

BEXLEY LABOUR GROUP

*OCTOBER 2017 - RESPONSE TO THE MAYOR'S
OFFICE FOR POLICING AND CRIME AND
METROPOLITAN POLICE SERVICE*

PUBLIC ACCESS AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Bexley Labour Group

LONDON BOROUGH OF BEXLEY Civic Offices, 2 Watling Street, Bexleyheath DA6 7AT

Bexley's Labour Group is made up of 15 of the 63 councillors in the London Borough of Bexley representing Belvedere, Erith, Lesnes Abbey, Northend and Thamesmead East wards. However, as elected members we have a corporate role for the whole borough and our residents.

We support the aims of the Public Access and Engagement Strategy to improve access to services and engagement with our communities, but have concerns regarding the consequences of some measures outlined in the document upon our residents.

We strongly believe that our residents should be able to continue to access a police station within Bexleyheath Town Centre given its role as the main town centre in the borough.

We have set out our comments on a number of issues below.

Government Funding of the MPS Budget

We believe that the Metropolitan Police Service is underfunded by central government, having had to make £600 million pounds worth of savings since 2010 after the national policing budget was cut by 20 per cent. Despite this context, we understand that you are required to find another £400 million pounds in savings by the end of the decade.

As a result of these cuts to Government police funding, in the past four years the MPS has lost more than 100 police stations and 2,800 police staff and Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs).

In addition, we understand that the Government has further added to the pressures by not funding the higher than expected pay rise this year, (2% instead of 1%, though still below inflation) costing an extra £18 million per year.

We have also noted that the Conservative Manifesto at this year's General Election did not guarantee police budgets, and as we have seen has opened up the potential for further cuts which undermine the ability of the police to keep Londoners safe.

We understand that the previous Mayor refused to raise the policing council tax precept, leading to a £17 million shortfall. The current Mayor has taken the decision to raise the policing council tax precept as far as he can, which raised £11.3m for the Met in 2017/18.

National Funding Formula

We understand that London will receive £1.90 billion from Central Government in 2017/18. Following this, funding may fall if the new funding allocation formula is introduced. The new formula moves to funding based more on population than need and means London would receive less funding.

The Mayor is on record as saying that "Londoner's safety will be put at risk if police funding is cut further, and that the Met stood to lose "between £184m and £700m from its yearly budget". The figures are from 2015 Funding Formula review, which was scrapped because

of issues with the accuracy of the data, and assumptions from the 2015 Comprehensive Spending Review. Unfortunately, the Government still has not confirmed whether it will proceed with this review. **We urge you to continue to do all you can to press to the Government that the new funding formula should be abandoned.**

Further pressures: police pay

The Government is going to lift the public sector pay cap for the police and prison officers. Public sector pay was frozen for two years in 2010, except for those earning less than £21,000 a year, and since 2013, rises have been capped at 1% – below the rate of inflation. We welcome this additional pay for hard working police officers but recognise that the Government has not supplied any additional funding towards this pay rise.

This will put additional pressure on the Metropolitan Police Service's budget. At the July Policing Plenary, the Deputy Commissioner told the Assembly that every 1% on police pay puts £25 million of pressure into the budget. **We urge you to continue to do all you can to press to the Government to ensure adequate funding is provided to fund the pay rise recently announced by the Government.**

Closure of Bexleyheath Police Station

The Mayor has warned that continued Government cuts to the Metropolitan Police's budget could mean up to half of London's police station front counters may close. We have strong concerns regarding the loss of a front counter in Bexleyheath town centre and ask that a base for policing be retained within the town centre.

A centre within central Bexleyheath is very accessible for all residents' due to its transport links and provides reassurance to our residents at all times of the day. Bexleyheath Town Centre can be accessed by 16 bus routes from across the borough. Sidcup is however only accessed by 10 bus routes from parts of the borough, with no direct bus routes to some central and northern parts of the borough including large parts of Belvedere, Crayford and Welling.

A base within Bexleyheath also allows response times across the borough to remain at their current levels. If response teams were to be relocated to Sidcup, this would adversely affect response times in the centre and north of the borough, which we believe will lead to considerable issues with the reassurance of our residents regarding how crimes are being responded to.

We understand the statistics used in the consultation, outline the number of crimes reported at Bexleyheath police station rather than the number of enquiries received at the front desk. We believe that a decision cannot be made without the statistics outlining the number of visitors to the station.

We strongly support the retention of a police station within Bexleyheath with a preference for this facility to remain on its current site. However, given some of the facilities previously provided on site have been relocated, we would support the relocation

of the facility on part of the site, if the site were to be redesigned to allow housing on part of the site or on another site within Bexleyheath town centre such as the former council offices site owned by Bellway.

As the decisions appear to be driven by cost given the government's cuts to policing budgets, we believe that if the present station is to be closed that every consideration should be given to ways in which the same service could be provided on a smaller site within Bexleyheath town centre.

New approaches to engagement

At present, more information is required on where ward hubs will be located and how they will be operated. We would welcome further information and consultation on this point prior to a final decision being made.

With regard to digital opportunities, we strongly support the Metropolitan Police Service in its aim to improve its online offer. Demand for digital services is increasing in this borough and across London and we believe you should be looking to adapt your services to cater for this demand, while appreciating that some of our residents will wish to engage in a more traditional method.

As local councillors, we believe the Metropolitan Police Service does not use digital services enough to publicise opportunities to report crime or to engage locally with policing teams. Far more needs to be done to publicise ward meetings and events on the Metropolitan Police Service website and to ensure that residents can adequately engage with their dedicated ward officers.

Consultation Process

We believe that the consultation has not been well advertised, with a reliance on local resident groups to advertise events via social media. As councillors, we were not advised of the consultation event held in the borough and become aware of its organisation a few hours before it was due to be held, via social media.

It is also unclear how you have sought to engage with hard to reach groups and we would be grateful of clarification as to how you consulted with them.

Communicating your decision

We would urge you to reconsider the closure of Bexleyheath Police Station and if you are minded to sell the current site, that you explore all opportunities to provide both a front counter and facilities for response vehicles in Bexleyheath town centre.

We would also ask that following any decisions, that any changes are communicated to the public, to ensure they understand any changes to local services. In addition, existing services should not be withdrawn before any new ones are in place and fully operational.

Yours Sincerely,

Councillor Daniel Francis, Leader – Bexley Labour Group