

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (SPECIAL) MINUTES

7 JULY 2020

Chair:	* Councillor Sachin Shah	
Councillors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Dan Anderson * Jeff Anderson * Sarah Butterworth * Stephen Greek 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Honey Jamie * Jean Lammiman * Chris Mote * Kanti Rabadia
Voting Co-opted:	(Voluntary Aided)	(Parent Governors)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Mr N Ransley † Reverend P Reece 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr M Chandran * Ms M Trivedi
Non-voting Co-opted:	* Harrow Youth Parliament Representative [Elia Yousf representing HYP]	
In attendance (Councillors)	Graham Henson Krishna Suresh Adam Swersky	Minute 121 Minute 120 Minute 121

- * Denotes Member present
- † Denotes apologies received

118. Attendance by Reserve Members

RESOLVED: To note that there were no Reserve Members in attendance.

119. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: To note that

- (1) the Declarations of Interests published in advance of the meeting on the Council's website were taken as read and the following further declaration made at the meeting by Councillor Jean Lammiman in respect of agenda item 4 be also noted:

Vice-Chairman of Heath Robinson Museum Trust – Non-Pecuniary interest.

- (2) Members and Co-opted Members who had declared interests remained in the virtual meeting whilst the matters were considered and voted upon.

RESOLVED ITEMS

120. Covid-19 - Impact on Policing - Question and Answer Session

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair welcomed Acting Chief Inspector Ed Baidon of the Metropolitan Police NW-CU (North West Command Unit) to the meeting. The Chair also welcomed the Portfolio Holder for Community Cohesion and Crime to the meeting.

The Chair added that since the death of George Floyd in the USA, the operations of the Police had come under increased scrutiny around the world. In Harrow, Councillors had felt that in light of the Covid-19 pandemic and the issues raised by the Black Lives Matter movement, it was timely for the Committee to discuss their impact on policing and to address the following key points:

- enforcement of the lockdown and changes as lockdown measures were being relaxed;
- impact on general crime and disorder and Community Safety in Harrow;
- impact of Covid-19 on BAME communities, including the inequalities they faced;
- partnership working.

The Director of Strategy as the lead officer on Community Safety welcomed the opening remarks made by the Chair and recognised the need for an open dialogue. He referred to the significant challenges faced by the BAME communities during the pandemic both internationally and nationally and cited the example of the disproportionate representation of BAME communities in areas such as the criminal justice system.

The Director referred to the need to work together to help understand the issues and to create better outcomes for Harrow's communities. The Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Crime referred to Harrow's diverse community which had pulled together during the pandemic. The Portfolio Holder spoke about a leaflet which set out how the different communities of Harrow could protect themselves and that this had been translated in different languages for circulation to the residents of Harrow.

Members of the Committee were invited to ask questions of the Police, Portfolio Holder and Officers.

Question 1:

In Harrow, the Black Community was seven times more likely to be Stopped & Searched than other Communities. Was this justified?

The Acting Chief Inspector reported that Stop & Search was not based on ethnicity. Various types of crime, intelligence and demographics of an area ought to be factored into this. Parts of Harrow had different demographics and all aspects, including age and ethnicity, would be examined.

In response to additional questions on whether there was a statistical error rather than a systematic issue, the Acting Chief Inspector explained that he was not saying that there was a statistical error but that additional information also needed to be factored in. He reported that, in Harrow, 1294 White people and 1474 Black people had been Stopped & Searched for the period July 2019 to June 2020. Whilst this did not equate to seven times, it was disproportionate in terms of the population of Harrow.

Question 2:

Allegations had been made that BAME Police Officers were more likely to be the subject of misconduct investigations. How were they supported? How was the representation of the BAME communities being increased within the Police Force?

There were 1597 Police Officers in the NWCUC of which 329 were from the BAME Communities and this equated to 20%. The Metropolitan (Met) Police carried out recruitment drives with a view to increasing representation from the BAME Communities. Across London, representation of BAME Communities in the Police Force was lower than in the NWCUC. A number of schemes had been put in place to support officers and to also increase female representation in all aspects of the Met.

The Portfolio Holder for Community Cohesion and Crime reported that Harrow was the second safest borough in London with very low levels of crime and this needed to be recognised.

Question 3:

What challenges did the Police face in policing the protests and Covid-19?

The Acting Chief Inspector reported that during the lockdown, London as a whole had experienced an increase in anti-social behaviour (ASB) although the overall level of crime had dropped significantly. Reports on anti-social behaviour mainly related to social distancing issues in parks and other places. He acknowledged that the Police had been slow in using various forms of IT available to communicate with its communities but changes were now in place to replace older forms of communication such as street briefings and face to

face meetings. However, some of the traditional methods of communication would still be required, such as face to face meetings.

In terms of staffing levels, these had been maintained as levels of holidays taken and training courses attended had reduced. The powers derived from Covid-19 legislation had been enforced and the levels of fixed penalty notices issued in Harrow had been the lowest in London and only 36 arrests had been made in the whole of London which had related to Covid-19 issues. Members were informed that there had been a decline in overall crime in Harrow and 1039 incidents had been recorded for April 2020, the lowest figure since 2016. However, since April, there had been an increase but it was below the average. Police Officers in Harrow had supported their colleagues in central London and in other parts of the country which they were used to accustomed to doing prior to the pandemic.

Question 4:

What were the biggest challenges for the Police and did these require additional resources and training?

The Acting Chief Inspector reported that the Police Force had learnt to evolve with reduced staff. More recently, a number of trainees had joined the North West Command Unit. Overall, training had to be adapted to suit the new ways of working and changes made to the development of the new recruits as work due to a reduction in the street patrols.

In due course, a period of reflection would become necessary together with a review of the methods employed during the pandemic in order to ascertain which areas needed to be prioritised. Lessons would also need to be learnt. Digital communication methods could become the norm.

Question 5:

How were the leaflets in different languages being distributed? As Community Centres had been closed, it was important to clarify the distribution of the leaflets. Had the Police and the Council become detached from the community?

The Portfolio Holder for Community Cohesion and Crime undertook to provide the leaflets produced to Councillors.

The Director of Strategy reported that as part of the Test, Track and Trace System, the Council was currently working with the Somali community. Posters had been produced, including a video, and it was intended to roll out this method of communication to other communities in Harrow. This method of communication would become particularly relevant should a local lockdown become necessary. The Council needed to work with its diverse communities and manage communications with them.

The Director added that the Council was keeping in contact with Harrow's faith communities and the previous work carried out with temples would be resumed.

In response to additional questions from Members, the Director explained that the video produced was specific to the Somali community but it was intended to replicate it for other communities.

Question 6:

Reports indicate that there had been an increase in domestic violence during the lockdown. What was the Harrow perspective?

What had been the impact of efficiency savings?

The Acting Chief Inspector reported that there had been concerns that the levels of domestic violence would rise during the lockdown. This concern had been based on the experiences during the Christmas break when levels of domestic violence normally rose as a result of families being together at home for a longer period of time during the holiday. He undertook to provide the statistics for Harrow.

The Director of Strategy informed the Committee that incidents of domestic violence in Harrow had increased and were above the general trend. However, there had not been a spike in domestic violence in Harrow. Incidents of domestic violence cases involving injury had remained static. The Director acknowledged that it was also important to consider the impact fear of domestic violence had on families and reported that the Council worked with the Police in this regard and to support victims. He added that MOPAC (The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime) had funded a post which was based at Northwick Park Hospital on the basis that the majority of domestic violence cases would present themselves at A&E (Accident & Emergency).

The Committee was informed that the funding would be reviewed and the commissioning process reviewed/conducted at the end of this Calendar Year.

Members were informed that the work of Police officers was 'close and personal', such as when making arrests. Police Officers had been provided with appropriate PPE (Personal Protection Equipment) such as face masks and hand sanitisers. Risk management exercises had also been undertaken. Additionally, officers had to attend to Covid-19 deaths, alleviate social distancing, assist with Track and Trace Systems. More and more of the back office functions were being carried out by colleagues working from home.

Question 7:

Community Outreach – The perception was that the community and the Police were not on good terms and this had been particularly evident since the death of George Floyd in the USA. The young people in London did not feel safe around the Police. How were the Police going to rebuild and rekindle the relationship with the community?

Knife Crime – There had been a decrease in violent crime during the lockdown but this was likely to alter. What measures were the Police looking at to slow down violent crime and ensure that knife crime was not prolific as had been the case before the lockdown?

The Acting Chief Inspector stated that he did not recognise the picture with regard to the poor relationship between the Police and the community and it was not what they were hearing from the different communities of London. The Acting Chief Inspector challenged the view expressed by the questioner and stated that it had not broken down along the lines being portrayed. He acknowledged that the Police did not always get it right and reported that the Police would be seeking the advice of the Independent Advisory Groups (IAG), set up in each borough, in this regard and to provide feedback. The IAG for Harrow was being revamped.

The questioner – a representative of Harrow Youth Parliament (HYP) - remained of the view that there had been a level of breakdown in relations between the two bodies and that it had largely been due to external factors. However, the problem needed to be acknowledged as, in Harrow, black people were seven times likely to be stopped by the Police.

In response, the Acting Chief Inspector reported that public attitude surveys were conducted by the Police and that these had shown a high level of confidence in the Police. Victims of crime had also felt satisfied with the work carried out by the Police. He referred to the IAG and suggested the setting up of a Youth IAG in order to get feedback from the younger generation. The representative of HYP welcomed this proposal and offered to assist in this regard as he too wanted to ensure a good level of communication between the two parties.

The Acting Chief Inspector acknowledged that under the new normal, crime levels were expected to increase, including knife crime. Instead of merely looking at enforcement and Stop and Search measures, the Police were looking to educate and increase engagement with the youth. The representative of Harrow Youth Parliament welcomed this response.

Question 8:

The Police response in Hatch End Ward during the encampment of travellers had been exemplary. How did the Police approach and manage similar issues, particularly during the pandemic?

The Acting Chief Inspector reported that Police Offices put their lives at risk at all times. In terms of the pandemic, Police Officers had been trained on safety measures, the need to 'give' distance, how to keep safe from physical attacks and staying out of the breathing range of others. Police Officers had also been training during the Ebola and Swine Flu epidemics and periodic ad hoc training was always being carried out.

Members were invited to report criminal activity – drug dealing and enclaves – in their Wards which would be addressed by the SNTs (Safer Neighbourhood Teams). There were a number of ways to report such crimes - telephoning the 101 Service or Crime Stoppers and reporting the crime online. The Police also had the remit to look at the underlying problems and why particular areas/locations were being targeted by drug dealers. There was a need to 'design out' such crimes and the Police relied on intelligence.

Prior to his summing up, the Chair stated that there appeared to be some conflict between the Police and the communities they served. The Black community in particular experienced more incidences of Stop & Search. He cited the recent example of the Police Officers taking pictures of the women who had been killed following a horrific incident in NW London and releasing these online and that this had resulted in confidence levels in the Police dropping further. The Acting Chief Inspector accepted that the Police behaviour in respect of this incident had been unacceptable and confirmed that the Police Officers involved had not served in the NW-CU.

In summing up, the Chair thanked the Acting Chief Inspector for his attendance at the meeting and welcomed the proposal to set up a Harrow Youth IAG. He remarked that the borough was safer because of the work done by the Acting Chief Inspector and his colleagues who worked long hours and put themselves in danger in order to protect the public whilst under increased public scrutiny and criticism. Harrow was proud to be served by those under the his leadership.

121. COVID 19 - Economic Recovery and Update - Question and Answer Session

The Chair welcomed the Leader of the Council and the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources to the meeting.

The Director of Strategy introduced the report that would be considered by Cabinet at its meeting scheduled to be held on 9 July 2020. He added that the report was part of the regular reports on Covid-19 submitted to Cabinet and it was being presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the purposes of the Questions & Answer Session that evening. The report updated Members on the latest situation and advice, including the economic impact of the pandemic and the Council's plans for recovery. The report also addressed the need to learn lessons which had been raised by the Committee at its last meeting.

The Leader of the Council referred to the report and drew attention to the emerging issues, particularly in relation to Children Looked After (CLA). The Leader added that in moving away from the crises, issues around mental health and self-harm had become evident. The Council was also facing significant financial challenges and further government announcements setting out how they would support Councils were awaited. He stated that 10,000 residents of Harrow were on benefits, the income received from Council Tax had dropped and many residents had been furloughed. The economic situation was challenging and many residents were likely to be made redundant and training and development would become vital in order to reskill residents into other types of employment. The Council was working as part of the West London Alliance, which was looking at ways to rebuild the economy and deliver on a low carbon economy.

The Leader was pleased to report that many businesses in Harrow had opened on 4 July 2020 and had managed their venues well by adhering to the guidelines. He thanked officers for their work.

The Committee asked the following questions:

Question 1:

Services provided by the Adult Social Care to those shielding had been impressive.

Questionnaire to residents needs to capture the changes required to critical and social care provision?

What were the pressures as a result of the increase in the number of children in care?

The Leader agreed that those shielded had received an excellent service from the Council and had been looked after well. Adult social care staff had been offering welfare calls to those on the shielded list during the early part of the pandemic, as part of the 7 day per week service. He added that the pressures in social care were challenging but the Council was working well in this area.

The Corporate Director of People outlined the issues around mental health presentations which had increased three fold since the pandemic. The number of those attempting suicide had increased and 42 cases had been reported since 23 March 2020. There had been a significant interest in the number of children in care. These changes were putting pressure on front line staff who were working a full week. The Council was working with its partners in order to support each other. One of the lessons learnt was the importance of a 'whole system' approach and there was a need to consolidate and strengthen the workforce and to provide support systems.

Question 2:

Harrow was mostly made up of micro businesses employing up to 10 people. In the current economic climate, these businesses would become extremely vulnerable and the Council's economic development team was too small to provide support?

The Leader explained that due to the points outlined in the above question, the Council was working with the West London Alliance and looking ahead to provide:

- digital connectivity - connecting entrepreneurs and micro businesses together;
- financial support and training where English was not the first language;
- workspaces;
- accelerator schemes, prosperity funds which the Council was bidding for;
- co-ordination and guidance on how to run an efficient business;
- support in the provision of interest free loans and grants;
- entrepreneurship, such as the model in Hammersmith.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources stated that it was important to recognise the business identity of Harrow as a large number of people were

self-employed and the make-up of Harrow businesses also included a large number of retail. It was therefore important to make Harrow as a destination to do business and shop. The Covid-19 economic crises was more significant than the financial crises and tough times lay ahead.

Question 3:

What was the position in relation to the distribution of Business Grants as some remained outstanding? When would the situation be resolved? How had the collection of Council Tax fared and what were the projections?

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources outlined the initial challenges which had delayed the distribution of grants which had been due to the technology available and staffing issues. However, to date, £33m had been distributed to businesses but a number remained outstanding due to the complexities of the cases. With regard to the distribution of discretionary business grant, the challenge had been to identify those that needed help. A small amount of money was available for distribution and only a few businesses would benefit from the discretionary grant.

In respect of the collection of Council Tax, the Portfolio Holder stated that the Council had fared better than other authorities as the initial approach taken 'if you can pay, pay' had helped but the loss would be substantial. He would provide the Members with the projections.

Question 4:

What had been impact on transport?

The Leader of the Council reported that air quality had improved and the number of people travelling by public transport had also reduced. The number of people returning to work was low and more people were walking or cycling. This had led to a serious debate about the use of vehicles as a mode of transport. In Harrow, vehicle use had previously been high and the Council needed to keep the numbers low. A great deal of vehicle use was due to the school run but it had been noted that the younger generation were using other modes of transport and were not totally reliant on cars. Hybrid models were also being considered.

Question 5

Streetspace Programme

Parking Issues – Belmont Circle, Kingsbury – discouraging people from shopping there. Representations received from businesses. The Council needed to listen to businesses?

The Leader of the Council stated that works to the highways/roads was financed by the Council's Capital Programme and the funding received from Transport from London (TfL) known as the LIP (Local Implementation Plans). However, the LIP was no longer available and the funding for road safety schemes had stopped. Various projects had therefore been paused and would resume when funding was available.

The Leader added that the government had announced the need to put traffic measures in place and a number of schemes had been bid for to help improve pedestrian access and cycling lanes but some schemes had been rejected. A number of small schemes had received funding which needed to be in place by September 2020, such as the scheme for Belmont Circle. Consultation on such schemes would be carried out and funding was dependent on their implementation. The Council had successfully bid for £638,000 from the TfL in the London Streetspace Plan which supported walking and cycling initiatives.

It was important that the schemes approved were implemented in order to improve the situation for businesses as well. Measures around parking and enforcement were being slowly reintroduced to support the reopening of businesses and prevent obstruction.

Members were informed that the majority of responses received in respects to the Council's website had been positive.

Question 6:

**Digital Connectivity – What support had been provided to businesses?
Young people and employment – What specific measures had been put in place?**

The Leader reported that the Council was working in collaboration with the businesses and internet providers to improve internet speed. It was recognised that people were not used to working from home, which also impacted on their mental health. Online training and support for those working remotely was being considered. The Council's Economic Development team was looking to commission training programmes to help re-skill residents. The West London Alliance (WLA) was looking at apprenticeship levy and the impact of Covid-19 on Heathrow Airport which recruited locally.

The Leader stated that he was also concerned about children attending schools, particularly the impact of Covid-19 on 14-year old pupils, and was looking at measures to support them in their health and wellbeing.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources was keen to provide access to digital technology which would provide access to online platforms and services. Otherwise, access to Universal Credit and services such as the recycling booking system at the Council's Depot would become meaningless for many. Accessibility to technology and training would be required.

With regard to the Council's own ICT rollout, the Portfolio Holder explained that the upgrading was underway and risks would need to be managed. The target was ambitious and, if successful, the Council would be at the forefront in the provision of IT in local government. The existing contract would be brought in-house in October 2020.

The Leader explained the problems encountered with the Council's online recycling booking system, such as queuing and blocking off of roads which had also been of concern to the emergency services. He also explained why the system could not be accessed on mobile phones and tablets.

Question 7:

Opening of all schools in September 2020 – How would the limited space in schools be managed? What safeguarding measures would be put in place? How would children travel when space on public transport was limited?

The Corporate Director of People informed Members that his team, including the Director of Public Health, was working with headteachers and governing bodies to ensure that appropriate safety measures were in place to allow all children to return to school in September. All parties were committed to the challenge and he had great faith in the community of schools in Harrow which would find creative solutions to achieve the required objective.

The Council had a statutory duty to safeguard children and was working with the stakeholders with a view to offering help earlier. He was pleased to report that families were responding well to digital contact methods.

Question 8:

With regard to page 14 of the supplemental agenda, paragraph referencing the pause in consultation and engagement and the need for the Council to fully understand the impact on Harrow's communities of the pandemic ... and that residents in our BAME communities were more likely to suffer the negative impacts either from the virus itself or the economic and social shocks which would follow. Could you please explain how these would arise?

The Director of Strategy explained that the Health and Safety Executive was meeting regularly to look at the impact on different communities. The understanding was that occupations within the BAME Communities, including other aspects of their lives, had exposed them considerably to Covid-19. More work was being done with Public Health officials on exposure and mobility in order to understand how life styles impacted negatively. For example, within the Somali community, a man was most likely to be employed as a mini cab driver and a woman would usually be employed as a care worker. By virtue of their employment, they were likely to have an increased risk of catching Covid-19.

Question 9:

Would the Council be restoring all its services?

The Leader of the Council reported on the challenges the Council was facing in bring back its services. The majority of staff were working from home and would continue to do so due the challenges in opening the Civic Centre as outlined in the report. Front line services were being restored and some staff had been relocated into different jobs. Staff working in the education service

were under a great deal of pressure and would need to continue working during the Summer break to ensure that all schools opened in September 2020.

The Leader paid a tribute to the resolve of staff, teachers and governing bodies in their work to ensure that schools opened in September as required by the government.

The Chair of the Committee thanked officers, Members and the Portfolio Holders for their participation in the Question & Answer Session.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 6.00 pm, closed at 8.16 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR SACHIN SHAH
Chair