

GIPSY HILL WARD SAFER NEIGHBOURHOODS PANEL

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4th March 2013.

Dear Mayor Johnson

Gipsy Hill Safer Neighbourhoods Panel

In January this year the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) launched its consultation exercise to reorganise the way our local communities could be policed in the future. Unfortunately in Lambeth, this MOPAC document was only available shortly before the MOPAC consultation meeting arranged in Brixton on 9/1/2013.

This meant that an appropriate response to the MOPAC document from the Gipsy Hill Safer Neighbourhoods Ward Panel could not be presented at that meeting. However, meetings have now taken place and the general views from those meetings in respect of the MOPAC proposals are contained below.

Gipsy Hill Safer neighbourhoods Panel

Gipsy Hill SNT has had a designated Safer Neighbourhoods Policing Team (SNT) consisting of a Sergeant, 2 Police Constables (PCs) and 3 Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs). The team operates out of Gipsy Hill Police Station which also provides a base where other SNTs can take their breaks. The station has been closed to the public since the Olympic Games in 2012.

The Gipsy Hill SNT Ward Panel holds meetings in two separate venues within the Ward. This allows an opportunity to residents in different geographical areas to voice their concerns and support about their local policing issues and priorities.

Panel meetings are monthly but the meetings alternate between the two locations. The strongly held view of the Gipsy Hill SNT Ward Panel is that the current model of neighbourhood policing has been very successful in reducing crime and anti-social behaviour, as well as increasing the confidence and safety of the community.

We believe that this has been due to the SNT being fully committed to the ethos of neighbourhood policing and putting it into practice on a day to day basis. Also having experienced Sergeants to supervise and support their teams and share their local knowledge of the Ward community, law abiding and otherwise. As well as using this local knowledge to target resources where they will be most effective.

MOPAC Document

The MOPAC document states that there has to be savings in the costs of policing of £500 million pounds over the next three years. This will be on top of reductions to services and resources that have occurred over the previous 3 years. The MOPAC London centric approach to reducing the policing budget does not allow for the variety of policing needs required in smaller localities. The projected outcomes of these reductions and the new policing model have not been underpinned by independent and authoritative research.

Neither have there been any assessments undertaken on the impacts of closures of police stations to the local communities where they are located.

New Policing Model Hannah

As well as experiencing the impacts of resource reductions over the last three years, the Lambeth police force has also been used as a pilot for a new policing model (Hannah) which was introduced in Lambeth in February 2011. These two factors combined have resulted in a reduction in the number of Police Officers in the Borough. This has directly led to the current situation where there are insufficient Police Officers to undertake all the jobs they are required to do. This has had serious implications on the way that Neighbourhood Policing has been undertaken in our Ward.

As a Ward Panel we have been regularly monitoring the level of abstractions of our PCs and have come to the conclusion that by default, due to abstractions and understaffing our Ward has often been operating with one PC and one PCSO. The model being proposed by MOPAC, which in practice has not been very successful. Since the recent allocation of new officers in December 2012 this has improved but continues to be undermined by abstractions.

The outcome of continual abstractions has been that the PCs on our local Safer Neighbourhoods Teams have frequently been used to fill the gaps in policing elsewhere and not undertaking their normal duties within the Gipsy Hill Ward. Proactive policing in conjunction with PCSOs is curtailed when no PCs are present. Inexperienced PCSOs, who were appointed in December, are now regularly patrolling our Ward without the benefit or supervision of more experienced officers.

The figures stated in the MOPAC document that the total number of Police Officers in the Borough will increase by four as a result of the MOPAC reorganisation do not instil confidence that our Ward is going to accrue any benefit from the adoption of this MOPAC model. In fact our local MP Dame Tessa Jowell stated in a Westminster Hall debate on 6.3.2013 about the Metropolitan Police, that between 2010 and 2015 the numbers of Police Officers in the Borough would have decreased by 157.

The new model promises that there would be a designated PC and PCSO for each Ward. The Wards experience to date does not lead us to believe that when the need arises for an officer with a specific skill set like driving or using arms they will not be abstracted. Or that on designated days set by the Commissioner they are not withdrawn from Ward patrol duties to undertake regular London wide initiatives like checking vehicles for being unregistered, uninsured or stolen.

It is even less likely that the two designated officers will have the time to liaise effectively with the Ward Community to build up the local intelligence necessary for effective and proactive policing. The disbandment of specialist teams that deal with crimes like burglary will now require them to be more involved in the investigations process.

The links with the designated PC and PCSO and the Ward Panel will now over time be weakened by the broadening of the policing boundaries to clusters of Wards and the development of Safer Neighbourhood Boards.

To date, the Gipsy Hill SNT Panel has involved its community in identifying our local policing priorities, this has now been removed and will only be acted on if coincides with MOPAC's priorities. With this new model, it is clear that Safer Neighbourhood Policing has been severely weakened and will continue in name only. At the next round of service reductions it will be easier to prove that Safer Neighbourhood Policing does not work and will be unfortunately abandoned.

Closure of Gypsy hill Police Station

We are also of the view that the closure of Gipsy Hill Police Station will also lead to further deterioration in the way the Ward is policed. Officers will have to start and finish their duties at another police station (Brixton). Not only will travel time (30 minutes) reduce their community presence within the Ward, but the likelihood of abstractions under this new model of policing is likely to increase.

We strongly believe that the retention of a Police Station or a suitable alternative building will not only benefit Gipsy Hill Ward but other Ward Communities adjacent to Crystal Palace.

Crystal Palace Triangle

Crystal Palace is unique in London in that it is at the convergence of five London boroughs Bromley, Croydon, Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham. The area also straddles at least three postcode districts SE19, SE20, and SE26.

Within these Boroughs and post codes the nearest Electoral Wards that create the Communities of Crystal palace Triangle are :-

- Bromley -Crystal Palace Ward
- Croydon-South Norwood Ward, Upper Norwood Ward, Norbury Ward.
- Lambeth-Gipsy Hill Ward, Knights Hill Ward
- Southwark-College Ward
- Lewisham-Sydenham Ward, Forest Hill Ward.

Those stations identified for closure and selling off under the MOPAC plan in the Crystal Palace Triangle area are; Gipsy Hill, South Norwood, Norbury and Sydenham.

The outcome of the police station closure programme will mean that (SNTs) will have to operate out of the remaining police stations many miles away from their local Wards and communities. This will have a significant impact on policing in Crystal Palace Triangle (CPT) area as it is generally the furthest point from the proposed 24 hour operational Police Stations. The delays of travelling to these Wards by SNTs and other officers will create a disproportionate negative impact on policing, trust and safety in these local communities.

We recognise that not all the Police Stations designated for closure within the Crystal Palace Triangle area are fit for purpose and are able to provide the level of facilities that are required for current and future policing. However, the Croydon, Bromley and Southwark Ward Communities around CPT agree there is a need for a physical base for their local SNTs and support this approach.

The obvious benefits of a designated building is that the Teams can store their essential equipment securely, have a base for the appropriate breaks and meetings and also provide a single point of contact for the Crystal Palace Triangle communities. The Mayor has previously made public statements that there would be no closure of facilities without an alternative facility being made available.

In this context, it would be sensible for Gipsy Hill Police Station to be retained or a suitable alternative facility is made available within the Crystal Palace area for use by all the Local Crystal Palace Borough Ward SNTs. We also feel strongly that this facility should have a front counter open to the public 12 hours a day. The public do not only go to front counters to report crimes but also to raise concerns and provide information to the police.

We recognise that the funding for any such facility will be problematic for any one Borough Commander to sanction. However, as the approach to reducing the budgets is Pan London, adjusting the budgets of the Crystal palace Triangle forces benefiting from this facility and sharing the costs between them is feasible.

Although crime does not recognise borders of boundaries, historically there has been a reluctance by Senior Managers in the Metropolitan Police to undertake policing across boundaries in the way that we are suggesting. We believe that there would be considerable benefits to the Crystal Palace communities and the future of policing in London, from exploring how a local policing model in an area like Crystal Palace Triangle can be developed on a cross borough basis.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David E. Green', with a stylized flourish at the end.

David E. Green, Chair
Gipsy Hill Safer Neighbourhoods Panel