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Via e.mail: stephen.greenhalgh@london.gov.uk

Councillor Keith Prince
Leader of the Council

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Please ask for Councillor Prince
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Our ref:
Your ref:

Date: 6th March 2013

Dear Stephen,

RE: MOPAC consultation response on the draft Police and Crime Plan and the Metropolitan Police Service Estates Strategy

I write to you regarding the invitation from the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime to consult on the draft Police and Crime Plan and the Metropolitan Police Service Estate Strategy. This letter outlines the feedback that has been collated from the widespread consultation undertaken by the Council with residents in the London Borough of Redbridge. We have consulted extensively, having discussed the plan and strategy at seven Area Committees. Additionally the proposals have been discussed at two Scrutiny Committees and also at the MOPAC public meeting on the 11th of February at Redbridge Town Hall.

There were aspects of the proposals that were welcomed. The increase of 86 Police Officers in Redbridge by 2015, which includes the increase of 68 SNT Officers, was a particularly welcome proposal, although we have some concerns about how this figure has been calculated which are addressed later in this letter. Those involved were also pleased about the target to reduce key categories of crime by 20% and the target to increase confidence in the Metropolitan Police by 20% over the next three years. The retention of the post of the Borough Commander for each borough was also welcomed. There were, however, also a number of areas of very significant concern and these are highlighted below.

1. Significant opposition to front counter and police station closures

The proposed closures of the front counters at Wanstead and Woodford Police Stations have been met with widespread strong opposition. We are particularly concerned about losing both Wanstead and Woodford Police stations at the same time; this would leave the west of the Borough without a single all-day access point. The Council is also concerned about the quality and relevance of the front counter data that was provided to us in November 2012 and which we believe has influenced the recommendations. We have previously made observations about the reliability of this data which was collected in 2010. I understand that a new survey has been commissioned and recently completed. We would like to see this new up-to-date data as soon as it is available.

It was felt that:

- To close these counters would lead to an unacceptable loss of access and reassurance for residents;
- The front counter at Ilford Police Station is already under severe pressure, evidenced by the long queues that are repeatedly witnessed. The proposals would undoubtedly further increase the demand at this location, leading to even more delays and dissatisfaction; and
- The reporting of crime would be more difficult and it could hinder some residents from making a report; this would disproportionately affect the elderly and the vulnerable who may not have access to the internet and who may find it more difficult to travel long distances.

Concerns have also been raised about the suggestion of reducing the opening hours of Barkingside Police Station from its current hours of 07:00-23:00. It was felt that this, along with the potential impact of closures of front counters in Waltham Forest, would only compound the issues highlighted above.

Redbridge currently has four Police Stations open to the public, located at Ilford, Barkingside, Woodford and Wanstead. It is the 9th largest borough in London in terms of geographical size and has a growing population. The recent census in 2011 showed a rise of 17% since 2001, an increase of 40,000 residents, bringing our population total to 279,000. Redbridge has had a higher growth rate than the average for London, nearest neighbours, outer London and East London. There has also been a 7.4% increase in the number of households to 99,100, which again demonstrates a growth rate since 2001 that is higher than East London, nearest neighbours and outer London.

In terms of reported crime over recent years, there has been a mixed picture locally. While we saw a 1% decrease in overall reported crime in 2011/12, we had a 43% increase in serious youth violence, a 17% increase in personal robbery, a 40% increase in knife crime and a 23% increase in gun crime. In addition, the Borough is particularly concerned about residential burglary, which has risen incrementally year on year and shows a 52% increase between 2007/08 and 2011/12. Furthermore, whilst we saw reductions in motor vehicle offences in 2011/12, this still accounted for 18% of all crime in Redbridge and the Borough was ranked 7th worst in London. Redbridge was ranked 18th in London in terms of total reported crime in 2011/12. While the picture for 2012/13 is showing encouraging improvements, this is against a back drop of previous increases against a number of worrying crime types and there are further concerns that violence against the person has continued to rise over the past year. Both Members and residents are seeking reassurance that policing arrangements in the Borough will support a sustained downward trend in crime and anti-social behaviour.

Councillors and residents recognise the crucial role that local police stations play in the community. They are also mindful of the above demographic and crime performance data and are concerned about the impact of resource reductions against this local contextual background.

During the consultation many residents expressed concern that the closure of front counters would lead to police stations being closed entirely. They were apprehensive that closures would send a message to offenders of a reduced police presence, which could make affected areas more attractive to those who commit crime. They were also worried that response times would suffer. They were concerned that safer neighbourhood officers should make the very best use of their time on duty in local wards and not waste time travelling from central bases. Furthermore, they believed that fear of crime would also increase across the community.

2. Future public access points:

Before Redbridge Council can make any further comment on contact points, we ask MOPAC to provide more information on where in the Borough the demand on its existing front counters is coming from. It also has a number of questions about the nature of contact points:

- What would the minimum standard be for a contact point?
- What days and times are they proposed to be open?
- Will there be a confidential space for residents to discuss sensitive information? If not, this could make residents less likely to use the locations.
- We understand that Police Officers would not have access to static police IT terminals at these contact points. Unless alternative mobile devices were provided, this could lead to officers taking written details of crime reports and then having to input them again electronically when back at the Station. This would be a less efficient use of time.
- Whilst crime and anti-social behaviour issues could be reported at these contact points, it would be difficult to carry out many of the other functions that MPS data confirms form the majority of reasons for visits to Police Stations e.g. the identification, collection and handing in of lost property; persons reporting on bail; the production of documents and other criminal justice enquiries. If only a narrow band of issues could be dealt with at the contact points, this would lead to even greater pressure on the two existing Police Stations with front desks that are proposed above.
- If the contact points were staffed by Safer Neighbourhood Officers, this would mean fewer officers on patrol.
- Is there funding available to rent premises? It may not be possible to get the right type of contact point provision in the right locations in the Borough without this.

- The Borough Commander has previously promised that there would be a safer neighbourhood base on the west of the Borough. Clearly the ideal solution would be to use one of the existing police stations. We expect this promise to be kept regardless of the outcome of this consultation.

Without more information, the Local Authority is unable to comment further on co-location opportunities and reiterates its strong opposition to the closure of front counters at any of the existing police stations in the Borough.

3. Police officer numbers

We welcome the increase in police numbers from the current base line figure of 444 to 530 police officers by 2015. However, our understanding is that MOPAC have included in both of these figures the 2.6 police officers that are currently funded by the Ilford Bid, and also the 6.5 officers funded by the Council (then matched by the MPS by a further 6.5 officers) under the buy-one-get-one-free agreement. This is not a true reflection of our understanding that these locally funded officers were additional to the Borough Workforce Target (BWT). We would like this delineation to be clear in your communication with the public. If the local funding of the police officers had not occurred, the MPS would have 15.6 officers less in Redbridge, both now and in 2015.

We are also seeking clarification regarding whether or not the buy-one-get-one-free deal will still be available for the full three years of this strategy. The Council has not decided yet whether it would continue to fund the same number of police officers for the full period and this is not an assumption that MOPAC should make and include in the 2015 figure.

The proposed overall increase is welcomed and clearly shows that Redbridge Borough is under resourced for police officer numbers. We would like to see the uplift in numbers occur much more quickly than 2015 as there is clearly a requirement for them now.

4. Concerns over changes to Safer Neighbourhood Teams

Concerns were raised about the proposed reduction in numbers to the dedicated Safer Neighbourhood Teams. There was strong universal agreement, at all of our consultation meetings locally with residents, that one Police Constable and one Police Community Support Officer per ward would be insufficient to provide meaningful local policing. Those consulted felt that this reduction would have a detrimental impact upon the established relationships currently in place with local communities. Furthermore, it could potentially lead to the loss of local knowledge of crime, known offenders and community intelligence. There were also concerns that these plans would lead to a lack of visible police officers throughout the Borough, which may have an adverse impact on both crime and the fear of crime.

At the London Councils meeting on the 10th January 2013, and again at the public consultation meeting in Redbridge on 11th February 2013, you in your capacity as Deputy Mayor for Policing & Crime confirmed that the local borough commander has the discretion to post more officers to the safer neighbourhood teams and increase the 1 PC and 1 PCSO allocation. We would welcome this approach and request that this is confirmed and communicated to the borough commanders across the MPS.

The proposal for the new Neighbourhood Policing Areas is unclear. The role of these new teams has not been fully explained and there is a concern that they will not be local enough to deal with the anti-social behaviour issues and other policing issues in some wards. At the MOPAC meeting held on the 11th February the Deputy Leader of Redbridge Council commented that one of our proposed Neighbourhood Policing Areas would contain nine council wards, which stretches from the east side of the Borough all the way across to the west, and this seemed rather large for the purpose. Assistant Commissioner Simon Byrne commented "that does not sound like a neighbourhood to me". We support AC Byrne's view and we suggest that the Borough is divided into four Neighbourhood Policing Areas rather than the three currently being proposed by the MPS; this will be a more local structure that reflects the different demands across the Borough.

We would also wish to draw to MOPAC's attention that it is proposed to close front counters at both Wanstead and Woodford and that these are situated in the proposed nine ward Neighbourhood Policing Area; residents in the west of the borough will see a reduction in both front counter and safer neighbourhood provision, this looks like a particularly raw deal for the residents in that part of the borough.

5. Ensuring the response to victims is all-encompassing and reaches all members of our diverse community

It was felt that the current proposals do not do enough to address what work will be done to ensure that vulnerable victims and those more susceptible to crime are encouraged to report it and are supported throughout the criminal justice process. Those consulted would have especially liked to have seen more recognition in the draft Police and Crime Plan in relation to young people, particularly with regard to the likelihood of them being victims of crime. There was also a strong view that all police officers should be trained in dealing with hate crime to ensure a consistent response to victims, rather than relying on one specialist officer to deal with any cases that arise. Concerns were also raised about there not being enough emphasis on cross-partnership working, especially with Social Services and Mental Health Services. There was also a call for more emphasis on the needs of women as victims of domestic abuse.

There was strong agreement that the Police and Crime Plan should commit to using all lawful criteria to encourage certain religious and ethnic groups to report crime and liaise with the Police.

6. Need for further clarification on aspects of the draft Police and Crime Plan

While feedback was provided during the consultation on the draft Police and Crime Plan, there were aspects that participants felt were unclear, and areas where they believed that further information was needed.

One area that was raised was the lack of detail regarding the new Safer Neighbourhood Boards. During the consultation an interest was expressed in knowing who will sit on the Boards, how they will be held accountable, and what relationship the Board will have with Ward Panels, Community and Police Engagement Groups and the Community Safety Partnership Boards? There appears to be a conflict of responsibilities and the proposals do not appear to have taken into account the statutory responsibilities of the Community Safety Partnership Board; for instance who should set the local community safety priorities? There was also a request for more information about how Neighbourhood Watches will fit into the proposed plans? We do see the potential for developing the role and remit of these new boards and would like to invite MOPAC to have discussions with Redbridge about piloting a new model for Safer Neighbourhood Boards locally.

At all seven Area Committee meetings, and through a range of other communication mechanisms, residents were informed that the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime were holding a consultation event in Redbridge on Monday 11th February 2013. It was felt that a single one hour meeting was insufficient to allow for a full expression of views on matters of such significance. We have not seen any minutes of this meeting to date and we would welcome sight of them as soon as they are available.

As you can see, the issues at hand have been very carefully considered during the consultation in Redbridge and the Borough has a number of very significant concerns about the proposals within the draft Police and Crime Plan and the Metropolitan Police Service Estate Strategy. We very much hope that our feedback will be given due consideration following the consultation period, and urge you to get in contact if you wish to discuss or clarify anything.

Redbridge has a long history of effective partnership working and the Council remains committed to this collaborative approach with both MOPAC and MPS locally.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Keith', written in a cursive style.

Councillor Keith Prince
Leader of the Council