

Community Safety partnership Plan 2021-24 Comments from Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 1st March 2021

The Committee welcomes the partnership Community Safety Plan for 2021-24 and the priorities set out in the plan.

Crime and Anti-social behaviour continues to be a key priority for residents as highlighted in the Annual Residents Survey. From the 2019 survey we know 48% of residents said that crime and ASB as their top concern. We also saw a number of indicators on concerns about ASB being problem had risen over the year including:

- People using or dealing drugs
- People being drunk or rowdy
- Noisy neighbours
- Vandalism and graffiti

As noted in the report the Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on crime and ASB and as there was no Annual Residents Survey last year these indicators were also likely to rise. The Committee was pleased therefore that tackling neighbourhood crime and ASB is reflected as a priority in the Plan.

The Committee held a Scrutiny Spotlight Session with Borough Commander and Cabinet member for Community Safety and Equalities in January 21 and some of the issues that came out from that session are outlined below:

ASB spotlight

The Committee:

- enquired the rationale behind three different ASB reporting systems and the confusion this brings to their constituents (tenants and residents) for reporting ASB. They further enquired if there were plans to integrate or streamline the ASB reporting systems;
- noted that LBTH had the highest level of reported ASB in London and that Covid and lockdown measures were contributing to rise in demand. It also noted that substance misuse is one the key drivers for ASB. The Community Safety Partnership confirmed that it was managing ASB levels using engagement, support and enforcement model for people engaged in substance misuse;
- wanted to understand the efforts being made to address car ASB (transportation of people to different locations in the borough), use of nitrous oxide and Air BnB properties being used for large gatherings and breaching Covid regulations;
- enquired on the level of collaboration between enforcement team, council's highway department and others in dealing with Car ASB, nitrous oxides in estates, use of Public Space Protection Orders (PSPO) in the context of ASB and the number of officers available for community policing;
- recommended ASB levels are compared with local populations when prioritising areas for action rather than a ward by ward basis; and
- requested the Community Safety Service to report back to O&S Committee in March 2021 on the consultation results and approach for ASB linked to nitrous oxide.

Borough Commander Spotlight

The Committee:

- raised concerns about the prolonged absences of Designated Ward Officers (DWO) and the impact this has on responding to ASB;
- questioned the recurrent use of Section 60 powers (stop and search) and wanted to understand how this impacted the relationship between the Borough Commander Unit (BCU) and community;
- heard how the BCU's partnership approach to 'Operation Continuum' benefited in tackling crime, disorder and violence linked to street-based drug markets and how the partnership approach benefited the Council and partners to use local intelligence and resources to support the BCU in disrupting perpetrators of crime and ASB linked to drug dealing;
- wanted to understand what happens to recovered money from illegal activities and they were informed that the Home Office makes allocations of seized assets according to formulas based on productivity to different BCUs;
- questioned the Borough Commander (BC) about the level of progress made to improve diversity and make the Safer Neighbourhood Ward Panels more representative. The BC responded that the pandemic had impacted the ability to adequately assess the progress on ward panels being more representative; and
- questioned the BC about the volume of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) being issued to residents for breach Covid regulations and wanted further understanding as to which demography was most impacted and what happens the fines being collected.

On the Plan itself the Committee made the following comments:

- Ensure partnership work with RSLs is reflected in the plan. Many larger ones are focused on addressing ASB with patrol services like Parkguard. It is particularly key LBTH ensures THH are achieving value for money from their ASB services now patrol services have been passed directly to tenants and leaseholders.
- Questioned whether increase reporting of ASB is a good sign of people's confidence in systems for reporting or whether it was as a result of people seeing more ASB;
- The need to have performance indicators against the outcomes the partnership is seeking to achieve to enable the partnership to measure progress and also for the public to be able to hold agencies to account;
- The Committee would be keen to see the delivery plan on tackling neighbourhood crime and ASB and have an opportunity to feed into this;
- Given the on-going discussion about the Chinese Embassy and the need for visible and protective security this needs to be a key priority;
- As previously highlighted by scrutiny need for clear communication to residents about how to report ASB and who is responsible for addressing as there is still confusion amongst residents as they are passed on by agencies;
- That engaging, empowering and hearing the voice and concerns of local residents needs to be at the forefront of the delivery and annual review of this plan.

The Committee hopes our comments are considered by Cabinet before the report is submitted to Full Council. Finally, as part of the Committee's work programme for 2021-2022 it will be important to review progress against this plan and we will welcome the engagement of partners in the scrutiny process.

Cllr James King
Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee