

SETTING STRATEGIC DIRECTION

FIRE ARMS UNIT AT GATWICK AIRPORT

Background

Members and Officers of the Authority became concerned by some disquiet amongst the Fire Arms Unit at Gatwick Airport. The Unit felt they could approach the Authority to air their concerns. The Lead Member for Firearms and the Deputy Chief Executive attended an uncomfortable meeting with the Unit where they were subjected to truculence and hostile body language. It became apparent from this meeting that the Unit were not playing a consistent part in the vital role of the policing at Gatwick. Although there were some valid points in the grievances put forward, they were ultimately a reflection of low-morale and disaffection. The Unit viewed themselves to be important and elite and did not consider that they should be included in the Neighbourhood Policing model being introduced at Gatwick.

The Authority adding value

A meeting was arranged with the Divisional Commander of Gatwick outlining the situation. He was embarrassed at the treatment given to the Authority, but not surprised. He discussed with them his desire to develop a 'team approach' and lack of success due to obstacles of the macho and elitist culture that was present in the Fire Arms Unit. This culture was partly a result of the lack of female fire arms officers working for the Unit, and was a barrier to increasing female officer numbers within the Unit.

The Lead Member met with the Divisional Commander of Gatwick and told him that she had a similar experience within the Prison Service. She forwarded papers on the subject to the Commander, and introduced him to a Prison Governor who had tackled a similar problem with 'work-to-rule' tactics to block positive and humane reforms within the Prison establishment. The Divisional Commander supported by the Lead Member was able to undertake a review of cultural issues, with the aim of bringing about positive change.

Outcome

As a result of the Authority's lead and close liaison and support with the Divisional Commander he was able to successfully roll out his neighbourhood policing model at Gatwick, with measurable and tangible improvements. The Unit was developed and worked collaboratively and positively.

A few disaffected officers chose to leave work for the Metropolitan Police Protection Unit. They were replaced by a tranche of newly recruited and trained officers, the majority of which were female.

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