

CRIME IN CROYDON

Submission No. 5 to the Croydon Opportunity and Fairness Commission

Discussion of issues relevant to the Commission's inquiries

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The first section is an update of questions submitted to the MOPAC police plan review in 2013 and to Andy Tarrant, Croydon Borough Commander (28 July 2014) to which no replies were received. The second section is based on work the author has previously undertaken examining the cost of crime to a local authority.

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The author was Secretary of the Community/Police Consultative Group for Lambeth and Panel of Lay Visitors to Lambeth Police Stations 1984-1989, and was first Chair of the Panel of Lay Visitors to Wandsworth Police Stations. In the 1990s he worked on a number of crime and community safety projects with Crime Concern.

He has spent his working, community and politically active life on issues relating to poverty, antipoverty, poor housing and homelessness, housing provision, regeneration, environment, community development and organisation, planning and community/police consultative issues, community engagement and participation, as well as being a historian of aspects of these including Black British History. He has been a Councillor, a member of regeneration boards, an administrator (inc. Committee Secretary) and organiser (e.g. events), a policy researcher and information sharer. He co-ordinates the Croydon Radical and Samuel Coleridge-Taylor networks, reports on developments and events on his two blog sites and in Croydon Citizen. He monitors and shares information in advance on what is under discussion in Council committees on one of his blog sites. He is currently organising several history and cultural events in Croydon.

CRIME AND POLICING INFORMATION

Given crime continues to be an issue for Croydon's residents and workers it is important to understand the nature, incidence and geography of crime and how the police operate to deal with it. In 2013 MOPAC consulted on a 're-organisation' involving the closure of police stations like Norbury. Various concerns were expressed about this across the Borough. In the absence of a public arena for discussing crime and policing through the winding up for the Borough consultative committees, the Commission has an opportunity to try and ascertain whether the changes have been beneficial or otherwise and whether this has been consistent across the Borough.

In addition to the standard provision and analysis of crime statistics the following questions could be usefully asked. Unless otherwise stated each question seeks the information for the Borough each of the years 2012, 2013 and 2014 and reference to police stations means those in the Borough.

Crime Statistics

1. How many additional crime categories did the Croydon police have to deal with in 2014 compared with 1997, 2002 and 2007?

Response Times

2. What was the average time taken for police officers despatched from each police station in response to an incident?

Staffing Establishment and Person Hours

3. At the beginning of each quarter what were the staffing establishments at each Croydon police station:

- Police officers
- Community support officers
- Civilian staff

including as at January 2015.

4. What were the total number of hours per station put in by:

- Police officers
- Community support officers
- Civilian staff

5. What were the total number of hours and % put in by each of groups in 4 above responding to:

- Burglaries
- Motor vehicle thefts
- Thefts from motor vehicles
- Shoplifting
- Traffic accidents
- Fights in public spaces
- Drunk and disorderly behaviour
- Domestic violence
- Rape and sexual abuse
- Drug offences

6. What were the total number of hours and % put in each of groups in 4 above responding to:

- Appearing in court
- Attending training
- Sick leave
- Holidays
- Attending meetings of neighbourhood watch, resident organisations and others
- Police Federation and other associations duties

Staff Costs

7. How many hours overtime was put in by each category of 'staff' at each police station?
8. Which categories of civilian staff were paid wages at or higher than London Living wage level?
9. How many cleaners and canteen workers employed by the Met Police Service or by contractors in Croydon paid (a) below, (b) at or (c) above the London Living Wage level?

Building Costs

10. What were the cost budgets for each of the police stations with regard to:
 - Repairs and maintenance
 - Redecoration
 - Upgrades of equipment
 - Energy
11. What were the average costs of holding detainees in the Croydon police station custody areas broken down into 'staff' time and costs such as food and non-food supplies for detainees?
12. In the 2013 MOPAC consultation how much money was predicated to be saved by the closure of each police station and how much was actually saved subsequently?
13. How much was the actual or is the predicted sales proceeds of each police station designated for closure as a result of the 2013 review?

Vehicle Costs

14. What were the annual costs of the police vehicle fleet at each police station?
15. What was the predicted increase in 2013 for fuel costs for the police vehicle fleet when vehicles were moved from closed to continuing police stations in 2013?

Early Morning Raids

16. What was the average cost of early morning raids on addresses in Croydon where occupants were alleged to have committed crime, broken down into (a) raids by Croydon based police; (b) police from other Boroughs; and (c) police from MPS special units based outside Croydon?
17. How many raids were carried out in the early mornings on people living in Croydon with no history of violence who were simply wanted for questioning?
18. How many early morning raids were the media invited to attend?
19. How many early morning raids did the media attend without invitation?

Police Service Counters

20. Since the closure of police stations in how many libraries and supermarkets have police service counters been opened up?
21. What are the opening hours of each police service counter?
22. What was the cost of equipping and adapting premises to open each police service counter?
23. What are the statistics on the use made of each police service counter?
24. How many individual premises are still need needed to be provide police service counters in libraries and supermarkets?

25. What is the timetable for opening additional police service counters?

Stops and Searches

26. How many stops and searches were made in the Borough by age, gender and ethnic group and legislative power, shown Borough wide and by each police station?

27. How many stops and searches led to:

- (a) arrests by alleged crime
- (b) charging by alleged crime
- (d) court appearances for alleged crime
- (e) acquittal at court
- (f) custodial sentences
- (g) community service sentences

28. What steps have been undertaken since 2012 in respect of tackling any alleged or actual racial discrimination by Croydon police officers as illustrated for example in stops and searches?

Costs of Crime

29. What has been the amount of time and the financial costs to the police service in Croydon of dealing with problems relating to

- alcohol
- violent disorder not linked to alcohol
- domestic violence
- care protection
- vulnerable people protection
- mental health crises

30. In the experience of the Borough's police what % of people arrested in 2014 needed access to the following treatment and support rather than a fine, community service or custodial sentence for:

- alcohol problems
- mental health problems

Privacy

31. What steps are taken not to name suspects until they have been charged and their names become public on court listings, so as to protect the reputations of those who are not charged?

Crime by Croydonites

32. What was the percentage of chargeable crimes committed by (a) Borough residents and (b) non-Borough residents?

33. What was the percentage of people sentenced to custodial sentences in Borough courts for offences committed in the Borough who were (i) Borough Croydon residents and (ii) non-Borough residents?

34. How many Borough residents were

- charged with crimes committed elsewhere in other parts of London and outside London, and
- subject to custodial sentences?

35. How many Borough residents at the time of their conviction are currently in prisons around the country?

WHAT DOES CRIME COST TO CROYDON COUNCIL?

A discussion note

Back in the 1990s I was working on a Crime Concern project with Islington Council looking at various aspects of crime including what it cost the Council. The estimate was a minimum of £20m. I wonder what the cost to Croydon Council is? In some respects it will be lower because it has a much smaller stock of Council housing.

The key question is can the Council's information systems provide answers to a large number of detailed questions about the costs of crime to the Council, and the costs of the measures it takes to deal with crime. If these costs can be brought down then it will make a contribution to reducing the budget gap 2015/19.

The following questions could usefully be explored.

Police Statistics

1. Do the police provide the Council with detailed monthly crime statistics to ascertain trends within the Borough and where there are particular geographic concentrations, and in particular
 - crime on Council estates and against its tenants
 - against its non-housing buildings, property, staff or users of its facilities?
2. Does the Council make use of detailed police statistics for survey and project work, especially in relation to its crime prevention initiatives on Council estates?

Council Recording Systems

1. Does the Council record information and keep statistics on
 - theft and destruction of Council cash and property through break-ins, walk-in-theft, staff theft, armed robbery and arson;
 - theft of the cash and property of Council staff, and assaults on Council staff;
 - fraud and corruption against the Council by staff, users and contractors?
2. Are logs of incidents kept at every Council building, and if so is there a central mechanism which enables this information to be collated?

Crime Incidents 2012 - 2014

As a longer time period of actual crime information affecting the Council would be distorted by the riots in 2011, it is simplest to look at the post-riot experience in 2012, 2013 and 2014.

1. Which Council buildings were targets of criminal activity?
2. Do the Finance Department's Insurance records for theft give an indication of the scale of the thefts of Council property in terms of incidents and claims subsequently lodged with the Council's insurers? There may also be thefts which are not reported to Insurance because they involve the theft of items under an uninsurable, or involve losses of equipment through walk-in theft which are not itemised under an all risks policy?
3. Is a log of incidents kept by the Education Department, itemising losses or thefts of such items as computer printers, camcorders, personal belongings, purses and wallets, videos, tools, recording equipment and vehicles?
4. Were any arson attacks carried out against Council buildings?
5. Do the records of the Human Resources Department show the numbers of verbal and physical assaults on staff? Is there any estimate of under-reporting?

6. Are records kept about fraud and corruption against the Council perpetrated by staff, users and contractors, including:
 - the deliberate non-payment of arrears of rent and of other payments due to the Council, and non re-payment of overpayments of housing benefit (i.e. not due to financial inability to pay);
 - the misuse of dependent residents of Council run homes;
 - the theft, interception and fraudulent encashment of housing benefit cheques.
7. Are records kept of the reported theft of personal property of users of Council facilities? Is Fusion, for example, expected to keep records of such thefts at the leisure centres? Although the Council and Fusion may have a disclaimer that it is not responsible for such losses, if they do not act could user numbers of the facility decrease?
8. What are the statistics of the work of the Council's Prosecution Team which give an indication of the range of work against unlawful and criminal actions for which the Council has responsibility for dealing with: public health, consumer protection, road traffic, assaults, street parking, dangerous dogs, building control, housing, dangerous structures, food hygiene, litter, parking by-laws, licensing, travellers, unlicensed trading obstructing the highway and food prosecutions.
9. What information does the Council have about other types of criminal activity which create problems for it, and create demand for its services:
 - Racial Harassment.
 - Violence. e.g. how many households have had to be being re-housed or accepted as homeless because of violence, including attacks of a racial, domestic violence, homophobic and religious nature?
 - How many known juvenile offenders were there in Croydon and how many of whom are involved with Council run or funded services?
 - Crime linked to anti-social problems arising from alcohol, drug and prostitution.

The Costs of Crime to the Council

In addition to information about the actual incidence of crime affecting the Council, can it analyse what the costs involved are?

1. What specific cost information has the Council got on theft and other crimes, and on expenditure by the Council on crime prevention, security and community safety measures to Council buildings, housing stock, and in public places?
2. Does the computer system for ordering repairs to housing stock have a coding for repairs required due to criminal activity?
3. Does the system for ordering repairs to Council owned buildings other than housing stock provide for a coding for repairs required because of a break-in or criminal damage?
4. How many ex-gratia payments have been made to staff who have had their belongings stolen or were assaulted?
5. How much rent arrears and benefits payments was written off because of:
 - debtors in prison
 - tenants charged for domestic violence offences acquitted after a long period on remand
 - housing benefit cheque fraud and theft?
6. What are the costs incurred by the Council as a result of physical assaults against Council staff in terms of sickness, time off work in relation to police inquiries and Court proceedings, and the cost of locum cover during extended absence?
7. What is the cost of security measures provided under contracts for guards, cash collection and alarms?
8. How much is spent on security guards at individual Council buildings and sites?

9. Is there a comprehensive record of all the security hardware and its costs that have been installed in Council buildings; items such as: CCTV, security cupboards, single digital security locks, and digital security locks with crash bars, power operated control locks?

Expenditure on security and crime prevention measures

1. In relation to the Council's housing stock, what are the costs of:
 - (a) capital measures that form part of general programmes to improve estates
 - (b) capital measures that are specifically aimed at increasing security
 - (c) revenue security measures on specific estates?
2. Similarly what have been the security and other crime prevention costs in relation to the Council's non-housing stock?
3. What are the costs of security and crime prevention measures to parks, playgrounds, open spaces and in streets?
4. What are the costs of community development and preventive initiatives either undertaken directly by the Council through, or through specialist projects, or by voluntary organisations with funding from the Council? These might include work on young people, domestic violence and child abuse?
5. What are the costs of support to victims and offenders through Council work or funding projects?
6. What are the percentages and costs involved in supporting offenders or the children of offenders through such services as educational psychology, child guidance, education welfare, learning support, play services, youth services, children's homes, family centres, voluntary homes, and boarded out children?
7. What grant aid and contract funding does the Council make to voluntary organisations and other providers which are involved in providing advice and support to victims and offenders. Which organisations receive wither grants or contracts for such work and how much funding is involved?
8. There are a whole range of other costs involved in the administrative and political processes involved in reacting to crime, in implementing crime prevention and community safety measures, and in the political oversight of this work,
 - Officers time and costs in preparing for, attending and taking action.
 - Officers time spent in liaising directly with the police, including crime investigation officers, crime prevention officers, and any specialist architectural liaison officer.
 - Councillors expenses in attending meetings.
 - Officer time spent in cross-departmental liaison.
 - The costs of staff involvement in responding to crime incidents
 - The costs of staff involved in general housing, social service and education provision which has a bearing.
 - The staff costs of programming and implementation of physical works.Are these costs known?
9. How much in costs did the Courts award the Council in respect of its prosecutions work? How much of the costs were recovered through the Courts?
10. How much does the Prosecution Team cost?
11. Did the Council incur any costs in its lawyers defending the Council against any prosecutions under environmental protection legislation?

What Next?

If the Council monitors the cost of crime how is this information made available to the public? If it does not carry out such monitoring then is it a matter for the Safety and Justice Cabinet member in collaboration with relevant colleagues with specific departmental responsibilities and the Cabinet member for Finance, or is it a matter that the Scrutiny and Oversight Committee should investigate?

If current working practices and systems do not provide a comprehensive picture of the extent and costs of crime, consideration should be given:

- to provide information for decision-making and effective allocation of resources
- to enable the Council to initiate preventive measures rather to respond with counter measures to criminal activity
- to provide more accurate budget estimates
- to enable the progress of crime prevention and community safety measures to be monitored.

Depending on what the current state of monitoring is, it may be necessary to consider the following actions:

- the redesign of order forms and invoices to incorporate a coding for identifying criminal damage, replacement due to theft, and security and community safety projects.
- training of all systems users to identify crime on all order forms and invoices.
- incorporation of cost centres for losses and damage caused by crime, and for expenditure on security and community safety measures and projects be incorporated into financial systems.
- compilation of statistics on staff as victims.
- computerisation of the recording of every incident of crime against the Council's buildings, estates, property, staff and users, broken down by type of incident, location, and damage, loss or injury, and be capable of being analysed by ward, smaller neighbourhoods within wards, streets, estates, and Council buildings; and to be designed to be flexible enough to meet any future changes in the type of data required, and to be transferable as Departmental structures and responsibilities are changed.
- police provision of information about incidents they have recorded of crime, anti social behaviour and other kinds of offences against Council buildings, property staff and users and on Council estates.