

VIOLENCE REDUCTION

Good Practice Case Studies

LB Hammersmith & Fulham
Weapons Sweeps

Drawing on the experience and expertise of officers within the borough's Neighbourhood Wardens Service and Parks Police, all staff within the team have undergone specialist training in effective search techniques - and their efforts are key to taking dangerous weapons off the streets, building intelligence, addressing immediate threats and reassuring communities.



Situation

Joint borough-wide weapon sweeps with the police and residents are helping to keep our communities safe. By conducting weapons sweeps with its partners, the council aims to address the immediate threat knives pose to community safety and, by extension, reassure residents. The council's weapons sweeps have successfully uncovered a number of knives and live ammunition.

Task

The council has been able to draw on the experience and expertise of two retired Metropolitan Police officers, who now lead the council's Parks Police and Neighbourhood Wardens Service respectively. These individuals have completed the Police Search Advisor (PoSA) training, so led the weapons sweep training sessions for their services. The training highlighted the key principles of effective search technique: effective planning, legal bases for searches, operation management, debriefing and recording search information. All council officers within the Neighbourhood Wardens Service and Parks Police completed this training.

Aside from teaching practical search techniques, the weapons sweep training provided the Neighbourhood Wardens and Parks Police officers with behavioural guidelines to inform their searches in the community; namely, being emotionally aware, taking ownership, working collaboratively, remaining open-minded and analysing critically. These behaviours link in with three key H&F Council values: 'Creating a compassionate council', 'Building shared prosperity' and 'Doing things with residents, not to them'. In the context of weapon sweeps, the

Partners involved

LB Hammersmith & Fulham

Neighbourhood Wardens

Parks Police

Police Safer Neighbourhood Teams

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council recognises residents are key stakeholders with a deep understanding of their local area and their unique ability to observe suspicious activity in it. The officers involved in the weapons sweeps are uniformed and use liveried vehicles and the Neighbourhood Wardens vehicles have overt CCTV attached. The officer's highly visible presence encouraged resident engagement and, in turn, led to greater resident trust.

Weapons sweeps have taken place in the borough for over a decade. Stephen Gibbs, Neighbourhood Warden Service Manager, says that the past year's sweeps were particularly effective due to 'excellent communication between partners' and 'a collaborative approach'. For example, the council worked jointly with the Safer Neighbourhood Teams during the Operation Sceptre National Week of Action (9-15 November 2020). Three weapons sweeps were conducted during this period, bringing the council and police teams together to share their expertise and work towards a common goal. The Neighbourhood Wardens and Parks Police have also engaged in joint patrols with the police in Operation Autumn Nights (focused on the Halloween and Bonfire Night period).

Action

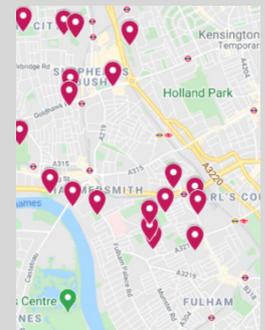
In 2020, 18 weapons sweeps were conducted. The council's evidence suggests sweeps are most likely to return positive results when carried out during school breaks, such as half term. As the map (right) shows weapons sweeps have taken place across the borough

Results

Patrols can generate 'negative outcomes' where no weapons are found, or 'positive outcomes' where weapons are found. Several sweeps have yielded excellent material results in addition to their inherent benefit and reassurance to the community. Five noteworthy weapons sweeps are outlined below:

1. Weapons sweeps were conducted in and around the carnival footprint in the lead-up to Notting Hill Carnival (even though the event was cancelled, the council and partners were concerned about UME's going ahead) and included detailed sweeps of nearby parks and large housing estates. 100 live shotgun cartridges contained in a leather bag were found by the Parks Police on a housing estate. The cartridges were referred to the police for recovery.
2. In August, Parks Police recovered a large knife from a park during a weapons sweep.
3. In November, Neighbourhood Wardens, working with the police, discovered a male sleeping rough in the bin room of a housing estate. Checking the individual against the Police National Computer (PNC), it was established he was wanted on 'recall to prison'. The individual was subsequently arrested.

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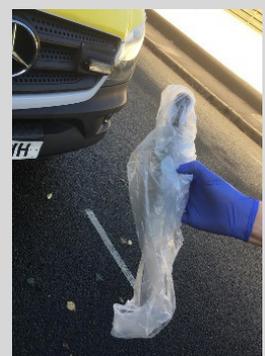
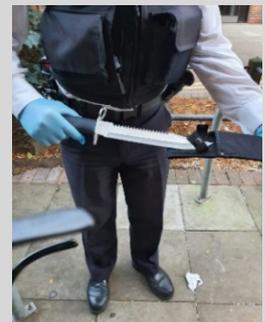


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4. In November, during a joint weapon sweep of a large housing estate, nine young people were seen making off from a housing block. When Wardens and police searched the area, two 'Rambo' style knives were found hidden in the undergrowth.
5. In November, following a stabbing incident in Fulham two days earlier, a joint weapons sweep was undertaken by the Neighbourhood Wardens and police. During the search, two members of the public made the team aware of a large carving knife hidden or discarded underneath a car. Officers visited the scene and the knife was recovered. While in the area, two further members of the public came forward stated they had witnessed the stabbing incident. Their details were given to the investigating team. This demonstrates the broader value of the weapons sweeps of reassurance to the community and intelligence gathering.



The future of weapons sweeps in Hammersmith & Fulham

The council is undergoing the amalgamation of the Parks Police and Neighbourhood Wardens into a new 'Neighbourhood Enforcement Team' (NET) with a large number of additional officers recruited. Officers will be divided into north, central and south teams, with dedicated neighbourhood enforcement officers for every ward in the borough. The NET will be one of the largest local authority enforcement teams in the country, with officers on patrol nearly 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Officers will have a broad range of enforcement powers, and rigorous weapons sweep training will form a key component of the team's induction. This should boost the council's capacity to conduct thorough weapons sweeps and draw on each area team's local knowledge. The council is excited to deliver this service even more successfully than previously possible and boost safety in the borough, provide reassurance and high visibility to the community.

Unfortunately, due to Covid-19 restrictions it has not been possible for residents to participate in the weapons sweeps, but we hope residents will be an integral part of this action once restrictions are lifted. We firmly see the third sector, friends of parks organisations and community groups being heavily involved in the weapons sweeps and this will be facilitated by the work of the Neighbourhood Enforcement Team and Gangs, Violence and Exploitation Unit's close links with these organisations.

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Summary

The advantages of conducting thorough weapons sweeps are incontrovertible; any knife taken out of circulation and off the street helps to prevent injuries and, potentially deaths. Weapons recovered help build intelligence for the council and the police, can potentially lead to convictions by the police and, crucially, residents are reassured by seeing the sweeps take place. The council's weapons sweep programme is an excellent example of the benefits of productive partnership working and patrols have been well received by all involved.

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This is one of a series of case studies submitted by London boroughs and collated by London Councils to share experience and learning across the capital. Publication date: May 2021