

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL  
ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 30 JANUARY 2017  
REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR PUBLIC PROTECTION, PLANNING AND  
GOVERNANCE

UPDATE ON OPERATION REPRISE AND OPERATION BALSAM

**1 Executive Summary**

- 1.1 This report updates members on the work carried out by the Public Health and Protection Team in relation to out of hours noise work. This is provided by three distinct services:
- 1.2 Operation Reprise – this provides a response service every Friday and Saturday night throughout the year between the hours 22:00 and 03:00
- 1.3 Operation Balsam – this provides a response service working with part of a larger police operation targeted to coincide with the start and end of the University of Hertfordshire academic year over a two to three week period.
- 1.4 Specific investigations – where noise monitoring is required a part of a complex planning consultation, nuisance investigation or monitoring during the early hours or at weekends.
- 1.5 A summary of statistics for Reprise and Balsam are provided at Appendix A

**2 Recommendation**

- 2.1 To note the work undertaken and support the continued night noise service provided by Public Health and Protection through Operation Reprise and Operation Balsam.

**3 Explanation**

**Operation Reprise**

- 3.1 Operation reprise has been providing the residents of Welwyn Hatfield Borough with a weekend night noise response service since 2008.
- 3.2 The service provides two Council officers, in a vehicle patrolling the borough and responding to complaints of noise received by both the police force control room and the Council call centre which are passed to the Reprise team. The Reprise team give an immediate response to noise complaints on Friday and Saturday nights between the hours of 22:00 and 03:00.
- 3.3 The team comprises of an Officer from the Environmental Health team and a street warden. The officer has to achieve a level of competency before authorisation and undertaking the Reprise role. The street warden is registered and trained under the Herts Community Safety Accreditation Scheme, acts as a driver and second person to support the authorised officer. The authorised officer

handles calls from the police and Community Housing Trust control room and residents. The authorised officer leads each visit and makes decisions as to the most appropriate course of action. The authorised officer would lead any discussion with the residents and alleged perpetrators. The second officer would be responsible for corroborative evidence.

- 3.4 The risk assessment is reviewed annually. All staff are provided with the appropriate Personal Protective Equipment including stab vests.
- 3.5 A dedicated Reprise mobile number is used. This number is to not to be issued to members of the public.
- 3.6 An operational order, defining the specific working arrangements, is issued to authorised officers, Street Wardens and the Police.
- 3.7 Case study – Loud Birthday Party.

*A number of complaints were received regarding loud music and singing in Cuffley and the complainants assumed the source was from an organised outside event. The Reprise team investigated and found that the music was in fact coming from a domestic property holding a large party both inside and in the garden with amplified music and professional DJs. There were approximately 50-60 people present and the music and noise could be heard up to a mile away. The team arrived around 01.30 hours and in the words of the EHO “the music was deafening”. It appeared as though the party was in full swing and they had no intention of finishing. The officer advised the occupier to turn off the music and bring people inside. Police assistance was sought and provided as there was such a large crowd. The occupier brought the party to a close and the crowds eventually left.*

*The service ensured that residents in the area did not suffer the music all night and that the correct source of the noise was identified.*

### **Operation Balsam**

- 3.8 The Council and Police have worked in direct partnership with the University of Hertfordshire to provide an extended out of hours noise service at the start and end of the academic year since 2009. In 2013 this particular project was re branded and known as Operation Balsam.
- 3.9 Police and officers from the Environmental Health team work directly together on Operation Balsam. The police have resources to provide different patrols with a specific remit to deal with burglaries, often against students, and other crimes as well as a patrol working with an authorised officer to deal with noise and antisocial behaviour issues.
- 3.10 The Environmental Health component of Operation Balsam consists of a police patrol and vehicle with an authorised officer to respond to any complaints of noise regarding any resident living in any part of the Borough over a two week period over the hours 22:00 to 03:00.
- 3.11 One key aspect of the operation is to impart a message of personal safety to the students and part of the Operational Order states that “Officers will engage with students at every opportunity, to educate students on the standards of behaviour expected during the coming year. In addition and where appropriate advice relating to housing, personal safety and security will be given.”

- 3.12 Therefore, Operation Balsam, both ensures that appropriate actions are taken to deal with antisocial behaviour and noise nuisance and additionally provides a positive message to young people that enforcement agencies are also there to provide support and advice

A debrief is carried out by Environmental Health, the University and the Police after each Operation with feedback given by all those involved to identify what works well and what can be improved. The conclusion at the last debrief identified that all went well but the key improvement required is enhanced promotion of the service. Promotion was through a press release, tweeting, informing all appropriate agencies and Councillors and at the University Community Liaison forum. Data sharing between agencies was an action target following the last debrief and was found to have improved with swift follow up visits made by the University after an Operation Balsam visit highlighted a problem premises.

- 3.13 All noise investigations follow the Enforcement Policy and take a staged approach to enforcement. There is no exception to these Operations and where perpetrators' choose to ignore our words of advice a noise abatement notice will be served. However, the vast majority of cases are resolved on site informally.

- 3.14 Case Study- Student Party in South Hatfield

*A student property was visited during Operation Balsam on a Friday night. The music was being played to an unacceptable level and clearly heard in within the neighbouring property. This was witnessed by the officers on duty. The students were spoken to on the night and the consequences explained. However, they ignored the advice and continued to make excessive noise the following evening. The officer on duty was able to access this information regarding the events the previous night. Because of the levels of noise and the fact that the noise continued a noise abatement notice was served. Monitoring was carried out on during subsequent weeks but there were no further complaints or disturbance.*

- 3.15 The ability to directly witness the nuisance is a key part to the success of the night noise service.
- 3.16 The use of the Samsung tablet has been successful allowing officers to gain access to encrypted data prior to visiting each premises that otherwise would not be available while driving round the district. This is also a key part of the Risk Assessment.
- 3.16 The aims of both Operation Reprise and Operation Balsam are: to provide an immediate response to residents disturbed by noise from premises, gather evidence, resolve the noise disturbance and take appropriate enforcement action, carry out any appropriate follow up work and mediation on a longer term basis to resolve ongoing noise and anti-social behaviour related complaints. We actively encourage good joint working together with relevant agencies including the police, the University of Hertfordshire and the Community Housing Trust.
- 3.17 These aims have been successfully achieved and the working relationships between Environmental Health, the police, the University and the street wardens are productive.

#### **4 Legal Implication(s)**

- 4.1 There are legal implications if complaints of noise are not investigated. The Council is required to investigate all complaints of noise that may fall under the remit of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Failure to do so can be investigated by the Local Authority Ombudsman. In addition, unsatisfied residents are likely to issue a complaint against the service or seek their Councillor / MP involvement.
- 4.2 There are legal procedures governing the investigation, and abatement of statutory nuisances. This includes provisions as to prosecution and/or work in default which can result in the seizure of noise making equipment.
- 4.3 The council has legal obligations to employees to protect their health, safety and welfare. This includes those staff working out of hours in connection with noise nuisance investigation and enforcement.

#### **5 Financial Implication(s)**

- 5.1 The funding for Operation Reprise is met by existing budgets.
- 5.2 Funding for Operation Balsam is entirely provided by the University of Hertfordshire as part of contributions to assist with community initiatives

#### **6 Risk Management Implications**

- 6.1 The risks related to this service are:
- 6.2 This service helps to reduce any risks of a perceived inadequate service provision that fails to meet customers' needs. It also mitigates against complaints to the local government ombudsman as the service is provided based on an assessment of need.
- 6.3 There are public health risks to persons who suffer noise nuisance; this can include increased stress levels and exacerbating existing heart conditions, high blood pressure etc.
- 6.4 There are risks to staff safety in carrying out this work. These can be minimised by appropriate control measures and staff training.
- 6.5 There is a resource implication providing authorised officers to work night shifts for a two to three week period. There is an impact on the ongoing routine work of the department. However this can be accounted for by forward planning of workloads.
- 6.6 There are risks by misunderstanding of what the service can provide. It is made clear throughout the request for service process of types of noise we can and cannot deal with.

## **7 Security and Terrorism Implications**

- 7.1 Operation Balsam may not operate if the Police resources are redirected because of an increased terror threat level.

## **8 Procurement Implications**

- 8.1 None directly arising from this report.

## **9 Climate Change Implication(s)**

- 9.1 None, though noise complaints are generally increased during warmer weather conditions due to parties being held outside and people leaving windows open.

## **10 Link to Corporate Priorities**

- 10.1 I confirm that the subject of this report is linked to the Council's Corporate Priorities (Our Community and Our Environment), and is linked to the statutory requirement under The Environmental Protection Act 1990.

## **11 Equality and Diversity**

I confirm that an Equality Impact Screening Assessment (EIA) has been carried out in connection with the proposals that are set out in this report. The results show that this service does not provide any differential impacts in relation to any of the 9 protected equality characteristics and that a full impact assessment is not needed. However, as part of the scheduled review of the noise service provisions, the screening assessment will be reviewed to see if there are any significant changes.

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Date	10 January 2017

Appendix A - Figures for Operation Reprise  
Operation Balsam Statistics

## Operation Reprise Statistics

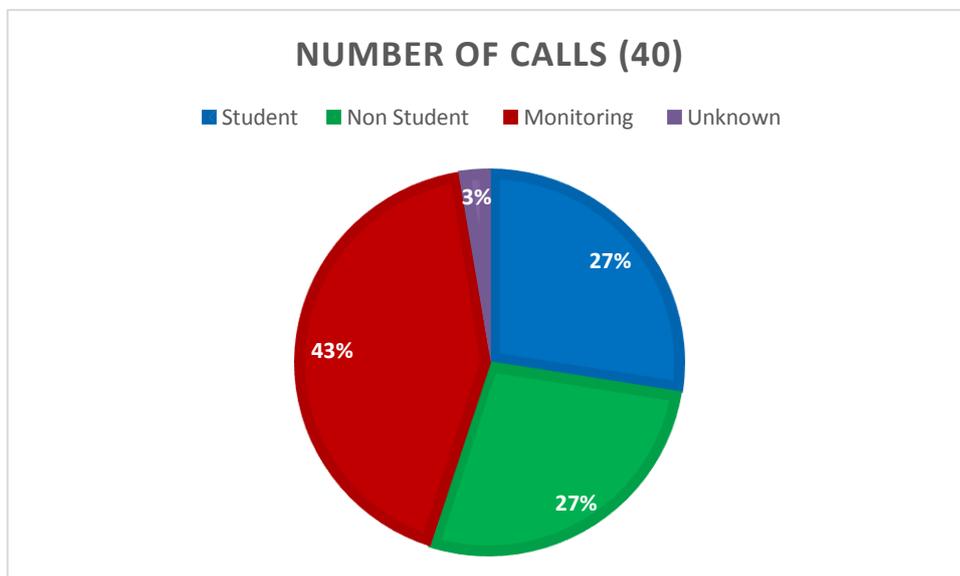
(Calendar Year 2016)

Calls received and attended - 346

## Operation Balsam Statistics

23<sup>rd</sup> September – 9<sup>th</sup> October 2016

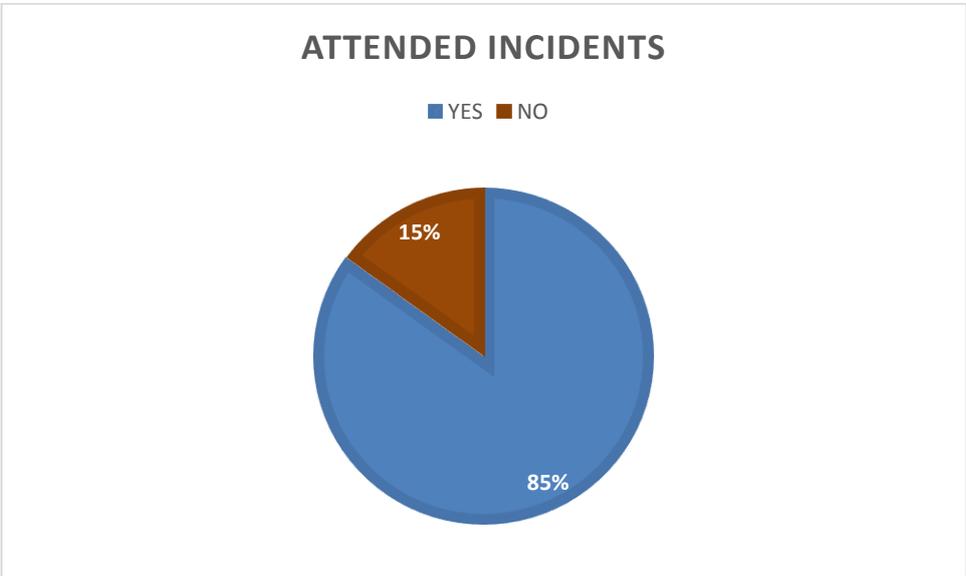
Call profile	Number of calls	Total
Students	11	40
Monitoring	17	
Non-Student	11	
Unknown	1	



## Action Statistics

Number of Warnings Given	Yes	1
	No	39
Resolved on Site	Yes	19
	No	1
	N/A	20
Attended Incidents	Yes	34
	No	6

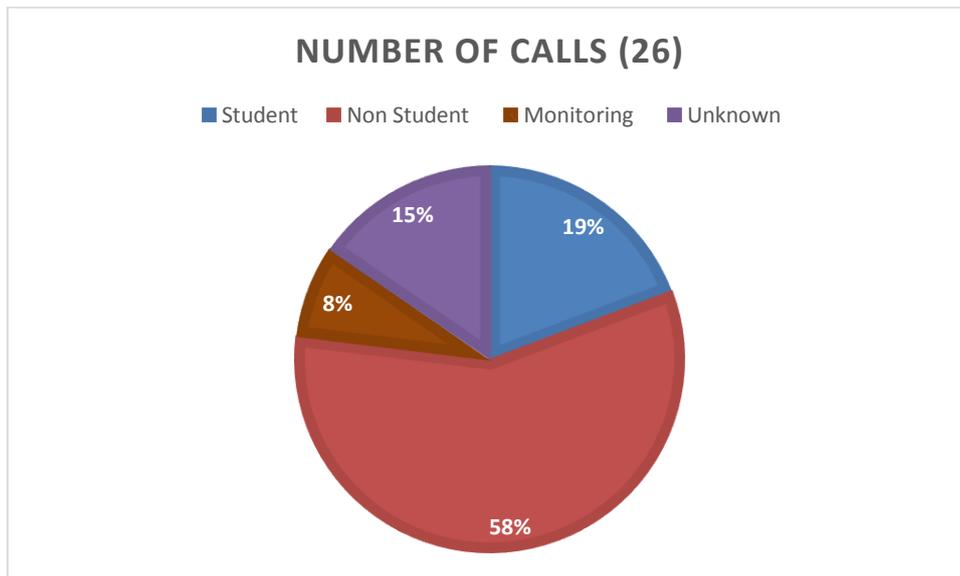
**Operation Balsam Statistics (Contd)**



## Operation Balsam Statistics

13<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> May 2016

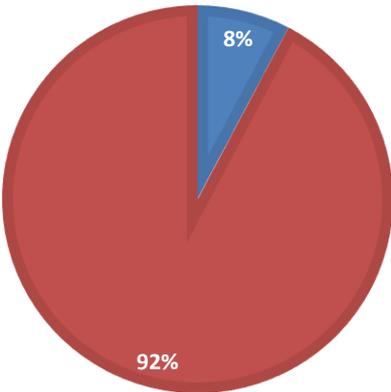
Call Profile	Number of calls	Total
Students	5	26
Monitoring	2	
Non-students	15	
Unknown	4	



Number of Warnings Given	Yes	2
	No	24
Resolved on Site	Yes	15
	No	11
	n/a	0
Attended Incidents	Yes	22
	No	4

### FIRST WARNINGS GIVEN

■ YES ■ NO



### ATTENDED INCIDENTS

■ YES ■ NO

