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Thank you for your letter dated 29 October 2014 following the Police and Crime Panel's (PCP) scrutiny of the announcements regarding Public Enquiry Office closures and the police's public contact strategy. I note that the report remains in draft and that it will be formally reviewed and considered at the next meeting in December.

The adoption of a select committee style process for the scrutiny session was a helpful innovation in my view. It allowed for a greater reflection of local views to be brought to the attention of the Panel and the attendance of witnesses also provided an additional dimension. I would certainly support efforts by the Police and Crime Panel to adopt similar approaches for future scrutiny items.

In passing, on a wider front, and working with other PCCs, I support strengthening of the role of the PCP and the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners is working on recommendations for PCC recall. Initial thoughts are that arrangements should mirror those for MPs (although the remit is very different) and that recall should hinge primarily on public opinion but with influence from the PCP.

Ahead of your next meeting, where I will be given the opportunity to comment on the report and respond to its findings, I thought it might be helpful to set out my thoughts at a high level, picking up three broad areas. I am also pleased to provide the additional information that you requested.

Engagement and consultation

I recognised at the Panel meeting in October, that there is further work that needs to be done to improve our consultation networks with local councillors, in particular those who sit on parish and town councils, to ensure that we understand their views on policing and also to communicate our own plans, priorities and issues. Our approach has traditionally been to consult directly with Unitary, County and District Councils with an assumption that County would communicate with Towns and Parishes. Many councillors, including town and parish councillors, engage directly with me and my office through my public surgeries and through correspondence and I speak regularly at a wide variety of events. However there is more that we need to do and we have already begun to take positive steps in that regard.

Alongside regular engagement and dialogue at the county, unitary and district levels with councillors, we are actively building new links. In respect of Cornwall – which is a particular challenge due to its large unitary nature – we are arranging to work more closely with the Community Network Managers and to tap into the regular cycle of meetings that take place within those networks which bring together county, town and parish councilors. I am also aware that the Chief Constable and his senior team are engaging with Cornwall Council to see how they can improve consultation with local parish councils and town councils. In some areas arrangements have recently been made to establish Police Liaison Officers within the councils to facilitate this dialogue.

Alternative engagement opportunities for the public

As we discussed at length at the Panel session the case for closure of further Enquiry Offices was clear. Many of the offices were not being used and in a number of cases they saw less than one visitor per hour. In light of the savage cuts imposed on us by central government we are forced to make some difficult choices. The decision to close these front offices will deliver annual savings of £800,000 which is a vital contribution to our savings targets. At many of my meetings in the community where these closures were discussed there was acceptance of the decision. The issue can be seen in isolation but in practice there are of course linkages across to the functionality of 101, the blue telephones and compensatory engagement plans.



The way people engage with the police is changing; in particular with the growth in IT enabled communications. However I recognise fully, as does the Chief Constable, that opportunities for face to face engagement and contact with the police remain fundamental. It is for local communities and their policing teams to decide on what is required and to own and manage that process – not for a single approach to be dictated from the centre. Direct engagement opportunities have been publicised so that the public are aware of opportunities like street surgeries, supermarket surgeries and local meetings and details can be found on the local policing pages on the force website (<http://www.devon-cornwall.police.uk/find-team/>). The full engagement plans have also been published on the force website

(<http://www.devon-cornwall.police.uk/our-people/our-plans/our-public-engagement-plans/>).

These local plans will need to continue to develop and evolve. In terms of additional opportunities, including use of partner facilities, discussions are taking place with local partners: this will continue and is being led by the local police. My intention was to review the efficacy of these plans with you when your programme permits but within 3-4 months. On an optimistic note, this focus on local engagement plans is to be welcomed and extended wider within the police service. My team will lead on this work which will happen in the first quarter of 2015.

The 101 Service

I believe our thinking on the 101 service is aligned, namely that waiting times are unacceptably high and that improvements must be made. The staff do a difficult job and they have my respect and my thanks for this but we must make sure they are given the right resources and tools. My review of the 101 service has now been completed and a copy of that report has been sent to the Panel. The Chief Constable has accepted all of the report recommendations and we have agreed an action plan. We have also entered into a new ICT service contract with BT which should provide significant benefits and opportunities for us as we seek to make better use of technology to manage public demand and expectations and to signpost callers more effectively. The recommendations you make with regard to the 101 service are all part of this work, including the possibility of prioritising blue phones.

Your request for additional information

As requested I attach a copy of the Equality Impact Assessment for the Public Enquiry Office closure decision. The Panel has also asked for information about the alternative options considered in relation to the front desk closure proposal. The Mid Term Financial Strategy 2014-2018

<http://www.devonandcornwall-pcc.gov.uk/Document-Library/MTFS-14-15-to-17-18.pdf>

set out a number of operational areas which were to be reviewed by the Chief Constable with a view to delivering required savings. That programme of review is ongoing and includes the review of custody provision within Devon and Cornwall. Work is underway as part of the 'Every Penny Counts' Strategic Delivery Board to consider the existing Estates Strategy which ends in 2015. This work is ongoing and further information will be provided to the Panel as that work progresses.

I hope that you find these comments and the additional information helpful.

I would welcome a meeting to keep you posted on the developing position over our budget where the pressures and risks are significant. As we move forward I am improving the disciplines within the budget development process and we are looking not only at government savings and risks but at 'new items' of spend such as local response to cybercrime, CSE and protection of neighbourhood policing.

Yours

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sarah Hopkins', written over a faint, larger version of the same signature.

Police and Crime Commissioner
cc sarah.hopkins@plymouth.gov.uk