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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