

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES

16 MARCH 2010

Chairman:	* Councillor Stanley Sheinwald	
Councillors:	* Mrs Margaret Davine * B E Gate * Mitzi Green * Jerry Miles * Mrs Vina Mithani * Janet Mote	* Christopher Noyce * Anthony Seymour † Mrs Rekha Shah Dinesh Solanki * Yogesh Teli * Mark Versallion
Voting Co-opted:	(Voluntary Aided) † Mrs J Rammelt Reverend P Reece	(Parent Governors) * Mr R Chauhan Mrs D Speel
In attendance: (Councillors)	* Councillor Susan Hall	Minute number: 700 and 701

- * Denotes Member present
- † Denotes apologies received

693. Attendance by Reserve Members

RESOLVED: That there were no Reserve Members in attendance.

694. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: To note that the following interests were declared:

Agenda Item 8 – Safer Harrow Annual Strategic Assessment 2009

Councillor Mitzi Green declared a personal interest in that she currently worked for the Crown Prosecution Service. She would remain in the room during the discussion and decision making on this item.

Councillor Mark Versallion declared a personal interest in that he was currently a Non-Executive Director of North West London Hospitals NHS Trust. His uncle was also head of the Metropolitan Police's dive team. He would remain in the room during the discussion and decision making on this item.

Councillor Janet Mote declared a personal interest in that her daughter currently worked at Northwick Park Hospital. She would remain in the room during the discussion and decision making on this item.

Councillor Brian Gate declared a personal interest in that he was married to a health professional based at St Peter's Medical Centre. His daughter also currently worked part-time at two medical centres. He would remain in the room during the discussion and decision making on this item.

695. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 23 February 2010 be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

696. Public Questions

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were put.

697. Petitions

RESOLVED: To note that no petitions were received.

698. Deputations

RESOLVED: To note that no deputations were received.

699. References from Council/Cabinet

RESOLVED: To note that there were no references.

RESOLVED ITEMS

700. Safer Harrow Annual Strategic Assessment 2009

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Community Safety and the Borough Commander, Dalwardin Babu, introduced the Annual Strategic Assessment. The Committee were informed that the assessment had been developed to enable partnerships to remain responsive to their local communities. By developing a better understanding of local crime trends, Harrow Police and its

partners were able to prioritise and allocate resources effectively. The Committee were informed that:

- residential burglaries in 2009 had increased by 11% in comparison to 2008. Approximately 50% of those arrested for burglary were not from Harrow;
- there had been 1247 recorded cases of domestic violence in 2009, a 13% increase from 2008. The previous year had seen an increase of 26%. It was felt that the increase in recorded cases of domestic violence was due to increased confidence amongst victims that their allegations would be taken seriously;
- there were 1623 cases of theft from vehicles in 2009, an increase of 3% from 2008. Number plates were the item most frequently stolen and there were plans to use SmartWater to tackle the problem;
- vehicle theft had decreased by 31% from 2008, with 335 cases reported. In order to achieve this reduction, the Police had worked closely with Safer Neighbourhood Teams;
- the Police were working closely with partners to combat alcohol related crime and disorder, with troublesome premises being threatened with closure. Football events at Wembley Stadium often resulted in many individuals coming into the borough to drink and, on such days, Harrow was provided with additional resources to deal with any disturbances;
- drug possession offences had decreased by 12% from 2008, with cannabis remaining the most commonly detected drug. The number of cannabis factories in the borough had increased in recent years, and the Police were working hard to target the individuals involved;
- between October 2008 and September 2009 there were 788 incidents reported on trains and at train stations in Harrow. The Police were working closely with the management of transport hubs to tackle the problem and progress was being made;
- the Police were working closely with the Council to encourage victims of hate crime to report incidents;
- Harrow currently had the third lowest violent youth offending statistics of London's 33 boroughs. Specialist Youth Offending Officers targeted young individuals that were considered at risk of offending;
- there were 404 robberies against the person in 2009, a decrease of 18% on 2008. This decrease followed a concerted effort by the Police to reduce incidents;
- in order to reduce anti-social behaviour, the Police actively shared data with the Council. The Police and the Council were also looking to change the way in which anti-social behaviour was dealt with on

estates. It was expected that perceptions of anti-social behaviour would improve once the Neighbourhood Champions scheme was fully implemented;

- the Council would be offering SmartWater to all 85,000 houses and flats in Harrow. Trained Police Officers would mark valuables with a solution which was almost impossible to remove and only visible under UV light. The SmartWater used in each individual's home would be unique and allow the Police to identify the rightful owner of stolen property that had been marked.

Following questions from the Committee, the Borough Commander, Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) Link Member and the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Community Safety stated that:

- Harrow was statistically one of the safest boroughs in London. Richmond had started to move ahead of Harrow although, as a smaller borough, like-for-like comparisons were not always possible;
- it was believed that the increase in the number of racist offences being reported indicated that people were confident that racism would be taken seriously by the Police and, as a result, were more likely to report such incidents;
- if a victim felt that an incident had been racially motivated, the Police were required to report it as a racist offence;
- SmartWater could be used in security systems so that intruders were sprayed with the substance. If later apprehended, the Police would be able to prove that the individual had committed an offence;
- the SmartWater initiative was being funded by the Council and supported by the Police who were investing significant resources into the initiative. Police Officers would visit the homes of those that wished to participate in the scheme in order to mark property with SmartWater. As SmartWater was unique to every property, residents would not be allowed to mark their own items nor keep spare SmartWater for future use;
- it was hoped that, with almost every home in Harrow utilising SmartWater, burglars would be less likely to operate in the borough. Every property using SmartWater would be given a sticker to place on their window;
- in order to combat offending by young people, the Police were working closely with schools, head teachers and Youth Offending Teams, with Police officers based at schools. The Police also attended school assemblies to educate students;
- in order to combat graffiti, the Police had access to a database of known 'tags' and the individuals they belonged to. Whilst the number

of incidents reported had increased by 132% since 2008, this was mostly due to Safer Neighbourhood Teams proactively reporting graffiti. In addition, if multiple individuals reported the same piece of graffiti, this was recorded as multiple offences;

- in order to monitor sex offenders living in the borough, the Police worked closely with the probation service. Offenders were periodically visited and there was a robust offender management scheme in place. At present, local residents did not have access to information concerning known sex offenders living in their area. However, a sex offender disclosure scheme was being piloted by some police forces, with the prospect that it might be implemented nationally in the future;
- the Police were actively encouraging certain communities to report crime, especially sexual offences. Although this often resulted in an increase in total notifiable offences, it was important that residents felt confident that the Police would take all allegations seriously;
- the crime statistics collected by the Police were used to identify trends and inform decisions relating resource allocation. The Strategic Assessment was used by the Police's Partners, including the Council and the Primary Care Trust (PCT), in order to work collaboratively to combat specific problems;
- incidents of car number plate theft had increased since the introduction of the congestion charge. The Police utilised automatic number plate readers in certain locations and would stop any car that was considered suspicious. The Police were also considering the use of SmartWater to discourage theft in the first instance;
- unemployment and the recession had not had a significant impact on crime levels in Harrow;
- sentencing of criminals was the responsibility of the Crown Prosecution Service. Not all crimes warranted a prison sentence, nor was this a cost-effective option. In the case of many young people it was felt that diversion activities and community orders were more appropriate;
- domestic violence was a priority for Harrow Police and a significant portion of the Local Area Agreement reward grant would be used to tackle the issue and improve support for victims, including young people. The Police were also working with Northwick Park Hospital in order to identify victims of domestic violence, particularly in cases where children were at risk;
- approximately half of all burglars apprehended in Harrow were not residents, with many coming from neighbouring boroughs. The Police kept a database of known offenders and undertook unannounced visits to their homes. It was hoped that the introduction of SmartWater would further discourage burglars from operating in Harrow, although it was hard for the Police to differentiate between "opportunity" and "planned"

offences. The Council's gating scheme for back alleyways was also helping to reduce the number of burglaries taking place;

- the MPA was responsible for resource allocation across the Metropolitan Police area. In order to calculate the required resources, a resource allocation formula had been introduced 7 years' ago. Although the formula might be altered in the future, nothing had yet been confirmed.

The Chairman noted that, in his experience, most anti-social behaviour on public buses occurred in the early morning. He stated that route 140 was particularly bad. He noted that most Police activity occurred during the afternoon and suggested that the scheduling of resources be re-examined. The Borough Commander agreed to look into the matter.

A Member stated that he was pleased that the Police wished to work more closely with Harrow NHS in order to combat drug abuse and suggested that the subject be considered for inclusion in the 2010/11 Scrutiny work programme.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Strategic Assessment be agreed for publication;
- (2) figures detailing the number of young offenders sentenced to custody and the number of registered sex offenders living in Harrow be provided to Members.

701. Winter Leaf Fall - Impact on Environmental Services

The Committee received a report which outlined the way in which the Council dealt with leaf collection. In response to questions from Members, an officer and the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Community Safety stated that:

- in order to prevent root damage to nearby structures, all new trees were planted in deep tree beds. In cases where individuals reported root damage to their property, the Council would investigate and, if necessary, install root barriers. It was not always possible to remove a tree as doing so had the potential to cause further problems such as increasing the amount of excess water in the surrounding soil and damaging underground cables;
- as part of the contract the Council had secured, any new tree that was reported to have caused problems would be replaced free of charge within the first 2 years;
- staff from different areas were drafted in to assist with leaf collection including the street cleaning and ground maintenance teams.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) it be noted that the winter leaf fall had been addressed successfully;
- (2) all those involved in the successful collection be congratulated on their accomplishment.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 9.25 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR STANLEY SHEINWALD
Chairman