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## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

11 SEPTEMBER 2019

(7.15 pm - 10.00 pm)

**PRESENT:** Councillors Peter Southgate (in the Chair), Peter McCabe, John Dehaney, Sally Kenny, Paul Kohler, Owen Pritchard, Nick McLean, Edward Gretton, Joan Henry and Natasha Irons

**ALSO PRESENT:** Chief Superintendent Sally Benatar, BCU Commander.  
Ed Hammond, Director of Research, Centre for Public Scrutiny.

Councillor Edith Macauley, Cabinet Member for Voluntary Sector, Partnerships and Community Safety

Neil Thurlow (Community Safety Manager), Kris Witherington (Consultation & Community Engagement Manager) and Julia Regan (Head of Democracy Services)

### 1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from co-opted members Emma Lemon and Colin Powell.

### 2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of pecuniary interest.

### 3 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 4 JULY 2019 (Agenda Item 3)

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 July 2019 were agreed as an accurate record.

### 4 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 14 AUGUST 2019 (Agenda Item 4)

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 August were agreed as an accurate record subject to the following changes:

- Page 8 – amend first bullet point subsequent to the comma to read "implying that even a large increase in parking charges would not have the desired impact"
- Page 10 – insert " from Councillor Owen Pritchard" at top of page between "further proposal" and "to ask"

### 5 CRIME AND POLICING IN MERTON (Agenda Item 5)

Chief Superintendent Sally Benatar, the Basic Command Unit Borough Commander, introduced the report and provided an overview of changes since she last attended the Commission at its meeting on 24 April 2019. Sally Benatar said that this had been

a stable period operationally and had seen a reduction in key areas of crime. She said that the Met was hoping to be allocated 6,000 of the 20,000 new officers promised nationally by the government, and was unsure how many of these would come to Merton but that the uplift would be very welcome.

Sally Benatar added that although Merton is the fourth safest borough in London in terms of the total number of notifiable offences, with no homicides for 16 months, the police are not complacent and are working hard in partnership with Safer Merton to address crime and anti-social behaviour. She anticipated that the deployment of officers to Westminster for public order policing would continue for some time and assured the Commission that she was doing what she could to manage this and minimise the impact on local policing.

Commission members asked a number of detailed questions on police resourcing, police estate, the Eastern Electrics festival and knife crime as planned. Sally Benatar's responses are summarised below.

#### Police resourcing

Currently there are 1,462 officer and staff posts across the BCU, with 95 vacancies (including 46 officers at training college). The 20,000 promised new officers nationally will be in addition to the existing establishment. There will be a level of flexibility in the allocation of additional staff locally, balanced with a requirement for consistency across the BCUs. The 2+1 allocation to wards is fixed – there is scope to expand this for “enhanced wards”, of which there is currently 1 in Kingston and 2 in Wandsworth.

The boroughs in the BCU have not used the MOPAC scheme to provide council funded police officers and Sally Benatar would not advise this as an option until vacancies have been filled as it would be counterproductive due to the need to take the funded officers from other areas of policing.

Members of the Commission reaffirmed their commitment to visible policing in wards and for proactive as well as reactive activities. Sally Benatar said that she had recently established a proactive tasking team comprising 3 sergeants and 24 constables to work across the BCU, to focus on preventative and proactive policing and violence suppression work.

#### Key performance indicators (KPIs)

The five KPIs (set out in response to question 8) were chosen because they could be achieved through better supervision and leadership. There are a wider range of operational performance indicators as well as the three operating principles for the BCU which are to focus on prevention of crime and harm, to work as a team and to put victims first.

#### Police estate

Sally Benatar said that she has no update on these matters as there is an ongoing review of the estates strategy as a result of the anticipated growth in officer numbers. In the meantime, Wimbledon Police Station will remain open 24/7 and Mitcham Police Station 9-5 Monday to Friday. The response team for Merton Borough continues to operate from Wimbledon Police Station. Sally Benatar undertook to

provide an update to the Leader and Chief Executive when an update was available and to ask for this to be shared with the Commission.

#### Eastern Electrics festival

Sally Benatar provided a detailed breakdown of offences committed at the festival (published alongside these minutes).

Members commented on the increased number of offences this year and asked what more could be done to make the event a success or whether it was not a suitable event for the venue.

Sally Benatar said that the police had worked closely with the council and the event organisers to make sure the event would be safe and secure. She said that she was concerned about the level of offences but stressed that the plan put in place ahead of the event had been robust and proportionate and that a similar process would be followed for any similar event applications in future. She declined to comment on what further conditions could be attached to the licence or whether the police would support a future event of this nature.

Sally Benatar confirmed that all four stabbings occurred inside the event and the police hadn't charged anyone, one of the reasons being that none of the victims wanted to co-operate with these investigations. The investigations remain ongoing. The level of policing had been increased on the Sunday, in response to the stabbings on Saturday, with central resources being allocated to Merton Borough in order to prevent further incidents, and this had resulted in a higher number of stop and search and arrests for possession of drugs.

Policing costs in 2018 were about £50k and in 2019 were about £100k. Costs are borne by the BCU. In response to a question about exactly how policing costs for such events are calculated, Sally Benatar undertook to find out and provide details.

ACTION: BCU Commander

#### Knife crime

Merton is the 5<sup>th</sup> safest London borough in terms of knife crime. There has been an increase but numbers are still low. The police are working hard to address knife crime and this is a priority for the Community Safety partnership.

Neil Thurlow, Community Safety Manager, added that this was a complex area and posed difficulties for the police when victims wouldn't engage in their investigations. CCTV footage is used to assist where possible.

Sally Benatar said that people who carry knives are more likely to become a victim of a stabbing. She stressed the role of parents and families in taking responsibility for the prevention of knife crime.

#### Stop and search

In response to questions about why increasing the number of stop and searches was a KPI rather than using a measure of the success of stop and search, Sally Benatar said that she wanted her officers to carry out more stop and searches as a

preventative power to suppress violence and knife crime, whilst also doing these in a proportionate and appropriate way. She said that the outcome rate was one of the highest in London but overall numbers had been lower across the South West BCU. She confirmed in response to a specific question that stop and search could be used to detect and prevent moped crime if there were grounds to do so. She undertook to take the concerns expressed on board and to provide data on stop and search in a future report and suggested that the Commission could also seek data from the Stop and Search Monitoring Group.

ACTION: BCU Commander and Head of Democracy Services

The Chair thanked Sally Benatar for her helpful responses to the Commission's questions.

## 6 SAFER MERTON UPDATE (Agenda Item 6)

Neil Thurlow, Community Safety Manager, introduced the report and drew the Commission's attention to the public health approach that has been adopted nationally and regionally in respect of knife crime; the new leaflet on anti-social behaviour; and the update on the Public Space Protection Order enforcement and consultation process.

Neil Thurlow and Councillor Edith Macauley, Cabinet Member for Voluntary Sector, Partnerships and Community Safety, provided additional information in response to questions:

- It is planned to use the learning from work done in Lambeth and Croydon on the relationship between domestic violence and knife crime and the benefits of early intervention.
- Antisocial behaviour - 23 Community Protection Warnings and 6 Community Protection Notices have been issued. These figures are in line with the national average. Members asked for data to be included in future reports, broken down by ward. ACTION: Community Safety Manager
- Public Space Protection Orders are not intended to prevent all drinking in public places but just to be used for problematic anti-social drinking.
- Licensing conditions could be used to address the issue of the use of "dog poo" bags being used to cover cans of alcoholic drink for covert drinking in public

Members asked for more detailed data on each anti-social behaviour category to be included in future reports. ACTION: Community Safety Manager

The Commission RESOLVED to:

1. Endorse the community weapon sweeps and recommend that these are publicised to all ward councillors; and
2. Endorse and promote the Safer Merton Community Safety Consultation.

## 7 CENTRE FOR PUBLIC SCRUTINY REVIEW OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY IN MERTON (Agenda Item 7)

The Chair introduced Ed Hammond, Director of Research at the Centre for Public Scrutiny, and thanked him for carrying out a thorough review and providing a thought provoking report. Ed Hammond drew the Commission's attention to the findings, in particular the suggestion that scrutiny should refine its focus to address those cross-cutting issues which affect the social fabric of the borough. Ed Hammond said that suggestion was central to being able to put in place some of the other recommendations. He added that an evolutionary approach would be required and that the Commission should be mindful of a degree of disengagement amongst some councillors in the recent past.

In response to questions about how information is used at meetings, Ed Hammond recognised that there was a need for members to spend time understanding an issue but said that, as there is limited time, this could be done outside of meetings and that it is important to move from general questions to dig into the detail and produce recommendations on the basis of deliberation. He said that the onus was on officers to make information more accessible as well as on members to be clear about what they require and to prepare for meetings.

Members discussed the recommendation to reduce the number of substantive agenda items. One member expressed concern that some more sensitive issues may be excluded and asked for clarity on how members can add items to the agenda during the year as well as at the beginning. There was disagreement about whether councillors who are not members of a Panel should be able to speak on agenda items – at present priority is given to local groups and residents and the constitution explicitly states that political groups shall not be entitled to use the deputation procedure.

Members agreed that they wished to ensure that scrutiny was not used politically and cited instances where Cabinet had made policy or budget changes in response to scrutiny.

In response to the discussion, Ed Hammond said that there was no hard and fast rule on the number of agenda items and that it would take time to get the number and depth of discussion right. He said that it is important that scrutiny should add value to the discussion of an item and that members should therefore be reflective and critical in relation to identifying which items to include on the agenda. He recognised that councillors have a political perspective and that this is valuable but should not extend to overt party political behaviour at scrutiny meetings. He said that scrutiny was most powerful when members acted collectively.

The Commission RESOLVED to establish a working group to develop an action plan in response to the recommendations of the CfPS review – Councillors Ed Gretton, Paul Kohler and Peter Southgate volunteered to join the working group.

## 8 RESULTS OF THE RESIDENTS SURVEY 2019 (Agenda Item 8)

Kris Witherington, Consultation and Community Engagement Manager, briefly introduced the report and provided additional information in response to questions:

- Local authorities traditionally have a poor reputation on value for money, probably linked to payment of council tax and lack of public understanding of the relative contributions of council tax and government grant. The LGA benchmark shows that Merton's value for money figure is above the national average.
- Waste is a universal service and is the most visible service to the public so satisfaction with this service will also impact on satisfaction with other aspects of the council.
- The residents survey is a snapshot and provides valuable trend data. It should be used in conjunction with other sources of information, including performance measures.
- Street cleaning has generally been a low performing measure in Merton in comparison with elsewhere.

The Commission expressed concern with the performance of the street cleaning service and RESOLVED to continue to focus on this at meetings of the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

9 FINANCIAL MONITORING TASK GROUP - NOTE OF MEETING HELD ON 17 JULY 2019 (Agenda Item 9)

The Commission noted the minutes of the meeting held on 17 July 2019.

10 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 10)

The Commission AGREED the work programme as set out in the report.