

Response from Kensington and Chelsea Council to the draft MOPAC/MPS Estate Strategy 2013 – 2016

Introduction

The Council welcomes the three year strategy and the major plans to reduce the police property holdings and make more effective use of the remaining stock. The following comments are designed to support MOPAC/MPS in finalising the strategy.

The Council has already responded to the draft Police and Crime Plan and some of the comments in that response related to estate issues referred to in this strategy. I have reproduced these here to make sure that they are also considered as part of a consultation exercise on the Estate Strategy

Comments from the Council's response on estates to the draft Police and Crime Plan

Front Counters

The Council acknowledges the scale of the savings that the Police must make and agrees that with the introduction of new means of communication it is time to review the spread of station front counters across London and their opening hours. There has been some consultation on this matter but we had expected to receive information on the following issues which would enable us to consider the proposals for Kensington and Chelsea in a London wide context

- Where existing stations are located in west and central London
- Across London what are the main reasons for personal callers at police stations and which of these can be undertaken just as effectively by other means
- How is the need for personal visits to police stations in London likely to change over the next three years
- What does this mean for the number of London police stations in the future and how many hours a front desk needs to be open
- How many front counters are needed per head of population across London and what standard should be put in place for the distance anyone has to travel to a front counter (i) during office hours and (ii) out of office hours

The plan does not mention these issues and therefore it looks like the proposed changes have been driven by local considerations rather than a coherent London wide approach. The final plan would be enhanced by demonstrating that the above factors have been taken into account and a London wide approach has been adopted which recognises that local residents are not concerned about borough boundaries when considering where their nearest police station front counter is.

The Council also thinks it is very important to demonstrate that all the Police Officers who are freed up from having to run public counters are returned to front line policing

in the borough where they are based. It would therefore be helpful to refer to the total number of police officers returned to the front line through this change in the final plan.

In relation to the specific proposals for Kensington and Chelsea, the Council recognises the case for retaining the 24/7 front counter at Notting Hill Police Station and closing the front counter at Chelsea Police Station. As indicated in the comments below under 'Public Access Points' the Council is firmly of the view that no change should be made until alternative access points are available and that there is good publicity about the option to go to Belgravia police station instead. The Council is also of the view that, at the earliest possible opportunity, the current front desk at Notting Hill Police Station is improved to bring it in line with best practice for customer service reception areas.

The Council also recognises the case to reduce the opening hours of the front counter at Kensington Police Station but is firmly of the view that this reduction should be from 24/7 to 14/7. 8 AM to 10 PM would be the most appropriate opening hours for the location.

The Council has previously proposed that there should be discussions with Fire and Ambulance Service partners and London Boroughs to see what scope there is to share buildings to provide the right level of front counter services. A reference to this in the final plan would be welcome.

When decisions have been made about the future of front counters in London it will be important to spend time getting the publicity right both in terms of giving advance warning and being clear about the other ways to contact the Police. It would therefore be useful to make reference to this publicity in the final plan and to give a commitment that the opening hours of front counters will not be changed until the new public access points are in place.

Public access points

The principle of providing more physical locations where the public can have face to face contact with the police is very welcome. There are, however, already opportunities in Kensington and Chelsea for the public to interact with the Police in this way, e.g. ward briefings. The Council would expect these new opportunities to be additional to what is currently provided.

It is important to be clear about the purpose of these extra opportunities for public/police engagement. They are clearly not meant to be a direct substitute for front counters at police stations but it is less clear, from the Plan, what their functions are. The Council is therefore of the view that it is important to make this explicit in the final plan. As its contribution to this matter the Council is of the view that such access points should have some confidential space where residents can report crimes through officers using the police IT systems. They should be places for residents and victims, not offenders.

As with front counters, the Council thinks that decisions should be based on ensuring that across London there is a reasonably, consistent approach to this matter e.g.

having a consistent number of day and evening hours when such points are 'open' in each Borough.

The Council is already working with Police colleagues to see what opportunities there are to use its buildings for this purpose. It is important though to note that the Council and other public sector partners will need to consider whether they need to ask the Police to cover any additional or opportunity costs arising from regular use of its property in this way.

The Council would expect to see specially trained officers manning public access points and would also expect them to be Police Officers rather than PCSOs. The Council would also need to be convinced that one officer is enough to look after each access point. The principle of locating them in busy areas is sound. Good publicity will also be crucial.

Other comments

Custody

The strategy refers to major changes in the provision of custody facilities in London some of which have already been made and others which are in the pipeline. As a means for making more effective use of resources this is to be welcomed but the Council does think that the views of local authorities and their communities should be taken into account when formulating and reviewing all these changes. They have an abundance of local knowledge which can help to inform MOPAC/MPS Plans.

There has been some local concern about the increased time taken by local Police Officers in getting to the new custody facility at Wandsworth. It would be useful to review these arrangements as new custody facilities come on stream elsewhere in London to make sure that time taken moving prisoners is kept to a minimum. The effect on the important appropriate adults' service also needs to be considered. The Council would be pleased to help provide local information in reviewing these issues.

Working with others

Local authorities and other public agencies are facing similar financial pressures to those currently being experienced by the MOPAC/MPS and are also looking at opportunities to rationalise their estate. Against that background it is important for these public agencies to work together and see what opportunities there are to share existing properties and, where appropriate, develop plans to accommodate bespoke facilities for several different agencies, e.g. combined police and fire stations.

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