

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

### **PUBLIC ORDER – OPERATION PEEL**

#### **Background**

Operation Peel is the name used for the annual policing of Lewes bonfire celebrations, a community event that has existed for many hundreds of years, pre-dating the Gunpowder Plot. The community supported the continuation of the tradition but there were real and legitimate concerns from the public and partners on the safety of the event. It was agreed by all the partners involved in Lewes Bonfire that the best way to improve the safety of this event was to reduce the number of people who attend the event as spectators and so reduce the risks associated with large crowds. The task facing all involved was to preserve the historic bonfire tradition in Lewes, which is on a scale that is unsurpassed, whilst ensuring public safety.

#### **The Authority adding value**

In order for the Authority to ensure that the policing of this important community event was allowed to continue, whilst ensuring public safety was maintained and the cost to the wider tax-payer in Sussex was minimised, the Authority appointed two of its members and the Chief Executive on the Operation Peel Platinum Planning Group. This group includes partners from the Fire & Rescue Service, Lewes District Council and the local NHS Trust.

The group met over the course of the planning process to monitor the wider impacts of the review on the community of Lewes and Sussex as a whole. There has been significant effort invested in updating the plan for Operation Peel, with strong partnerships with the Authority and partner agencies, culminating in a seminar at Slaugham Manor for Members of the Authority, all emergency services, local authorities, and bonfire societies in Sussex. This meeting set out the proposed model for policing these events based on ACPO guidance and legal advice from the Authority.

Negotiations between Southern Railways, Lewes District Council, British Transport Police and Sussex Police resulted in the cancelling of the additional train services from Brighton to Lewes during the event. This had been requested by the bonfire societies and was identified as a key opportunity to improve public safety. A wider road closure plan was also agreed with all statutory agencies, to reduce visitors arriving in Lewes by private transport.

Stewarding was provided by Lewes District Council to support the police in diverting visitors arriving by rail to less crowded areas of the town during the processions. This was in response to the identified over-crowding issues that were agreed at the Bonfire Safety Group workshop, to which the Authority also contributed.

The provision of crowd barriers in the High Street and police officers lining the route in crowded areas was withdrawn, with the bonfire societies taking on the responsibility for negotiating their way through the spectators.

### **Outcome**

As a result of the successful Platinum Group planning of Operation Peel, and particularly the Authority's role as advocates of the community's interest in this event, there now exists a greater understanding within statutory agencies of the role of the police in public events and the liability issues arising. This has resulted in stronger partnership working between statutory agencies and has seen the development of a shared operational plan that is intended to address the identified risks of over-crowding at the event. The policing of this year's Lewes bonfire celebrations were considered a success, both in terms of people's enjoyment of the event and the Force's role in policing a public event. The Authority will continue to work with the Force and other partners to establish a safety advisory group for East Sussex.

### **Contacts:**

Superintendent Tony Blaker: Sussex Police

Dr John Godfrey, Chief Executive: Sussex Police Authority

Prof Gordon Bull: Lead Member, Sussex Police Authority

Dr Roma Walker: Lead Member, Sussex Police Authority