

## Policing Crime debate

Sunday, 16 September 2007

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow): I thank the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) for shortening his speech to allow me to contribute to this important debate on policing. I will devote my remarks to the good news, the bad news, the root causes and the solutions, and I have about 40 seconds for each.

The good news is that Tower Hamlets has less crime than other inner city boroughs with less deprivation. The best news is that Tower Hamlets has been allocated an extra 147 police officers. That is an increase of 25 per cent., which reflects the fact that ours was the most under-resourced borough in London. Other elements of good news include estate wardens and the reduction in reported crimes related to drugs, criminal damage and residential burglary.

The bad news is that street crime has surged throughout London and street crime in Tower Hamlets is 50 per cent. higher than the London average. In the most recent year for which we have data, the police and the council between them received approximately 30,000 calls about street disorder, noise nuisance and abandoned cars, much of it gang-related.

I wish to apologise to the residents of Pevensey house, Harvey house, Pelican wharf, Alliston house, Gascoigne place, Gun place and Roman road, among others, who have written to me in great detail about the gang behaviour that is causing them continual suffering and unacceptable harassment, which I will not go into now.

One of the biggest casualties has been police response time, owing to the fact that the police have been so overstretched. A local councillor set out a familiar story:

"At 9.00 pm . . . I reported that a group of people were drug dealing openly around Vallance Road . . . I was told an officer would come around to investigate and take details. At 12.45 am I telephoned again . . . again at 1.15 am and yet again at 1.45 am, by which time I had waited nearly five hours for an officer to get to the scene",

and he eventually went to bed. He added:

"These same people are always dealing here and this was not an isolated incident."

Mr. Brian Boag writes that when he reported gangs vandalising cars, he was informed that there was a five to six-hour wait for police that evening. They were dealing with serious calls. He says:

"I am a senior nurse in the health service and have seen the changes and improvements in health care provision. I recognise that these have resulted as a consequence of new Labour's action. I know there is more to come in relation to public services, but situations similar to the one I have outlined above cannot be allowed to continue."

The last resident whom I shall quote, Mr. Uddin from London E14, said:

"I could not get police to help. I telephoned five times and waited 1½ hours. Then they told me they could not come. Please tell us how are we going to live in this borough without police help?"

Thankfully, we are getting that police help; a 25 per cent. increase will have a huge impact. However, we must look at the root causes of crime.

As we have heard, permanent exclusions of primary and secondary school pupils have increased. In Tower Hamlets they have increased by almost a quarter&mdash;24 per

cent.&mdash;since 1998-99. That is why education services in Tower Hamlets will now be working with the community partnership to track what problem young people are doing inside and outside school. Our approach must be targeted. It is an astonishing fact that a quarter of the offences committed by young people are the work of just 3 per cent. of that group. We must nail that 3 per cent. of offenders, but we must help the other 97 per cent. of offenders, most of whom come from the poorest households.

Finally, and briefly, I come to the solutions. One solution is more police. We have them, but demographic trends in Tower

Hamlets, with growing numbers in the age cohort that commits most crime, means that we will need more. We need more consistent sentencing. Inconsistent sentencing causes much distress not only to the victims but to the police. We need an effective multi-agency approach to crime reduction, more tightly linking the police, local authorities, the Crown Prosecution Service and the probation service, the emergency services, drug action teams, health authorities and the local community and voluntary sector. We also need to improve our action and record in the battle against drugs.

Finally, I wish to welcome the new borough commander in Tower Hamlets, Mark Simmons. It is a challenge; I know that he is equal to it. Let us work together to ensure that the 25 per cent. increase in police numbers helps to ease the distress of so many residents in Tower Hamlets.