

Minutes

RESIDENTS' SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE

12 April 2023



HILLINGDON
LONDON

Meeting held at Committee Room 5 - Civic Centre

	<p>Committee Members Present: Councillors Wayne Bridges (Chairman), Colleen Sullivan (Vice-Chairman), Scott Farley (Opposition Lead), Janet Gardner, Ekta Gohil and Peter Smallwood</p> <p>Others Present: Mark Billings (Director of Housing) Darren Deeks (Libraries Service Manager) Michelle Greenidge (Private Sector Housing Manager) Inspector James McGahan (Metropolitan Police Service) Chief Inspector James Herring (Metropolitan Police Service) Councillor Eddie Lavery (Cabinet Member for Residents' Services) Neil O'Connor (Community Engagement Project Officer), Liz Penny (Democratic Services Officer) Gary Penticost (Director of Operational Assets) Jacqui Robertson (Service Manager for Community Safety) Helena Webster (Community Engagement & Town Improvements Manager) Debby Weller (Head of Housing Strategy and Policy)</p> <p>Witnesses Eleni Yiangu (Gating Officer – Ealing Council) Yasmin Basterfield (Safer Communities Team Leader)</p>
70.	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (<i>Agenda Item 1</i>)</p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Sital Punja.</p>
71.	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN MATTERS COMING BEFORE THIS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 2</i>)</p> <p>There were no declarations of interest.</p>
72.	<p>TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 3</i>)</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting dated 15 March 2023 be agreed as an accurate record.</p>
73.	<p>TO CONFIRM THAT THE ITEMS OF BUSINESS MARKED AS PART I WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC AND THOSE MARKED PART II WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE (<i>Agenda Item 4</i>)</p> <p>It was confirmed that all items were in Part I and would be considered in public.</p>
74.	<p>A REVIEW OF ALLEY GATING IN HILLINGDON: WITNESS SESSION 3 (<i>Agenda Item 5</i>)</p>

It was noted that this was the third and final witness session relating to the Committee's review of alley gating in Hillingdon. Elleni Yiangu, Gating Officer and Yasmin Basterfield, Safer Communities Team Leader, were in attendance representing Ealing Council. A report setting out Ealing's alley gating scheme had been included in the agenda pack and Members were invited to ask questions in relation to this. It was noted that, in Ealing, alley gates would only be gifted to residents on private land and in ASB hotspots.

In response to questions from the Committee, it was confirmed that Ealing Council kept records of key holders' details for one year after an application had been received; this information was never shared and was deleted after a year for GDPR reasons.

With regards to bank accounts, Members heard that Ealing bore the full initial cost of providing alley gates in the borough; thereafter ongoing maintenance costs etc were the sole responsibility of the residents. Generally, one lead resident would be responsible for setting up a bank account and no known issues with frozen bank accounts had been experienced to date. It was confirmed that Ealing always used the same contractor; officers would check their eligibility first then refer residents to the contractor directly to obtain keys. Alternatively, residents could approach their neighbours.

In response to further questions from the Committee, Councillors heard that, in Ealing, 100% consent of all homeowners was required prior to installation of alley gates. In cases where a resident, or residents, did not wish to consent, officers would contact them directly to establish why. If landlords were out of the country, the approval of managing agents or whoever was residing in the property would be sought. Members were informed that two applications had been rejected recently as developers had an interest in the land.

Members sought further clarification regarding the monitoring of ASB in Ealing. It was confirmed that not all cases were monitored; only those where there had been high levels of ASB prior to installation of alley gates. In one such case a significant reduction in burglary had been observed following installation of gates in a problematic area.

Members thanked the officers for their report and attendance at the Committee.

RESOLVED: That the Residents' Services Select Committee noted the evidence heard at the witness session and sought clarification as necessary in the context of the review of alley gating in Hillingdon.

75. **CRIME AND DISORDER SCRUTINY - POLICE PERFORMANCE DATA** (*Agenda Item 6*)

Chief Inspector James Herring and Inspector James McGahan of the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) were in attendance and presented the crime performance data figures covering the period March 2022 – February 2023 vs March 2021 – February 2022. Key points highlighted included:

1. Each Borough in West London now had a senior Leader – for Hillingdon this was Superintendent Antony Bennett. The aim was to increase the number of police officers in the Borough in the long term;
2. One priority area for the BCU Commander was tackling violence – particularly

Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG). The Town Centre Team had been very successful, but the Partnership Tasking Team would be lost in 2023. New initiatives included a neighbourhood police week of action and working with female officers to improve trust and confidence;

3. There had been an uplift in robbery, burglary, vehicle crime, theft and arson in the current year whilst figures for possession of weapons had declined;
4. In terms of Ward figures, there had been a significant increase in crime in Heathrow Villages in the past year. The Chief Inspector would be meeting with colleagues later in April to discuss this further. It was possible that Heathrow's increased opening hours could be having an impact on this;
5. There had been a notable decrease in crime in some wards including Ruislip Manor, Pinkwell, Charville, Hillingdon East and Ickenham & South Harefield which was to be welcomed;
6. There were significant resourcing challenges being faced by the MPS – Operation Stabilise sought to address this;
7. Body worn cameras were encouraged when officers carried out stop and search and initiatives were in place to train new recruits.

Members noted that certain communities were very reluctant to engage with the Police as they distrusted them – the latest negative publicity regarding the Met had not helped. It was suggested that police officers should patrol local areas more so as to be more visible, build trust and enable the residents to get to know them better.

In response to this, it was confirmed that a current key priority was to build trust and confidence in local communities. Recruitment and retention of officers were particularly challenging at the moment, but the aim was to keep neighbourhood officers in post for longer. It was important to maintain the levels of all police officers including PCSOs.

Further to their enquiries regarding communications, Members were informed that OWL was a very useful tool. Other options including "Nextdoor" and social media platforms such as Twitter were also very useful in increasing engagement with communities.

Members requested clarification as to the meaning of 'I' and 'S' call volumes as set out on pages 34 and 35 of the agenda pack. It was confirmed that these related to response times - 'I' calls had to be dealt with within 15 minutes and 'S' calls within one hour.

Members expressed concern regarding the push to go online noting that this was impractical for some older residents. It was confirmed that all drop calls were recorded and drop 999 calls received a call back. Councillors asked if this data could be made available to the Committee - Chief Inspector James Herring agreed to follow this up outside of the meeting.

The Committee noted that 4.1% of officers did not use body worn cameras and enquired why this was the case. It was confirmed that the aim was to achieve 100% usage and measures were in place to reach this target. All officers were encouraged to use body worn cameras when going out on a job, both to enable them to record

evidence and for their own personal safety.

In terms of stop and search figures – outcomes per 1000 population, Members noted that, in the majority of cases, stop and search resulted in no further action being taken. Members were concerned that this would serve to create a negative impression of the police. Chief Inspector James Herring advised the Committee that stop and search was a useful tool in the prevention of crime but, in reality, the number carried out was decreasing. The Police welcomed scrutiny of their work. The Committee Members expressed an interest in attending a ride-along with the Police and it was agreed that Democratic Services would follow this up with the Chief Inspector after the meeting.

The Community Safety Manager informed the Committee that the strategic priorities for 2023/2024 had now been agreed by the Safer Hillingdon Partnership. Once in post in May 2023, the new Director of Community Safety and Enforcement would confirm how this would be delivered.

RESOLVED That:

- 1. Chief Inspector James Herring explore the possibility of providing the Committee with data regarding drop calls;**
- 2. Democratic Services liaise with Chief Inspector James Herring re. Members’ request to attend a ride-along with the Police; and**
- 3. The Residents’ Services Select Committee noted the contents of the Police Performance Data report and asked questions in order to clarify matters of concern or interest in the Borough.**

76. **HOUSING LIVING STANDARDS** (*Agenda Item 7*)

In relation to the Housing Living Standards report included in the agenda, Debby Weller - Head of Housing Strategy & Policy, Michelle Greenidge – Private Sector Housing Manager, Mark Billings – Director of Housing and Gary Penticost – Director of Operational Assets were in attendance to answer Members’ questions. Members heard that all reported defects were identified by officers and photos taken.

Members sought clarification of the use of the word ‘adequate’ in relation to private sector housing, noting that some dwellings which passed scrutiny were far from acceptable. It was claimed that, in some cases, sub-standard accommodation had a valid gas safety certificate. Members enquired how private landlords could be made to adhere to the Council’s standards of accommodation.

In response to this, Members heard that a gas safety certificate was a legal requirement and checks had to be carried out on an annual basis. Old boilers did not necessarily need to be replaced if they were still working well. The Private Sector Housing Manager confirmed that a Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) evaluation tool was used to identify hazards in a property – hazards were assessed against a set of criteria and, if they were not considered to be category 1 or 2 hazards, there was little the Council could legally do about them. At the request of Councillors, it was agreed that the Committee would be provided with a list of the 29 hazards against which properties were assessed. It was confirmed that gas operatives were required to appear on a list of Gas Safe registered operatives; the Council could ensure they were genuine by checking the list. As of 1 October 2022, landlords were also required to provide carbon dioxide detectors in their rented properties. Any landlords acting illegally were taking a huge risk, but little could be done about this

unless a problem arose.

In reply to their questions, the Committee Members were informed that approximately 350 households in the Borough were currently in private temporary accommodation; about 100 of these dwellings had been inspected to date. It was not possible to visit every dwelling, but there was a new requirement for a contract with the local authority regarding standards. Members heard that the Council was part of a Pan-London programme 'Setting the Standard' which aimed to ensure bed & breakfasts and studio flats used by local authorities for nightly paid temporary accommodation met a decent level of quality and management standards. The Landlord Engagement Team also inspected family sized accommodation. It was important for the Council that temporary accommodation used was of a good standard.

Members enquired whether feedback from those in temporary accommodation was sought. It was confirmed that an officer contact was provided to enable people to report problems, but no feedback was collected at present. The Director of Housing agreed to explore ways in which this could be done.

With regards to Automatic Opening Vents (AOVs), Councillors were informed that these were generally required under building regulations for buildings over 6 storeys in height. The Government was moving towards a requirement for these, and the Committee endorsed this approach.

Members enquired how damp in houses let by the Council through housing associations could be reported. It was confirmed that the Private Sector Housing Team would be responsible for enforcing on this.

Noting that the team had carried out 300 inspections of properties under the Homes for Ukraine scheme between 1 April 2022 and 21 March 2023, Members enquired whether there would be extra capacity in the team to do more home inspections in the future. It was confirmed that this was not the case as the UK Government had provided funding for an extra officer to assist with the additional inspections at that time.

In response to further requests for clarification, Councillors heard that the Council did not write to all tenants who reported a problem at their accommodation. It was acknowledged that retaliatory evictions were a matter of concern, but these were very infrequent. It was agreed that more work could be done on the website to remind landlords of their responsibility to communicate with tenants.

Members sought clarity regarding the areas of greater population density mentioned on page 52 of the pack under item 38. It was confirmed that these figures were taken from national surveys and referred to dense areas in terms of population. It was noted that these areas tended to be less affluent, have more private rented dwellings etc – these factors coalesced to form greater issues and fed into areas where the Council had more activity.

At the request of the Committee, it was agreed that Councillors could have sight of both the 'Spotlight' report (mentioned on page 48 of the agenda pack) and the Council's latest Damp and Mould leaflet (page 52).

In response to further questions from the Committee regarding the new damp, mould and condensation tracking system (page 50, item 37), Members were advised that the new system was used by the Council's in-house repairs service. 115 new issues had

been raised in February 2023.

RESOLVED That:

1. **The Committee be provided with a list of the 29 hazards against which properties were assessed;**
2. **The Director of Housing explore ways in which feedback from those in temporary accommodation could be sought;**
3. **The Director of Housing explore ways in which the Council's website could be amended to remind landlords of their responsibility to communicate with tenants;**
4. **Councillors be provided with a copy of the 'Spotlight' report and the Council's latest Damp and Mould leaflet; and**
5. **The Committee noted the contents of the report and the actions being taken by officers.**

77.

HILLINGDON'S LIBRARY SERVICE'S DRAFT STRATEGY 2023-2027 / THE FUTURE OF HARLINGTON LIBRARY (*Agenda Item 8*)

Darren Deeks, Libraries Service Manager, and Councillor Eddie Lavery, Cabinet Member for Residents' Services, were in attendance to respond to questions from the Committee in relation to the Library Service Draft Strategy 2023-2027 and the Future of Harlington Library.

Members sought clarification as to why residents were not using libraries as much as they had pre-pandemic. The Libraries Service Manager indicated that usage figures were improving; however, pre-pandemic levels had not yet been reached. It appeared that people's habits were changing, and this could be attributed to a number of factors such as flexible working, the reluctance of some older people to mix with others and limits on capacity for safety reasons. Hillingdon was performing well compared to other London boroughs.

The Committee noted that, as indicated on page 85 of the agenda pack at item 4, three Hillingdon libraries had lower active membership than Harlington Library. It was confirmed that Harlington Library had been sited in the school for over a decade which restricted its use as it did not feel like a public library.

With regards to the tiered grading system, Councillor Lavery advised the Committee that the tiers were based on usage and visit numbers. Flagship libraries had a large footfall and were well used while smaller libraries tended to serve the local community. It was important for the Council to maintain coverage across the Borough. Footfall would be monitored on an ongoing basis to inform decisions. Harlington Library was the only proposed closure due to its own particular circumstances whereby it was predominantly only used by school children.

In response to further questions from the Committee, it was confirmed that satisfaction levels were generally high. A library home service was available for those who needed it. Councillor Lavery confirmed that libraries were tailored to the requirements of local areas and facilities offered were driven by demand; for example, computers were heavily used by young people in Botwell. Officers were looking to expand the offer for young people to include sign language and other activities of interest.

In respect of seasonality of study, Members enquired whether hours of operation would

reflect this. It was confirmed that Hillingdon strove for consistency across the Borough to ensure level access on a daily basis. Residents were generally happy to accept lunch time closures which also enabled students to take a break from their studies.

Councillor Lavery informed the Committee Members that libraries were an essential part of community hubs. The Council was looking at ways to make best use of all its assets across the Borough and considering all options including locating banking and police surgeries within libraries. Members heard that a pilot was underway regarding HSBC in Eastcote Library and Barclays at Ruislip Manor library was under consideration. Ways in which the Adolescent Team could use libraries was also being explored.

In terms of the digital offer, the Committee was advised that there had been an increase in the use of Borrow Box, but the range of books was limited compared to the range of physical books available to borrow. Press Reader had successfully replaced newspapers and magazines.

It was acknowledged that additional activities available within libraries could be better publicised in one place to make it easier for residents to access the information.

At the request of Members, it was agreed that the Libraries Service Manager would explore the possibility of libraries being used as designated safe spaces.

The Libraries Service Manager affirmed that the consultation periods on both strategies would close on Sunday 16 April 2023. 753 responses had been received regarding the main strategy and 78 regarding Harlington Library thus far.

RESOLVED That:

- 1. The Libraries Service Manager explore the possibility of libraries being used as designated safe spaces; and**
- 2. That the content of the report be noted.**

78.	FORWARD PLAN (<i>Agenda Item 9</i>) RESOLVED: That the forward plan be noted.
79.	WORK PROGRAMME (<i>Agenda Item 10</i>) RESOLVED: That the Work Programme be agreed.
	The meeting, which commenced at 7.00 pm, closed at 8.48 pm.

These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information on any of the resolutions please contact Liz Penny, Democratic Services Officer on epenny@hillingdon.gov.uk. Circulation of these minutes is to Councillors, officers, the press and members of the public.