



ISLINGTON

**Islington Town Hall
Upper Street
London
N1 2UD**

(020) 7527 3072

Website: www.islington.gov.uk

Stephen Greenhalgh
Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime
City Hall
The Queen's Walk
More London
SE1 2AA

4th March 2013

Dear Stephen,

MOPAC Police and Crime Plan for London

I am writing on behalf of the Liberal Democrat council group in Islington following publication of the draft Police & Crime Plan and Estate Strategy.

The priorities set out in the draft Crime Plan in light of likely continued budget pressures are clear and many of the aims of the Plan are commendable. However, the Islington Liberal Democrat council group still has significant concerns about some of the draft proposals.

Front-Line officer numbers

Under the proposals, Islington will have 64 fewer front line officers than in 2010 and will also see the dismantling of the dedicated ward-based Safer Neighbourhood Teams which have served our community so well in recent years. This would follow on from the Metropolitan Police's decision last year to delete four sergeant posts in Islington and the council's decision to stop funding 16 PCSOs in the borough.

Safer Neighbourhood Teams have been one of the Metropolitan Police's major successes. Having just a "named Sergeant" for each ward (instead of a dedicated Sergeant) and just one PC in each ward is not an acceptable level of community policing. It also risks a return to 'sector policing' that has been tried previously in London and found to be wholly unsatisfactory.

The Plan also gives the impression that police numbers will increase overall. It would appear though that, in fact, only the number of constables will increase while PCSOs, civilian staff and ranks from Sergeant and above will decrease.

Continues...

Continued...

Neighbourhood policing proposals

I understand that some of the proposals on neighbourhood policing have been trialled already in some parts of London. It is therefore troubling that the results of these pilots have not been made available as part of this consultation exercise. Boroughs would have been able to establish whether there has been sufficient capacity to respond to these reforms and, most importantly, prove that they are still responsive to local needs and priorities.

The Plan also states that there will be more police in the borough's wards as a result of neighbourhood policing. However, there is no explanation or clarification as to how this will be achieved in practice. Any reduction in a visible, on the street presence engaging with residents and the community at large would be a retrograde step. As a minimum we would like to see 2 or 3 named officers per ward in Islington with a named investigatory lead.

Investigative responsibilities

We are also concerned that the proposed new investigative responsibilities for neighbourhood police officers will mean less time being visible on the streets and engaging with the community. We believe that Islington's SNTs have played a vital role in deterring and reducing crime, providing reassurance, gathering intelligence and dealing with anti-social behaviour and should therefore not be diluted. The Plan offers clear targets on crime reduction but no suggestions as to how this will be delivered other than neighbourhood-level investigation.

Pooling resources

There are also real concerns about pooling police resources across the borough, especially by ending the ringfencing of Safer Neighbourhood Teams. We had experience of this during the Olympics and while, fortunately, there were no serious incidents reported, community representatives noticed the difference with a lack of visible officers on the beat in Islington.

Reductions in police station counters

Although we are fortunate in Islington to have no proposals for total police station closures, there is some question as to whether the reduction in front-desk hours at Holloway police station is based on accurate figures and around the evidence base for these proposed reductions. Islington residents deserve to know which criteria have been used to justify the proposed reduction in opening hours at Holloway police station's front desk given that there are only two stations in the whole borough and also what savings will be generated so that alternatives can be considered.

Safer Neighbourhood Team bases

While the Islington Liberal Democrat group has issues about the existing accessibility for the public to the borough's Safer Neighbourhood Team bases, there is considerable confusion about the proposed new 'police contact points' in public places. No details about locations or opening hours have been revealed yet and it does not seem reasonable to propose closing existing bases in conjunction with reduce opening hours for police station front desks without any detail of what will follow. Residents need to know that the opportunity to contact the Police will at least remain the same before they can give a considered view on the proposals.

Continues...

Continued...

Borough-led savings

It is notable that the draft Plan makes no commitment that savings generated in the boroughs remain in the area concerned. This is a key issue for Islington residents. It cannot be right that efficiencies are made locally but that the savings are then used centrally or in other parts of the capital, especially when Islington's population is set to rise and given the particular challenges of policing in inner London.

Resource allocation

Assuming that these proposals are implemented, any final resource allocation should be published in a clear and transparent way both by ward and by borough in advance of their introduction. This would ensure that everyone is clear about what is being proposed, that expectations are not raised falsely and allow proper scrutiny of how the proposals are implemented in Islington.

Consultation

Finally, there are also real concerns about how this consultation has been carried out as a result of the lack of information and engagement in Islington. The one public meeting for residents on 22nd January was very poorly attended and there has been no other major attempt to seek residents' or the community's views specifically about what is proposed for Islington's police service and the wider London proposals and their impact locally.

In conclusion, we believe that MOPAC needs to explain to Islington residents how it believes that Islington can be a safer place with fewer police on the street and potentially fewer places for residents to contact the police. I look forward to seeing the detailed proposals for Islington and hope that changes will be made in line with the public responses you receive.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Terry Stacy', written in a cursive style.

Councillor Terry Stacy
Leader of the Opposition

