

Agenda Item 3

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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

20 SEPTEMBER 2017

(7.15 pm - 9.35 pm)

PRESENT: Councillors Peter Southgate (in the Chair), Hamish Badenoch, Mike Brunt, Brenda Fraser, Sally Kenny, Dennis Pearce, David Williams, Agatha Mary Akyigyina OBE, Suzanne Grocott and John Dehaney

Co-opted Member Helen Forbes

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

Chief Superintendent Steve Wallace (Borough Commander), Sophie Ellis (Assistant Director of Business Improvement) and Julia Regan (Head of Democracy Services)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from Councillor Peter McCabe (substituted by Councillor John Dehaney), Councillor Abigail Jones (substituted by Councillor Agatha Akyigyina) and Councillor Oonagh Moulton (substituted by Councillor Suzanne Grocott). Apologies were also received from co-opted member Colin Powell. The Chair announced that co-opted member Mansoor Ahmad had resigned from the Commission subsequent to publication of the agenda because he is no longer a parent governor.

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 were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting.

4 CRIME AND POLICING IN MERTON (Agenda Item 4)

Crime data and policing in Merton

Chief Superintendent Steve Wallace, Borough Commander, introduced the crimes figures set out in Appendix 1 of the report. He drew the Commission's attention to the 10% reduction in burglary over the past year, though comparisons should be made with caution due to some re-categorisation issues. Robbery has increased, particularly personal property of robbery committed by moped riders. Taking of vehicles, particularly mopeds, has also increased in the rolling year to date compared to last year but overall is now since April reducing considerably. Reports of domestic

abuse have decreased, which is indicative of the commitment to tackling domestic abuse and successful partnership working.

The Borough Commander provided additional information in response to questions:

- The level of knife crime has been fairly static
- The police have been robust in serving notice and using powers to deal with Traveller encampments. Additional resources can be drafted in from within the Metropolitan Police as and when needed.
- The overall increase of just over 2% in crime in Merton has been at a lower level than in neighbouring boroughs. Merton Police have maintained a prompt response to 999 calls, with more than 90% receiving a response within 5 minutes

The Borough Commander answered questions about the Eastern Electrics festival held on 5 August in Morden Park. He said that although the Police, Fire Service and Council had significant concerns in advance of the event, overall he was pleased with how well policing of the event had gone. There were around 15,000 attendees, no arrests and no significant crimes reported to the police.

MOPAC Public Access and Engagement Strategy

The Borough Commander said that he was well aware of public concerns that have been expressed regarding the proposed closure of Wimbledon Police Station. He said that the consultation document was evidence based and contained a lot of detail, including data on the reduction in public use of front offices. He reminded members that the proposals had been made in the context of the need to save a further £400m from the MPS budget over the next four years and that the priority was to protect frontline policing and to redesign services in order to make better use of digital technology. He urged all concerned to respond formally to the MOPAC consultation.

The Borough Commander said that there would be a 24/7 front office in every borough. He assured members that the police would continue to police Wimbledon town centre and respond to crimes regardless of where the front office was based. He envisaged that there would be a need for an operational base in the west of the borough if the 24/7 front office were to be located in the east.

Councillor Edith Macauley, Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities, stated that Wimbledon town centre is a crime hotspot and her view is that the police stations in Wimbledon and Mitcham should both remain open to provide a deterrent and protection to residents.

The Borough Commander provided additional detail in response to the questions set out in paragraph 2.4 of the agenda report:

1. Addressed this question in his opening remarks

2. Reassured members that the proposals should not impact on response times and that town centres would continue to be patrolled. Each ward will have two named officers, with well publicised contact details.
3. Proud that Merton remains one of the safest boroughs in London. He said that the crime hotspot in Wimbledon town centre was due to the density of licensed premises in the Broadway area. He assured members that police resources would be flexed as appropriate and that the proposals should not affect the overall effectiveness of policing in the West of the borough.
4. Understood that fear of crime is often higher than the reality. Added that police officers spend the vast majority of time out responding to crime rather than sitting in police stations.
5. Some vacancies remain at detective rank and for police sergeants – otherwise the establishment level has now been reached in Merton. Police numbers are reducing across London and Merton will need to take a share of this but numbers not known at present.
6. The value of the Wimbledon police station site is estimated to be £6.75m. Running costs are around £500,000 pa.
7. Opening Mitcham police station 24/7 is one option but it would need some investment in order to provide that facility.
8. Addressed this question in his opening remarks

Members of the Commission discussed the consultation document and the information provided by the Borough Commander and made a number of points that the Commission AGREED should be included in its formal response to the consultation:

The Commission agreed that it is important to have a debate about the best way to resource policing in the borough and that the location of police stations would not necessarily be the same as at present. It was noted that the operational presence on the street does not necessarily have to be matched by public access to police stations.

The Commission asked whether a pragmatic proposal could be developed that would differ from the traditional police station but would provide a 24/7 “shop front”. Some members expressed a preference for a traditional police station to provide reassurance to the public and act as a deterrent to criminals.

Noted that Wimbledon is a significant transport hub and suggested that moving a police front office away from Wimbledon would send the wrong message to the public. Members supported the retention of a front office in Wimbledon and suggested that the building could be reconfigured for other uses (such as housing) to generate revenue.

Views differed on whether Mitcham Police Station was currently in the best location to serve Mitcham town centre and whether an alternative location in the east of the borough would work better operationally for accessing other parts of the borough.

The Commission questioned whether it is wise to cut so much from police budgets at a time of increasing terrorism and civil unrest.

RESOLVED: that the Commission would make a formal response to the MOPAC consultation, using the minutes of this meeting as a basis for the response. The Head of Democracy Services will circulate a draft response to all Commission members by email so that a final response can be agreed.

5 CUSTOMER CONTACT PROGRAMME - UPDATE (Agenda Item 5)

Sophie Ellis, Assistant Director of Business Improvement, introduced the report and drew the Commission's attention to the progress that had been made, in particular with the website and the redesign and automation of customer processes, since her last report. She explained that the council had experienced ongoing delays in the provision of services from GDIT and that the mechanisms within the contract are being used to address this. Despite this, a constructive working relationship has been maintained and progress is still being made to complete work on the website and the customer account.

In response to questions from members, Sophie Ellis said that the project was in its final phase and that the remaining elements were set out in paragraph 3.4 of the report. As part of the TOM process the customer contact strategy will be refreshed. Sophie Ellis said she would consider how councillors could feed in to this.

The Commission RESOLVED that the Financial Monitoring Task Group should examine the programme's budget and associated savings and how lessons would be learned from this project.

6 PROPOSAL FOR TASK GROUP REVIEW OF RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF TEACHERS (Agenda Item 6)

RESOLVED: that the Commission

1. Sets up a task group to review the recruitment and retention of teachers in Merton;
2. Approves the terms of reference and scope of the task group as set out in the report;
3. Appoints Councillors Agatha Akyigyina, Dennis Pearce and Peter Southgate plus co-opted member Helen Forbes to the task group.

7 MINUTES OF MEETING OF FINANCIAL MONITORING TASK GROUP 25 JULY (Agenda Item 7)

The Commission noted the minutes of the Financial Monitoring Task Group's meeting on 25 July 2017.

8 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 8)

The work programme was AGREED.

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