

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

OPERATION OTTER – POLICING OF THE 2009 LABOUR PARTY ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Background

Operation Otter, the policing of the 2009 Labour Party Conference in Brighton, was the largest pre-planned operation that Sussex Police undertook in 2009. The operation involved the deployment of over 1000 officers and staff, required a large dedicated team of planners, and cost over £5.7m. The Authority were concerned by the high levels of community concern, the cost and the significant risks including the reputation of the Force should there be a breach of security on public order.

The Authority adding value

The Authority became involved at a very early stage and nominated the Lead Member for Counter Terrorism and the Chairman of the Authority to have an active, supportive and intrusive oversight of the planning process and operational deployments. Their role was to ensure that the planning process followed nationally agreed protocols and was proportionate to the overall risks.

The Authority also insisted that the entire Authority be allowed access to the policing operation during the conference so that all members could be reassured that the operational phases were performed to the high standards that were expected by the public of Sussex.

Outcome

Members of the Authority attended table top exercises and at their request the Authority invited senior members of the planning team to present the plans to the entire Authority and keep members updated with plans as they were developed.

The Authority members added value in a number of ways:

- Members supported the special grant bid to the Home Office for funding the operation and the capital bid for the refurbishments of the planning office at Brighton Police Station
- Members played an active role in ensuring that the policing style adopted for the operation was in keeping with community expectations and ensuring that PCSOs from outside Brighton were not deployed to the operation, thereby protecting the policing presence so valued by communities across the county.
- The Authority was particularly keen to ensure that policing levels across the rest of Sussex, specifically neighbourhood policing, was not compromised by the operation.

The operation was universally regarded as a success by all key stakeholders with community concerns addressed and incorporated into event planning. The involvement of the Authority was welcomed and acknowledged by the planning team, and is seen as a strong model of how the Authority can play an influential role in oversight of major policing operations.

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