

THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN

At a meeting of the **CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on **MONDAY, 10TH JULY, 2023** at 6.30 pm in Committee Room 2, Town Hall, Judd Street, London WC1H 9JE

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE PRESENT

Councillors Awale Olad (Chair), Camron Aref-Adib, Sharon Hardwick, Matthew Kirk, Izzy Lenga and Rishi Madlani

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ABSENT

Councillors Nina De Ayala Parker and Stephen Stark

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor Sabrina Francis (Cabinet Member for Young People and Culture)

The minutes should be read in conjunction with the agenda for the meeting. They are subject to approval and signature at the next meeting of the Culture and Environment Scrutiny Committee and any corrections approved at that meeting will be recorded in those minutes.

MINUTES

1. TERMS OF REFERENCE

RESOLVED –

THAT the Committee's terms of reference be noted.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Nina De Ayala Parker and Stephen Stark

An Apology for lateness was received from Councillor Izzy Lenga.

3. DECLARATIONS BY MEMBERS OF STATUTORY DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS, COMPULSORY REGISTERABLE NON-PECUNIARY INTERESTS AND VOLUNTARY REGISTERABLE NON-PECUNIARY INTERESTS IN MATTERS ON THIS AGENDA

Councillor Hardwick declared for transparency that in relation to item (10) Camden Libraries Update Report, she worked for the Chartered Institute of Libraries.

In relation to the same item (10) Councillor Aref-Adib declared that he worked as a volunteer at Highgate Library.

In relation to item (9) Sports and Physical Activity for Children and Young People Councillor Madlani declared that he was the Co-Chair of Pride and Football which promoted and encouraged LGBT people to be involved in sports.

In relation to the same item (9) Councillor Olad declared that his children took part in gymnastics.

4. ANNOUNCEMENTS (IF ANY)

The Chair announced that the meeting was broadcast live by the Council to the Internet and could be viewed on the website for six months after the meeting. After that time, webcasts were archived and could be made available on DVD upon request. Those who were seated in the room or participated via Teams were deemed to have consented to their contributions being recorded and broadcast and to the use of those sound recordings and images for webcasting and/or training purposes.

5. DEPUTATIONS (IF ANY)

The Chair advised that one deputation request had been accepted in relation to opposing the installation of gates at Primrose Hill Park from Amy McKeown representing Primrose Keepers; and would be taken in conjunction with item 8 Primrose Hill Briefing – Royal Parks on the agenda.

The Chair also informed the Committee that a second supplementary agenda had been published which contained a statement from Councillor Burrage in response to the deputation. Copies of the deputation and statement were included in the supplementary agendas.

6. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR DECIDES TO TAKE AS URGENT

There was none.

7. MINUTES

RESOLVED –

THAT the minutes of the meetings held on 15th March 2023, 3rd April 2023 and 16th May 2023 be signed as accurate records.

8. PRIMROSE HILL BRIEFING - ROYAL PARKS

Consideration was given to the reports of the Director of Royal Parks and Director of Public Safety.

Consideration was also given to the deputation request and statement referred to in Item 5 above.

The following responses were given by the depute to members questions:

- There was a need to collect and share proper data relating to crime and anti-social behaviour in Primrose Hill Park and then determine whether the data justified gating the park. This was not currently happening.
- The crime statistics shared in the Safer Parks Panel meetings indicated that crime in the park was negligible. There was nothing standing out from the data which justified gating the park.
- The crime data indicated that there had been a couple of indecent exposures. There had been talk in the local community about 2 rapes in the area which had been discussed at a meeting at which no one from the local community appeared to be present.
- It was very concerning for women and people living in the area to hear that rapes were happening. There was a world of difference between indecent exposure and a rape.
- The survey data used in the deputation statement was from the whole borough rather than Primrose Hill ward, because people from across Camden used the park.
- Accurate crime data from the area was not easily available. It had been a challenge getting accurate crime data before decisions were made particularly from Regents Park and Primrose Hill.
- The rumours in the local community were that there was inaccurate crime data around Primrose Hill.

Invited to comment on the crime statistics in Primrose Hill Police Inspector Stevie Bull -of the Neighbourhood Policing Central North Borough Command Unit (BCU) informed the Committee that between 1st January 2023 and 30 June 2023 a rough breakdown of the figures indicated that 131 calls had been received by the Police relating to the park, 28 of which related to anti-social behaviour and crime. About half of the crime calls were to do with phone theft. It was highlighted that due to challenges experienced the data was compiled manually.

Police Inspector Nick McLaughlin from the Royal Parks Operational Unit commented that when looking at the crime statistics for Primrose Hill it was not a hotspot for sexual offending, rape and crime in general. The common themes in the area were issues with alcohol and mental health, the numbers in the area remained low. The issue in the area was more of a noise issue rather than a crime issue.

He informed the Committee that he was happy to make a commitment to sharing accurate data with Camden Council officers and the Royal Parks Team. Expressing his surprise that this was not already being done because local ward Councillors sat on Safer Parks Panels across London. He said the information was available.

Action By: Police Inspector Royal Parks Operational Unit

He was happy to provide more detailed information on crime stats to the Committee.

Action By: Police Inspector Royal Parks Operational Unit

Answering further members questions the depute gave the following information

- Primrose Hill Park was an area of low crime in comparison to other areas in the borough, the numbers appeared to have been distorted by repeated reports of minor noise and anti-social behaviour which appeared to have been exaggerated.
- It was a safe environment for young people and she was of the view that it was safe to walk through the park at night.

The Community Safety Manager made the following comments in response to the deputations and members questions:

- The Community Safety Service had not been part of the conversation about gating Primrose Hill Park.
- The Council could only respond to the issues reported to it.
- For several years, the Council's Community Safety service had tried to encourage the local community to improve the formal reporting of issues such as noise nuisance, anti-social behaviour (ASB) and criminal activity by reporting to the Police and the Council. That was the only way an effective picture could be formed to decide on the partnership response.
- Since the pandemic, all boroughs across London had created a Summer Violence Plan and although Primrose Hill was not classed as a hotspot of violence, was down as a standing item on the Summer Violence Plan because of the level of community reporting from the area.
- There had always been discussions about temporary fencing and gating of the park in response to reporting of noise nuisance, ASB and crime.
- In relation to sexual offences in the area, the Police reported that issues of risk assessment to the wider community and victim anonymity were considered when deciding whether to publicise this to the wider community.
- In terms of a Community Management Plan, this was already being done in part through the Summer Violence Plan. The Community Safety Service had been working closely with the Police, they would also involve the Royal Parks Operational Unit to put in place resources to respond to issues raised in Primrose Hill Park.
- There was a need for additional resources as identified in the deputation, officers were happy to take an action point form this. To coordinate a multiagency group that considered residents views and put together the available resources from these organisations to see what could be done to

provide a coordinated response to what gets reported with regards to Primrose Hill.

- The deputations at the meetings had assisted in creating a more initiative-taking strategic platform to work from. This had now become more of a decision-making forum which had not been there previously.
- There were data protection regulation issues with sharing crime statistics in a brief period over a small geographical area. However, providing a broader picture, such as patterns over extended periods was something that could be done.
- The Community Safety Service had received increased reports of drug activity across the borough in the last 6 months.

The Chair informed the depute that the Committee did not have the power to ask the Council and the Planning Committee to refuse planning permission to Royal Parks, that was a matter for the Planning Committee to decide based on the planning merits of the application. He hoped that the various groups in the Primrose Hill would work together to form a collective vision for the area for the future.

The Committee thanked the depute for attending and for her deputation.

Andrew Scattergood (Chief Executive Officer), David McLaren (Chief of Staff), Alison Jeremy (Director of Communications) Royal Parks were in attendance and provided the following responses to members questions.

- With regards to Royal Parks announcement in the press of the installation of gates on Primrose Hill Park the day after the Council's scrutiny Committee meeting, they had tried to engage with the Council in advance of their statement but without success.
- Royal Parks apologised for the circumstances regarding declining the invitation to the Scrutiny meeting and subsequent press announcement regarding installation of gates on Primrose Hill the following day.
- They explained that the invitation to attend the meeting had been issued sometime before and Royal Parks had not connected the meeting date with the timing of the announcement, remarking, that it had not been thought through. Royal Parks would check with their colleagues to find out when the invitation to attend the Scrutiny Committee had been issued and report back to the Committee.

Action By: David McLaren Royal Parks -Chief of Staff

- Given the circumstances of what happened it was not an attempt to avoid scrutiny by the Council. Indeed, Royal Parks had repeatedly sought the views of the Council throughout the engagement process on many occasions and their view on Royal Parks managing of the situation at Primrose Hill but failed to get a formal response from the Council.
- Royal Parks had also engaged with a number of Councillors over the years meeting on sites at Primrose Hill providing responses to the Council and Councillors.

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- With regards to the decision to install gates, Royal Park had sought to seek a balanced view through the engagement strategy. There were differing views about whether to install gates, Primrose Hill Park was witnessing large numbers of people making use of the park creating noise issues.
- It was felt that the balanced proportionate approach was to put in gates that would provide the infrastructure rather than temporary fencing so access could be controlled into the parks.
- Royal Parks had announced that from British Summer time i.e., the end of March to the October period gates would be locked in the evenings at the weekend on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays.
- Royal Parks would monitor and review the situation with the gates and commit to engage with the Council before any further decision was taken.
- Royal Parks conducted a comprehensive engagement strategy carrying out a survey which ran from 15th November 2022 for 6 weeks.
- The survey was published on Royal Park's website, through social media platforms and press announcements. Paper copies were also sent out to residents.
- The survey was sent to 37,000 people/residents, 1437 completed the survey, the response rate was about 4%
- With regards to toilets, the parks toilets were open till 9pm at night, this appeared to be the first time this had been raised as an issue. There was the need to factor in long hours staff worked.
- There was no outreach work planned.
- Royal Parks job was to manage the parks and did not have an enforcement role. There were Park Rangers that were an additional resource and their job was to educate rather than enforcement.
- The Royal Parks Operational Unit which was part of the Metropolitan police operated in the park and shared the data.
- The local police, Safer Neighbourhood BCU meet regularly with the Royal Parks Operational Unit to discuss issues across the parks. There were lots of areas that were looked after in addition to Primrose Hill.

Police Inspector Nick McLaughlin (Royal Parks Operational Unit) commented that he did not dispute that there were some issues in the area, it was a place where young people gathered during the summer months, during the pandemic it had been quite challenging. However, it was not a crime hotspot, from January 2021 to December 2021 there were 225 crimes reported in the area, for the same period the following year this dropped to 69 for the year and the area was on course for similar figures this year. He encouraged Councillors to engage with the Safer Parks Panels.

The Committee thanked the Police and Royal Park's Officers for attending the meeting.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted.

9. SPORTS AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Recreation.

The Committee was shown a brief video clip called 'Wildcats captured in their Natural Habitat' of young children playing football.

In response to questions, the Head of Sport and Physical Activity, Nigel Robinson, Community Sport and Physical Activity Manager, Deborah Bush and Director of Recreation Oliver Jones made the following points:

- With regards to opening up access to sports facilities to underrepresented groups such as the South Asian Community, the Council had made this a formal performance indicator to improve access to sports facilities to disproportionately under-represented groups in the community. The reasons for low representation were being investigated with the aim to devise a work plan to break down barriers.
- There was the expectation that before any physical activity or exercise was taken up, a qualified instructor would ask about physical conditions, require a health questionnaire to be completed and provide the appropriate warnings.
- With regards to people that were unaware they had a medical condition, community centres could signpost people to conduct checks before starting exercise classes. This could be taken back to community centres to provide guidance to customers.

ACTION BY: Head of Sport and Physical Activity/Community Sport and Physical Activity Manager

- In terms of prices charged by Multi-Use Games Areas (MUGAS), a lot were mostly located in parks and housing estates where people were not charged. There were 3 in leisure centres for which the Council charged.
- There were also lots of other facilities which were not managed by the Council.
- The Leisure Centres fees and charges were set by the Cabinet and agreed at the Council every year. The prices were largely led by demand and also based on the rate charged by surrounding facilities.
- In some cases, there were concession rates applied for example, for some facilities and centres there was a 30% discount for children.

A member highlighted that in the Northwest of the borough there was a lack of green space / community space to cater for the needs of secondary school pupils. The Community Space in West Hampstead served the needs of younger children and older people quite well, there was however a gap for secondary school pupils and requested that consideration be given to providing a package for this group.

- In relation to the drop off in figures when transitioning from primary school to secondary school, this was a national issue of drop out between primary and secondary pupils particularly for teenage girls. There was a significant amount of data nationally and officers were looking to understand the reasons for this at a Camden local level.
- A questionnaire had been developed to help provide a better understanding of the situation regarding transition from primary to secondary school in Camden. This would be reviewed with the aim to break down the barriers.
- With regards to low rate of physical activity and take up of opportunities particularly among South Asian women, numerous needs assessments had been conducted by the Council over the years. Offers had been targeted to areas known to be underrepresented.
- With regards to the demographic shift in the population of Camden, the Council was still trying to understand the impact of this. The Council was reviewing this with a view to including it in its internal programme.
- With regards to gymnastic facilities in the borough these were oversubscribed. The Council had received a grant of £7.7m from the Government's levelling up fund, £3.5m of which was going towards the upgrade and extension of sports centres and gymnastic facilities in the borough. This would increase the capacity by 30%, it was hoped that this increased capacity would grant many more Camden children access to the facilities in the borough.
- With regards to the sporting facility on Alex Street, the Cabinet Member for Young People and Culture informed the Committee that she had met with the UCL union and the issue was around change of use of the building and the planning works. It had become a contentious issue between the parties involved.

The Committee commented that there had been a long gap since a report on Sports and Physical Activity had been received and looked forward to having another report in due course. Officers were thanked for the report and attending the meeting.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted.

10. CAMDEN LIBRARIES UPDATE REPORT

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Recreation.

In response to questions, the Head of Libraries, Fiona Tarn and Director of Recreation Oliver Jones made the following points:

- With regards to the Council developing links with universities, partnership links between the Council and Universities were already in place, however stronger links continued to be developed for example officers had been in

contact with University College London (UCL), as University students would be working as volunteers in Council libraries over the summer.

- Partners in the Knowledge Quarter were also keen to collaborate with the Council, to work together and share expertise.
- Once the Council received the full report from its recent Peer review it would be looking at how it could collaborate with Universities and the Knowledge Quarter to have a workshop arrangement to take the library service forward into the future.
- The Council was also the first London Borough to be part of the British Library's Living Knowledge Network. It would have live streaming events to complement British Library exhibitions in Council library spaces.
- Officers had also been in contact with the Wellcome Trust to discuss how they managed their space.
- Libraries were not likely to change that much in the future. The curativeness of information was still important, artificial intelligence would still be important as well as the space. Having somebody to talk to, understanding how to navigate and find things.
- The Council was also looking to maximise flexibility in its libraries to use the core space for things such as heritage and culture.
- Providing staff training and connecting them with broader experiences will assist the team in developing the service into the future.
- The Council was committed to maintaining a library service in the Highgate area whatever happens regarding refurbishment works, including keeping volunteers involved.
- Cool spaces were promoted corporately, disentangling people who were attending the library because of warm spaces or air conditioning from other users was a challenge as what people were doing was not monitored in libraries.
- There were leg counters in the libraries so the Council did have an idea of the number of people that were in the library. The data was however not necessarily representative of those using the spaces.
- Library of things was available in 2 libraries. Kentish Town and Kilburn which seemed to be used more and doing really well in terms of the demand.
- The Council would be joining the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) as a member. which would provide CILIP membership to two members of the Council's library team,
- CILIP would also be doing a skills audit of the staff, once the skills gaps of staff were identified a plan would be put in place to address the skills gap and develop staff on from that.
- The Council had also invested in Opening the book training which would build the skills of the staff.
- The Council had just developed a welcome guide which would also be printed in other community languages.
- Revenue reserves had also been allocated to each library in the borough to increase the book fund. The book fund would be used to do outreach work and would reflect what was required in the local community.

The Cabinet Member for Young People and Culture commenting on the need for Camden Libraries to have an on-line representation informed the Committee that those conversations were taking place. The Cabinet Member also informed the Committee that she had toured all the libraries in the borough and was impressed with how resolute and committed staff were and was interested to hear about plans for the library service including reflecting the communities they were in and all the varied service provided. The Cabinet Member informed the Committee that she was looking to see how the library service could expand on the varied opportunities available.

Officers were thanked for the report and attending the meeting.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted.

11. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 4 END OF YEAR 2022/23

Consideration was given to the report of the Executive Directors of Supporting People, Supporting Communities and Corporate Services.

Officers agreed to provide an explanation relating to the Cost of Living Dashboard Q4 2022/23 table on page 115 of the agenda, as the top line relating to “Households with a cash shortfall – those households either at risk or are already in financial crisis where their income is not likely to meet their essential expenditure each month”, the March 2023 figure was shown as 3,769, which a Committee member queried as this was noticeably lower than the trend and the opposite direction to the other indicators.

ACTION: Director of Recreation

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted.

12. WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to the report of the Executive Director Supporting Communities.

Members discussed the work programme and suggested that items for the September meeting should include:

- Lithium powered vehicles – due to the recent safety concerns
- Annual report of the Cabinet Member for a Sustainable Camden

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- Tree Strategy Update (moved from the November meeting)
- Culture (the programme and what the Council's strategy is – Arts Council cuts, preserving theatres)

Resolved:

That the report be noted

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

There was none.

The meeting ended at 9.10 pm.

CHAIR

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MINUTES END