

Submission from Rt. Hon. Dame Tessa Jowell MP

Policing and Crime Plan Consultation – March 2013

Summary and Recommendations

This submission has reviewed the MOPAC proposals and reaches the following conclusions:

- 1) The decision to close East Dulwich and Gipsy Hill Police Station is misguided, unacceptable and in breach of the Mayor's pre-election pledge. A permanent policing presence must be maintained in East Dulwich and Gipsy Hill.
- 2) GLA Datastore figures, and those revised by MOPAC, confirm the number of police officers available to Lambeth and Southwark will continue to fall and Metropolitan Police figures show an increase in crime in 5 out of 8 wards in my constituency.
- 3) The proposals make no reference to the handling of abstractions which has made the delivery of reliable and predictable levels of neighbourhood policing impossible.
- 4) Public support for the proposed reforms to neighbourhood policing is questionable. The Mayor must think again and, working closely with the police and local communities and stakeholders, develop alternative proposals which command public confidence.
- 5) I, my constituency team and community representatives have spent a lot of time and devoted a lot of effort to responding to this consultation. That is a measure of how important policing and community safety are to my constituents. Therefore in a spirit of constructive contribution I hope that the Mayor will take seriously the concerns I have raised and the proposals we have made.

Introduction

The Mayor's Commitment and increasing pressure on Borough Command

The MOPAC proposals call into question the Metropolitan Police's capacity to ensure Londoners are kept safe and secure. The concern about falling police numbers and counter closures is shared right across London by political representatives from across the board.

The Metropolitan Police did an extraordinary job during the London Olympic and Paralympics Games and contributed enormously to the success of the Games. I particularly want to recognise and thank the two Borough Commanders in my constituency - Chief Superintendent Matt Bell in Lambeth and Chief Superintendent John Sutherland in Southwark. The hollowness of MOPAC's

stated ambition of doing more with less fails to recognise that the resources available to our communities are stretched almost to breaking point.

In March 2012 the Mayor promised that *'no front counter will be closed without a new improved facility being put in its place'*¹. That promise is being broken in these proposals. In each borough, it is intended to retain only one 24-hour police station – Brixton, in Lambeth, and Walworth, in Southwark. I have serious concerns on police numbers, on the level of abstractions and consequently for the future of effective safer neighbourhood policing against a backdrop of rising crime locally². My constituents have expressed significant concern about the absence of a police presence in Dulwich. The abandonment of Gipsy Hill Police Station will create a policing 'black hole' that could extend more widely across the Crystal Palace Triangle if these proposals are implemented.

The Facts on Police Numbers

Despite the commitments made in the 2012 Mayoral election campaign, Lambeth will see a reduction of 157 officers by 2015, while Southwark will be down by 132 when comparing MOPACs figures for 2010, published on the GLA Datastore, with those presented in the consultation document³. This is of course despite the fact that the Deputy Mayor Stephen Greenhalgh, in his letter dated 5th February 2013 following discrepancies raised by Joanne McCartney AM, has admitted to a number of errors on the Datastore which have now been corrected by MOPAC⁴.

It is not clear how MOPAC have calculated the figures provided for 2011 in the consultation document – 814 for Southwark and 870 for Lambeth. According to Datastore figures, at no point in 2011 did Southwark or Lambeth have as few as 814 and 870 police officers respectively. The average numbers of officers for each borough in 2011 was 890.3 and 970.9⁵. These discrepancies can be identified for other boroughs and for the total number of officers across London as pointed out by Joanne McCartney AM on 14th February⁶.

It is important that the figures used by the Mayor are accurate and support facts already in the public domain. Furthermore, in the case of Southwark, in the first version of the public

¹ <http://mgt.london.gov.uk/mgt/public/question.do?id=40490>

² Crime is up in 5 out of 8 wards in my constituency when comparing figures between September 2010 to February 2011 with September 2012 to February 2013.

³ Figures of 157 and 132 represent the average of number of police officers in 2010 (adding totals for each month and dividing by 12) subtracted from the 2015 figures provided in the consultation document. **Lambeth:** 1031 - 874 = 157. **Southwark:** 948 - 816 = 132. Source: <http://data.london.gov.uk/datastore/package/metropolitan-police-service-recorded-crime-figures-and-associated-data>

⁴ <http://www.london.gov.uk/moderngov/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=240&Mid=4548>

⁵ Averages for 2011 calculated in the same manner as outlined in footnote 3. Source: <http://data.london.gov.uk/datastore/package/metropolitan-police-service-recorded-crime-figures-and-associated-data>

⁶ <http://www.london.gov.uk/moderngov/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=240&Mid=4548>

consultation document, it was stated that Peckham Police Station would be retained as the only 24 hour front counter when in fact the intention is for Walworth to provide this service.

Lambeth has had a 20% reduction in the number of officers since May 2010. Lambeth had 1,052 officers in May 2010 which had fallen to 838 by December 2012⁷. Lambeth and Southwark represent some of the worst affected boroughs in London in terms of the drop in police numbers⁸.

I therefore support the proposals being made by Lambeth Council for need for an extra 100 police officers. Other boroughs like Hammersmith and Fulham have seen a reduction of only 5% in police numbers. There is no reason for Lambeth residents to suffer a disproportionate reduction in crime fighting resources. 100 more police officers would mean Lambeth being treated like other London boroughs and will bring it into line with the London average.

The Challenge of Abstractions

I have been in regular discussions with the Chief Supt Matt Bell and Chief Supt John Sutherland about the demand on their respective forces and the need to provide support to London wide events. I have obtained data on abstractions for the wards in my constituency. Abstractions - the arbitrary withdrawal of police staff to deal with issues elsewhere - are unpredictable and unplanned, but required. There is significant evidence which suggests some wards are under particular pressure with Safer Neighbourhood Team (SNT) members - Sergeants, Police Constables and Police and Community Support Officers - being abstracted regularly and as a matter of course onto other tasks. In East Dulwich ward in Southwark there were 17 shifts spent on abstractions in the month of November 2012 and 15 shifts in the neighbouring Village ward. In October 2012 in Herne Hill ward in Lambeth, there were 23 shifts spent on abstractions, followed by 22 in November and 19 in December. Figures are very similar for other wards I represent in Lambeth.

This data is supported by local anecdotal evidence I have received from constituents concerned that they cannot reach their SNT members or that they are not on hand in the wake of incidents to which they would normally respond. Having reviewed the level of abstractions in both Lambeth and Southwark, I am concerned about the frequency with which police constables are abstracted from our SNTs, diminishing teams' powers of arrest and enforcement. **If this level of abstractions were to be maintained on the smaller SNTs that the Mayor plans to implement, then effective neighbourhood policing will be made impossible.**

⁷ Source: <http://data.london.gov.uk/datastore/package/metropolitan-police-service-recorded-crime-figures-and-associated-data> Lambeth: 1052 - 838 = 214 (214 divided by 1052 = 20%).

⁸ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-21461623>

The Future for Safer Neighbourhood Policing

In spite of the issues I have raised above regarding abstractions, Safer Neighbourhood Policing is working. Having a dedicated local SNT means that communities and residents get to know and trust their local officers. It also means that local concerns are taken seriously and dealt with more effectively at a local level. It is against this backdrop that overall crime across London has until now been falling. The scaling down or removal of SNTs would mean that residents will not be able to build up the same relationships with their local police. Not only will this undermine public confidence in the police, but will result in the loss of a flow of vital intelligence from members of the public to local police officers they know and trust.

I am concerned that one PC will not be able to collate intelligence and build links across a whole ward. There is a further danger that local businesses will not be able to liaise directly with police without a permanent team which is locally based. We should not forget that successful businesses are safe business in boroughs where the confidence to invest is key to reducing unemployment and building growth. Businesses are important eyes and ears in our neighbourhoods and need to know who to contact when they witness something in their shopping parade that is wrong – a visit from the local team every once in a while makes businesses feel safer but also helps share intelligence. It also remains unclear what is meant by the term '*named sergeant*' and just how much time he/she will spend in the ward they serve as opposed to the '*dedicated PC*'.

Crime Figure Trends in Dulwich and West Norwood (Metropolitan Police's Crime Figures)

The changes to the structure of local SNTs are being proposed against a backdrop of rising crime locally. Comparing figures between **September 2010 and February 2011 with September 2012 to February 2013** total crime is up in 5 out of 8 wards across my constituency⁹.

Ward	Total Crime
Coldharbour	Down 10%
Thurlow Park	Up 7%
Knight's Hill	Up 17%
Gipsy Hill	Down 10%
Herne Hill	Up 31%

⁹ Given that the figures for the month of February 2013 are yet to be published, the six month total for September 2012 to February 2013 is based on 5 months of published figures and an estimate for February. Data has been collected from the Met Police Crime Mapping monthly wards table. The initial data we collected in September 2012 was for the time period September 2010 (earliest possible data available at that time) to August 2012. Thereafter the data has been updated monthly. Source: <http://maps.met.police.uk/tables.htm>. Given that the Met Police Crime Mapping provides rolling 24 month ward level data, the data above has been quartered into 6 month periods to identify trends. See attached spreadsheet for figures and workings.

College	Down 4%
East Dulwich	Up 13%
Village	Up 4%

Whilst we have seen some encouraging signs in wards such as Coldharbour in Lambeth, for example in tackling drug offences and criminal damage, there are still worrying trends in crime such as Violence Against the Person (VAP) up 7% and Theft and Handling (T&H) up 10% in the ward across this period. Lambeth Council has maintained a commitment to fund a significant number of extra PCSOs to help tackle local crime and to boost representation in its SNTs. I am concerned that if SNTs are reduced in the way that the Mayor has proposed, these areas of progress could be set back significantly.

Elsewhere in Knight's Hill ward, total crime is up significantly across this period with VAP up 23% and Burglary up 42%. In Thurlow Park the number of incidents of Burglary stood at 80, between September 2010 and February 2011, but this has risen to 133 incidents between September 2012 to February 2013. Incidents of Fraud and Forgery have also been rising steadily. In Herne Hill ward Robbery and Burglary are up significantly whilst incidents of T&H have risen by 45% (up from 243 between September 2010 and February 2011 to 352 between September 2012 to February 2013).

In Gipsy Hill, where this is serious concern in the local community about the planned disposal of its police station, burglary is up 33%. Similarly in College ward, East Dulwich ward and Village ward, where the nearest 24 hour front counter will be based at Peckham, VAP has remained stubbornly high. In East Dulwich and Village Ward it has risen by 51% and 57% respectively whilst Theft and Handling in East Dulwich is also up by 24%.

This obviously presents a mixed picture but there are real and justified concerns about crime locally which is supported by anecdotal evidence I have received and cases I have dealt with on behalf of my constituents. **In Southwark the two wards where crime is up over the course of the last two years, East Dulwich and Village, are also the two with the highest number of abstractions across October, November and December 2012. In Lambeth, abstractions have been highest in the wards of Herne Hill and Knight's Hill across these same three months.** Herne Hill and Knight's Hill have also seen the highest rises in overall crime in the part of Lambeth I represent, up 31% and 17% respectively.

A Future for Policing in Gipsy Hill and East Dulwich

Given this picture of local crime across my constituency, I am concerned about the proposed closure of **Gipsy Hill Police Station**. It is essential that there remains a local base in Norwood from which police officers can operate. If Gipsy Hill Police Station ceases to be a base for the police then officers will have to operate from Brixton – about a half-hour journey on the bus to Gipsy Hill. It remains unclear what criteria MOPAC has used to justify the disposal of Gipsy Hill.

Crystal Palace is unique in London in that it is at the convergence of five London boroughs in Bromley, Croydon, Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham. The area also straddles at least three postcode districts SE19, SE20 and SE26. The stations identified for closure in the Crystal Palace Triangle area are; Gipsy Hill, South Norwood, Norbury and Sydenham. The SNTs in many of these areas will have to operate out of the remaining police stations many miles away from their local wards and communities. Gipsy Hill Police Station itself is approximately 5 miles from Brixton Police Station, 4.7 miles from Croydon Police Station, 5.6 miles from Lewisham Police Station, 5.7 miles from Bromley Police Station and 6 miles from Peckham Police Station. Each of these distances is at least a 30 minute single bus journey where this option is available¹⁰. **If these proposals are implemented in their current form, the unique geographical position of the 5 Boroughs surrounding Crystal Palace could result in a disproportionately negative impact on policing in those local communities because of the delays there will be in SNTs travelling to these wards.**

There is widespread local support for Gipsy Hill Police Station to become a base for SNT policing within the Crystal Palace Triangle. A physical base for the local SNTs would mean that they can store their equipment securely and have an appropriate base for meetings. It would also serve as a contact point for the communities of the Crystal Palace Triangle. 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 the Crystal Palace Triangle can be developed on a cross borough basis. **I strongly support that recommendation and commend it in view of the high level of support from local community.**

The building that has housed **East Dulwich Police Station** is no longer fit for purpose. However, its permanent closure and sale is unacceptable unless an alternative secure base has been made available for local policing in the area. In line with the Mayor's commitment, he should instruct his officers and relevant officials to work with Southwark Council to pursue this.

The Council is committed to making up to £750,000 available to the Metropolitan Police Authority to facilitate community safety work in the borough including the retention of front counter services in East Dulwich and Rotherhithe. The Council is also committed to working creatively with the police over the use of any Council-owned premises which may be suitable for use by the police, and to flexibility on planning consent for change of use from A1 (retail) on Lordship Lane should a shop front be required for use as a police patrol base and front counter facility. **This is a constructive proposal which I hope, in the consultative spirit of this exercise, the Mayor will accept.**

The physical and iconic reassurance provided by the local police station in East Dulwich and Gipsy Hill should not be underestimated. Access to, and the presence of, a local police station is particularly important for vulnerable residents – elderly people, disabled people, young people,

¹⁰ Distances calculated using first suggested route on Google Maps Directions Tool. This is not of course always necessarily the route taken by public transport which is likely to be longer.

victims of domestic abuse, for whom a police station is a place of safety. **It is essential that these proposals are subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment.**

College ward SNT is currently based in Seeley Drive on the Kingswood Estate and I understand that there is a commitment to the team remaining at this base until the current lease expires. I share the view expressed by Cllr Helen Hayes and Cllr Andy Simmons that the **SNT base on Seeley Drive is essential to local policing in the area of the Kingswood Estate, and call for a long term commitment to be made to retain this base, beyond the term of the current lease.**

It is critical that the Metropolitan Police, together with the Mayor, work closely with local communities and stakeholders to develop an alternative plan which is put together with the benefit of local understanding, local knowledge and popular consent. Proposals developed with the local community are far more likely to command public support and will, as a result of working together with local residents, result in proposals which are likely to be more effective in cutting crime whilst being cost effective.

Consultation Meetings and Survey

The Process and Public Reaction

Both meetings in Lambeth and Southwark had large attendances. This is testament to the excellent community safety networks and the importance that might constituents attach to policing. The many active Neighbourhood Watch schemes within my constituency are major foci for community involvement. In both meetings some of the key concerns expressed included saving the SNTs and not cutting them in number, keeping local police stations open particularly in Gipsy Hill, honesty around police numbers and public access to the police. Many have expressed disappointment that these meetings were just one hour long. Many feel that this did not give the police or Deputy Mayor significant enough time to understand the strength of feeling about these issues and that, given that the consultation document was released on the same day as the Lambeth and Southwark meetings, there was insufficient time for the public to digest and assess the proposals.

I hosted a well attended meeting with SNT Panel Chairs and Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinators from within my constituency to discuss these proposals. I have also conducted a survey on some of the issues specific to my constituency in the Mayor's plans. Four thousand surveys were delivered by volunteers to residents in the Gipsy Hill and East Dulwich areas. The survey was also conducted at my weekly advice sessions and in conjunction with the clients of local charities. I have outlined the results below with a selection of quotations taken directly from the surveys.

Results from the Survey

Altogether 343 residents have responded. While of course this cannot be statistically significant, the judgment from those members of the local community that took part is clear. I have outlined the results below as a percentage breakdown on each question that was asked. Residents were also given the opportunity to give their comments so also included are a selection of quotations taken directly from the surveys which encapsulate common themes raised.

1) *'Would you be satisfied reporting serious crime at proposed new public access points such as within supermarkets, your local post office or library?'*

Altogether there were 342 responses to this particular question. The percentage breakdown of responses was:

Very Satisfied – **3.5%**

Satisfied – **8.2%**

Dissatisfied – **17.5%**

Very Dissatisfied – **70.8%**

2) *'Are you satisfied with the present Safer Neighbourhood Team structure which currently consists of about 1 Sergeant, 2 Police Offices and 3 PCSOs?'* Note - this question was not included on the survey that was delivered to residents in the Gipsy Hill area.

Altogether there were 143 responses to this particular question. The percentage breakdown of responses was:

Very Satisfied – **9.7%**

Satisfied – **46.2%**

Dissatisfied – **23.1%**

Very Dissatisfied – **21%**

3) *'ONLY ANSWER THIS QUESTION IF YOU LIVE IN LAMBETH. Would you be satisfied having just one 24 hour front counter in the Lambeth based at Brixton?'*

Altogether there were 202 responses to this particular question. The percentage breakdown of responses was:

Very Satisfied – **0.5%**

Satisfied – **3.5%**

Dissatisfied – **14.6%**

Very Dissatisfied – **81.7%**

4) 'ONLY ANSWER THIS QUESTION IF YOU LIVE IN SOUTHWARK. Would you be satisfied having just one 24 hour front counter in the Southwark based at Walworth?'

Altogether there were 127 responses to this particular question. The percentage breakdown of responses was:

Very Satisfied – **0.9%**

Satisfied – **4.7%**

Dissatisfied – **8.7%**

Very Dissatisfied – **85.8%**

5) *'Would you be satisfied if Gipsy Hill Police Station was kept open as a base for the different police Safer Neighbourhood Teams from the boroughs that border Upper Norwood and Crystal Palace as well as providing a counter service to the public?'* Note - this question was included on the survey that was delivered to residents in the Gipsy Hill area.

Altogether there were 173 responses to this particular question. The percentage breakdown of responses was:

Very Satisfied – **69.4%**

Satisfied – **23.1%**

Dissatisfied – **4.6%**

Very Dissatisfied – **2.9%**

6) *Do you have any other views about these issues that you wish to share?*

Altogether there were 216 responses to this particular question. Listed below is a selection of these under appropriate themes.

Relationship between residents' perceptions of personal safety and the current location of police stations

'Peace of mind knowing that help is near at hand if needed.'

'Won't feel safe without it.'

'It is vital and key to keeping our neighbourhood safe.'

Accessibility of proposed remaining police stations

'The distance to the 5 borough centres must be taken into account.'

'People with disabilities would be seriously inconvenienced.'

'Too long, too far.'

'To have no Police presence in our community feels a little like state abandonment'.

Potential reduction in the reporting of crime

'There is a very real danger that the proposals would result in potentially serious delays in the reporting and resolution of serious crime.'

'I think that older people will not want to go to Walworth to report anything or go anywhere else.'

'If I cannot go to Gipsy Hill Police Station, I would not bother to report a crime.'

The perception that the reduction of police numbers and stations lead to an increase in crime

'Walworth is too far away to be of any use and the criminals will know this.'

'Maintaining a police station at Gipsy Hill sends a message to anti social and criminal elements.'

'Closing the police station will escalate crime.'

The importance of a local police presence on the streets

'I would like to see more police officers walking the streets in Dulwich Village and Lordship Lane.'

'I would like to see a proper SNT who get to know local residents, likely problem spots. Officers who are seen by the general public at different times of day. A proper base for the team.'

'Police should be both more visible and more, not less, accessible'.

'We need to see increased local presence from our SNTs.'

'Our local SNT is around the minimum in number.'

Police numbers

'We need more police to keep streets secure and safe to be honest.'

'More police please.'

'More local police.'

Trust and viability of using alternative police access points

'Police stations must be police stations, not other places – security wise.'

'We are against closing East Dulwich and Gipsy Hill police stations. Will proposed access points be properly manned? Will they be 24 hour or store hours?'

'Supermarkets are not private.'

'Police stations must be police stations, not other places – security wise'.

Conclusions that can be drawn from the survey results

There is clear **dissatisfaction** about reporting serious crime at proposed new public access points as well as having just one 24 hour front counter in Lambeth and Southwark based at Brixton and Walworth respectively.

There is clear **satisfaction** if Gipsy Hill Police Station were to be kept open as a base for the different SNTs from the boroughs that border Upper Norwood and Crystal Palace as well as providing a counter service to the public.

The results **were mixed** in relation to whether residents were satisfied with the present SNT structure which currently consists of about 1 Sergeant, 2 Police Offices and 3 PCSOs. However it is clear from individual comments that a number of residents perceive that the existing size of the SNT is insufficient to fulfil their purpose.