

Merton Council

Overview and Scrutiny Commission

5 April 2016

Supplementary agenda

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Agenda Item 3

All minutes are draft until agreed at the next meeting of the committee/panel. To find out the date of the next meeting please check the calendar of events at your local library or online at www.merton.gov.uk/committee.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

23 MARCH 2016

(7.15 pm - 9.45 pm)

PRESENT: Councillor Peter Southgate (in the Chair),
Councillor Peter McCabe, Councillor Stan Anderson,
Councillor Hamish Badenoch, Councillor Brenda Fraser,
Councillor Suzanne Grocott, Councillor Jeff Hanna,
Councillor Abigail Jones, Councillor Oonagh Moulton and
Councillor Katy Neep

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor David Simpson CBE

John Dimmer (Head of Policy, Strategy and Partnership), John Hill (Head of Public Protection and Development, ENVR), Jeanette Chacksfield and Amanda Woodhall (ASB Officers), Khadiru Mahdi and Sarah Hannigan (MVSC), Julia Regan (Head of Democracy Services), Superintendent Steve Wallace, Chief Inspector Phil Palmer and Chief Superintendent Stuart Macleod (Borough Commander)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from co-opted members Geoffrey Newman and Colin Powell.

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

None.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

Agreed as an accurate record of the meeting. No matters arising.

4 CRIME AND POLICING IN MERTON (Agenda Item 4)

The Borough Commander, Chief Superintendent Stuart Macleod, introduced his deputy, Superintendent Steve Wallace, and Chief Inspector Phil Palmer who has lead responsibility for operations. In introducing the performance information data for Merton and its statistical neighbours the Borough Commander said that Merton is ahead of target on the MOPAC7 crime figures and that, of its neighbours, only Croydon had achieved greater reduction in crime. Merton continues to be a low crime borough.

In response to detailed questions about the crime figures he said that a number of factors had contributed to the reduction in robbery, including policing practices, success in detection and conviction plus CCTV coverage and work with mobile

phone companies to make it harder to steal and re-sell phones. Rates for violence with injury have gone up across London, primarily due to changes in recording practices rather than any change in incidence. Domestic abuse is still under-reported so an increase in numbers is a positive step. Gun crime remains low in Merton compared to the rest of London but there is no room for complacency so lots of work is being done locally to address gun and knife crime. Child sexual abuse and counter terrorism work are likely to remain priorities for the Met following the mayoral elections.

The Borough Commander said that the model of policing was broadly unchanged since the last time he had reported to the Commission. There had been substantial savings made though these were lower than initially anticipated. The impact locally had included the loss of a senior police manager (Chief Inspector) as for other boroughs, small decline in the number of PCSOs and some outsourcing of back office services such as finance and HR. In response to questions he said that he was committed to ensuring that there was dedicated ward coverage by one PC and one PCSO per ward and that there were no immediate plans to sell police buildings in Merton.

The Borough Commander and his colleagues provided responses to each of the questions raised by Commission members, as set out in the agenda report:

Q1 – has the Borough Commander given any thought to how the government’s announcement on greater collaboration between the emergency services might be taken forward locally?

Response – there is already a strong working relationship locally between the police, fire and ambulance services and some joint working is taking place, for example on smoke alarm and crime prevention advice on some estates as well as the work with councillors on visits to neighbourhoods to provide a one stop shop approach to crime and anti social behaviour. The Borough Commander anticipates sharing of emergency response (999) control rooms in the future, but this will be a corporate initiative rather than a local one.

Q2 – has the reduction in the use of stop and search powers impacted on knife crime?

Response – there has been some impact but overall Merton remains a safe borough with small numbers of knife crime. Although the number of stop and searches has reduced, the proportion of these that have resulted in police action has increased and exceeds the target. The Borough Commander has continued to provide training to ensure stop and search is carried out appropriately and that his officers feel confident in using the stop and search powers.

Q3 – how does the level of policing and reduction in number of officers compare to other boroughs?

Response – Merton has the same policing model and is no different to other boroughs. At present, Merton has some extra officers (above establishment

probationary officers) and these are deployed on safer neighbourhood teams but will be moving on in due course.

Q4 – Is the dispersal of rough sleepers in Hyde Park likely to have an impact locally?

Response – there is no empirical evidence of an impact. The action taken in Hyde Park was primarily aimed at appropriately encouraging foreign nationals to leave the country. The number of rough sleepers has increased slightly in Merton but there is no indication that this is a displacement issue.

Q5 – How do the ward teams work together? In particular, how is consistency across the borough monitored and how is good practice shared between teams?

Response – collaboration and sharing good practice is at the heart of police work. This is discussed regularly at team meetings and feeds into deployment decisions and training.

Q6 – how much collaboration is there between the police, council and other agencies to deal with low level crimes? Will there be an impact on the council's planning enforcement team when these issues are not dealt with by the police?

Response – the police continues to respond to all reported crimes. There is strong partnership working with the council and other partners, such as local betting shops and off licences, on anti-social behaviour and this has led to a reduction in reports to the police.

Q7 – have cutbacks had an impact on 999 call response times?

Response – policing levels have not been reduced in Merton. Merton has exceeded the target for 999 calls by responding to 91% within 15 minutes compared to Met target of 90%.

RESOLVED: that the Commission thank the Borough Commander and his officers for their hard work and success in continuing to keep crime rates low in Merton.

5 ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR (Agenda Item 5)

John Hill, Head of Public Protection, introduced his colleagues – Jeanette Chacksfield and Amanda Woodhall, ASB Officers, who comprise the council's anti social behaviour team.

John Hill drew the Commission's attention to the broad definition of anti social behaviour (ASB) and the three category levels set out in the report. He said that the team receives a large number of complaints and that details of these by locality for the last three years are set out in appendix 4. He added that successful resolution requires close partnership working.

Councillor David Simpson, Conservative Spokesman on Crime, was invited by the Chair to join the discussion of this item.

Several members said that they had found the support of the team very helpful in working on anti social behaviour problems in their wards. The recent joint event for residents in Wimbledon involving the ASB team, police and fire service had been very positive and members looked forward to similar events in other parts of the borough.

John Hill and his colleagues provided additional information in response to questions:

- Information on ASB and the services available are provided in the main community languages and translation services are offered on request
- The annual residents survey shows that the level of concern with ASB is falling and the numbers who feel informed about the issue is increasing
- How ASB complaints are categorised will depend on the information provided by the informant. Issues that are more appropriately dealt with elsewhere will be referred on, for example drug related and other crimes will be reported to the police and amplified noise referred to the noise team
- Work is underway to encourage greater use of online and email to report ASB – phone line will continue to be available

Members commented on the impact that ASB has on residents lives and the difficulties sometimes experienced in getting these resolved. They advised that data in addition to the perception measures in the annual residents survey, for example the number of repeat complaints, would be helpful. John Hill undertook to review the questions in the annual residents survey.

RESOLVED : to receive a report in 12 months. This should include ASB trend data by ward broken down by category level.

6 GRANT FUNDING AND COMMISSIONING TO THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR (Agenda Item 6)

John Dimmer, Head of Policy Strategy and Partnerships, provided a brief introduction to the report and stressed that Merton has a thriving voluntary sector. He said that the internal audit review had found that key controls were in place and that where minor controls were not in place these have now been addressed. Data on the council's spend on the voluntary sector is collected by the policy, strategy and partnerships team and is published on the website. The level of funding has fallen year on year and it is expected that this trend will continue. Work is underway to identify future funding priorities and to set out what the voluntary sector can expect in terms of funding and support.

Khadiru Mahdi, Chief Executive of Merton Voluntary Service Council, welcomed the report and the actions taken to address the audit findings. He highlighted the reduction in funding to the voluntary sector and said that MVSC would be reviewing the impact that this had had on the sector. He stressed that investment by the council in the voluntary sector enabled not just the provision of services but also provided an

opportunity for voluntary sector organisations to access additional funding for the benefit of local services and local residents.

In response to a question about the audit suggestion to centralise commissioning, the Director of Community and Housing, Simon Williams, said that while there was no perfect model the current approach through the four service departments worked well. He will be working with the new Interim Head of Procurement to ensure that the approach is as rigorous as possible and that data is used to support the best outcomes.

In response to a request, John Dimmer undertook to provide a progress update on recommendation 26 of the audit review regarding the updating of the occupation of property by voluntary organisations policy. ACTION: Head of Policy, Strategy and Partnerships

RESOLVED: to thank the officers for a good report and to endorse and support the valuable work that is done by the voluntary sector.

7 UPDATE ON VOLUNTEERING AND COMMUNITY STRATEGY ACTION PLAN (Agenda Item 7)

Khadiru Mahdi, Chief Executive of Merton Voluntary Service Council, introduced the report and drew the Commission's attention to some of the achievements in the past year. Sarah Hannigan, Head of Volunteering, described the work that was being done to support the four disability day centres with the targeted recruitment and placement of dedicated volunteers; the launch of the VolunteerMerton web enabled platform, that will match local opportunities to volunteers; work with vulnerable young people and people with special needs, plus the Value You Scheme initiative that provides a certificate for 100 hours of voluntary service as well as discount cards given by local businesses that have subscribed to the scheme.

In response to questions, Sarah Hannigan and Khadiru Mahdi said that there had been work with groups of employees to encourage greater levels of volunteering, the Fayre and Square employability skills shop in Centre Court shopping centre to enable young people to acquire retail skills and a joint venture with the Merton Chamber of Commerce on a range of activities.

Members welcomed the report, commented on the comprehensive nature of the strategy and asked to be kept informed on progress with this important work.

8 PLANNING THE COMMISSION'S 2016/17 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 8)

Members commented on how well the workshop approach had worked at the meeting of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel meeting on 22 March and agreed to continue trying out new approaches to scrutiny when there are opportunities to do so.

Members of the financial monitoring task group said that its scrutiny of a small number of service areas in more depth had worked well and they would like to continue that approach next year.

RESOLVED: to re-establish the financial monitoring group for a further year at the meeting of the Commission on 7 July 2016.

Commission members agreed that identifying questions for the Borough Commander in advance of the meeting had worked well. It was agreed to take a similar approach to questioning the Leader and the Chief Executive at the Commission's meeting on 7 July. ACTION: Head of Democracy Services to add an item to the agenda for 5 April so that questions can be identified.

RESOLVED: to request an opportunity for pre-decision scrutiny of the proposals for public consultation on the budget, and specifically on the levy for adult social care. The Commission wishes to scrutinise the methodology and content of the questions to be asked. ACTION: Head of Democracy Services to find out what the consultation timetable is so that this item can be included in the Commission's work programme.

RESOLVED: to agree the work programme for the Commission's meetings on 5 April and 7 July as set out in the report.

9 FINANCIAL MONITORING TASK GROUP - NOTE OF MEETING ON 23 FEBRUARY 2016 (Agenda Item 9)

Minutes were noted.

Members of the financial monitoring task group reported that there had been general dissatisfaction with the level of detail in the report on estate management and this item will be revisited at a future meeting.

Commission members asked for an update on the position regarding the future of the New Homes Bonus following consultation by the government. ACTION: Director of Corporate Services

Committee: Overview and Scrutiny Commission

5 April 2016

Wards: ALL

Subject: Review of weightings used to determine departmental savings

Lead officer: Caroline Holland

Lead member: Councillor Mark Allison

Contact officer: Paul Dale

Reason for urgency

The Chair has approved the submission of this report as a matter of urgency. This is because it provides the Commission with the information required in order to respond to the referral on this issue from Council.

Recommendations:

1. That the Panel considers the weightings used to determine the distribution of departmental savings required to balance the budget and provides comments.
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1. Purpose of report and executive summary

- 1.1 This report sets out details relating to the weightings used to determine departmental savings targets and their appropriateness in relation to the previously approved "July principles" as requested by the Commission.

2. Details - Revenue

- 2.1 At the Council meeting on 18 November 2015 the following motion was resolved:-

"Noting the current budget process is already well under way with savings targets for the Medium Term Financial Strategy from 2016/17 to 2019/20 already scrutinised by each of the scrutiny panels in October and November this year with no changes agreed, this Council resolves to ask the Overview and Scrutiny Commission to review, in line with its usual practice of scrutinising all aspects of the budget proposals including deliverability and risk, the weightings used to determine departmental savings targets and their appropriateness in relation to the previously approved "July principles" which were voted for by all parties on the council with the exception of the Conservative Group - bearing in mind that the weightings have been agreed by Council in each of the past five years and that, unless the council tax is increased, reductions to savings in one area will mean more cuts are needed in other areas, particularly environmental services - in detail at a date after its next meeting on 24 November 2015, and thereafter as is usual on an annual basis as part of the usual scrutiny process regardless of which administration is in office."

- 2.2 The requirement to set a balanced revenue budget means that most, if not all, Councils require a mechanism to allocate and identify savings in order to reduce

their budget forecast in line with forecasts of resources, particularly in recent years which have seen significant reductions in grant funding from central government and limitations to the amount that council tax can be increased.

- 2.3 As part of its business planning approach and the development of the medium term financial strategy, Merton has similarly employed various mechanisms to set savings targets in order that it can set a balanced budget. In recent years this has included the ambition to balance the budget over the four year period of the MTFS.
- 2.4 Since 2010/11, with the exception of 2012/13, Merton has used departmental controllable budgets which have been weighted to allocate savings between departments in the ratio Corporate Services, Environment and Regeneration, Community and Housing, and Children, Schools and Families of 1.5 : 1.5 : 1.0 : 0.75 to reduce the impact on Adult Social Care, Children's Social Care and vulnerable groups. This is just one method of resource allocation.
- 2.5 Merton has used the following methodologies for calculating departmental savings targets in recent years:-

2007/08	The budget gap was shared between departments pro rata to their direct variable expenditure budget
2008/09	Variable budget – Departments were asked to produce savings @ 5%, 10% and 15% and Star Chambers were used to select savings across departments to meet balance the budget.
2009/10	Controllable budgets, again with 5%, 10% and 15% savings targets with Star Chambers reviewing and selecting savings to balance the budget.
2010/11	Controllable budgets, weighted in the ratio Corporate Services, Environment and Regeneration, Community and Housing, and Children, Schools and Families in the ratio 1.5 : 1.5 : 1.0 : 0.75
2011/12	Same as 2010/11
2012/13	Budget Pack: Savings for CSF, CH and E&R based on Service Reviews and CS based on major restructuring
2013/14	Same as 2010/11 plus 2% assumed fees and charges income
2014/15	Same as 2010/11 plus 2% assumed fees and charges income
2015/16	Same as 2010/11 plus 2% assumed fees and charges income incorporated into savings targets
2016/17	Same as 2010/11

- 2.6 In years prior to 2010/11, there was no specific method of protecting services to vulnerable groups built into the savings target allocation process, however there was regard taken of the deliverability and reputational risk, which led to some services for vulnerable groups being protected on an ad hoc basis from specific savings proposals on reaching the decision making process.

- 2.7 Since 2010/11 the method of calculating savings targets has specifically protected the two departments serving the most vulnerable groups. From the small sample of other London boroughs used in this report for comparison purposes it appears they do not adopt a similar approach to protecting vulnerable services. It should also be said that Merton is transparent in setting out the methodology used in calculating its savings targets in reports to Cabinet and the detail for future years, but it has been difficult to identify similar details for other London boroughs.
- 2.8 It has been the practice in the past few years that where departments do not identify savings/income to achieve their targets in any year then the balance is carried forward as a starting position in the following budget year.
- 2.9 The availability of fees and charges income to departments is relevant, particularly if there is no allowance made for it in setting the targets. However, the key measure is how departments are performing against their budgeted levels of income and this has been an issue in some areas in recent years.
- 2.10 The Council resolution from the 18 November 2015 meeting refers to reviewing the appropriateness of the weightings used in relation to the “July principles”.
- 2.11 The “July principles” are

Merton should continue to provide a certain level of essential services for residents. The order of priority for ‘must’ services should be:

- (i) Continue to provide everything that is statutory.
- (ii) Maintain services – within limits – to the vulnerable and elderly.

After meeting these obligations Merton should do all we can to help out residents who aspire. This means we should address the following as priorities in this order:

- (i) Maintain clean streets & keep council tax low.
- (ii) Keep Merton as a good place for young people to go to school and grow up.
- (iii) Be the best it can for the local environment.
- (iv) All the rest should be open for discussion.

2.12 The Effect of Changing Weightings

The following tables show the share of the latest budget gap on a number of different bases:-

1. Assuming all departments have equal weighting
2. On the weightings basis used since 2010/11 used in the ratio Corporate Services, Environment and Regeneration, Community and Housing, and Children, Schools and Families of 1.5 : 1.5 : 1.0 : 0.75
3. In the ratio Corporate Services, Environment and Regeneration, Community and Housing, and Children, Schools and Families of 1.5 : 1.5 : 1.0 : 1.0

4. In the ratio Corporate Services, Environment and Regeneration, Community and Housing, and Children, Schools and Families of 1.5 : 1.5 : 0.75 : 0.75

Based on the weightings and the 2015/16 controllable expenditure figures used for the 2016/17 budget, the share of savings for each department is set out in the following tables, using the latest MTFS gap of £ 3.5m:-

1. EQUAL

DEPARTMENTAL SAVINGS TARGETS	Controllable Expenditure	Weighting	Weighted	Share of Budget Gap
USING 2015/16 CONTROLLABLE BUDGETS	2015/16 £000	by dept. No.	Controllable £000	Gap £000
Corporate Services	20,197	1.00	20,197	559
Children, Schools and Families	28,273	1.00	28,273	782
Environmental Services	27,993	1.00	27,993	774
Community and Housing	48,959	1.00	48,959	1,354
Total	125,423		125,423	3,469
MTFS Gap 2019/20 (£000)			3,469	

2. CURRENT BASIS

DEPARTMENTAL SAVINGS TARGETS	Controllable Expenditure	Weighting	Weighted	Share of Budget Gap
USING 2015/16 CONTROLLABLE BUDGETS	2015/16 £000	by dept. No.	Controllable £000	Gap £000
Corporate Services	20,197	1.50	30,296	738
Children, Schools and Families	28,273	0.75	21,205	516
Environmental Services	27,993	1.50	41,990	1,023
Community and Housing	48,959	1.00	48,959	1,192
Total	125,423		142,450	3,469
MTFS Gap 2019/20 (£000)			3,469	

The reason that CSF receives greater protection than C&H is because the C&H budget includes services such as libraries and heritage and adult education which are not directly to vulnerable groups whereas CSF is entirely directed at children.

3. CSF & C+H 100%; E+R & CS 150%;

DEPARTMENTAL SAVINGS TARGETS	Controllable Expenditure	Weighting	Weighted	Share of Budget Gap
USING 2015/16 CONTROLLABLE BUDGETS	2015/16 £000	by dept. No.	Controllable £000	Gap £000
Corporate Services	20,197	1.50	30,296	703
Children, Schools and Families	28,273	1.00	28,273	656
Environmental Services	27,993	1.50	41,990	974
Community and Housing	48,959	1.00	48,959	1,136
Total	125,423		149,518	3,469
MTFS Gap 2019/20 (£000)			3,469	

4. CSF + C+H 75%; E&R + CS 150%

DEPARTMENTAL SAVINGS TARGETS	Controllable Expenditure	Weighting	Weighted	Share of Budget Gap
USING 2015/16 CONTROLLABLE BUDGETS	2015/16 £000	by dept. No.	Controllable £000	Gap £000
Corporate Services	20,197	1.50	30,296	807
Children, Schools and Families	28,273	0.75	21,205	565
Environmental Services	27,993	1.50	41,990	1,119
Community and Housing	48,959	0.75	36,719	978
Total	125,423		130,210	3,469
MTFS Gap 2019/20 (£000)			3,469	

2.13 Based on the current gap in the MTFS approved by Council in March 2016 and the 2015/16 controllable budgets and not taking into account any shortfall by departments in achieving previously approved targets, each department would get the following savings target under each of the bases exemplified in paragraph 2.12:-

DEPARTMENTAL SAVINGS TARGETS	EQUAL BASIS 1	BASIS 2 CURRENT	BASIS 3	BASIS 4
SHARE OF SAVINGS UNDER EACH BASIS	£000	£000	£000	£000
Corporate Services	559	738	703	807
Children, Schools and Families	782	516	656	565
Environmental Services	774	1,023	974	1,119
Community and Housing	1,354	1,192	1,136	978
Total	3,469	3,469	3,469	3,469

DEPARTMENTAL SAVINGS TARGETS	EQUAL BASIS 1	BASIS 2 CURRENT	BASIS 3	BASIS 4
INCREASE/ (DECREASE) OF SAVINGS UNDER EACH BASIS	£000	£000	£000	£000
Corporate Services	559	179	144	249
Children, Schools and Families	782	-266	-126	-217
Environmental Services	774	248	200	344
Community and Housing	1,354	-162	-218	-376
Total	3,469	-0	0	0

Any shortfall in delivering savings against targets will distort shares so where departments do not identify savings/income to achieve their targets in any year then the balance is carried forward as a starting position in the following budget year.

Any amendment to the weightings proposed would apply to new savings required from 2019/20 as the MTFs is currently balanced up to 2018/19.

2.14 Methods used by neighbouring boroughs in recent budget processes

As previously stated and as indicated in the table in paragraph 2.5, there are various ways available of setting savings targets.

Sutton	The savings total required was split across Directorates on an equal basis of approximately 27% of baseline net direct expenditure (as at 2014/15). No specific reduction for vulnerable groups.
Kingston	Tackling the cuts through innovation and through the Outcomes Based Budgeting process which has identified 8 community outcomes as priorities for Kingston. No specific reduction for vulnerable groups.
Croydon	Significant savings are required. The approach is underpinned by the transformation programme Croydon Challenge, comprising of a number of projects which looks at every aspect of the council. No specific reduction for vulnerable groups.

3. Alternative Options

3.1 As set out in the report.

5. **Consultation undertaken or proposed**

5.1 None.

6. **Timetable**

6.1 This report is presented in accordance with undertakings given following the Council resolution on 18 November 2015

7. **Financial, resource and property implications**

7.1 As set out in the report.

8. **Legal and statutory implications**

8.1 None.

9. **Human Rights, Equalities and Community Cohesion Implications**

9.1 None.

10. **Crime and Disorder implications**

10.1 None.

11. **Risk Management and Health and Safety Implications**

11.1 None

Appendices – the following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report

There are no appendices for this report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1 The following documents have been relied on in drawing up this report but do not form part of the report:

Budget working papers 2016/17

13. **REPORT AUTHOR**

- Name: Paul Dale
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FOREWORD TO O&S ANNUAL REPORT

Local government continues to face severe financial challenges in delivering services to residents, and these inevitably affect the scope of scrutiny and what can be achieved with limited resources. We have responded by trying to ensure the topics and issues selected for scrutiny are as relevant as possible to the challenges confronting the council, while retaining our independence from the executive.

Nothing could be more relevant to the council than the determination of its budget, and scrutiny made Cabinet fully aware of the concerns of service users over proposed cuts in adult social care. Cabinet responded by setting up a £1.3m Savings Mitigation Fund for 2016/17 to help the most vulnerable users, and agreed to consult on levying a precept for adult social care in future.

This is the latest example of scrutiny making a real difference to the budget setting process in Merton, and it sets us apart from other London boroughs where scrutiny has very little influence on the budget.

We have also chosen topics for investigation that are highly relevant to the financial pressures facing the council. The Commission is looking into shared and outsourced services, and whether there is scope to do more; while Sustainable Communities is investigating the potential for commercialising services to generate additional revenues. The Commission maintains a watching brief for the voluntary sector, because we realise how crucial it is in supporting vulnerable communities in Merton. We depend more and more on our partners in the voluntary sector for the social cohesion of the borough.

For the first time I can remember, there were no call-ins in 2015/16. Does this mean we have perfected the use of pre-decision scrutiny?

Perfect in every respect is our small but hard working officer team, and on behalf of all members involved in scrutiny I would like to thank Julia Regan, Stella Akintan, Annette Wiles (from January 2016) and Rebecca Redman (until December 2015) for their unwavering commitment to making scrutiny in Merton amongst the best in London.

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