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MOPAC310820- D3422

Dear Sian,

Thank you for your letter of 15 August regarding your constituent's concern about the rise in crime, social problems and Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) in the borough of Richmond.

My top priority is keeping Londoners safe and I understand and share your constituent's, concerns about crime and anti-social behaviour. The Mayor and I believe that local communities should be at the heart of the policing response to these issues. That is why the Mayor has committed to ensuring that every ward in London has 2 Dedicated Ward Officers (DWO's). The role of DWO's is to help gather intelligence on local issues, problem solve and detect crime. MOPAC officers have spoken to Borough Commander Sally Benatar and she has assured MOPAC that she and her team are committed to community policing in the borough, led by their teams of DWO's, and that they have been working hard to address the concerns about crime and ASB through partnership work, increased patrols of the area, and use of legislation such as S.35 dispersal orders.

I would urge you to ask your constituent to speak to the local DWO's - they are there to help. They can visit www.met.police.uk, type in their postcode to find their local team and how to contact them.

As you are aware, the Police service has suffered from systematic and continued disinvestment in the police by Central Government. Since 2013-14 the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) has been forced to deliver £850 million in savings which resulted in officer numbers falling to a 15-year low in mid-2018.

The Mayor, for his part, continues to do everything in his power to increase police funding. He has diverted business rates to invest in policing in London and has taken the difficult decision to increase council tax in each year of his Mayoralty. This has helped to pay for 1,300 more police officers than otherwise would have been affordable. By October this year, officer numbers in London will have grown by 1,369 to reach 32,500.

The scale of the cuts enforced by central government mean, however, that even with the additional Mayoral investment the MPS was forced to make difficult choices, including having to rationalise the estate and close some police stations. We know that many of the front counters which were closed in 2017 had a very low footfall, with some receiving only a handful of visits each day, hence it was the right decision to prioritise officer numbers. Every pound

spent on maintaining underutilised front counters is one that can't be spent on maintaining or increasing officer numbers.

We do recognise that the presence of front counters can provide both access and reassurance which is why, despite the challenging financial position, the commitment set out in the Public Access Strategy remains for one front counter open 24 hours, seven days a week in each Borough. Our access strategy also reflects the significant uptake in online crime reporting which shows we are responding to the public's changing demands in how they access police services. I am aware Twickenham Police station which usually serves the area has been closed for refurbishment, however residents can access police services at Teddington Police Station.

The Mayor's commitment to policing has meant that as of July 2020, the South West BCU has 1,572 officers. This is more officers than the separate boroughs of the South West BCU (Wandsworth, Richmond upon Thames, Merton, and Kingston upon Thames) had in 2016. While it is true that between March 2016 and March 2019, South West BCU saw a reduction in the number of officers, the reduction was by 11% and not 53%.

It is also worth reflecting that crime rates for Richmond as a whole are lower than the average for London. The rate for Richmond is 62 per 1000, whereas the average for London is 93 per 1000. You are correct that the rate for South Richmond is higher than the rest of the borough, however, this area is home to the boroughs busy centre and night-time economy.

I agree that Police in Richmond, as across London, need more resources to help fight the scourge of crime and anti-social behaviour. Unfortunately, as I mentioned, due to cuts, resource challenges are not unique to Richmond. This is why the Met implemented the Basic Command Unit (BCU) model, under which Wandsworth, Richmond upon Thames, Merton, and Kingston upon Thames were merged.

Resources are now shared between these three boroughs to provide resilience and a more efficient, coordinated response. The MPS undertook careful consideration of resource allocation in the design and testing of the BCU model. Geography, transport links, town centre proximity, crime patterns/demand, existing local partnerships and many other factors were all considered as part of this, but the MPS's overriding priority was its ability to deliver operational policing with less resources.

Both the Mayor and I do share your concerns about crime increasing in the capital following the easing of lockdown. The Mayor has written to the Home Secretary to express his serious concern that Government decisions are making it harder for us to keep Londoners safe as lockdown lifts. We would welcome your support in pressing this message home.

Government failure to support local and regional government with the huge financial challenges caused by Covid-19 could jeopardise our ability to tackle crime at this crucial juncture. The Mayor has also urged the Home Secretary to provide urgent support to protect our police from a new era of austerity and for her to commit the Home Office to fund the full costs of Covid-19 on the MPS.

Thank you for writing to me about this critical issue. I hope that this response provides you with some reassurance that these issues are taken extremely seriously and that you will lend your support in pressing the case for increased national funding to provide the policing response we both agree London deserves.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sophie Linden', with a small dot at the end.

Sophie Linden

Deputy Mayor for Policing And Crime

.MOPAC's crime dashboard shows that for the 12 months to July 2020, the crime rate for South Richmond was 111 per 1000, while the rate for the whole borough is 62 per 1000 and the average for London is 93 per 1000..