

Rt Hon Simon Hughes MP

Member of Parliament for Bermondsey & Old Southwark
Deputy Leader, Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Party
House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA

Mayor of London
c/o Siobhan Coldwell
Head of Strategy
Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime
10 Dean Farrar Street
London, SW1H 0NY

6 March 2013

Draft MOPAC Police and Crime Plan 2013-2017 and Draft MOPAC/MPS Estate Strategy 2013-2016

1. I write as Member of Parliament for Bermondsey and Old Southwark in response to the consultation on the draft Police and Crime Plan for greater London.
2. I attach the responses of my colleagues Caroline Pidgeon, on behalf of the Liberal Democrats on the London Assembly, and Councillor Anood Al-Samerai on behalf of the Liberal Democrats group on Southwark Council. I commend their responses to you.

Reduction of crime and police numbers

3. I have long supported efforts to increase the number of police in Southwark to 1,000, and regret that national and London funding to do this is not currently available as a result of our national economic situation. My Liberal Democrat colleagues on Southwark council and I have always been very strongly opposed to any proposed cuts to frontline police services. In a borough with 290,000 residents and where the most serious forms of crime- 'violence against the person' and 'personal robbery' are rated as 'high' and 'above average' respectively, it is essential that frontline policing is supported and not reduced. I would not wish to see any further reductions in police numbers in Southwark from the current number and would urge you to increase numbers again as much as possible. I applaud the plan to increase considerably the number of police constables across London, and believe it is right to seek to reduce the numbers of police at more senior levels. I would encourage you to recruit as many special constables as possible, as well as to increase the numbers of police cadets and volunteers.
4. The test for me of successful policing and a good police service in London is not, however the number of employees or buildings but the effectiveness in preventing, successfully investigating and successfully prosecuting crime and criminals and making our city safe. I commend the recent reductions in crime figures and encourage you and the Commissioner and senior management team to continue to focus on this objective. In particular I encourage you to continue your efforts to bring down crimes of violence against the person – gun and knife crime, robbery and sexual offences – and hope that the more vulnerable groups in our society [older people, children and young people, and those with special educational and health needs] will be supported ever more effectively. You need particularly to restore confidence of women [and men] in the reporting and investigations of sexual offences following the recent IPCC report into Operation Sapphire in Southwark.

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Safer neighbourhood teams and local policing

5. I have serious concerns about the proposed 'restructuring' of Safer Neighbourhood Teams, which I share with my colleagues on the GLA and Southwark Council.
6. A reduction in the size of SNTs from six officers [one sergeant, two police officers and three PCSOs] to two or three police officers [one Police Constable and one Community Support Officer, with a sergeant in charge] will in all probability have serious consequences in terms both of the local knowledge available to assist with investigations and public confidence levels across local communities.
7. At present, little information is available on where Safer Neighbourhood Teams will be based. I believe it is of the utmost importance that SNTs continue to be based in the areas which they serve. It is reassuring for people if they know that their local safer neighbourhood officers come to work in their area every morning and are not only visiting periodically from a base elsewhere in the borough. It is also wasteful for time to be taken by requiring officers and PCSOs to report to one place and then have to spend time on duty travelling to a place of work. I am therefore concerned that any savings made by moving SNTs to locations away from the area they serve will be outweighed by new inefficiencies, namely the need for officers to spend a significant amount of their shift time travelling to and from their areas of operation. I therefore hope that you will not go ahead with this part of the plan, and that a way will be found for SNTs to continue to be based in the areas which they serve.

Frontline services, police stations and police counters

8. I understand that the Metropolitan Police as a whole is required to find significant savings over the coming years and that Southwark police must therefore make savings accordingly. In these circumstances, I believe that frontline services can be best maintained if those responsible think creatively about how existing services can be made more efficient and act quickly to secure necessary provision. I am clear that there needs to be a robust rationalisation of the police estate.
9. Rotherhithe, Southwark and Walworth police stations are in my constituency. I am pleased that Walworth police station will remain accessible throughout 24 hours in every day, and that Southwark police station will remain one of three principal police stations in our borough. I am willing to support the change to one 24-hour accessible police station provided the counter service is significantly improved at all police stations and police bases which have front counters or are accessible to the public. Bluntly, police counters have regularly provided a rubbish service to the public and this needs immediate and consistent improvement. When people come through the door there should be a method immediately their needs and then dealing with them with appropriate urgency and always with civility. Civilians and even volunteers can reasonably be used to help improve counter services of police throughout London.

Alternatives to present Rotherhithe police station

10. I do not object to the plan to close Rotherhithe police station provided that a replacement permanent police base for Rotherhithe, equally or more accessible to the public, is provided before the present station closes. I am very clear that there must continue to be a police front counter in the SE16 area (Bermondsey and Rotherhithe). It would not be acceptable for people living in this part of the borough to have to travel to Walworth for the nearest police front counter service.

If Rotherhithe police station closes, there are a number of locations which could be used as a permanent or semi-permanent replacement police base. I met with the Borough Commander in December, who told me that he also supports a continued police counter service in SE16 and was willing to consider suggestions as to the best possible location for a new base.

11. I have carried out a survey of local residents in which I suggested 10 possible sites for a new police base, and asked people to list what they thought were the 5 best locations, in order of preference. Using a system of 5 points awarded for a 1st preference, 4 points for a 2nd preference, etc..., the results of the survey were as follows:

1. Surrey Quays Shopping Centre
2. Canada Water Station
3. Albion Street
4. The council 'One Stop Shop' in Market Place (The Blue)
5. Bermondsey Underground Station or Jamaica Road
6. Nearest available place to the Jamaica Road/Lower Road roundabout
7. Rotherhithe Station
8. The parade of shops on Lower Road opposite the Osprey Estate
9. Surrey Docks Station

12. As you can see, Surrey Quays and Canada Water station are by far the most popular locations with local residents. These places are easily accessible to many people living in both Bermondsey and Rotherhithe, and have a high footfall. I am passing the results of this survey to my Borough Commander, as well as to you, and will continue to work with him, local groups, the council and others to establish the best and most viable location for an alternative police base should Rotherhithe Police Station close. I reiterate my insistence that there must continue be a police counter in SE16, and I ask that the Plan takes account of this and gives best consideration as to how this can be best achieved.

13. I am very happy to engage in further consultation in the weeks ahead in the interests of my constituents.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Simon Hughes". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Simon Hughes MP
MP for Bermondsey & Old Southwark