

Committee: Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Date: 24 April 2019

Subject: Crime and policing in Merton

Lead officer: Chief Superintendent Sally Benatar, BCU Commander

Lead member: Councillor Peter Southgate, Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Commission

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Recommendations:

- A. That the Overview and Scrutiny Commission discuss and comment on the responses to its questions (see Appendix A) and the crime data provided by the Borough Commander (see Appendix B) and ask other questions as appropriate.
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1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. The Basic Command Unit (BCU) Commander, Chief Superintendent Sally Benatar, has been invited to attend the Overview and Scrutiny Commission meeting to give a brief overview of any changes since she attended previously in September 2018 and to address the questions identified by Commission members in section 2 below. Her responses are set out in Appendix A.
- 1.2. She was also requested to provide crime data in the same format as that provided previously. This is set out in Appendix B.

2 DETAILS

- 2.1. The BCU Commander has been asked to provide an overview of any changes since the last meeting and anything she wished to draw to the Commission's attention.
- 2.2. Commission members also identified a number of questions they would like to discuss with the BCU Commander. These were emailed in advance of the meeting so that the BCU Commander could prepare her answers. The questions and answers are set out in full in Appendix A. The questions are:
1. what are the police doing to limit the theft from vehicles and theft of vehicles, also in particular the short term rise in theft of cat converters in certain types of vehicles (but not others)
 2. what are the police doing to tackle the rise of 'organised' begging and 'false homeless people', including scammers and trouble makers
 3. why is it that the Police do not impound van and lorries without road tax, MOT or insurance that are used to transport rubbish that is fly-tipped? (for example, the fly-tipping that occurred on the car wash site at the top of West Barnes Lane in May last year, see: <https://twitter.com/stephencrowe999>) This specific lack of action appears to be in line with a general policy on non-enforcement in these types of incident; why?

4. what is being done to educate children and prevent knife crime across the borough? Please include the knife crime action plan in the agenda pack.
 5. what is the Borough Commander doing to press the Deputy Mayor for Policing to finalise the issue of whether Wimbledon police station will be closed or not?
 6. What communication has the BCU Commander had with the Deputy Mayor for Policing & Crime (or any other member of MOPAC) in connection with future plans for Wimbledon and/or Mitcham police stations.
 7. When is the Morden Police Station opening?
 8. Following the inaccurate response to our previous question, where the BCU Commander incorrectly stated the capacity of Mitcham police station yard to be 45 vehicles, when it is in fact no more than 30, what plans does she have to house all the vehicles currently stationed at Wimbledon & Mitcham police stations?
 9. Merton is struggling to access resources through the Tactical Tasking and Co-ordinating Group (TTCG) because most of it is going to Wandsworth. What does Merton need to do to access it and ensure it doesn't lose out?
 10. People are fearful of coming forward and reporting crimes, particular low level crimes like anti-social behaviour, because of the repercussions so there is a lot of unreported crimes. There has to be a focus on getting people to come forward, but in cases where this isn't possible what more can be done to ensure that crimes can still be addressed.
 11. People in Mitcham are asking for Bobbies on the Beat. What are you doing to ensure that addressing crime in Mitcham Town Centre is made a strategic priority?
 12. Is the BC aware of any returning ISIS fighters and their families who have come back to the four boroughs making up the BCU, and specifically to Merton? What measures are being taken to monitor their activities?
 13. What were police response times in Merton, for each of the three categories of call out, in each of the 12 months prior to the merger of the BCU and in each of the months following merger.
- 2.3. The BCU Commander's responses to these questions are set out in Appendix A.
- 2.4. The BCU Commander has been informed that members of the Commission intend to ask additional detailed questions at the meeting on the 24th to focus on three specific areas:
- policy and response in relation to Traveller sites (in conjunction with written report from the council's Property Management and Review Manager already on the Commission's agenda for 24 April
 - the future of both Wimbledon & Mitcham police stations and the operational impact on the BCU of the decision to retain Lavender Hill Police Station.
 - how the BCU has impacted on police resourcing within the borough and how resources are flexed. In particular, the Commission is interested in the deployment and backfilling of Community Police Support Officers, particularly in areas with higher than average TNO rates

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

Commission members may choose to ask questions about other aspects of policing in Merton.

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

4.1. Not applicable.

5 TIMETABLE

5.1. Not applicable.

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

6.1. There are no property or resource implications at this time.

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

7.1. None for the purposes of this report.

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

8.1. None for the purposes of this report.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

9.1. None for the purposes of this report.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

None for the purpose of this report.

11 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

Appendix A – BCU Commander’s response to questions posed by members of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Appendix B – crime data for Merton and surrounding boroughs

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1. None

Appendix A Questions and answers from the BCU Commander

1. what are the police doing to limit the theft from vehicles and theft of vehicles, also in particular the short term rise in theft of cat converters in certain types of vehicles (but not others)

answer

Work is ongoing with a mixture of plain clothes and uniformed activity. Morden Neighbourhood teams have completed a number of proactive operations at known places and times where cars have been targeted. We have had staff in the Council CCTV room during these operations to look for and target a vehicle that we have identified involved in a significant number of crimes both in Merton and Sutton. The vehicle has been on several sets of false plates but work continues to identify and target these offences. We also continue to push out crime prevention advice to warn people not to leave their possessions in view in their vehicles.

2. what are the police doing to tackle the rise of 'organised' begging and 'false homeless people', including scammers and trouble makers

answer

Our neighbourhood teams have been completing proactive plain clothes work to target not just the people doing the begging but the vehicles dropping them off. They have been liaising with officers across the South West Command Unit in order to proactively target the offenders and the people who are assisting them. Offenders have been given support information. A number of community protection warnings (CPWs) have now been issued.

3. why is it that the Police do not impound van and lorries without road tax, MOT or insurance that are used to transport rubbish that is fly-tipped? (for example, the fly-tipping that occurred on the car wash site at the top of West Barnes Lane in May last year, see: <https://twitter.com/stephencrowe999>) This specific lack of action appears to be in line with a general policy on non-enforcement in these types of incident; why?

answer

Police are limited in their powers when fly tipping is occurring on private property. Lack of road tax is a matter for the DVLA. If vehicles are parked on private property there are legal issues with prosecuting offenders for vehicle offences. When vehicles are seen on roads, police will look to deal with any offences that are identified.

Police have worked closely with the council and have successfully seized and crushed vehicles that have been involved in fly tipping. This work is ongoing and footage of the first vehicles crushed was widely publicised by police and council. We will continue to do this.

4. what is being done to educate children and prevent knife crime across the borough? Please include the knife crime action plan in the agenda pack.

answer

We are working tirelessly to identify and pursue offenders, help bring perpetrators to justice, take weapons off the street, support victims, engage and reassure the public, and keep our communities safe.

Tackling crime requires strong partnership working. Police often have a role in galvanising a response but it will take sustained and effective partnership working with a holistic, preventative approach at grass-roots levels to deal with the complex causes and to create tangible alternatives for our young people, helping them avoid the draw into gangs and violence.

We have initiated public information campaigns to educate the public and urge citizens to be vigilant and report concerns to the police; and to give them the confidence to play a proactive part in tackling the issue within their communities. We support the work of our partners in understanding and effectively tackling the root causes of drug and violent crime affecting young people.

Some of our key assets in tackling violence include the Violent Crime Taskforce, which is a team of specifically selected, full-time police officers who focus on tackling violent crime on the streets of London, using a full range of proactive tactics. We also have the Trident unit in place to tackle gun and gang crime through intelligence led stop and search, armed patrols, pro-active and reactive investigations. Trident is committed to extensive diversionary work to steer young people and gang members away from a life of crime, as well as working with the firearms industry, licence holders and registered firearms dealers to ensure gun safety. We work closely with social media companies to take down videos which encourage and promote violence.

We are also running or involved in a multitude of other diversionary schemes utilising sport or music, working with organisations such as Wave Trust and Kicks to build relationships, provide positive mentoring and signposting to help and support more positive life choices.

The Volunteer Police Cadets have 5,100 cadets aged between 10-18 and seeks referrals from Youth Offending Teams, partner organisations and schools. They undertake a range of activities exploring key crime issues, helping with police activities including community knife sweeps and test purchasing operations.

We work closely with Merton Council on the Community Safety Partnership Knife Crime and Serious Youth Violence Plan, which focuses on the protection of life, the reduction in youth violence, bringing offenders to justice and supporting victims and their witnesses.

5. what is the Borough Commander doing to press the Deputy Mayor for Policing to finalise the issue of whether Wimbledon police station will be closed or not?

Answer - I will provide an update on this subject at the Commission.

6. What communication has the BCU Commander had with the Deputy Mayor for Policing & Crime (or any other member of MOPAC) in connection with future plans for Wimbledon and/or Mitcham police stations.

Answer - I communicate regularly with the MOPAC team and will provide an update at the Commission.

7. When is the Morden Police Station opening?

answer

There is no date for the reopening of this police base. Our Property Service colleagues are reviewing whether it's viable to retain this premises for use as a Safer Neighbourhood base. I'm optimistic that it will be but I don't have a definitive answer or timescale yet. I will update the Head of Community Safety as soon as I can.

8. Following the inaccurate response to our previous question, where the BCU Commander incorrectly stated the capacity of Mitcham police station yard to be 45 vehicles, when it is in fact no more than 30, what plans does she have to house all the vehicles currently stationed at Wimbledon & Mitcham police stations?

answer

The capacity is 45.

9. Merton is struggling to access resources through the Tactical Tasking and Co-ordinating Group (TTCG) because most of it is going to Wandsworth. What does Merton need to do to access it and ensure it doesn't lose out?

answer

Merton does receive resources from through Tactical and Coordinating Group process. Merton officers bid for resources at the meetings. The resources are limited and have to be deployed across the South West Command Unit to the areas where the need is greatest. For the first two weeks of April, there is a significant increase in plain clothes tasked resources in Mitcham as per recent bids at TTCG.

If a partner identifies an issue which they feel needs tackling the first point of call should be their Neighbourhood team who will complete some analysis and give some thought as to how to solve the problem; the team will then attend the TTCG to request resources to assist them.

10. People are fearful of coming forward and reporting crimes, particular low level crimes like anti-social behaviour, because of the repercussions so there is a lot of unreported crimes. There has to be a focus on getting people to come forward, but in cases where this isn't possible what more can be done to ensure that crimes can still be addressed.

answer

A lot of the work the Met is doing has been outlined at question 4. Communities have a vital role to play in tackling violent crime. We want to hear from anyone who may have information about anti-social behaviour or crime in their neighbourhood. This information could save lives in the future. Non-urgent crime including anti-social behaviour can be reported online via the Met Police website, and there is a link to this on the Merton Council website. Anti-social behaviour can also be reported directly to the council.

If people aren't comfortable speaking directly to the police, we encourage them to contact the independent charity Crimestoppers. They do not ask your name or trace your call. Fearless.org is a site where people can access non-judgemental information and advice about crime and criminality. It also provides a safe place to provide information anonymously about crime.

Our Neighbourhood teams run weekly community contact sessions for residents to contact them and will take action when information is received, where it is appropriate.

11. People in Mitcham are asking for Bobbies on the Beat. What are you doing to ensure that addressing crime in Mitcham Town Centre is made a strategic priority?

answer

Anti-social behaviour is one of the Merton priorities with a specific focus on Mitcham. The Dedicated Ward Officers are out patrolling across their ward on foot, bike and occasionally in vehicles. There are no vacancies on the Neighbourhood teams in Mitcham and I recognise the importance of keeping the teams up to strength in this area. As in a previous answer, there is also proactive work by the CID ongoing in Mitcham to address crime issues and this is reviewed regularly through our tasking process.

12. Is the BC aware of any returning ISIS fighters and their families who have come back to the four boroughs making up the BCU, and specifically to Merton? What measures are being taken to monitor their activities?

answer

The Counter-Terrorist Command are not aware of any returnee ISIS fighters that have returned to one of the four boroughs that make up the South West Command Unit.

If this were to happen, which would most probably be in the context of a prisoner release, the Counter-Terrorist Command would link in with me and the Local Authority at the earliest opportunity in order to discuss this further and to jointly manage any associated risk and / or safeguarding concerns.

13. What were police response times in Merton, for each of the three categories of call out, in each of the 12 months prior to the merger of the BCU and in each of the months following merger.

Answer

I have provided details of Immediate call performance (calls that are graded as requiring a response within 15 minutes) and I will of course be happy to answer questions on this at the Commission.