

Weavers Community Action Group
Sent via email

Executive Mayor's Office

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Dear Weavers Community Action Group,

Thank you for coming to meet with me on Friday 23rd November. Your presentation was a very compelling insight into the difficulties faced by residents in some of our highest crime wards.

I appreciate the time and effort that you are making to improve the situation and your offer to work with us on these issues.

We have major concerns about drug dealing, drug use and the impact of the associated crime and ASB on the borough. It came up on the doorstep at the local elections earlier this year. This is why when I was elected for my first full term as Mayor in May 2018, I made it clear that tackling crime and ASB was to be a top priority for my administration. The Council's Strategic Plan reflects this commitment and prioritises making people feel safer in their neighbourhoods and tackling ASB.

Due to the complexity of the challenge, interventions to tackle the multiple causes and effects of crime and ASB will always require close partnership working across public agencies, especially between the police, local authority and probation service. Whilst we each have different statutory responsibilities and powers we have a very constructive local Community Safety Partnership, which recognises the significance of the issues identified in your presentation and has made tackling drugs, alcohol and the associated ASB one of its four main areas of focus.

The current financial pressures facing the Council and its partners are clearly creating significant budget challenges, we have lost 64% of our core funding from Central Government since 2010. We are not alone in this challenge. After 10 years of sustained crime reduction in London we are in a new landscape seeing some forms of violent crime and ASB increasing. Over 200 police officers have been lost from our streets. Cutting crime and Anti-Social Behaviour will not get easier.

We take the safety of our residents extremely seriously and are absolutely steadfast in taking decisive action against the drugs market and its related crime and ASB. This will be an ongoing fight, but we have achieved some notable successes over the course of 2018, including:

- In addition to the Tower Hamlets Homes police, I have invested further in additional policing to create a Partnership Task Force (PTF). Currently comprising of 1 Sergeant and 10 Police Constables who are tasked on a weekly basis by the Council to crack down on drugs and violent crime in the borough. This includes intelligence-led action against cars that have been identified as linked to drug dealing. When at full complement the PTF will comprise of 4 Sergeants and 20 Police Constables. The PTF has robust targets around tackling drug supply and reducing violence. Measures include the number of drug supply and possession arrests, stop and search for drugs and weapons, seizures of drugs and knives, and detections for these offences.
- In 2017 it was clear that business as usual policing wasn't having the desired impact on the drugs issue. We launched Operation Continuum with our police partners to target the local drugs market and its associated crime and ASB. We are using the intelligence from these operations to better understand how the markets work. This operation has drawn together policing and Council resources in a coordinated way and to date has resulted in 191 arrests for drugs offences, with 31 men sentenced to a combined total of more than 100 years prison time. In addition large quantities of Class A drugs and Cannabis have been taken off the street and 33 offensive weapons recovered and a number of individuals compelled into treatment.
- Addressing the challenge of rising street homelessness by providing a range of support services to safeguard the wellbeing of this vulnerable group - there were 475 identified rough sleepers in 2017/18 compared to 331 in 2012/13. The Council continues to fund a Street Outreach Response Team that is proactive in identifying rough sleepers and assessing their needs (this service supported 338 clients into accommodation in 2016/17), and has implemented the 'No First Night Out' initiative to provide accommodation for single people who may resort to sleeping on the street. The local NHS commissions a 'Pathway Homeless Team' based in the Royal London Hospital that works with homeless patients to address their underlying needs, and there is a specialist General Practice surgery for the street homeless, Health E1, which is managed by the East London Foundation Trust - the borough's mental health services provider.
- Sustaining investment of £8 million in our award winning drugs and alcohol services to ensure that those who need treatment receive it.

Despite these achievements, there is more to do. I recognise the frustration of residents who feel that action has not always been swift enough. This is why I have made it clear that the Council must enhance the pace and delivery of its activities in this arena. I am pleased to report a number of changes are currently underway to enable further improvements:

- Forming a Mayoral Crime & ASB Board that will bring together services from across the Council that impact on drugs, crime and ASB. This will increase the accountability of those responsible for managing the Council's response and allow the Cabinet to have a relentless focus on performance;
- I mentioned in the meeting that there are some further changes to overhaul services to bring community safety and other relevant services of the council under a single department with a new service delivery model.

- I and my police partners have met with the chief executive of InLink and we are working with them to address the issues with the free call facility. I thank you for your support with this matter.
- The council will continue to use all its powers and resources to support our police partners and Operation Continuum, utilising 'Achilles Heel' tactics which involve exploiting all available legislation to disrupt and deter criminal behaviour. For example, using Housing Act legislation and ASB Crime & Policing Act Legislation (such as civil injunctions, premises closure notices and Criminal Behaviour Orders) to address the most high risk and entrenched offending.
- The Cabinet also recently agreed to a new Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy, which sets out a range of actions over the next 5 years to further improve both the prevention of homelessness and the response of services to homeless households and vulnerable people. This will ensure a more holistic offer with our partners
- Our CCTV network assists with x3 arrests a day and we will continue to invest in this.

I would like to propose a further meeting in the New Year with police partners and my officers to review progress on a number of areas.

Yours Sincerely,



Mayor John Biggs
Executive Mayor of Tower Hamlets