

Report of:	Meeting	Date	Item No.
Cllr Roger Berry, Neighbourhood Services Portfolio Holder, Philippa Davies, Corporate Director of Resources and Cllr May Gandhi, Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Council	8 September 2011	12

Police Station Closures – Consultation Response
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1. Purpose of Report

1.1 To report the work of the Police Station Closures task group to Council.

2. Outcomes

2.1 Effective policing in the borough of Wyre.

3. Recommendation

3.1 That Council adopts the consultation response (Appendix 1) and agrees to submit it to the Lancashire Constabulary as part of the Constabulary's public consultation exercise.

4. Background

4.1 As part of on-going work to identify savings in the region of £42 million over the next four years, the Lancashire Constabulary has been reviewing the properties it uses and the services it provides at front counters in police stations. Over £38million of savings have already been agreed.

4.2 The police say that these savings will include eight hundred posts, two thirds of which will be police officers and one third police staff, mostly from back office or support functions. The police are now looking closely at police premises and in particular whether to close some of the less frequently visited front counters and police buildings.

4.3 A three month public consultation exercise is underway, which ends on 23 September 2011.

5. Key Issues and Proposals

5.1 Included in the police proposals is the complete closure and sale of the police stations at Poulton and Cleveleys. It is proposed that the Garstang police station be retained as an operational base, with the front counter likely to be closed, although that decision is yet to be taken (see Appendix 2).

5.2 The Police Station Closures task group has met on three occasions to examine the proposals and their likely implications, and has produced the attached response to the police consultation, on behalf of the council.

5.3 The recommendations of the task group are as follows:

1. That Poulton police station be kept as an operational base.
2. That the use of the Bungalow at the Poulton Civic Centre, including the charging policy, be reviewed.
3. That a police office in Cleveleys be maintained.
4. That options for sharing a building in Cleveleys with other organisations be explored, as well as the potential for using volunteers to staff a front desk.
5. That the front desk at the Garstang police station be kept open, possibly staffed by volunteers, in order to provide the public with direct access.
6. That, despite officers currently being based in Fleetwood, police presence and visibility be maintained in Poulton at a level that reflects the fact that it is “the Northern Division’s ‘number one policing priority’ on a Friday and Saturday evening, more important than both Lancaster and Fleetwood based on the criteria of threat and risk” (Chief Superintendent Richard Bayly, July 2011).
7. That response times continue to be monitored and reported periodically to Wyre Council’s Overview and Scrutiny Committee, via the Community Safety Partnership.
8. That the possibilities for sharing premises with other organisations should be explored in all appropriate circumstances.
9. That the possibility of establishing a central ‘hub’, equally accessible to all Wyre residents, be fully explored, in conjunction with other agencies (e.g. the Ambulance Service and Fire and

Rescue Service) with whom the police might be able to share the facility.

10. That the police embark on a public engagement campaign to inform and reassure the public about the implications of changes to their methods of policing.

5.4 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the proposed consultation response, including the ten recommendations, at their meeting on 22 August and approved the report in full.

IMPLICATIONS	
Finance	The task group recommends that the charging policy in relation to the use of the Bungalow at the Civic Centre by the police be reviewed, as it is currently used at nil cost and considered a contribution in kind to the Community Safety Partnership. The value attributed to this usage by the Estates team in June 2010 was £5,125.
Legal	There are no legal implications directly associated with this report.
Community Safety	The task group has considered the likely impact of the police recommendations on response times in particular, and has taken the safety of the public into account when framing each of its recommendations.
Equality and Diversity	There are no equality and diversity implications directly associated with this report.
Sustainability	The task group is making recommendations that it believes will secure the long term safety of residents in the borough.
Health and Safety	There are no health and safety implications directly associated with this report.
Risk Management	There are no risk management implications directly associated with this report.
Asset Management	There is the potential for greater sharing of facilities between the council and the police.
Climate Change	There are no climate change implications directly associated with this report.

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List of Background Papers:		
Name of Document	Date	Where available for inspection
Police Station Closures Task Group documentation	July – August 2011	Democratic Services, Wyre Council

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 - Report of the Police Station Closures task group

APPENDIX 2 - Front Counter and Estates Organisational Reviews - Police station and premises recommendations

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Response to Consultation on Proposed Police Station Closures

1. Recommendations

- 1.1
 1. That Poulton police station be kept as an operational base.
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 7. That response times continue to be monitored and reported periodically to Wyre Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee, via the Community Safety Partnership.
 8. That the possibilities for sharing premises with other organisations should be explored in all appropriate circumstances.
 9. That the possibility of establishing a central 'hub', equally accessible to all Wyre residents, be fully explored, in conjunction with other agencies (e.g. the Ambulance Service and Fire and Rescue Service) with whom the police might be able to share the facility.
 10. That the police embark on a public engagement campaign to inform and reassure the public about the implications of changes to their methods of policing.

2. Background

2.1 A task group comprising eleven non-executive councillors has met on three occasions between 7 July and 16 August 2011 to consider the likely impact of the proposed police station closures on the residents of Wyre. Two other members have attended one meeting each and also made valuable contributions.

2.2 The task group interviewed the following witnesses:

- Chief Superintendent Richard Bayly, Lancashire Constabulary (on two occasions)
- Robert Ruston, Partnerships & Performance Officer Lancashire Police Authority
- Cllr Roger Berry, Neighbourhood Services Portfolio Holder, Wyre Council

3. Methodology

3.1 The task group referred to documentation made available through the websites of the Lancashire Police Authority and the Lancashire Constabulary, as well as information gathered from a number of other similar consultation processes across the country.

As well as the task group interviewing the witnesses listed above, four councillors visited the Fleetwood Police Station and observed two separate officer briefings. Whilst there, they also took the opportunity to have informal discussions with a number of police officers and Police Community Support Officers, as well as Richard Bayly, Chief Superintendent.

One member has also spent five hours with a response officer in Poulton. During that time the councillor saw the shift briefing and was also involved in a 'Code 1' response which led to an arrest and subsequent transportation of the alleged offender to the custody suite in Blackpool.

4. The Proposed Closures – Findings

4.1 Financial implications of proposed closures

Councillors have been advised that if the proposed closures go ahead, a total revenue saving of £1m and capital receipts totalling £4m were anticipated across the force area. The projected saving for 2011-2015 for the Northern Division (Lancaster and Wyre) is £3.4m, of which the projected savings from the proposed closures in Wyre are as follows:

Poulton Police Station	£18,000 per annum
Cleveleys Police Station	£13,000 per annum
Garstang Police Station	£11,000 per annum

These savings reflect the annual running costs of each police station (heating, light, water, insurance, etc.) If Poulton police station is to be kept open to the public, it is understood that capital expenditure of £200k will be required in order to bring it up to the required standards.

The task group took the view that a saving of £18k, for example, is a very small sum, relatively speaking, when compared with the perception of the loss to the town and surrounding areas. It equates to only 39.1% of the cost of one police officer.

4.2 Poulton Police Station

Poulton-le-Fylde has a disproportionately high concentration of bars and clubs for a town of its size and this often causes concerns about crime and disorder on any evening, but particularly on Fridays and Saturdays. Indeed, Chief Superintendent Bayly, as part of his evidence, stated that Poulton remained the Northern Division's "number one policing priority on a Friday and Saturday evening, more important than both Lancaster and Fleetwood based on the criteria of threat and risk". The fact that there has always been a police station in the centre of the town, often with police vehicles parked outside, has ensured that the visibility of the police has hitherto been high. In addition, with police officers based there, a swift response has been possible when it has been needed, but there are concerns that this will now be compromised.

Members have expressed serious concerns about police visibility in Poulton, and they make the point that there is a strong correlation between visibility and the prevention of crime. The public needs to be reassured, and without a regular police presence in the town councillors are concerned that this will not be achieved.

Since changes to the methods of response policing were implemented on 1 July 2011, with officers working out of the Fleetwood police station, there has been reported a marked reduction in police visibility in the town and members initially expressed their concerns about the ability of the police to deliver the sort of response times to incidents that might be required.

The view about response times has, however, been tempered to some extent, by the evidence gained by several members of the task group who spent time with the police, including with response officers. One specific incident, a 'Code 1' response, was witnessed by one councillor. At the time the response car was in Poulton but in 4.5 minutes was attending the incident in Fleetwood, which culminated in an arrest.

Whilst accepting that police visibility is a very important factor, members have been reassured that response times still appear to be very good despite the new working arrangements from Fleetwood.

Mr Bayly advised that for Wyre as a whole, response targets are being met as follows:

Code 1	91.6% of calls being met within fifteen minutes
Code 2	94.2% attending within one hour

The target is 90% in both cases.

4.3 Conclusions for Poulton

Members of the task group agree that it is very important to maintain a high level of police visibility in Poulton. Whilst accepting that it might not be necessary to keep a front desk in Poulton, councillors feel strongly that an operational base should be maintained, which will help to ensure police visibility in the town.

The use of the Bungalow at the Civic Centre should also be reviewed. Several options could be considered, including moving staff from the Bungalow to the operational base at the police station, which would free up the Bungalow as a CCTV centre. Members urge the police to 'think out of the box' and to not necessarily simply implement the proposals that have been made to date. Options for closer working with the council and other agencies should be considered.

4.4 Cleveleys Police Station

The task group is aware that the current police station in Cleveleys is relatively large and costly to maintain. The task group understands that, although the Cleveleys police station was originally to be closed altogether, there are now plans to have a Neighbourhood Policing office in the town, probably in a shop front, but without a front desk open to the public.

Members have some concern that in a lively resort such as Cleveleys, with significant numbers of visitors and consequential crime trends (thefts, etc.) there should still be a police station that is accessible to the public. Members have expressed concern that without that, Cleveleys (and possibly Poulton too) could be targeted by travelling criminals, leading to an increase in crime rates.

The task group is aware of some very effective work on Restorative Justice that has been developed recently and would wish to ensure that the project is able to continue whatever decision is finally made about police premises.

4.5 Conclusions for Cleveleys

The task group concludes that it is very important to keep a police presence in Cleveleys, which has an elderly population, in order to reassure the public and deter travelling criminals. Options for sharing the building with other organisations should be explored as should the potential for using volunteers to staff a front desk.

4.6 Garstang Police Station

The task group understands that the Garstang police station will remain in use as a base for response teams and that the possibility of having a front desk there as well has not yet been ruled out. Members would argue that the public is entitled to have an open front desk in the borough at a site other than Fleetwood, which is relatively geographically removed, and Garstang would be a very suitable place for that.

4.7 Conclusions for Garstang

Councillors support the maintenance of an open front desk in Garstang. Whilst accepting that there is a cost to that (quoted at £72,000 - £100,000) the town's geographic location in the borough and proximity to the A6 make the case a strong one.

As an alternative option, staffing a front desk with volunteers should be considered.

5. Other comments

5.1 Policing Over-Wyre

The way in which the Over-Wyre area is policed continues to be a concern for councillors. Poulton has clearly been the best base for this until recently, and the road network makes it impossible to effectively police Over-Wyre from Garstang. Whether it will be possible to deliver satisfactory response times from Fleetwood remains to be seen. This further strengthens the case for maintaining Poulton as an operational base.

5.2 Response times

Members of the task group have consistently expressed their concerns about the likely response times that will be achieved if Poulton police station is closed as an operational base and the officers relocated to Fleetwood. Mileages will be increased and officers, not all of whom, it is understood, are 'Advanced Drivers', will often need to drive at high speed over a considerable distance, a requirement for which they are not necessarily fully equipped.

Whilst there have been continued concerns about response times, those councillors who attended officer briefings at Fleetwood were very impressed with the well-organised and professional way in which they are delivered. The officers were very clear in their communication and, although figures are still required for verification, the task group members came away from those visits with the opinion that the residents of Wyre are likely to experience a more streamlined and efficient delivery of service than they did before the change was made to the new working practices.

Whatever the outcome of the consultation, the monitoring of response times must remain a priority.

5.3 Custody Suite

The closure of the custody suite at Fleetwood will mean that any arrested persons will have to be transported to Blackpool or Lancaster. Bearing in mind the fact that processing detainees can often be a lengthy process, greater pressure will be placed on operational police officers and the time that police officers are in direct contact with the public will be reduced.

5.4 Footfall

It was felt by the task group to be inappropriate to make decisions about police station closures on the basis of footfall (i.e. the number of visitors per hour). The differences in footfall between police stations were often very small. It was being proposed, for example, that the Poulton police station be closed with 3 visitors per hour while Fleetwood be kept open with 3.6 visitors per hour. Skelmersdale's front desk is to be maintained with just 3 visitors per hour, as is St Annes' with 3.1.

5.5 Cross border policing

Councillors have been informed that the new arrangements for response policing include the reintroduction of a 'command and control' system, similar to that which existed some fifteen years ago. As a result, it was likely that the public would increasingly see officers deployed across boundaries as GPS technology would facilitate the nearest officers being sent to deal with a particular incident.

Task group members took the view that this approach should be treated with a degree of caution as, although it was being presented as an advantage, it could equally be a disadvantage to Wyre residents if officers were frequently deployed to neighbouring areas, e.g. Blackpool.

5.6 Shared premises

The task group welcomes the drive towards an increase in shared premises, which has the potential to bring the police closer to their communities, as well as being a more cost effective method of operation. Councillors support increased sharing of premises

and working in collaboration with other organisations, and propose that this approach is fully explored at every opportunity.

The view was expressed in the task group that there was little evidence of alternative models of policing having been considered. Although KPMG, consultants, were engaged by the police two years ago, it appears to councillors that there has been no full evaluation of alternative models.

Members urge the police to consider a 'hub model', with a police station centrally based within the borough, which would be more accessible to all residents. The proposed use of Fleetwood, effectively as the centre of a 'hub', is not seen as ideal long term solution in terms of location. Centralised development as a joint venture, perhaps in partnership with the Ambulance Service and the Fire and Rescue Service, should be considered.

5.7 Public perceptions

The public will need reassurance if any of the proposed closures go ahead. It has already been noted that police visibility is a concern, and this will be heightened if it is confirmed that the public are to lose one or more of their police stations.

While it is accepted that the police are confident about delivering an enhanced service to residents, evidence of that will be required.

In addition, councillors would like to see a campaign of information being provided to residents, informing them about the new style of policing so that they are reassured about public safety and the effectiveness of the police response capability and to address the perceived reduction in policing.

Front Counter and Estates Organisational Reviews Police station and premises recommendations

**premises that are shown as being 'on the market' have already been identified prior to the reviews as surplus to requirements and are not part of the consultation process.*

NORTHERN DIVISION

Station/ Premises	Current status	Proposed status	Visitors per hour	Nearest alternative police station
Lancaster	Open Front Desk	Open Front Desk	8.6	N/A
Morecambe	Open Front Desk	Open Front Desk	5.6	N/A
Fleetwood	Open Front Desk	Open Front Desk	3.6	N/A
Garstang	Open Front Desk	Front counter decision TBC To be retained	1.6	Lancaster/ Preston
Poulton	Open Front Desk	Complete Closure and to be sold	3	Blackpool Central/ Fleetwood
Cleveleys	Open Front Desk	Complete Closure and to be sold	1.7	Fleetwood
Carnforth	Operational base	To be retained	N/A	N/A
Over Kellet	Rural Beat Occupied	To be sold	N/A	N/A
Cowan Bridge	Rural Beat Occupied	To be sold	N/A	N/A
Caton	Operational base	To be sold	N/A	N/A
Cabus	Rural Beat Occupied	To be sold	N/A	N/A
Bowgreave (Old Garstang)	Operational base	To be sold	N/A	N/A
Cockerham	On the market	N/A	N/A	N/A
Preesall	On the market	N/A	N/A	N/A
Hambleton	On the market	N/A	N/A	N/A