

Agenda Item 3

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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

24 APRIL 2019

(7.15 pm - 9.45 pm)

PRESENT: Councillors Peter Southgate (in the Chair), Peter McCabe, Laxmi Attawar, John Dehaney, Sally Kenny, Paul Kohler, Oonagh Moulton, Owen Pritchard and David Williams

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Edith Macauley MBE (Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities)

Chief Superintendent Sally Benatar (BCU Commander), Inspector Ed McDonagh (Merton Police), Chris Lee (Director of Environment and Regeneration), Rachael Wardell (Director, Children, Schools & Families Department), Howard Joy (Property Management & Review Manager), Neil Thurlow (Community Safety Manager), Adrian Ruthowski (CCTV Manager) Evereth Willis (Equalities and Community Cohesion Officer) and Julia Regan (Head of Democracy Services)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from Councillor Rebecca Lanning and from co-opted members Helen Forbes, Emma Lemon and Colin Powell.

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of pecuniary interest.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2019 were agreed as an accurate record.

4 CRIME AND POLICING IN MERTON (Agenda Item 4)

Chief Superintendent Sally Benatar, the Basic Command Unit Borough Commander, introduced the report and provided an overview of changes since she previously attended the Commission's meeting in September 2018. Sally Benatar said that this has been a busy period operationally, with a lot of prevention activity. Crime figures have been relatively stable with a small increase in the number of crimes solved. Knife crime, domestic violence, theft from motor vehicles and burglary continue to be local priorities. She drew the Commission's attention to two recent stabbings, one in Mitcham and one in Morden, to which there has been a robust police response and a number of knives have been seized.

Members of the Commission expressed concern about the impact of policing the environmental protests in central London on the level of cover and the budget locally. Sally Benatar said that 80-100 officers from the BCU (Merton, Richmond, Kingston and Wandsworth) had been sent each day and that adjustments had been made locally, such as a temporary move to 12 hour shifts, to ensure that there was minimum cover in CID, response teams and ward officers as far as possible.

Sally Benatar, Neil Thurlow (Community Safety Manager) and Councillor Edith Macauley (Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities) outlined some of the work that is being done to prevent young people from being drawn into gang culture, including work with schools, school police officers, multi-agency work with voluntary sector, youth offending service and other youth work. Rachael Wardell, Director of Children Schools and Families, provided further detail on the work undertaken by the youth justice team with young people in gangs and problematic friendship groups.

In response to a question about the knife crime action plan, Neil Thurlow undertook to share this private partnership document with members of the Commission on a confidential basis.

ACTION: Community Safety Manager and Head of Democracy Services

Sally Benatar provided additional information in response to questions:

- The police are still investigating the two recent knife crime incidents, there does not appear to be a link between the two, nor do they appear to be gang related
- The police are very mindful of the level of public concern and fear of crime, particularly in Mitcham where resources are being deployed accordingly
- All schools have a named police officer and an allocation of police hours. 2 posts are currently vacant.

Commission members asked a number of detailed questions on police resourcing and police stations as planned. Sally Benatar's responses are summarised below:

Police resourcing

There are 84 police officer vacancies across the BCU. Recruitment is a priority and the police are actively recruiting at the moment. One of the challenges is that the starting salary of £30k is not attractive compared to some other jobs that candidates could undertake, particularly given the high risk of assault. Merton Council, local MPs and partner organisations have been very supportive in assisting the police to reach out to communities through stalls at events and other publicity.

Once all the vacancies have been filled, Sally Benatar would be happy to have discussions with the council about the potential for the deployment of funded police officers with the council.

Police stations

Sally Benatar read out a prepared statement:

“The intention set out in our consultation document in 2017 was for Mitcham Police Station to be the 24/7 front counter location and Response parade site for Merton Borough, with Earlsfield Police Station remaining the Response parade site for Wandsworth Borough and with Wimbledon Police Station to be sold.

After eleven months’ experience of working at greater scale across the boroughs, it has been identified that there is a need to review the operational implications of continuing to operate with two separate Response parade sites for Merton and Wandsworth, as opposed to having a shared parade site covering both boroughs. This internal review is now taking place.”

In response to concerns raised by members of the Commission, Sally Benatar said that she had requested this review to investigate the most efficient way of using police resources now that these were deployed at greater scale within the BCU. She stressed that this was a separate matter to the location of the 24/7 front office (police station) and that there would continue to be one of these in each borough, the location of which would be a matter for MOPAC.

The Commission and the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities requested further detail of the review to be made available in a briefing to councillors. Members of the Commission said they wished to be fully sighted on decisions that would have an impact on policing in Merton and that there should be a public consultation. Sally Benatar said that there had not been a public consultation when the Kingston and Richmond Response parade sites were merged and there was no plan to have a public consultation on how Response policing is delivered as this is an operational policing decision. The public consultation on front counters was a separate issue. Sally Benatar undertook to take the Commission’s concerns back and said that she would share a briefing note with them as soon as she could.

RESOLVED: the Commission agreed to invite the BCU Commander to a future meeting for an update on police estate matters as well as crime statistics and other policing issues.

5 TRAVELLERS UNAUTHORISED ENCAMPMENT PROTOCOL (Agenda Item 5)

The Property Management and Review Manager, Howard Joy, introduced the report and drew the Commission’s attention to progress made on review of the joint protocol between the Council and the Police, the obtaining and use of both interim and subsequently a long term injunction and the response to recent encampments. Howard Joy said that experience to date is that the injunction is proving an effective deterrent to encampments on council owned land.

In response to questions, Howard Joy said that a likely side effect of the injunction would be increased pressure on privately owned land. He said that private landowners can take out an injunction against encampments and as there is no requirement for them to carry out welfare assessments they can act faster than the council is able to under the Criminal Justice Act. Wimbledon Common Conservators

have taken out their own injunction and Mitcham Common is covered by the council's injunction.

RESOLVED: the Commission thanked the Property and Review Manager for the report and welcomed the progress made in obtaining an injunction.

6 SAFER MERTON CCTV SERVICE (Agenda Item 6)

The Community Safety Manager, Neil Thurlow, outlined the contents of the report which provided an update on the CCTV service and future plans. He introduced his colleague Adrian Ruthkowski, the CCTV Manager.

Members asked questions about the budget overspend and plans for income generation. Neil Thurlow and Adrian Ruthkowski explained that the overspend in 2018/19 was due to the income target not being met and that work is in progress to generate increased income next year. The main commercial partner at the moment is Clarion Housing but there is potential to market services, particularly out-of-hours services offering economies of scale and other benefits to industrial units, high street retailers, schools and nurseries.

In response to a question about enforcement of fly-tipping, Chris Lee, Director of Environment and Regeneration, said that a separate team is responsible for this and they use covert cameras and work closely with Veolia to capture the evidence required for a prosecution. This evidence includes information on who was responsible for the fly-tipping, what was dumped, when and where. Chris Lee said that every resource available was being used to bring perpetrators to justice.

Neil Thurlow said that the Crime and Disorder Act overrides GDPR requirements so that information collected by CCTV cameras can be shared to prevent or solve a crime.

7 SAFETY OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN MERTON - RESPONSE FROM CABINET (Agenda Item 7)

The Director of Children Schools and Families, Rachael Wardell, said that the joint scrutiny exercise held during Local Democracy Week had been well received by the young people and by the councillors who were involved. Rachael Wardell added that she hoped the exercise would be repeated this year and said that recommendation 2 would be invaluable in helping to promote the involvement of young people in scrutiny in a wide variety of ways.

RESOLVED : the Commission welcomed the updated action plan and endorsed the involvement of young people in scrutiny in future along the lines set out in the report and in the Commission's work programme report (item 10 on the agenda).

8 EQUALITY AND COMMUNITY COHESION STRATEGY (Agenda Item 8)

The Equality and Community Cohesion Officer, Evereth Willis, introduced the report and highlighted the progress that had been made over the past year, particularly on narrowing the gap on educational attainment, the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), food poverty and welfare support. Evereth Willis said that work was ongoing to narrow the gap on child obesity, to develop the sustainable communities plan, volunteering and social capital. She was pleased to report that equalities is now more systematically embedded in the day to day work of the council. She stressed that although the strategy is set for four years, the action plan is reactive and can therefore change year on year.

The Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities, Councillor Edith Macauley, added that voluntary sector groups and the Joint Consultative Committee had been involved in the development of the action plan.

Evereth Willis and Rachael Wardell (Director of Children Schools and Families) provided additional information in response to questions:

- Public Health, Children Schools and Families and the Licensing teams are working together to tackle childhood obesity through a number of work streams including the healthy weight and diabetes strategies and are looking to see what action could be taken to limit the number of fast food outlets around schools
- The council has been working with Transport for London to ensure that traffic junctions are DDA compliant – if councillors have specific examples of where this is not the case these should be sent to Evereth Willis or to the Director of Environment and Regeneration
- The council continues to work with schools to encourage them to sign up to the daily mile scheme

9 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT (Agenda Item 9)

The Commission discussed the report and RESOLVED: to approve the annual report for presentation to Council at its meeting on 10 July 2019. The annual report should be updated to include information from the Commission's meeting on 24 April and the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel meeting on 30 April. The report should also include information from the 2019 annual member survey.

10 PLANNING THE COMMISSION'S 2019/20 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 10)

The Commission discussed the report and RESOLVED:

1. to re-establish the financial monitoring task group for 2019/20
2. to include the following agenda items on the agenda for its meeting on 3 July as set out in the report – priorities and challenges for 2019/20, Merton

Partnership annual report, analysis of annual member survey, discussion of questions for the Borough Commander