

London Borough of Waltham Forest

Communities Scrutiny Committee

Mini-Themed Review 2023-24

Combatting Serious Violence in Waltham Forest

Chair of Committee: Cllr Yusuf Patel

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Public access Open

1. Chair's Introduction

As Chair of Communities Scrutiny, I am pleased to present the findings and recommendations of our mini-themed review on serious violence in Waltham Forest. The importance of this review was necessitated by the troubling rise in violent incidents, particularly knife crime, which has raised significant concerns among our residents.

This review aimed to understand the root causes of this rise in violence and through engaging a diverse group of stakeholders including young people, and voluntary and community organisations, we explored innovative and effective strategies to prevent it.

Our evidence sessions provided invaluable insights and a broad spectrum of perspectives, diving into the challenges faced and potential solutions. We held a particularly powerful session at the Town Hall with young people from the borough, sharing their lived experiences and the importance of a holistic and collaborative approach to violence reduction. This session underscored the significant importance of involving young people and ensuring their unique voices, perspectives and innovative ideas are heard and acted upon.

We have taken the key discussion points from our sessions and put forward a set of recommendations which we hope will guide the councils work and have a profound impact to foster a safer Waltham Forest.

I would like to thank all committee members, young people, and officers for all their support and contributions to this review. Their insights and dedication in this process have been invaluable. I would like to also extend my heartfelt gratitude to all the external witnesses who kindly gave up their time to contribute to this review. Lastly, thank you to Cllr Khevyn Limbajee, Cabinet Member for Community Safety, for his leadership.

Cllr Yusuf Patel, Chair of Communities Scrutiny

2. Summary of recommendations

2.1. After consideration of the evidence gathered throughout this min-themed review, the Communities Scrutiny Committee recommend:

- Recommendation 1: The Council to explore more ward level youth-only spaces, which allow young people to feel safe and relaxed.
- Recommendation 2: Youth workers employed by the Council are Mental Health First Aid trained and proficient in Trauma Informed responses.
- Recommendation 3: The Council to explore offering gym memberships and other sports activities to young people with a reduced cost.
- Recommendation 4: The Council to work with food banks to support them in exploring ways to enable young people to access services easily.
- Recommendation 5: The council to facilitate training (and refresher courses) delivered to all MET police about trauma informed approaches and engagement, building up trust with young people and their families.
- Recommendation 6: YA/YIAG extend their training and refresher courses to all police officers and not just new employees.
- Recommendation 7: The Council to explore how to enhance the promotion of life-based lessons in primary and secondary schools. Such as, budgeting, tax, and bills.
- Recommendation 8: Community Safety Officers work with education colleagues when talks are being delivered in schools, to promote what's available for young people.
- Recommendation 9: Officers to develop support for parents who may fear negative repercussions if they ask for help, such as the Godwin Lawson Foundation.
- Recommendation 10: The Council to consider ways they can promote a sense of belonging and positive sense of self with young people who live in the borough, in partnership with schools and VCSE organisations.
- Recommendation 11: The Council to find out what schools are offering for young people and providing additional provisions, seeking to build on the existing offer.
- Recommendation 12: Council services champion co-design and collaboration with young people from the early stages when introducing new policies and strategies.
- Recommendation 13: When work has been done with young people, the Council ensures they are kept informed about the result of their input.

- Recommendation 14: The Council to research into the effects of domestic violence as a driver of serious violence, promoting the results.
- Recommendation 15: The Council to circulate information about safe spaces and initiatives in libraries and cafes as well as digitally.

3. Background

- 3.1. The London borough of Waltham Forest (LBWF) has seen a sharp increase in serious violence in recent months, notably knife crime with injury. Residents have expressed concerns about this increase and want to know what the Council is doing to tackle this; with a specific interest in how LBWF is holding the Metropolitan Police to account as well as providing support for residents. Fear of crime and violence has consistently been the top concern of those who live in the borough in five of the last seven Resident Impact Surveys (RIS), with over 40% of residents citing it as a key concern since 2018. There are notable differences across wards, with hotspots areas where residents do not feel safe, based on fear of crime, number of recorded offences and anti-social behaviour (ASB) incidents. In July 2022 the Communities Scrutiny Committee agreed to look at Serious Violence in the borough.
- 3.2. The recommendations made in this mini-themed review aim to be considered in conjunction with the refreshed Violence Reduction Partnership and the findings from the Citizens Assembly on the future of neighbourhood policing. They can also be considered within the new corporate framework, Mission Waltham Forest, which has a holistic approach to create stronger communities and aims to utilise the power of the community along with increased collaboration with partners. The aim of this mini-themed review was to understand the different needs of different communities within the borough.

4. Methodology

- 4.1. The Committee used meetings from July 2023 to December 2023 to look at the context, speak to young people, Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise (VCSE) representatives, and the proposed new strategy. In lieu of a report going to the Committee in October, two evidence sessions were held. Prior to the sessions, members agreed on questions, and these were sent out to attendee's ahead of time.
- 4.2. An evidence session for adults was held online which aimed to hear from charities, organisations, and experts. A broad range of organizations were invited to the session; however, turnout was low. The Young Advisors (YA) and Youth Independent Advisory Group (YIAG) led in-person evidence sessions hear directly from young people who can provide valuable insight based upon their lived-experience and/or suggest ways to Council can better communicate, engage, and support with its younger residents.

- 4.3. Members sought to assess the existing strategy Waltham Forest Council employs to prevent and tackle serious violence and consider recommendations to improve the Violence Reduction Partnership (VRP) and Violence Reduction Strategy (VRS) which are due for a refresh in 2024.

20th July 2021

The Scrutiny Policy Assistant presented the scoping report on Serious Violence in Waltham Forest. Describing the context, presenting the existing data, and rationale for conducting a mini-themed review. This formed the basis for discussion into this topic and members agreed they wanted to uncover reasons behind the increase of youth knife crime in the borough and explore innovative ways to tackle and prevent this.

Following this, officers presented a report which introduced Serious Violence. This report highlighted how over the last 12 months Waltham Forest has seen a significant increase in knife crime with injury, particularly in under 18's. The Committee were informed of key definitions so they could understand the different forms and extremities of violence. Members were told the recorded offences in Waltham Forest in the 12 months ending May 2023 for varying types of violence with these figures compared with the nearest neighbors.² Members were then informed of the challenges of reinvigorating the strategy along with the progress made thus far.

16th November 2023 – Online evidence session – Adults

The online session was aimed at understanding the challenges being faced by different communities in the borough. The session was an hour-long virtual meeting and sought to bring together an array of different groups and individuals. Ahead of the evidence session members agreed on a list of topics and/or themes which would be discussed. These were sent to attendee's ahead of time so they could turn up prepared with relevant information.

Unfortunately, attendance was much lower than expected. There was representation from Break Tha Cycle and the Chair of Waltham Forest Council of Mosques however, members note this is not representative of the

¹ <https://democracy.walthamforest.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=723&MId=5702&Ver=4>

² Other similar London Boroughs' are used as a comparator group in much of our analysis of data on crime and community safety. This group is identified through the CIPFA 'Nearest Neighbours' model, which takes account of a range of demographic and socio-economic factors. There are 15 other boroughs in the group: Barking & Dagenham, Brent, Croydon, Ealing, Enfield, Greenwich, Haringey, Hillingdon, Hounslow, Lewisham, Merton, Newham, Redbridge, Southwark and Sutton.

borough. More work needs to be done engaging with different communities, this should hopefully arise during the Citizens Assembly.

The Committee heard from attendees about the challenges they face when experiencing serious violence in the borough. Members were keen to understand best practise and any gaps in support. A common theme throughout the session was the importance of cross collaboration with other organisations, which can be an effective way to continue reaching out to residents when funding is decreasing. Attendees also found it was hard to gain enough momentum with numbers to secure future funding, highlighting how it takes a while for word to get around about a youth hub (for example). They become popular but do not have the funding to carry on. A loss of youth spaces leads to an increase in youth violence.

Members also heard about the importance of engaging with parents and building trust with the young people of the borough. Members also heard how young people react with services when they respect adults, especially if they have lived experience. The evidence session solidified the need for a holistic approach to ending serious violence.

28th November 2023 – Young Peoples Evidence Session

The Young People's Evidence Session was held in-person, in Walthamstow Town Hall. This session was designed and ran by members of the YIAG with support from officers. This was in response to feedback from the last themed review where the YIAG took part in the session, they wanted more autonomy and responsibility. Members agreed to allow the YIAG to lead and they would have an opportunity to ask any unanswered questions during the session.

The session was an hour and a half and was a mixture of ice breaker activities and discussions. It was attended by a representative from Project Zero³, young people from Home Cooked (Haringey based charity), and some younger members of the YIAG. Questions were suggested by members ahead of the meeting and then tweaked by members of YA/YIAG. They were then circulated with those who were interested in attending the evidence session this enabled individuals to state if they were comfortable with the questions and to think about what they would like to say ahead of time.

Attendees raised the lack of youth spaces within the borough and how an increase in youth spaces would help young people to create social networks and be easily signposted towards help available. The young people also spoke about the lack of opportunities within the borough and would welcome

³ <https://projectzerowf.co.uk/>

mentoring opportunities. They also raised the importance of mental health support and police officers receiving trauma informed training.

Following the evidence sessions, findings were anonymised and disseminated to members to inform their recommendations.

12th December 2023⁴

Members looked at a report on Serious Violence Duty - reinvigorate the partnership and plan. This was an opportunity for the committee to hear the current plans of the Council to reduce violence in the borough by utilising the Waltham Forest Community Safety Partnership (SafetyNet). Members heard about figures for serious violence in the borough over the last 12 months and highlighted engagement with residents which took place over 6 months.

The Committee explored different methods the Council could employ to reduce violence in the borough and increase confidence in the police. Members discussed the possibility of using existing resources such as youth hubs. Waltham Forest's nearest neighbours were looked at to see how the borough fared when compared to similar boroughs. Finally, members sought to understand why there wasn't more engagement in schools taking place. Following this discussion, members discussed and agreed the recommendations they would like to make based on the evidence gathered during this mini-themed review.

5. Key Findings

5.1. The Committee recommends:

- The Council to explore more ward level youth-only spaces, which allow young people to feel safe and relaxed.
- The Council to explore offering gym memberships and other sports activities to young people with a reduced cost.
- The Council to circulate information about safe spaces and initiatives in libraries and cafes as well as digitally.

5.1.1. During the evidence sessions young people expressed their desire for more youth spaces in the borough, they noted how these could help create a 'home away from home' and stability with people with similar lived experiences to themselves. By creating more youth spaces, the Council could easily signpost to further

⁴ <https://democracy.walthamforest.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=723&MId=5704&Ver=4>

support available and reach a larger range of residents. If youth spaces could also be used for sporting activities, young people stated there was a financial barrier to accessing sports facilities. Youth spaces could have a wide array of benefits for the young people of Waltham Forest, providing a sense of belonging and safety, which could ultimately reduce violence in the borough.

5.2. The Committee recommends:

- Youth workers employed by the Council are Mental Health First Aid trained and proficient in Trauma Informed responses.
- The council to facilitate training (and refresher courses) delivered to all MET police about trauma informed approaches and engagement, building up trust with young people and their families.
- YA/YIAG extend their training and refresher courses to all police officers and not just new employees.
- The Council to explore how to enhance the promotion of life-based lessons in primary and secondary schools. Such as, budgeting, tax, and bills.
- Officers to develop support for parents who may fear negative repercussions if they ask for help, such as the Godwin Lawson Foundation.
- The Council to research into the effects of domestic violence as a driver of serious violence, promoting the results.

5.2.1. Mental health awareness and support underpinned most discussions throughout this mini-themed review. By increasing awareness amongst employees of the Council and young people all parties will be better equipped to recognise those who need to support before they potentially turn to serious violence. By introducing refresher courses for trauma informed training, overtime trust should build up between young residents and police. Mental health can be a factor determining violence, if the borough works towards increasing support and awareness, both adults and peers will be able to recognise and support those in need. It's imperative that young people have access to adults they can trust and be surrounded by those who understand their needs.

The Committee recommends:

- The Council to work with food banks to support them in exploring ways to enable young people to access services easily.
- Community Safety Officers work with education colleagues when talks are being delivered in schools, to promote what's available for young people.
- The Council to consider ways they can promote a sense of belonging and positive sense of self with young people who live in the borough, in partnership with schools and VCSE organisations.
- The Council to find out what schools are offering for young people and providing additional provisions, seeking to build on the existing offer.

5.2.2. These recommendations promote the importance of a holistic approach to reducing serious violence in the borough. By considering every aspect of a young person's life the Council can seek to break down barriers they may face which if left ignored could lead to increased instances of serious violence. The young peoples evidence session demonstrated people wanted to feel a sense of belonging and this could be found in places where different members of the community need to access (such as a food bank). The evidence given suggests that if young people feel supported in the community, they are less likely to feel isolated and become at-risk of serious violence.

5.3. The Committee recommends:

- Council services champion co-design and collaboration with young people from the early stages when introducing new policies and strategies.
- When work has been done with young people, the Council ensures they are kept informed about the result of their input.
- Members to revisit the recommendations in a year time to monitor progress.

5.3.1. These recommendations seek to increase engagement with young people in the borough. Having young people's input in prospective plans made by the Council will enable them to feel invested in the future and trust that there are policies in place to ensure they have the best support in life. The final recommendation ensures the Committee can monitor the progress of these findings and encourage officers to consider ways to measure the success of these findings.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1. This mini-themed review has produced a wide array of recommendations from a targeted investigation into what is driving the rise in serious violence and ways to empower residents to feel safe. Whilst it was limited both due to time and engagement it has uncovered common threads between different groups and ideas which may enable residents to feel safe from incidents of serious violence.
- 6.2. The two evidence sessions were vital in providing members with different perspectives and challenging their expectations. Members are keen to consider different engagement methods going forward to ensure more groups can attend.
- 6.3. The Communities Scrutiny Committee hope this report and recommendations can be considered more broadly alongside the findings from the Citizens Assembly and the refreshed Violence Reduction Partnership. If the Council commits to understanding reasons behind increased serious violence and seeks to implement a borough wide approach, progress can be made. Work is needed to create stronger relationships between the Council, VCSE's, young people, faith leaders and health services to combat the rise of serious violence and help mitigate potential drivers. Members will revisit the findings of this mini-themed review in a years' time to establish the progress against the recommendations.