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MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 6 February 2012 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Alan Hall (Chair), Vicky Foxcroft (Vice-Chair), Jackie Addison, Christine Allison, Paul Bell, Duwayne Brooks, Vincent Davis, Julia Fletcher, Carl Handley, Michael Harris, Ami Ibitson, Jim Mallory, Pauline Morrison, Marion Nisbet, Sam Owolabi-Oluyole, Jacq Paschoud, Philip Peake, Eva Stamirowski and Stella Jeffrey

APOLOGIES: Councillors Obajimi Adefiranye, Anne Affiku, Kevin Bonavia, John Bowen, Suzannah Clarke, Janet Daby, Amanda De Ryk, Alexander Feakes, Sven Griesenbeck, Chris Maines, John Muldoon, Alan Till and Darren Johnson

ALSO PRESENT: Aileen Buckton (Executive Director for Community Services), Mayor Sir Steve Bullock (Mayor), Gary Connors (Strategic Community Safety Services Manager), Andrew Hagger (Scrutiny Manager), Barrie Neal (Head of Corporate Governance and Policy), Kevin Sheehan (Executive Director for Customer Services) and Suzanne Wallace (Deputy Borough Commander and Superintendent Partnership) (Lewisham, MPS)

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 12 October 2010

Resolved:

The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 12 October 2010

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 29 November 2010

Resolved:

The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 29 November 2010

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 6 April 2011

Resolved:

The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 6 April 2011

4. Minutes of the meeting held on 26 June 2011

Resolved:

The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 26 June 2011

5. Declarations of Interest

None were declared

6. Operational Experience of the August 2011 Public Disorder

- 6.1 Sir Steve Bullock, Mayor of Lewisham addressed the Committee providing both a personal and organisational perspective on the events around the events and the weeks afterward. The Mayor highlighted the following points:
- He was in communication with officers and the borough commander immediately.
 - He was receiving updates directly and via media such as email/text/Facebook and TV throughout the events.
 - It was a challenging time for all involved.
 - The response from volunteers wanting to help with the clear-up was fantastic and it was very positive to have such a great response.
 - Lewisham staff responded extremely well.
 - Lewisham Council did practical things to help the situation and the police, such as providing transport for them.
- 6.2 The Mayor then responded to questions from the Committee:
- It was a one-off event and is unlikely to occur again.
 - There was extraordinary feedback from the public and a positive reaction to police in Lewisham and way they behaved.
 - Funds were made available very quickly to help businesses recover as there were concerns over the impact this could have, especially given the levels of insurance that businesses had. Lewisham Council waived the rent for Lewisham market traders, which got a very positive response.
 - The riots were political in motivation in Tottenham, however in Lewisham it was opportunistic.
 - The need for a balance in the response to events such as these.
 - There will be an effort to ensure to events like these do not occur in the future.
- 6.3 Superintendent Suzanne Wallace then addressed the Committee. She has the partnership portfolio and is deputy to the Borough Commander in Lewisham and highlighted the following points:
- She met with other officers at Scotland Yard to discuss Tottenham situation on Sunday.
 - Police engaged key community people in the borough to gain intelligence on what was happening on the ground.
 - Resources were at maximum capacity, with officers in Lewisham pulled all over the place to support other actions.
 - There was a willingness and can-do attitude from staff. Police came back from holidays to help. There were volunteers offering to help, though it was difficult to accommodate them due to the 'full-on' nature of that period.
 - There was a wariness among officers of getting too directly involved in disorder situations, however there was great bravery as well in situations such as the Cafford Retail park where they got directly involved.
 - The MPS communication systems struggled to cope.
 - The response of CPS and the courts has been good and they operated almost 24 hours a day to deal with prosecutions.
 - There was a higher than normal rate of guilty pleas partly due to the speed with which courts acted.
 - The post-investigation is ongoing, with the MPS reviewing the investigation teams.

6.4 Superintendent Wallace and officers then responded to questions from the Committee:

- Importance of getting the correct information out there, although there is a tension, between speed and accuracy as well as independence, though the communications team could be less risk averse.
- Police are now mandated to have a Twitter account (though Lewisham had previously had one).
- Lewisham Council was conscious of getting consistent messages with the police, so it all linked up. There has to be authority, though we need to be quicker.
- The police could have got more community intelligence. There was a sense by the early afternoon that the tension was rising. But the public order officers were elsewhere in London dealing with issues. This meant the situation was left to more inexperienced officers to deal with and who handled it well.
- The resources available may not have been enough to deal with what was an extraordinary situation.
- From Lewisham Council's perspective the police did a good job.
- It was difficult for the Council to put a statement about the rumoured EDL march in Eltham as it was mostly rumour and it was hard to check it all out.
- Police are developing community networks and have widened the net and taken on critical friends (some from Safer Neighbourhoods Panels).
- The aspiration is to get better community link but the Police are not there yet. It can be very difficult to get the representation and are willing to reach out and explore how to do this. However it is challenging for any organisation to get the views of the community.
- There can never be a single way of communicating, so while increasing electronic communication is useful it is not always appropriate.
- It is not considered protocol to inform businesses whether they should close or not. Also vulnerable people need services and there is a need to ensure that information is correct.
- There needs to be a balance between not wanting to close services, but not risking staff. The general approach is that it is business as usual for as long as possible and only shut if you have to.
- The emergency planning protocol worked well, with Council staff inserted into the police gold/silver/bronze level of command.

6.5 The Committee then discussed a number of issues arising from the evidence given:

- That if the Mark Duggan incident in Tottenham hadn't happened then the riots would not have occurred.
- That visits by Safer Neighbourhood Teams to local people and businesses had provided reassurance.
- That the role the fire service played during the events should be praised.
- The importance in making sure that other services, such as caring services are kept going during events such as these.
- The importance in finding out what people want in terms of feeling safe.

Resolved:

The Committee agreed that:

- The response by organisations within Lewisham to what was a challenging and difficult series of events was excellent. Services went beyond the call of duty in the way they conducted themselves.
- The Riots Communities and Victims Panel Interim Report was produced very quickly after the events.
- Increasing use of communications and technology to gain and share information is encouraging and the Committee would like more information on how the Police are involving critical friends.
- The contingency and planning process should be examined by the appropriate Select Committee.
- The final report of the Riots Communities and Victims Panel should be considered by the Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee.
- The work carried out on building cohesion within communities should continue to be examined.

7. Items to be referred to Mayor and Cabinet

The meeting ended at 8.50 pm

Chair:

Date:
