

Sadiq Khan
The Mayor of London
City Hall
Queens Walk
London
SE1 2AA

Leader's Office, Room 163
Barking Town Hall
1 Town Square
Barking, Essex IG11 7LU

Phone: 020 8227 2101
Email: darren.rodwell@lbbd.gov.uk
Website: www.lbbd.gov.uk

Date: 4th August 2017

Dear Sadiq

Allocation of police resources in Barking & Dagenham

I wrote to you on 29 June to voice my concerns about declining police numbers and the Borough Command Unit Area East's ability to respond to the policing challenges we face in Barking & Dagenham.

Since my first letter MOPAC has published its consultation on public access, which includes proposals to close Dagenham Police Station and five other police buildings in our borough. I want to focus on the issue of police resources in this letter and will provide a detailed response to the MOPAC consultation separately. I would however like to make clear that I am totally opposed to these proposals and believe that they cannot go ahead given the issues we are currently experiencing with the BCU and response times locally.

I remain concerned that while the BCU needs time to bed in, the resources we have been allocated do not meet our needs. They also reinforce the historically unfair and unequal distribution of police resources in our borough.

Barking & Dagenham has always had fewer police officers than other London boroughs as a proportion of its population. This was no doubt a reflection of our lower crime rates relative to the rest of London. In keeping with this, we were one of the last London Boroughs to benefit from an uplift in police officers at the start of the decade. This can be seen in the GLA's own figures¹, which show we did not reach our peak officer strength until March 2015.

However, our borough has changed dramatically in recent years. We now have one of the fastest growing and most transient populations in the country. It is also much younger and much more diverse than it once was. This has brought new policing challenges more akin with those traditionally experienced in some inner parts of London. Since 2012, we have experienced some of the worst rates of criminal

¹ https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/recorded_crime_associated/resource/893044be-2edc-4045-b7e5-7f82148e8cc0

damage in the capital (in 2016/17, we had the joint worst), and we have seen a 33% real terms increase in crimes involving violence with injury during this period.

Despite this, we have experienced the third sharpest cut in police numbers in London in recent years. We have also experienced a disproportionate increase in our crime rates, both in absolute terms, and in comparison with other parts of London. This means our resources have not kept pace with demand compared to other boroughs.

For example, between March 2015 and March 2017, our police numbers were cut by 15%. Only Wandsworth & Bromley fared worse with cuts of 15.5% and 16% respectively but they have not experienced the high rate of violent crimes and criminal damage we have seen. Boroughs with similar rates of criminal damage and violence with injury have not experienced the same reduction in numbers. In fact, when we group these boroughs together, Barking & Dagenham has experienced by far the sharpest fall in police officers in London.

Of the seven boroughs with the worst rates of violence with injury, Barking and Dagenham's 15% reduction in officer strength is nearly double that of the next largest reduction (Lambeth on 8.5%) between March 2015 and March 2017. When you compare the six boroughs with the highest rates of criminal damage during the same period, Barking and Dagenham's reduction again tops the list, with Greenwich and Croydon in joint second with reductions of 10%.

The crimes I have singled out need to be countered with more proactive and visible community policing. Whilst I understand why officer numbers in Westminster have barely changed over this same two year period, I find it astonishing that despite increasing rates of crime relative to other boroughs, Barking and Dagenham has suffered the worst cut in policing numbers compared to others.

Barking and Dagenham also now finds itself with the second highest number of acid attacks out of all London Boroughs, which is causing deep concern among our community. I understand that you see this as a priority and the Met are working hard to tackle the issue. As a Council, we will also be doing all we can alongside the BCU to crack down on those who commit acid attacks. I am also lobbying the Home Secretary to introduce tougher legislation aimed at clamping down on acid attacks. However, what residents need is reassurance in the form of a visible police presence and I am unconvinced that the BCU will be able to deliver this as it currently stands.

It was hoped that the formation of the East Area BCU in April this year would boost police officer numbers across Barking and Dagenham, Redbridge and Havering. However, the uplift from the BCU has not achieved this, nor has it brought us on par with boroughs experiencing similar crime rates to ours.

Three months on it is apparent we are nowhere near providing the service we need to keep our residents safe. The most recent figures I have seen for police response times show that just 52% of emergency calls in our borough are being responded to within the Met's own target time - the worst in London. This is shocking.

Currently, the BCU is reinforcing the unequal distribution of police resources. This is evident from a comparison of the East Area BCU with the Central North BCU. In March 2017, the GLA's figures show that the Central North Area had retained 94% of its police officer strength from March 2015. However, the East Area had only retained 86% of its former strength in the same period.

The most recent uplifts in April 2017 took the East Area BCU to 91% of March 2015 strength, but the Central North BCU uplift took it to 97%. What's worse is that when you take into account the high number of unfit and undeployable police officers in the East Area BCU, we are back to where we started two years ago.

We were one of the last boroughs to reach our peak police officer strength, and subsequently we have had the third sharpest decline in the last two years. It is evident that Barking & Dagenham is under resourced and our BCU is unable to provide proactive and visible policing at this moment in time.

Residents' anxieties will increase yet further if we are to lose six police buildings, including Dagenham Police Station. As previously stated, I will be responding separately to the MOPAC consultation and will argue that these proposals should not even be entertained until our problems with police resources have been addressed.

I would be grateful if you could give these issues your consideration. I want to see the BCU succeed but this will be impossible if it does not have the resources it needs to meet the challenge presented by our growing population, high levels of crime and our changing position in London.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Darren Rodwell
Leader of the Council

cc

Sophie Linden, Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime
Jon Cruddas MP, Member of Parliament for Dagenham and Rainham
Rt Hon Dame Margaret Hodge MP, Member of Parliament for Barking
Unmesh Desai AM, Member of the London Assembly for City and East
Detective Chief Superintendent Jason Gwillim, BCU Commander, East Area