

Agenda Item 3

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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

19 SEPTEMBER 2018

(7.15 pm - 9.30 pm)

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

Co-opted Members Helen Forbes and Emma Lemon

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Edith Macauley MBE (Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities)
Chief Superintendent Sally Benatar, BCU Commander

Rachael Wardell (Director, Children, Schools & Families Department), Neil Thurlow (Community Safety Manager), Kim Brown (HR Lead), Steve Langley (Head of Housing Needs and Strategy), Temitayo Oketunji and Julia Regan (Head of Democracy Services)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from Councillor Oonagh Moulton (substituted by Councillor Thomas Barlow) and from co-opted member 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 were AGREED as an accurate record of the meeting.

4 CRIME AND POLICING IN MERTON (Agenda Item 4)

Sally Benatar, the Basic Command Unit Borough Commander introduced the report. The south west London Basic Command Unit (BCU), comprising Merton, Richmond, Kingston and Wandsworth was the third to go live. The Borough Commander said that across London there had been significant cuts and that there were currently fewer police officers in London than in previous years but that additional funding was anticipated next year which would enable them to recruit more officers.

Since taking up the post the BCU Commander has attended various public and other meetings and was aware that the public's main concerns include increasing the visibility of the police, tackling anti-social behaviour, improving accessibility of the 101 phone service and issues around contact with neighbourhood police officers.

The BCU Commander provided responses to those questions marked as “answer to follow” in the report:

Question 18

The answer is partly provided by the response to Question 14. In addition, the police are carrying out intelligence-led stop and search and are seeking to increase this as a preventative measure. The police also use a wide range of tactics, working in partnership, including covert operations to target gangs and drug dealers, as well as test purchases of knives plus enforcement action, work to remove online content that incites violence and use of automated number plate recognition to target moped enabled crime. The BCU Commander stressed the importance of prevention and early intervention work with schools.

Question 20

The BCU Commander referred to evidence from the College of Policing about the services that have the greatest impact on levels of crime. She added that one of the most significant factors in terms of demand on policing services is mental health.

Question 21

This is a complex area and there is no specific comparative data. Merton’s multi-agency panel is well placed to tackle criminal exploitation of children and young people. There is also lots of preventative work and proactive work on offender management to reduce the level of re-offending.

Question 22

There were no murders in Merton in 2016/17, 3 in 2017/18 and 2 so far this year. Strategic action taken is as described in previous answers.

Question 23

The PSPO has been one factor contributing to a lower level of anti-social behaviour reports this year. Further detail on street drinking and anti-social behaviour is contained in the Safer Merton report elsewhere on this agenda.

The Chair invited members to ask supplementary questions arising from the written responses set out in the agenda pack. The Borough Commander provided additional information in response to these questions:

- Parade sites are the location at which officers start their shifts and receive their briefing. The number of officers at parade sites will vary across shifts and they are allocated as required to answer calls. They may return to the parade site during the shift but were more likely to go to one of the custody suites. Officers have mobile devices so can work from any police building.
- Resource planning provides a minimum of 72 emergency response officers per shift across the four boroughs.
- Data shows calls and crime reports received per borough but not officer time spent in each borough.

- The move to the BCU model of policing has introduced a different way of working whereby officers follow through on crime reports rather than passing to other officers (this bring the BCU in line with other parts of the country)
- Each ward has two dedicated police officers and one PCSO, in line with an undertaking by the Mayor of London. The number is not based on the number of total notifiable offences recorded for each ward.
- Officers within the BCU are moved around to work flexibly and respond to demands as they arise. Additional resources can be drawn in from a central London pool if required, based on the risk posed balanced against demands elsewhere in London.
- Ward officers look at crimes and trends in the local area and put out messages to residents. The BCU Commander undertook to discuss communication issues with Neighbourhood Watch.
- There will be more school police officers in the BCU than previously and more work with primary schools. There are a number of vacancies at present.
- No decision has been made yet on where the bases for the neighbourhood hubs will be located. The BCU Commander undertook to discuss this with Councillor Edith Macauley, Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities.

In response to a request for further information, the BCU Commander said that there is a police protocol that sets out powers and procedures in relation to Traveller encampments. Responses are made in partnership with the council. Debriefs are carried out and lessons learned include the importance of clear communication, ensuring response is proportionate and taking account of other responsibilities including safeguarding. Neil Thurlow, the council's Community Safety Manager, added that the council is currently considering the case for taking out a borough wide injunction to protect council-owned land. Members noted that the Commission would receive a report on the Travellers unauthorised encampment protocol at its meeting on 24 April 2019.

There was discussion about the number of parking spaces available at Mitcham Police Station. ACTION: Councillors Owen Pritchard and Paul Kohler agreed to visit to check the actual number.

The BCU Commander invited Commission members to visit the police command control centre at Hendon to see how 999 calls are handled and allocated.

In response to a question about the crime statistics set out in the report the BCU Commander said that the number of offences had increased slightly and the detection rate had decreased slightly. This is the case across the BCU but less so in Merton than elsewhere. The police continue to encourage reporting of domestic abuse and are working to tackle knife crime, which is one of the local priorities.

5 EXECUTIVE RESPONSE AND ACTION PLAN - RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF TEACHERS SCRUTINY TASK GROUP (Agenda Item 6)

Members discussed the executive response to recommendations made by the task group. Overall, disappointment was expressed that the responses had not taken on board detailed points made by the task group in its report and that responses to some of the recommendations had not addressed the totality of the recommendation (for example, recommendations 1,2 and 16). The Director for Children Schools and Families, Rachael Wardell, said she would take the Commission's comments into account when bringing the progress update to the Commission on 20 March.

Members made specific comments on a number of recommendations:

Recommendation 3

Members noted that the recommendation had been accepted "in principle" only and were hoping for more enthusiasm to be demonstrated in promoting the teacher apprenticeship scheme.

Rachael Wardell, said that the scheme would be promoted as one of a number of routes into teaching, albeit one for which there is a relatively small pool of potential applicants.

Recommendations 9-12

Members expressed disappointment but not surprise that Cabinet had rejected these recommendations and said although they understood Cabinet's reasons for the rejections, housing remained a significant factor in the recruitment and retention of teachers.

Rachael Wardell said that, in addition to the points made by the Cabinet Member, the lack of housing stock at the disposal of the council and the decreasing number of teachers to be directly employed by the council (rather than by academies for example) would make such an offer impracticable and very costly.

ACTION: The Commission Chair, Councillor Peter Southgate, and co-opted member Helen Forbes will review the executive response and provide detailed comments on where there should be a fuller response in March.

6 SAFER MERTON UPDATE REPORT (Agenda Item 5)

Neil Thurlow, Safer Merton Manager, introduced his colleague Temitayo Oketunji, newly appointed Victims Champion. Neil Thurlow summarised the main points from the report to provide an update on work undertaken by Safer Merton and the Community Safety Partnership over the past 12 months.

Neil Thurlow and Temitayo Oketunji proved additional information in response to questions:

- The majority of anti-social behaviour cases are received via email or from the contact centre and require low level involvement and/or signposting to other agencies
- Ask Angela numbers are not recorded centrally as they are dealt with by the licensed premises that receives the request
- The Victims Champion post has been funded for 3 years by the Mayor of London
- The restorative justice officer works to explain the concept of restorative justice to victims and to engage them in the process to achieve an outcome. The level of uptake has been low locally, in London and nationally. Neil Thurlow advised that this work sits with Roberta Evans, the Youth Offending Team Manager in CSF, and undertook an action to request information on how the work is analysed. ACTION: Safer Merton Manager and Youth Offending Team Manager

In response to a question about problems experienced with the 101 phone number, the BCU Borough Commander, Detective Superintendent Sally Benatar, said that some improvements have been made to the menu of options that have reduced waiting time to an average of 85 seconds this week and that a recruitment campaign for 101 phone line staff would start soon.

Councillor Edith Macauley, Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities drew the Commission's attention to the work of the One Stop Shop, which has helped around 2500 people since its inception 8 years ago. She added that a presentation on hate crime work had been well received by the Joint Consultative Committee With Ethnic Minority Organisations.

The Chair thanked Neil Thurlow for his comprehensive report and asked if a short email could be sent to all councillors to set out key messages about phoning the police which could be passed on to residents. ACTION: Safer Merton Manager

7 TASK GROUP TERMS OF REFERENCE - ROAD SAFETY (Agenda Item 7)

RESOLVED:

1. to agree the terms of reference of the road safety around schools task group as set out in the report;
2. to appoint Councillors Rebecca Lanning and Peter Southgate and co-opted member Helen Forbes to the task group. Further members to be sought by the Head of Democracy Services.

ACTION: Head of Democracy Services.

Members asked that the task group assess the viability and contribution of a pedestrian area around schools; and make sure that children and young people wear helmets when cycling and comply with the Highway Code.

8 TASK GROUP TERMS OF REFERENCE - EU RESIDENTS IN MERTON
(Agenda Item 8)

RESOLVED to agree the terms of reference with a small change to read:

- To consider what support EU residents and council employees will require to identify their status and rights as Brexit progresses;
- To identify existing support and best practice in other councils, voluntary organisations and in the private sector that could inform the council's approach in providing or signposting to services;
- To make recommendations about how the council could support or signpost EU residents and council employees as Brexit progresses in order to achieve the optimum outcome for that individual, including to secure settled status if desired.

9 MINUTES OF THE FINANCIAL MONITORING TASK GROUP, 30 AUGUST
2018 (Agenda Item 9)

Noted.

10 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 10)

RESOLVED:

1. To agree the work programme as set out in the report
2. To ask the Director of Corporate Services to use the November Business Plan report as an opportunity to provide the Commission with information on how the large budget gap predicted for 2020/21 will be addressed, what options are available for closing the gap and what are the implications of each option