' and the success of the Council and the 'BD Can' network in ensuring vulnerable residents across the Borough were supported in a timely fashion to get through the Covid-19 lockdown that was announced in March 2020, which was largely down to the Council's effective use of data.

The Council's Head of Insight and Innovation (HII) and Manager of Insight and Innovation (MII) delivered a presentation on the Council's approach to ethics and transparency in relation to predictive analytics (the use of data to help identify future outcomes and deliver services), which covered the following areas:

- The reasons for bringing this issue before the Committee;
- Explanation of 'OneView', the Council's predictive analytics tool;
- What does OneView do and what benefits has it brought to the Council?
- How OneView had supported the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic;

- The value OneView has added to staff and residents;
- How the Council ensures that its use of data is ethical and transparent;
- The potential controversy surrounding predictive analytics tools and the perceptions held around these compared to the reality;
- Summary of Information Ethics & Transparency Charter;
- Why outcomes matter;
- Independent Research undertaken by the Ada Lovelace Institute – Key Findings to be shared next month; and
- Moving forward.

The HII was asked whether residents received opportunities to review the data held by the Council to ensure that it was correct and confirm their agreement to the Council continuing to hold data on them. The HII explained that the data used in predictive analytics was already held by the Council on various systems, such as those used by social workers and housing officers. When these officers took case notes, for example, they obtain residents' consent to holding and utilising their data, and many of the privacy notices used in these processes explained the legal reasons for doing so, as well as the Council's duty of care in maintaining personal data. Therefore, predictive analytics work did not involve additional GDPR implications, as the Council would have already adhered to GDPR as a part of normal service delivery. He confirmed that a resident could make a subject access request to check what data the Council held on them.

In response to a question, the HII confirmed that testing to ensure the data held by the Council was protected was part of the Council's usual corporate IT security testing.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member, HII and the MII for the presentation, time and attendance.

47. Work Programme

The Chair informed the Committee of the following changes made to the Work Programme since the last meeting, which was noted by the Committee:

- Due to the Assembly meeting needing to be moved to 3 March 2021 (for reasons relating to the setting of the GLA precept for Council Tax and its impact on the Council), the Overview and Scrutiny Committee scheduled for the same date had been cancelled. The agenda items that were scheduled for this meeting, namely the General Progress Update on the Recommendations arising from Key Line of Enquiry 4 of the Scrutiny Review into 4 Ambition 2020, and the report on the Impact of the change to Reside's Eligibility Threshold, would now be presented to the Committee at its meeting on 9 June 2021.