

LONDON BOROUGH OF HARROW

CABINET – 12 JULY 2018

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 5 JUNE 2018

Community Safety, Violence, Vulnerability and Exploitation – Annual Refresh

The Committee received a report on the Annual Refresh of the Community Safety and Violence, Vulnerability and Exploitation Strategy. The Divisional Director, Strategic Commissioning introduced the report, advising that it built upon the comments from the Committee when it considered the draft strategic assessment in March; further work had been done to address specific points raised then by Members.

Chief Superintendent Simon Rose, Borough Police Commander for Harrow confirmed that the document reflected both the priorities of the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) and the two additional local priorities selected by the Council.

A Member asked about the definition of motor vehicle crime. Chief Superintendent Rose advised that this data did not include those crimes in which people were robbed while in or on their vehicles. Theft from motor vehicles had declined by 5.8% in the period in question, while theft of motor vehicles had increased by 43%. However, overall, crimes involving motor vehicles in the Borough had reduced substantially. He referred to thieves targeting high value vehicles which modern electronic locking systems; they were now able to "scan" the vehicles when left unattended, say, in a supermarket car park during the day, and acquire the electronic data to be able to then steal it overnight.

Another Member welcomed the new Portfolio Holder for Community Safety to his first meeting of the Committee in that capacity, and asked him to clarify the scope of his role. The Portfolio Holder clarified his remit, confirming that crime and community in respect of children and young people would be covered. He underlined that he would seek to work in partnership with relevant local organisations, including the Harrow Youth Parliament and Young Harrow Foundation. He would prioritise addressing crimes against and involving young people, and violent crimes such as knife crimes which had increased in London recently.

In response to a Member's question about the crime levels in Croydon revealed in the data, Chief Superintendent Rose advised that the borough

was affected by the number of care homes for young people located there which had the effect of increasing certain types of crime. London Boroughs had their own particular factors such as the gang and drugs issues in Lambeth, the impact of the Notting Hill Carnival in Kensington and Chelsea, and the number of Premiership football teams in Hammersmith and Fulham. So across London, there was a range of different factors affecting crime. He confirmed that, by comparison, Harrow remained a very safe borough. In terms of the trends in certain areas, for example the recent modest reduction in crime in Croydon, Chief Superintendent Rose cautioned that data could sometimes mislead; for example, an increase in crime levels sometimes reflected Police activity to detect crime and arrest those involved. He also explained the different classifications of knife crimes to help Members interpret some of the data. The Police would often shift resources from one area to another to respond to particular situations; for example, Harrow had received more resources recently following a killing and other incidents. These fluctuations in resources made it difficult to rely completely on some trends in crime data.

Replying to a question on the overall reliability of data, the Divisional Director reassured the Committee that the data presented in the report was from MOPAC and was the most relevant available. Chief Superintendent Rose added that interpretation of the data could be challenging as some short-term trends did not necessarily reveal anything of significance.

A Member referred to increasing public concern over violent crime, particularly the use of knives. Chief Superintendent Rose confirmed that there had been increases in violent crime and knife crime in recent months and concerns had arisen from stabbing incidents in Queensbury and Wealdstone. He explained that these had been linked to gangs operating in Brent and Ealing and that a public meeting had been held on the issues in the previous week at the Red Brick Café in the Wealdstone Centre. South Harrow was currently a crime hotspot and Police were addressing this with various strands of work locally.

A Member who had recently been elected for the first time reiterated the concern among local people about violent crime. She asked about the levels of crime in her ward, the increase in hate crime revealed in the report, and the fact that only a quarter of residents surveyed knew how to contact their local ward Police officers. Chief Superintendent Rose reported that some wards, such as those close to town centres, would always have higher levels of crime, and factors such as new licenced premises and the location of night clubs would also have an effect. With respect to the result of the survey question on contacting ward officers, he suspected that his ward had been affected by a change in the survey methodology in the last year. He acknowledged that changes in personnel had not helped, but he expected that this awareness would increase over time; he referred to improvements in the Metropolitan Police website which now provided for post code searches for local officers and to a new project with University College London designed to improve access to "Designated Ward Officers". In respect of hate crime, he advised that this was sensitive to world events and high-profile news stories. To some extent, the data would be affected by the Police and community trying to address under-reporting. Relevant data was available on a ward basis on the Metropolitan Police website. The Divisional Director added that

the Council worked with Stop Hate UK as an agent to facilitate and increase third-party reporting and that a conference had been held to discuss issues with key stakeholders in local communities.

The Member followed up her question by asking about partnership working with other boroughs. Chief Superintendent Rose reported that his Borough Commander role covered Brent and Barnet as well as Harrow so Police officers, senior council staff and other relevant agencies would share information and best practice. He gave an example from another area which involved an arrangement with children's care homes to deal with disruption and damage by residents without immediate recourse to calling the Police in; incidents could then be addressed with greater sensitivity and more careful direction of resources. The Divisional Director added that a meeting had taken place in Ealing earlier that day concerning the Racecourse Estate in Northolt and the activities of the South Harrow gang. The Council funded an organisation called Ignite to work on gangs and this included opportunities for cross-borough engagement.

A Member referred to the treatment of the issue of modern slavery in the report, expressing concern that there did not seem to be any particular plan to address it. The Divisional Director explained that there had been recent legislation which meant the Council needed to understand the definition of modern slavery and develop ways of identifying the signs of its operation. By its nature, it was a hidden crime and was also strongly linked to organised crime. Chief Superintendent Rose gave the example of some nail bars which used staff who had been trafficked from abroad, were accommodated in often crowded, squalid conditions and were then charged exorbitant amounts for board and lodging, effectively having to work for no pay or being forced into debt. There were similar abuses connected to car washes, cannabis farms, sex workers and the "county lines" drug business. The Divisional Director added that there might be scope for the Council to take enforcement action about the operation of some of the businesses involved; he would raise this with the relevant Council department.

The Member also asked about the scope to share crime data across agencies and the lack support to victims of crime. Chief Superintendent Rose confirmed that while data was shared across agencies, there were clearly limits to this; for example, to protect the identity of informants. There were agreed information sharing arrangements for non-sensitive data. He referred to corporate arrangements for victim support, though he accepted that the switch to an "opt-in" system a year ago may have affected the perception of the availability of services. Victim Support had confirmed that they have capacity to meet the needs of victims. Chief Superintendent Rose explained that, in some cases, the Police could not do as much in terms of community reassurance as they wished because there were reporting restrictions in relation to some crimes and there were cases where an investigation and/or prosecution might be prejudiced by open communications about what had happened. However, the Police did as much as possible within these constraints, to provide information, including to ward councillors, and to reassure the community and support victims.

The Member's final question concerned the portrayal of Harrow as the safest borough in London and the risk that this could engender complacency in agencies working to tackle crime and possibly attract more crime in future as a result. Chief Superintendent Rose was not aware that criminals were taking advantage in this way. He referred to the difference in the number of calls to Police via the 999 emergency in a recent period – 609 in Harrow while Brent and Barnet had each received over a thousand – as indicating a genuine difference in criminal activity.

Another newly-elected councillor asked whether the information on Pages 63 and 64 of the agenda pack reflected a seasonal link to the level of anti-social behaviour. He also sought an indication of the trend in anti-social behaviour in the first few months of 2018, since many residents had raised the issue in the election campaign. Chief Superintendent Rose reported that spikes in the levels of anti-social behaviour were clearly related to certain seasonal events such as Halloween, school holidays, Bonfire Night and the Notting Hill Carnival; periods of hot weather also correlated. He had figures for anti-social behaviour over the previous 12 months and these revealed a decrease of 13.1% in anti-social behaviour and 11% in repeat anti-social behaviour; there had been a drop across London as well, but by a smaller proportion. Chief Superintendent Rose accepted that residents were nevertheless concerned about the issue.

The Chair asked whether the information on Page 117 of the agenda pack indicated a drop in confidence in policing. Chief Superintendent Rose accepted that the survey results on knowing how to contact local Police officers and the provision of information to local residents were disappointing and improvements should be put in place. Traditionally, local officers had sought to engage residents in local meetings on topical local issues, but it was acknowledged that many, particularly young people, tended not to come to such events. The Police were keen to develop other methods including the "OWL" online neighbourhood watch system, but there were issues of cost to resolve. "Virtual" ward panel meetings would encourage a broader range of people and subjects to be involved.

A Member welcomed the idea of online neighbourhood panels. She underlined the considerable shift recently in the fear of crime, giving the example of artifice burglary as making people afraid even in the relative safety of their own homes; she also referred to a family connection with the only British person killed in the London Bridge terrorist attack in June 2017. She urged all agencies and councillors to encourage residents not to fear crime disproportionately and not to let it affect their daily lives unduly. Chief Superintendent Rose was very conscious of the issue and he reported that he had had discussions with the Harrow Times crime reporter to encourage greater coverage of good news stories rather than simply featuring serious crime when it occurred. This would help in achieving a more balanced picture of community safety in the Borough.

On the subject of artifice burglary, the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety referred to his introduction of a "no cold calling" zone in his ward. Chief Superintendent Rose reported on the "smart water" system which had been introduced in some households; as it involved warning stickers and posters,

this would have some deterrent effect on potential burglars, but evidence suggested that the biggest impact was on the occupant of the property as simply applying for and implementing the smart water pack, had the effect of making them more careful and observant. He explained that the scheme was sometimes introduced in particular zones with a target of signing up 80% of households there; this tended to be more effective than individual households paying for their own smart water pack. Chief Superintendent Rose was aware of a small team at Scotland Yard working on levels of burglary across London which could inform implementation of the scheme in a coordinated way in target areas across the capital. In response to a question as to whether the Administration could fund a local project, the Divisional Director advised that there were always choices to be made about the priority and value for money of various schemes; in his instance, there was some evidence that the scheme itself was not as significant driver of change as awareness of the risks among residents. The Member asked that more information be sent to the Committee on the smart water scheme.

The remaining Member of the Committee who elected recently for the first time, reported that she had been a victim of burglary and aggravated harassment over the previous 12 month; there had also been a stabbing on a nearby estate. She was concerned about the trends in certain crimes, particularly knife crime and hate crime and the decline in the numbers and local visibility of Police officers. She asked about the Police plan to address this and particularly about the rumours that South Harrow Police Station was to be closed. Chief Superintendent Rose confirmed that the Police were retaining the premises with a "front desk" for the public; indeed, the building was being refurbished. He acknowledged the natural public concerns over reports of crime and the genuine recent increase in knife crime in London; however, he wanted to underline that the Police were responding to this and were adopting ways of coping better with the budget reductions they had to implement; for example, Police officers were increasingly using tablet/smartphone devices and applications to file reports without the previous requirement to return physically to a base to type up reports. By comparison with the Metropolitan Police average response time of 15 minutes, Harrow's was 7 minutes and 44 seconds. The Divisional Director added that the Council had responded to the consultation exercise about the future of South Harrow Police Station and underlined the value of community representatives reassuring the public about its future.

In response to a Member's query about bids for funding to implement local community safety initiatives, Chief Superintendent Rose reported that a number of partnership bids with Brent had been submitted to MOPAC, including a number since his recent arrival as Borough Commander. The Divisional Director confirmed that the Council tried to submit as many funding bids as staff capacity allowed. There were sometimes judgements to be made about the value of some funding schemes balanced against the resource required to bid, eg. limited and short-term funds. Overall, MOPAC had about £20m of bids in the last round with only £3m funding available. Chief Superintendent Rose advised that Harrow benefited from some schemes which were implemented across a number of boroughs; single borough bids tended to be less successful.

In response to a Member's query about criminals going away from their home areas to commit crimes in other boroughs, Chief Superintendent Rose confirmed this was a feature to some extent; for example, pickpockets from the east of London committing crimes in central London and burglars targeting affluent areas such as parts of Kensington and Chelsea. He was not aware of any particular trend of criminals based in inner London boroughs coming to Harrow to commit crimes. By contrast, the "county lines" criminality was essentially about sending young people away from London to places such as Bournemouth and Cardiff to act as drug "mules". Chief Superintendent Rose did not have figures at the meeting of the number of young people from Harrow involved in these crimes.

The Chair thanked Chief Superintendent Rose, the Portfolio Holder for Community safety and the Divisional Director, Strategic Commissioning for attending the meeting and answering questions from members of the Committee.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted and that the comments made at the meeting be drawn to the attention of the Cabinet when it considers the annual refresh of the Community Safety and Violence, Vulnerability and Exploitation Strategy.

Background Documents:

Agenda of the Overview and scrutiny Committee – 5 June 2018: Report on the Community Safety, Violence, Vulnerability and Exploitation Strategy Annual Refresh.

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