

DEVON AND CORNWALL POLICE AND CRIME PANEL

Subject: Scrutiny of the "Police and Crime Commissioner's Joint Announcement with the Chief Constable in Respect of Devon & Cornwall Police "Public Contact Strategy" – Station Enquiry Offices' Rationalisation".

Date: 17 October 2014

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Executive Summary:

In accordance with Section 28(6)(a) of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011, the Police and Crime Panel (PCP), is responsible for scrutinising and supporting the actions and decisions of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC). The PCP meeting of 20 June 2014 agreed its first 'reactive' Scrutiny topic for 2014/15 would be the "Police and Crime Commissioner's Joint Announcement with the Chief Constable in Respect of Devon & Cornwall Police "Public Contact Strategy" – Station Enquiry Offices' Rationalisation". The scrutiny review is to be undertaken adopting a 'select committee' style approach.

Attached (Appendix 1) is a letter from ACC Paul Netherton dated 18 March 2014, and a further letter attached (Appendix 2) from, and jointly signed by, the PCC and the Chief Constable dated 13 May 2014 sent to Leaders and Chief Executives of all Councils in the force area, along with MPs, Lord Lieutenants, High Sheriffs and the LCJB. These letters laid out the details of the proposed Station Enquiry Rationalisation proposals and areas affected. A copy of the latter was provided to the Panel previously at the PCP meeting on 20 June 2014.

In addition a covering letter (Appendix 3) was sent to the Chair of the Police and Crime Panel, dated 14 May 2014, advising that "The force is to announce shortly that it will enter a period of consultation with a view to closing twelve Police Enquiry Offices from 31 October 2014." It appears, therefore, there is still an opportunity, for the PCP to scrutinise and make any recommendations to the PCC and the Chief Constable in advance of 31 October 2014.

In liaison with the Chair and Vice Chair of the PCP, the Host Authority has conducted, on behalf of the PCP, a range of direct engagement with communities, businesses and organisations across the force area, with an emphasis on those likely to be most affected by the proposals. This has been carried out to determine the degree of awareness, since the Police public survey carried out in 2010/11, of the proposals and to feed back to the PCC and Chief Constable views gathered about the proposals. In addition, the Host Authority has acquired a range of additional relevant information from the PCC to assist the PCP in scrutinising this topic.

In preparing for this scrutiny topic, the Host Authority has taken account of the legislation, Panel Arrangements and Rules of Procedure, and Local Government Association Guidance¹.

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Recommendations & Reasons for recommended action:

It is recommended that the PCP:

- adopts a select committee style approach and scrutinises the “Police and Crime Commissioner’s Joint Announcement with the Chief Constable in Respect of Devon & Cornwall Police “Public Contact Strategy” – Station Enquiry Offices’ Rationalisation”, and
- agree its findings which will be used to inform any recommendations to be made to the PCC and Chief Constable in a final report to be formally reviewed and agreed at the next meeting of the PCP. This report will be made available to the PCC and Chief Constable in draft form prior to the deadline of 31 October 2014.

The above reflects the PCP role to effectively and robustly scrutinise the PCC’s decisions in an open and transparent manner and ensure that issues of mutual concern or interest can be shared in a way that is both constructive and supportive.

Alternative options considered, and reasons for recommended action:

An alternative would be not to undertake a reactive scrutiny role which would limit the PCP’s influence on the “Police and Crime Commissioner’s Joint Announcement with the Chief Constable in Respect of Devon & Cornwall Police “Public Contact Strategy” – Station Enquiry Offices’ Rationalisation.” This would mean the PCP is not fulfilling its function in legislation² to carry out investigations into decisions made by the PCC and into topics of particular interest, or public concern.

Background Papers:

² Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 s28(6)

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 On 20 June 2014 the PCP agreed its first 'reactive' scrutiny topic for 2014/15 would be the "Police and Crime Commissioner's Joint Announcement with the Chief Constable in respect of Devon & Cornwall Police "Public Contact Strategy" – Station Enquiry Offices' Rationalisation". Given that the proposals are due to be implemented from 31 October 2014, it was considered appropriate and timely not only to publically scrutinise the PCC's and Chief Constable's proposals, but to also offer support and act as a critical friend. The scrutiny review is to be undertaken adopting a select committee style approach.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 On 11 July 2013, the PCP adopted some principles for selection of scrutiny topics. The Chair and Vice Chair are satisfied that this scrutiny topic meets those criteria in particular:-

- **Public Interest:** the concerns of local people should influence the issues chosen for scrutiny
- **Ability to Change:** priority should be given to issues that the PCP can realistically change

- 2.2 The Chair and Vice Chair, in liaison with the Host Authority, agreed it would be worthwhile carrying out some direct engagement with communities and agencies across Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, with an emphasis on those deemed as most directly affected, seeking views on the proposals. This was carried out in three ways, as follows.

2.2.1 Firstly, on 10 July 2014, the Chair of the PCP wrote to members of the PCP asking them to assist with this evidence gathering by communicating directly with residents in the areas affected, and seeking written 'quotes/statements' that could be included, with their agreement, to inform the scrutiny. PCP members were also asked to consider forwarding the request to other Councillors in their respective authorities in order to cast the net wider in terms of capturing community views about the proposals. There were many responses received and these have been summarised and attached (Appendix 4).

2.2.2 Secondly, consideration was given to contacting agencies and organisations throughout Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly across a range of disciplines, who supported and/or were in regular contact with members of the community, including those working with victims and offenders who may be affected by, or concerned about the proposals. A letter was prepared (sample attached Appendix 5) and sent direct to the following agencies:

- Community Safety Partnerships
- Devon and Cornwall Probation Trust
- Age UK (Devon) and Age UK (Cornwall)
- Victim Support
- Devon & Cornwall Community Watch Association
- Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership
- Devon Grapevine
- Devon ReForm
- Chambers of Commerce

There were many responses received, but particularly from Town and Parish Councils across Cornwall, and these have been summarised and attached (Appendix 6).

2.2.3 Lastly, an 'open letter' from the Chair of the PCP was prepared and published for a time limited period on the Devon and Cornwall Police and Crime Panel Website, containing similar content to the letter referred to in paragraph 2.2.2, seeking views from members of the public in respect of the proposals (Appendix 7). Responses received are captured, summarised and also included in Appendix 6.

2.3 The engagement in paragraphs 2.2.1-2.2.3 above also assisted us with determining witnesses for this scrutiny topic, see paragraph 2.5.

2.4 What stood out as the main points of feedback from the engagement exercise carried out in paragraphs 2.2.1-2.2.3 was:

- Many of the Parish and Town Councils from Cornwall that responded stated they were not aware of the proposals and did not recall being, or had not been, consulted.
- Many respondents were not aware of the 'new Contact Strategy' or "communication and engagement plan" and what the proposals were to explain the ways in which engagement and accessibility between the Police and the public would be enhanced in other ways.
- Concern re the lack of Police attendance at Parish and Town Council meetings.
- Concerns were raised about the 101 service.
- Concerns were raised about opening hours during the summer season in Cornwall when there are many visitors to the area.
- Concerns generally about a lack of Police visibility, contact and presence, and particularly in rural Parishes and in some town areas.
- There was some appreciation of the economic factors driving these decisions and the need to rationalise, but that other means of contact with the Police needed to be strengthened.
- There were some suggestions for alternatives, eg operation of a 'roster/duty session' system amongst Police team members in stations affected.
- There were some queries about when the savings would be realised and whether the stated £750,000 would be reinvested in frontline policing.

2.5 The Chair and Vice Chair agreed with the Host authority that, on this occasion, witnesses would add further value to the scrutiny of this topic, and therefore, the following witnesses have been invited to give evidence:

- Councillor Pete Tisdale, Stithians Parish Council, Camborne
- Councillor Robert G Drew, Carn Brea Parish Council
- Mr Jeremy Joslin, President, Hayle Chamber of Commerce

Witnesses have been fully briefed by the Host Authority and provided with a copy of the PCP's 'Witness Charter' (Appendix 8).

2.6 The Chair and officers from the Host Authority have liaised with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) prior to this Panel meeting, in order seek relevant information that would add context and assist the Panel to conduct a robust and effective

scrutiny of this topic. The Host Authority has requested the following information from the OPCC as follows:

- The 'detailed examination', what this involved and shows – ie. consultation responses
- Overarching 'Contact Strategy' & detailed 'Engagement Plans'
- A map locating front desk closure locations to aid rationale
- Policing numbers of those areas affected overlaid by population of each Age profile of areas affected
- Footfall facts/figures of each station enquiry office affected

This information has been provided by the PCC and is attached (Appendices 9 and 10).

2.7 The information provided by the PCC in 2.6 above has been analysed and the PCP may wish to probe for example:

- In 2010/11 the then review into Station Enquiry Offices resulted in a reduction from 57 to 21. The revised Comprehensive Spending Review in 2014 led to a further review and proposals to close a further 12 of the remaining 21 Station Enquiry Offices – leaving only 9 across the entire Police Force area.
- It does appear from the map of remaining 9 Station Enquiry Offices that there is a disproportionate lack of Station Enquiry Office provision between Bodmin, Barnstaple and centrally in the Force area with most remaining offices predominantly covering from Camborne in the far south west, along the south coast to Torquay in the south east and from there up to Barnstaple.
- It is clear that extensive public surveys were carried out by the Police in 2010 that supported the 2010/11 review. But other than some more recent 'stakeholder' consultation it is not clear what further consultation, or what further awareness raising with the public has been carried out by them, if any, in relation to this second review.
- The decisions in respect of this more recent review appear to have been made reliant predominantly on 2010 consultation, and based on 'professional judgement'. This has been further supported by footfall analysis, combined with a focus on 6 other issues including for example population, location, Custody Centres and Courts. However, other than the PCP's recent 'call for evidence' to inform this scrutiny topic, it is not clear what has been done further by the Police to consult the public or raise awareness of these further reductions in Station Enquiry Offices and to actively promote the other forms of accessibility that are available other than 'station signage'.
- There are continuing concerns about the 101 non-emergency number.
- It is not clear from the information provided how aware the public are of this second round of closures.
- The associated 'Contact Strategy' and detailed 'Engagement Plans' were not provided.

3.0 NEXT STEPS

3.1 At this Panel meeting, the PCC will be asked to agree its findings which will be used to inform the recommendations to be made to the PCC and Chief Constable in a final report to be formally reviewed and agreed at the next meeting of the PCP. This report will be made available to the PCC and Chief Constable in draft form prior to the deadline of 31 October 2014.