

Consultation Response:

To: The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC)

From: Camden Council – Officer Response

Subject: The Draft Police and Crime Plan for London.

1. Introduction:

This response is based on the recognition of the financial pressures faced by all public services and on the understanding that as such all agencies are required to work differently making more effective use of reduced resources. The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) has outlined their responses to these challenges in respect of the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) in the Draft Police and Crime Plan. This paper outlines comments and concerns on the proposals set out in the draft plan.

2. Background:

Camden Council is well placed to comment on the proposals. We have a long tradition of working closely with the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) in order to tackle the crime and community safety concerns that matter most to our local communities.

The relationship has been particularly strong in a number of areas, which include:

- The creative use of antisocial behaviour (ASB) legislation particularly in successfully tackling problems such as the open drugs market that previously existed in the Kings Cross area.
- The pioneering "co-location" of our specialist domestic violence team (Camden Safety Net) at Holborn Police Station.
- The partnership approach taken to address issues relating to licensed premises.
- The council's support and commitment to the Safer Neighbourhood Panel structure and community engagement via groups such as the Camden Community Police Consultative Group (CCPCG).

Whilst we recognise the financial challenge MOPAC and the MPS face we are concerned that the Draft Police and Crime Plan for London will have a negative impact across many aspects of this historically positive relationship. These concerns are set out in more detail in the response below but we have also highlighted ways in which we can work together to continue our partnership working. We have also used this response as the basis for our submission to the London Assembly's Police and Crime Committee on the draft plan.

3. Safer Neighbourhood Teams & the future of Neighbourhood Policing:

MOPAC's on-going commitment to neighbourhood policing is positive. Maintaining front line visible resources will both be central to delivering the targets around reducing crime and increasing public confidence. However there are concerns around whether the deployment of the neighbourhood policing resources will have the desired impact.

The reduction in officer strength in the Safer Neighbourhood Teams (SNTs) to 1 Sergeant (a post shared in 8 of our 18 wards), 1 PC and 1 PCSO is a major concern. Council officers from a wide range of departments have built up strong local relationships with their ward based teams. There is a danger that the "operational memory and impact" of much of this will be lost within the proposed changes. A good example is the need for local police resources to continue to support the council and partners in the process of consultation, application and enforcement of ASB legislation. This will be especially pertinent given some of the proposed changes to these arrangements set out in the Home Office Draft ASB Bill.

However, our far greater concern in regards to the Draft Police and Crime Plan relates to how local communities can influence the work done by their local police resources. Currently ward based community panels set priorities for their SNTs, the proposed arrangements for local policing areas cut across this process and risk alienating residents, businesses and partners and thus severely undermining confidence in the police.

There is a risk that local police will no longer be able to focus on "quality of life" issues for communities such as problem premises, neighbour nuisance, street population activity and ASB. This will be a particular problem in areas where issues occur across local authority borders. This may mean that local police presence, reassurance and visibility will be lost, damaging perception and confidence, which is often unrelated to levels of crime. The capacity for local police to play a role in the development of restorative justice and the rehabilitation agenda will also be compromised. Given on-going concerns around youth disorder and serious youth violence we would ask that MOPAC include a commitment to maintaining designated police officers for schools in the Police and Crime Plan.

4. Proposed Changes to the Police Estate in Camden:

The need for public services to engage with residents and businesses in the most effective ways possible is central to their success. The proposal to establish alternative access points in locations away from police stations has merit in this regard and we want to work with MOPAC to explore opportunities around sharing buildings and co-locating officers to this end.

There is however a concern that the front counters being proposed for closure in Camden will have a disproportionate impact in the north and centre of the borough, especially in regards to Holborn Police Station being the only location that will be open on a 24 hour basis.

There is a risk that this will mean that communities in Camden are less likely to engage positively with the police, especially in terms of those crime types that are under reported in any case notably domestic violence, sexual violence and hate crime. We would like MOPAC to consider how its proposals will safeguard reporting from vulnerable individuals and communities. The closure of police stations and front counters will reduce police visibility in our communities, thus reducing reassurance and undermining confidence. Communities will need to be reassured that there will be no impact on response times, as any reduction could mean that communities have less confidence in the police's capacity to respond to their needs when required.

5. The Future of Community Engagement with the Police:

The proposal to create Safer Neighbourhood Boards (SNBs) would undermine the current community engagement work structures in place in Camden. This is managed by our local Community Police Engagement Group (CPEG), which is called the Camden Community Police Consultative Group (CCPCG). The CCPCG itself is based upon the SNT panel structure, whose future is also unclear (see section 3 above).

There is an increasing concern about the vague nature of the plans in respect of the creation of SNBs and would ask for urgent clarity about and like to be involved in shaping the following issues locally:

- a) The governance arrangements,
- b) The role of local councillors,
- c) The funding arrangements for the boards.

6. Objective, Goals and Priorities:

The 7 "high impact, high volume" crime types that are listed in the draft plan as priorities for reduction would appear to have a clear focus on tackling the number of total notifiable offences (TNOs). There is a concern that this precludes a number of crime areas where there would be high risk victims, who may experience significant levels of harm, which include:

- Serious Youth Violence
- Domestic Violence
- Sexual Violence
- Vulnerable victims of ASB

There is also little emphasis on quality of life issues such as neighbour nuisance and other ASB. We recognise that a commitment reference is made to developing a second violence against women and girls strategy in summer 2013 but would welcome clarity on how the police will assist with the delivery of this.

Local priorities around these work areas are likely to remain in place and police support in delivering this will be of paramount importance. This will be more difficult if their resources are targeted at reducing TNOs.

This will also be the case across London especially in work areas where the Greater London Authority retains a focus.

We would ask MOPAC to re-consider the priority crime list in the light of the observations above.

7. Information Sharing with the Police:

Sharing information quickly and effectively has been a key element of the successful relationship between the council and the police. Centralising this function and thus removing local analytical support based in Borough Intelligence Units (BIUs) will have a significant impact on levels of communication between the local authority and the police, both strategically and operationally. This is especially worrying in regards to information in the immediate aftermath of critical incidents and will significantly reduce community confidence in the police as well as that of partner agencies.

The local police analytical function is also a central component of the Community Safety Partnership in Camden, especially in terms of identifying local priorities around crime. The proposal puts this contribution at risk, and undermines the partnership's ability to allocate resources to tackle crime effectively, thus impacting negatively on reduction targets.