

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
ENVIRONMENT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 26 MARCH 2018
REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (PUBLIC PROTECTION, PLANNING AND GOVERNANCE)

NOISE UPDATE – OPERATION REPRISE AND BALSOM

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report updates members on the work carried out by the Environmental Health team in relation to programmed out of hours noise work. This is provided by:
- 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.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 For members to note the work undertaken and support the continued service provided by the Public Health and Protection and the Street Warden team taking part in Operation Reprise and Operation Balsam.

3 Explanation

3.1 Operation Reprise

Operation Reprise has been providing the residents of Welwyn Hatfield Borough with a weekend night noise response service since 2008.

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 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.

The team comprises of an officer from the Environmental Health team (authorised officer) and a street warden. All officers are registered and trained under the Herts Community Safety Accreditation Scheme which then allows access to safetynet and the PNC for certain information. Environmental Health officers are able to access the PHaP case management system via a tablet while out on district and on PC while based in the office.

This level of vetting allows the team to access a large amount of information to make informed decisions regarding their own safety and level of remedial action taken.

The street warden acts as a driver and support for the authorised officer. The authorised officer handles calls from the police and Council control room and residents. The team visit both the complainant and alleged perpetrator. 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 collecting corroborative evidence and for use of the Bodycam

3.2 **Operation Balsam**

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 as Operation Balsam.

Police and Environmental Health Officers work directly together during Balsam. The police provide a specific shift pattern to deliver resources for a late turn during these operations, patrols have a remit to deal with burglaries, often against students, and other crimes as well as working with an authorised officer to deal with noise and antisocial behaviour issues.

Environmental Health work with the communications team to produce a promotion package via photographs and press release, social media, informing all appropriate agencies and Councillors and at the University Community Liaison forum. This is a key part of the operation, residents need to know the service is available to ensure it is used.

The Balsam team will respond to any complaints of noise in any part of the Borough over a two week period over the hours 22:00 to 03:00 but prioritises those complaints by or about student properties.

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.”

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.

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For both services the risk assessment is reviewed annually in consultation with all authorised officers and the Health and Safety officer. All staff are provided with the appropriate Personal Protective Equipment including stab vests. There

are staff review sessions. This will include reminding staff to report abusive behaviour displayed towards them.

3.3 **Specific Updates for 2017-18**

- The statistics for Reprise and Balsam are attached as Appendix 1.
- An incident occurred whereby a specific risk assessment was required to ensure appropriate control measures were in place for a delusional resident threatening staff. This highlighted the need for good communication and sharing of information across council departments and the need for taking action promptly. It also highlighted the need for a robust potentially violent person protocol, which has now been produced and awaiting implementation
- Street wardens now wear bodycams routinely and record at any time there appears to be the potential for conflict. These are proving to be an effective personal safety and corroboration tool.
- The new alarm system for Campus East presented some operational difficulties getting in and out of the building which have now been resolved but again show the need for good joint working across the Council. As always these situations do provide the path to better understanding of other team`s roles and a chance to have face to face conversations is the best way to determine practical solutions.
- Operation Balsam was one of two nominations to the Municipal Journal awards from the Public Health and Protection service. The nomination is attached as Appendix 2.
- Over the last year we have seen some inclement weather which has almost hampered the service. Business continuity plans in place mean the weather is monitored and agencies informed if the service cannot go ahead. There have been a couple of occasions where the service has been cancelled due to staff sickness.
- The service provides eyes and ears for the Council during unsociable working hours and staff are able to provide compliance checks for other teams such as planning, environment services, ASB and licensing.
- Following previous debriefs data sharing is now more streamlined particularly during Balsam. The police send in nightly logs of all incidents and actions which are collated by the support team. The logs are assessed and where necessary follow up work is implemented. EH will assist the University disciplinaries by taking part and providing direct evidence. All calls are followed up in writing to the residents.
- These Operations provide effective and swift action to resolve complaints on the night. The evidence gathered is vital and there has been one seizure this year as a direct result of this service.

- The relationship between the Police and University is strong and positive. These Operations cultivate this by providing practical and operational arrangements.

4.0 Legal Implications

4.1 There are legal implications if complaints of noise are not investigated. The Council is obliged to investigate all complaints of noise that 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 seek their 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.

5.0 Financial Implication

5.1 The funding for Operation Reprise including all staff and equipment 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 environmental initiatives

6.0 Risk Management Implications

6.1 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.

6.2 There are risks to staff safety in carrying out this work. These can be minimised by appropriate control measures and staff training.

6.3 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.

6.4 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.

7.0 Security and Terrorism Implications

In complying with the Prevent duty Local Authorities need to ensure that publicly owned resources do not provide a platform for extremists and are not used to disseminate extremist views.

8.0 Procurement Implications

None directly arising from this report.

9.0 Climate Change Implication(s)

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

10.0 Link to Corporate Priorities

I confirm that the subject of this report is linked to the Council's Corporate Priority "maintain a safe and healthy community" and "engage with our communities and provide values for money".

11.0 Equality and Diversity

I confirm that an Equality Impact Assessment have been carried out in connection with Reprise and Balsam.

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Title: Update of the Operation Reprise and Operation Balsam services

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