

Overview & Scrutiny

Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission

Site Visit to Young Hackney Concorde, 22nd January 2019

Commission Members in attendance:

Cllr Sharon Patrick (Chair); Cllr Sade Etti (Vice Chair);

Introduction

The Commission's review is focused on the response of the Council's Community Safety Partnership to an increase in serious violence. Its review is set within the context of the services, functions and issues that the Commission oversees in terms of Scrutiny.

Another Scrutiny Commission leads on exploring topics and issues concerning children and young people specifically. In reflection of this – and while acknowledging the crucial role of a range of services for young people in this area – the Commission's review is not focused on services and support for young people.

This said, the Commission wished to gain some indicative level insight into the impact that the increase in violence and reporting of it had had on a youth organisation in the borough.

The Commission carried out a site visit to the Concorde Club on the 22nd January. The Hackney Marsh Partnership manages the Concorde (and Stoke Newington Youth Hub) on behalf of Young Hackney. Members spoke to the lead officer for the Partnership, two youth workers, and two youth leaders.

Members were aware from involvement with the Hackney Marsh Partnership that the Concorde had been impacted by some violent incidents occurring in the surrounding area.

Discussions explored the impact that these incidents had had on staff and the club itself, how staff were being supported, and views towards policing in the area.

Themes emerging from discussions with staff

Staff awareness of a small number of serious incidents in area.

Staff were aware of two incidents in the last year where shots had been fired on the Kingsmead Estate. A serious knife crime offence had been carried out in the lead up to Christmas.

Recent court cases had also seen a number of young adults from the estate being sentenced for violent offences. This had included a young person who had been a member of the club.

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Emotional impact on staff of intensive, high stakes work; need for greater support

There were clear accounts of the intensive work of staff with members, and of the close and long lasting relationships which they built with young people.

We heard from the lead officer for the Partnership that staff went above and beyond in their work. The centre was largely made up of long serving staff. One youth worker spoke of the contact and engagement she had with young people who no longer attended the Concorde but were living in challenging situations.

A Member said she would be having a discussion with a young person who she understood had produced a video in which they mocked / 'disrespected' a gang in a neighbouring area, and was planning to publish this online before an upcoming foreign trip. She would work to impress on the young person the potential dangers they could cause to others in their local area.

Given the personal investment which staff made in young people, there was significant distress when the few went on to make wrong decisions. Recent court cases had ended with the sentencing of a number of young adults from the estate, including one who had attended the Concorde when they were younger. The young person had been a success story for the club, progressing from living in a challenging environment to gaining skilled employment. That the young person had then gone on to make the wrong decision had brought real sadness to those who had worked with them and supported them.

Linked with this case and others, more than one member of staff felt that there was a need for greater wellbeing support. The Hackney Marsh Partnership had arranged one of the staff members we spoke to with a limited number of counselling sessions, as she had requested. This followed her witnessing and acting as a first responder to a serious violence incident in another area of the borough. However, she felt that she could have benefitted from more extensive counselling. As a worker in a non-statutory service, she didn't get the clinical supervision which would be provided in statutory settings.

Another member of staff also spoke about the intensity of youth work; largely caused by the commitment which workers put into the role. Her partner – also a youth worker – had needed to reduce the number of hours he worked. She also felt that greater counselling provision would be helpful for many staff.

Members heard from the lead officer for the Hackney Marsh Partnership that he was in discussions with Young Hackney around the possibility of greater counselling provision for staff.

Parents and young people's concerns around safety (exacerbated by less police) and negative influences, and response by Club

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Staff said there were perceptions among both members and parents around reduced safety. This was in relation to the small number of incidents occurring in the vicinity of the club, those in the borough and London generally, and the nature of media reporting on these. One staff member reported feeling that youth work was increasingly unsafe.

Reductions in police in the area made this issue worse. Police were previously visible on the estate and surrounding area, and used to actively engage with the club (playing five a side with members and staff). This was not the case anymore.

These concerns had impacted on attendance levels of older young people to the club. More parents were reluctant to let their children travel there, particularly from outside the immediate local area.

One staff member noted how the exaggeration of the scale of issues in both the local area and more widely, were compounding fears and concerns. The number of incidents were actually very low. There was known to be a gang on the estate, but the offences they had committed had generally been low level crimes.

Staff were also working hard to challenge a view which some parents did have, that there were gang-related issues inside the club and a risk of negative influences.

This included work to communicate the wide range of positive activities which young people at the club were involved in, for example a recent residential trip to Gambia. The work of the club was communicated in the community including through presentations to Resident Associations.

Supporting young people through recent events

Young people had been effected by recent court cases affecting people they knew had lived in the local area. They were aware of these. Staff were discussing with young people their feelings towards what had happened. The home environment which the club sought to create – including through the providing of cooked meals – helped enable honest and open discussions.

Importance of a place in which to feel free

A worker spoke of the need young people and children felt to hold themselves in particular ways when out in the public realm.

This need was real – they needed to be careful about how they conducted themselves, including how they looked at others. She had needed to speak to some young people around this as their body language could put them at risk.

This made the need for a safe space like the Concorde – where young people could express themselves freely - so vital.

Staff would see a marked relaxation and change in some members upon their entry to the club.

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Themes emerging from discussions with young people

The Club - and the staff - were crucial

Both young people said the Concorde provided an environment in which people felt safe and comfortable. Staff at the club were a huge source of support and advice, for them and for others. Staff spoke to them respectfully and treated them as individuals.

Young people needed to be mindful when moving around, but felt safe on the estate

Both said young males needed to be careful and mindful in moving around; both were concerned that cases of mistaken identity could impact on them or family members. Both felt safe on the estate they lived on. One said while a gang was present, that Members had respect for their families.

Drivers for entry into harmful behaviour – promise of wealth, and peer pressure

The young people knew of a small number of others who had become involved in crime. These young people had usually been attracted to this by the (real or imagined) prospect of material goods.

Peer pressure was another. Young people wanted to belong within groups of others.

Parenting very important, but parents can only do so much

The young people both spoke about how their parents had influenced them. They had given them an understanding of the need to live a legitimate life, and the strength to resist peer pressure to do otherwise.

However, they did not see different parenting styles as the explanation for why some others had entered into harmful behaviour. Those they know who had done so had upbringings similar to theirs.

Residential trips vital

Residential trips offered young people to see other surroundings, some of whom would otherwise only see their estate and immediate area. Joint visits with youth clubs in other areas of the borough helped build relationships with people who might before be automatically seen as rivals / not friends. They enabled creativity and improved independent thinking.