

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

OPERATION ADIO - 4 MAY 2009

Background

There is a relatively long and regular history of protest activity within Sussex. Since 2000, the Force has experienced policing significant protests such as animal rights protest, No Borders peace Camp and Smash EDO, an anti-arms trade movement. The G20 protests in London in March 2009, and the initial findings of an Inquiry by HMIC into the policing response to that event, called for a change to the way the police plan for public protests.

Operation Adio is the latest in a series of planned protests/demonstrations against the activities of ITT/MBM and their links to the arms trade. It was also the first sizable demonstration in the country following the G20 events in London and the related negative media coverage. As such it attracted much media attention, notably that of Roger Graef who was making a documentary about public order policing.

How the Authority added value

The protest was billed as a 'reclaim the streets' – anti-capitalism event, with no indication that protest activity would be centred on a particular location. Despite strenuous efforts from Sussex Police no organisers for the protest were willing to come forward and as a result little was known about protester intentions or numbers. There was considerable concern from the community in Brighton and Hove, and Ms Emma Daniel and Mr Ben Duncan, two of the Authority members for Brighton and Hove, raised their concerns with the Chief Constable, particularly following the high profile G20 event. As a result, a plan was put in place, working with other partners in the City, to reassure the community, including businesses.

Emma Daniel, Ben Duncan and Dr Roma Walker (Lead Member on Public Order and also a Brighton & Hove member) attended a planning meeting for the operation to scrutinise planning tactics and community impact assessments for the event.

On the day itself Ben Duncan, Alan Price (Lead Member on Operations) and Peter Bratton (Vice Chairman of Professional Standards Committee) all visited the operations room and met with the Gold Commander, ACC Robin Merrett. They remained for much of the day and were able to view and discuss with the Gold Commander the policing operation as the day unfolded.

A police operation was put in place with the first priority being to minimise the risk of harm to the general public and to those involved in or affected by the event.

Mutual aid was provided by Hampshire, Kent and Thames Valley Police and all officers involved were clearly briefed with regard to the strategy and the need for them to be identifiable was stressed.

Protester numbers peaked at around 1000 with the march taking place within the City Centre and then out towards Preston Park. At its conclusion there had been a total of 4 arrests, 2 incidents of minor criminal damage and 2 police officers had received minor injuries.

Outcome

The Authority was particularly keen to understand how the democratic right for peaceful protest was balanced against the need to minimise disruption to the local community, whilst ensuring an appropriate police style was adopted.

Members scrutinised commanders and sought reassurance on issues such as command and control, the wearing of visible warrant numbers, the use of horses from another force, and community impact assessments.

As a result of the inclusive planning for this event, the community impact of the operation was minimal. Feedback from partners indicated there had been little disruption and no incidents were raised with the police. Members' contributions were valued and the Protective Services Scrutiny Committee will keep under review the policing of public protests in Sussex in the light of evolving national guidance and local experience.

The post incident criminal investigation team are currently reviewing the evidence from the day and will be endeavouring to identify those responsible for offences and effect post incident arrests.

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