

POLICE AND CRIME PANEL – 11 NOVEMBER 2014

DORSET POLICE FRONT COUNTER SERVICE PROVISION

REPORT BY THE POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To update Members on the changes to Dorset Police front counter service provision and the Police and Crime Commissioner's role in the review process.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Dorset Police established an estates review in 2010 with the aim of examining and reshaping the Force to achieve the required financial savings whilst also ensuring the continued delivery of the best possible services to communities.
- 1.2 As part of this wider review, a detailed scoping and consultation exercise in relation to front counter service provision was undertaken by Dorset Police between October and December 2012.
- 1.3 The Force still needs to find further savings as the result of continued reductions in central government funding and inflationary cost increases.
- 1.4 After a period of extensive consultation, changes to counter service provision were announced in September 2014, with provision reducing from 15 to nine locations. Four full-time enquiry offices will remain – in Bournemouth, Poole, Weymouth and Bridport. This, along with the decision to sell the Ferndown HQ building will collectively save Dorset Police an estimated £700,000 per annum.
- 1.5 Dorset Police have always stressed that the closure of enquiry offices does not equate to the closure of police stations themselves and the Chief Constable remains committed to ensuring that there remains a policing footprint in every town in Dorset.

2. COUNTER SERVICE PROVISION AND CONSULTATION

- 2.1 The provision of counter services and enquiry offices is an operational policing matter and therefore ultimately a decision for the Chief Constable of Dorset Police.
- 2.2 That said, the provision of such services is clearly of great importance and interest to members of the public. The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) was elected in November 2012, during the initial scoping and consultation exercise undertaken by the Force into front counter services.

- 2.3 A key role of the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) is to consult and engage with local communities. Unsurprisingly, in discharging these responsibilities, front counter provision became a common theme of discussions and meetings between the public and the PCC.
- 2.4 In October 2013, the PCC and the Chief Constable launched a public consultation into the future provision of front counter services. The review had identified that enquiry offices were under-utilised by the public with a number receiving just a few visits per day. The Community Safety Survey (CSS), commissioned by the PCC, also regularly identifies that the preferred method of contact with the police by residents is via the telephone or on-line. The proposal at this stage was to close 12 out of the 15 enquiry offices in operation.
- 2.5 As a result of this consultation and the number of alternative suggestions that were proposed, the PCC was keen that Dorset Police revisit their proposals and consult further. In December 2013, the Chief Constable therefore announced a further period of detailed consultation on some revised options.
- 2.6 The results of this extensive review have led to the decision that has recently been announced. In addition to the four full-time enquiry offices, Blandford, Gillingham and Sherborne will alternate opening two days each per week. Swanage and Winfrith will operate a 'signposting' facility where staff will help members of the public with their enquiries by directing them to relevant services.

3. CONCLUSION

- 3.1 The decision regarding future front counter services highlights the difficult decisions that need to be taken to ensure that Dorset Police are achieving the required savings as a result of the cuts to funding to the service.
- 3.2 The Police and Crime Commissioner has ensured that local people have had extensive opportunity to contribute to the debate and to propose alternative ideas. As a result, the public have had a direct role in influencing and shaping the final proposals and to ensure that services are retained where they are most needed.

4. RECOMMENDATION

- 4.1 Members are invited to note the update in relation to the future provision of front counter services by Dorset Police.

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