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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

8 SEPTEMBER 2021

(7.15 pm - 9.00 pm)

PRESENT: Councillor Peter Southgate (in the Chair),
Councillor Peter McCabe, Councillor Ben Butler,
Councillor Billy Christie, Councillor Paul Kohler,
Councillor Nick McLean, Mansoor Ahmad and
Councillor Sally Kenny

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Agatha Akyigyina

Zoe Gallen, Liz Hammond (Interim Head of HR), Cathryn James
(Interim Assistant Director, Public Protection) and Kiran
Vagarwal (Interim Head of Community Safety)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from Cllr Aidan Mundy (with Cllr John Dehaney as sub), Cllr Thomas Barlow (with Cllr Omar Bush as sub). Cllr Brenda Fraser and co-opted Member Roz Cordner.

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 as a true and accurate record.

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

The Chair welcomed the South West BCU Commander, Chief Superintendent Elisabeth Chapple, to the meeting.

The Borough Commander described her current priorities to the Commission Members as follows;

We have a really good complement of officers now in Merton so we have been able to put more resources in and around schools - We have done this because with new pupils joining and older secondary school children learning to be independent they are potentially more vulnerable to robbery.

Any offences that affect violence against women and girls - As we've talked about in previous meetings some of those offences that are affecting women, particularly domestic abuse, have stayed quite high. We have also seen an increase in calls relating to mental health issues

Sanction Detection rates - This is a national policing issue but does also apply to Merton. This is how many crimes we're solving and they're really low nationally. It's a really complicated picture to try and understand exactly why that is and why there has been a decline in recent years.

We've been working with the Crown Prosecution Service on a lot of the issues including the backlog of cases and also on the full code test (whether cases progress to prosecution). One of the issues around this is how much digital data do we need to look into, which particularly affects crimes like sexual offences and it's been a period of negotiation between us and the Crime Prosecution Service to get to a balance of what the right amount of detail is to prove a case but yet not impinge on the privacy rights of victims and people associated with that case.

In response to supplementary questions from Commission Members, the Borough Commander gave further details where possible;

Stop and search

2011 was the last cut of the population data and we are hopeful we'll get a new recut of that data imminently. I do believe there is an ongoing disproportionality in terms of the demographic of people that we're stopping and I think that it's a societal and community cohesion issue as well as a policing issue so questions are rightly being asked of policing in terms of whether we have any inherent biases when we're stopping people.

In terms of positive outcome, we do require our officers to have detailed and varied grounds for stop and search but I do not have the data to hand.

Action: Borough Commander agreed to provide further detail on the number of positive outcomes for different stop and search categories.

Burglary

Over the last month Merton has seen a 24.5% increase in burglary, likely as people are starting to leave their homes and go back into their workplaces, so we're renewing our efforts in terms of both our dedicated ward officers going around as well as visually looking out for any vulnerabilities on premises.

Knife crime

Merton has a really good multi-agency response with regards to knife crime. Safer Merton have been very heavily involved in looking at what we can do to prevent it, as well as dealing with the traditional police role of being reactive to any issues. This includes work such as lighting particular areas to the education about this issue in schools.

Action: Borough Commander agreed to bring data of weapons based stop and searches by age demographic to a future meeting to allow for a more structured discussion about it.

Slammin Events in Morden Park

The events on the weekend of 4th and 5th September were mostly a positive picture although there are a number of licensing issues that we will be working through with the appropriate parties.

From a public safety and vulnerability perspective it didn't go quite as well as we would want and we think it could have been done better but from a crime perspective it was fairly smooth.

The Bronze Commander, who is the person responsible for the public order policing on that weekend, reported to me that there was around 7000 people in attendance each day.

Saturday, which was attended by an older demographic of people, was very trouble free. There was one arrest for affray but it was on the periphery of the event right so cannot absolutely be attributed to that event and there was one community resolution for drugs.

On the Sunday there were two arrests - one for drug supply offences and one for common assault which was on one of the stewards. There was also an allegation of a sexual assault in the queuing area.

In conclusion, for that number of people, licensing issues aside, we were happy from a policing perspective with the safety outcome of that event.

Future of Wimbledon police station

My understanding is that MOPAC will shortly be opening discussions to understand the strength of feeling around this and other estates. I've not heard in any forum recently that we're in danger of losing Wimbledon police station but I would like that to be confirmed formally.

The Chair thanked the Borough Commander for her attendance this evening.

5 SAFER MERTON UPDATE (Agenda Item 5)

The Head of Community Safety gave an overview of the broad area of work and directed Members attention to Section 1.1 which provides a table of the service delivery objectives of the Safer Merton team.

In response to Commission Member's questions, the Head of Community Safety further explained;

Bids

We write our own funding bids but sometimes we will collaborate with our colleagues in other boroughs such as Wandsworth and Kingston. We have found that when we do collaborate with other boroughs, it does draw a bit more attention than us applying alone.

CCTV

Our focus is to increase the mobile CCTV resource. At present we have around 13 cameras across the borough and we are always looking at how we can expand that and/or use different models to increase capacity. We are currently in discussion with a number of companies to run pilots around the borough so we can secure at least another 13 cameras.

How do we measure the success of our CCTV operation?

Success can be measured in a number of ways. For example, if we've got 212 cameras across the borough, success could mean that they are all operating effectively, that downtime is minimal, incidents are being captured, and there is positive liaison with the police as well as arrests and convictions.

As part of our upgrade program, we will be looking at upgrading the existing cameras and, as part of that work, all the cameras will be audited. The audit will look at which cameras have been effective. Those that are not effective, we will look at why - it could be because the design and the landscape around them has changed since installation.

How do we measure success in other areas?

Success for us is extremely broad it could be the reduction of repeat victims coming to our service, equally it could also be an increase in reports of hate crime and domestic violence. We want to see more victims coming to us for help and we want them to come early on before things escalate to a critical point,

One could look at those figures and think are we poor performing because we've got an increase in domestic violence reports? Or are we performing well because we've pushed the message out there and raised awareness and encouraged people to report incidences?

PSPO's

We have continued to collect the data that we need to evidentially support the extension of the current PSPO's. Unfortunately, due to Covid and lockdowns, we haven't been able to get the level of evidence and data that we need to support the extension or put in any new PSPO's across the borough. However we are monitoring this and keeping it continuously under review.

6 MERTON COUNCIL AS AN EMPLOYER - MENTAL HEALTH (Agenda Item 6)

The Interim Head of HR presented the report and confirmed Mental Health has been one of the biggest priorities this year.

The last biannual staff survey identified mental health as one of the highest deteriorating factors. In response, there is a multitude of support that Merton have put in place;

- 129 training courses (with over 1300 staff trained)
- Mental Health policy and guidance
- Numerous well-being initiatives including managing zoom fatigue, well-being Wednesdays, financial Fridays and singing from home Mondays.

- Staff engagement surveys including two pulse surveys related to health and well-being
- Trained up 34 mental health first aiders in the organisation
- All managers are going to be trained in mental health awareness
- We are also working towards achieving the London Healthy Workplace award

In response to questions:

We haven't identified any specific pockets, groups or teams within the Council's staff that are suffering worse levels of mental health or anxiety.

Use of the Employee Assistance Program is entirely confidential and we are only ever given the high level numbers, never any identifying information, so monitoring whether there have been improvements for staff that have used it is not possible.

Some training courses are at no cost to the Council and some are funded through the apprenticeship levy. Although the participation numbers have been low, in comparison to the actual numbers booked onto the courses, those that do attend speak very highly of all the courses.

7 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 7)

The work programme was noted and agreed.