



Devon & Cornwall Police
Building safer communities together

To:

Leaders of Unitary Authorities, County and District Councils
Chief Executives of County and District Councils
Chief Executives of Unitary Authorities
MPs
Lord Lieutenants
High Sheriffs
LCJB Chair/Members

13 May 2014

Dear Colleague

**DEVON & CORNWALL POLICE PUBLIC CONTACT STRATEGY
STATION ENQUIRY OFFICES' RATIONALISATION**

We are now in a position to update you following Assistant Chief Constable Paul Netherton's letter of 18 March 2014 regarding our public contact strategy and specifically the police station enquiry officer review that we are undertaking.

Public Contact Strategy

You will be aware of the significant budgetary pressures placed on all public sector agencies including our Police Service. Our pledge is to retain at least 3,000 police officers in Devon & Cornwall and ensure that the vast majority of these resources are on the front line and visible to the public to prevent crime, support victims and bring offenders to justice.

As part of our forward strategy and to adjust to future constraints we are introducing a new Contact Strategy which will ensure each local policing area has a detailed 'engagement plan' to increase accessibility and is best placed to provide the accessibility and service that the public will find most relevant to 21st century society. As part of this Strategy we are actively discussing with the public and partners how we can engage more effectively, for example through the use of regular surgeries in libraries, supermarkets, partner agencies premises etc.

Public Enquiry Offices

In 2010/11 we consulted with the public and key stakeholders regarding a demand-led proposal to rationalise the above service. Following a detailed examination of our police enquiry offices the number of offices was reduced from 57 to 21 across Devon & Cornwall. This rationalisation saved the Force approximately £1.5m per annum.

Since our last correspondence on this subject we have conducted footfall surveys and examined the demand on our front offices and have ascertained that demand has fallen further since 2010. The main reasons are that more legislative checking of documents is completed either on line or via an officer's radio from the scene of an incident, an increased usage of our Force's and the Police & Crime Commissioner's websites, our enhanced appointments system and a significant increase in the ownership and use of Smartphone and tablet technology by all sections of the public.

We have a responsibility to ensure that our service offer is relevant to the public of today and tomorrow, and is provided in an efficient and effective way. During the review into our enquiry offices we found that in some of our smaller towns less than one member of the public was visiting the office per hour, and even then it was, more often than not, for a matter that could be more effectively dealt with by other methods (website advice, telephone enquiry, reception).

Following discussions between us, the Chief Officer Group has considered various options based on analysis and discussions with stakeholders and have a preferred option which is to retain the three 'principal' front offices at Heavitree Road (Exeter), Charles Cross (Plymouth) and Torquay with six day opening (0800-1800 hours Monday to Friday and 0900-1700 hours on Saturdays). This is a reduction in hours of four hours each evening, when we know the footfall drops off significantly, and no Sunday opening – again there is little public demand for Sunday opening evidenced by the low footfall.

In addition our preferred option (which will now move to consultation with staff and the Trade Unions) includes the retention of the following six front offices with Monday to Friday opening of eight hours per day. This also reintroduces an 'all-day' Monday opening which the public tell us they prefer to the current Saturday morning opening:

Barnstaple
Crownhill (Plymouth)
Camborne
Truro
Bodmin
St Austell

We therefore propose to close twelve front offices from 31 October 2014. These are Tiverton, Honiton, Exmouth, Newton Abbot, Totnes, Okehampton, Bude, Launceston, Liskeard, Falmouth, Penzance and Newquay. However we do propose to open Newquay front office just during the summer months when demand is significantly increased.

A number of criteria were used to arrive at this decision including footfall, population size, seasonality, custody centre/court provision, future proofing, accessibility and arterial routes.

What we would stress is that no police stations are closing, and officers and PCSOs will continue working out of all our current sites. Currently when a front office is shut a 'blue wallphone' is accessible to members of the public, at no cost, for direct dial into our Force Control Rooms for both 999 and 101 calls, and this facility will remain. We will also be looking to improve the service offered to 101 callers, not least in forming better links to partnership agencies where the subject of the call may be better addressed.

The proposals generate a long term annual saving of £750,000 which can be re-invested into frontline policing. Clearly it is always regrettable to withdraw a point of contact the public has traditionally been used to, but this review has shown that front offices are not the preferred choice for the public to access our services anymore. We need to provide new opportunities for public engagement and look at new ways in which we can engage – both face to face as well as through the digital environment.

We will do this as part of the new Contact Strategy by undertaking active local discussions and considering alternative means of engagement with the public such as regular surgeries in libraries, supermarkets, partner agencies premises etc. We will want to meet with you and other key stakeholders in each locality where the PEO (police enquiry office) service is being withdrawn to discuss options and listen to any ideas that you and other partners can bring to the table. You will be contacted in the next couple of weeks to facilitate this process. By the time of any changes we will have a clear plan of existing and additional police engagement opportunities in each locality.

We will also be offering better access to information through our new Force website with new 'FAQs,' a 'track my crime' facility and mobile data for officers and staff. We will continue to consider new ways to boost engagement and accessibility, for example through a possible Smartphone App and other innovations.

We would really welcome discussions with yourselves and other local partners in order to engage with your ideas about how engagement and physical presence can be further enhanced jointly in each locality. We have had some excellent feedback in relation to the correspondence from 18 March and several offers to work more collaboratively. Our new Partnership Superintendents are working hard to achieve this.

Communication

We intend to inform our affected staff on Tuesday 13 and Wednesday 14 May, commencing formal consultations with our Trade Unions on 14 May. A press release has been prepared and media interviews will be conducted, but embargoed until 00.01 Thursday 15 May 2014. We would be most grateful therefore if you could refrain from sharing or commenting on this information until after then.

We would be grateful for your support as we address these difficult decisions.

If you have any particular queries or concerns then please do not hesitate to contact our respective offices.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shaun Sawyer'. The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping 'S' that loops back under the name.

Shaun Sawyer
Chief Constable

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tony Hogg'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent 'T' at the start.

Tony Hogg
Police & Crime Commissioner