

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

9 SEPTEMBER 2020

(7.15 pm - 9.15 pm)

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

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors

Matt Burrows (Head of Communications and Customer Experience), Caroline Holland (Director of Corporate Services) and Kiran Vagarwal (Interim Head of Community Safety)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

There were no apologies for absence.

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 previous meeting were agreed.

4 BCU COMMANDER - CRIME AND POLICING IN MERTON (Agenda Item 4)

The Chair welcomed the new Borough Commander, Chief Superintendent Elisabeth Chapple, to the meeting.

The Borough Commander gave a brief introduction and responded to Panel Member questions, concerns and priorities as below:

With regards to surge capability, we use a Cluster Strategy;

- Dedicated Ward Officers are able to bid for extra resources to address priorities.
- Clusters of wards/neighbouring wards work together – if staff member off sick or has adjusted duties.

In terms of proactivity, crime prevention and community engagement;

- We currently have 23 vacancies for Dedicated Ward Officers and it's important we bring that figure down and work on this has already begun..
- The public attitude survey asks whether 'local communities know who their local officers are'. The scores are always low at around 14-20%. Therefore we plan to increase marketing on who local officers are and how you can contact them, plus other avenues for contact if that officer is unavailable.
- Have invested highly in the Violence Suppression Unit and the Burglary and Robbery teams.
- This BCU isn't making the best use of the resources available to it at present, particularly from a central perspective such as evidence based policing. I plan to strengthen those links more in the SW BCU.
- We are putting into place a community engagement plan. Also we are trying to have Ward Panels virtually and working on different options to bring the panels back to physical meetings.

The Police are trying to address and tackle low level nuisance on a multi-agency basis, particularly with Councils. We know this issue greatly affects how safe residents feel in their homes and we are increasing our work with community protection warnings and notices as well as an ASBO early intervention scheme. Please ask residents to keep reporting these consistent issues so we can aim to have the resources required in the most affected areas.

Our long held ambition is that the Metropolitan Police should be representative of the community it serves which is 40% BAME and 50% women.

Looking at the stop and search statistics;

- Although we stop a higher number of white children in comparison to black children, when you look at that in terms of the population, it is disproportionate. Since this issue has been highlighted, these disproportionate figures are slightly coming down.
- Officers are better reflecting on the strength of the intelligence they are receiving. We also need to educate our communities on evidenced based policing - what did you see, distinguishing features etc.
- There is still a KPI of volume on stop and searches. However that metric will be replaced by a different measure going forward.

In lines with the Mayors strategy, we have been asked to set a 60% carbon reduction target. We are making a shift towards electric cars and when refurbishing buildings, we will look to install solar power, increase electric charging points in the yard.

Continuity of leadership is important to me. My personal intention is to remain in post for at least three years.

The Chair thanked the Borough Commander for a valuable session.

5 SAFER MERTON UPDATE (Agenda Item 5)

The Community Safety Manager outlined the report on Community Resilience which includes three areas: Hate Crime, Neighbourhood Watch and the Merton Safer Neighbourhood Board.

The Community Safety Manager highlighted a few key points for each area;

Hate Crime

- There has been a steady increase in overall hate crime since April this year. Predominant area arising has been racially motivated hate crime.
- The Hate Crime advice surgery has continued a sustained service throughout lockdown.
- Hate crime awareness week is 10-17 October 2020.

Neighbourhood Watch

- Neighbourhood Watch currently at 22,000 members across the BCU with 478 co-ordinators.
- Work closely with police and familiar with areas where we would like to increase and expand the membership.
- Merton is one of the few boroughs that run a junior Neighbourhood Watch.

Merton Safer Neighbourhood Board

- Community engagement is funded through MOPAC
- At 2.26 we have listed six projects we were looking to commission, unfortunately there is a pause on this discretionary funding.

In response to Panel Member questions the Community Safety Manager clarified;

There is under reporting amongst the community with regards to hate crime. We aim to increase reporting through more publicity and third party reporting. Looking at the increased figure of 359 reports compared to the previous year's 330, it is hard to conclude whether more incidents occurred or whether there was an increase in confidence of reporting.

Neighbourhood Watch is extremely effective. Not only does it provide eyes and ears in the wards but it is useful for pushing out messages at a street based level.

As part of hate crime awareness week, a session on bystander training will be delivered on 15 October by the Chair of the Hate Crime Strategy Group.

VAWG and Domestic Abuse

- Decision made to extend strategy and delivery plan until March 2021.
- In response to Panel Member questions the Community Safety Manager clarified;
- Dealings with brothels is one of our priorities over the next 12 months
- One stop shop is running as a virtual service. Capacity will need to be considered as to whether it could run as both a face to face and virtual offering.
- Updates on Ask Angela and misogyny as a hate crime will be provided to the Panel.

6 COVID-19 UPDATE -COMMUNICATIONS (Agenda Item 6)

The Interim Head of Customer Experience & Communications summarised the report and responded to Panel Member questions;

The Council uses three main digital channels to reach target groups on social media, which are Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Instagram tends to reach youngest audience. We also use local press and outdoor media.

It is a challenge for local authorities to reach the 20-29 year old demographic. Most tools at our disposal have a limited reach.

Low traffic neighbourhoods will be promoted on digital media, My Merton, weekly bulletins etc.

We implemented weekly Councillor bulletins during March and we will look to extend this regular update as a channel to communicate to all Councillors.

With a limited amount of occupancy within the Civic Centre and other Council buildings, the majority of staff are working from home. Feedback from staff has been positive and our communication has been very strong.