

The Highland Council

Community Safety, Public Engagement and Equalities Committee – 5 December 2013

Agenda Item	8i
Report No	CPE 50/13

Police Scotland Public Counter Service Provision: Consultation

Report by Depute Chief Executive

Summary

Police Scotland is consulting the Council on its review of public counter service provision. Of 21 public counters identified for the review, no changes are proposed for 11 (including six currently co-located with Council services), an increase in opening hours for four, reducing opening hours for two and moving to part-time arrangements in four. Following consultation with members at Ward level a proposed response is drafted for members to consider.

1. Background

- 1.1 Police Scotland is working to standardise opening hours for counter services. It has reviewed the levels of public service that occur at police offices and considered how to have the most efficient opening times to the public. They are now consulting on proposals and have given the Council an extension from 31st October 2013 so that this committee can agree the response to the consultation.
- 1.2 An earlier review in 2012 by Northern Constabulary resulted in co-locating police and Council service point functions. They are found in:
- Muir of Ord, Lairg and Gairloch, where the service point moved to Police Stations to co-locate
 - Golspie and Bettyhill, where a police counter service is provided within the service point
 - Broadford, where a police counter service is provided in the Service Point/Library.

They show good partnership working and planning for sustainable local rural services. No changes to these arrangements are included in the current Police Scotland consultation.

2. Changes proposed.

- 2.1 Police Scotland's proposals focus on 21 police offices at this stage and we are being consulted on the following proposals:
- No change to 11 offices/counter services. These are in Inverness, Tain, Alness, Kyle of Lochalsh, Portree and all of those co-located with Council Service Points in Muir of Ord, Lairg, Gairloch, Golspie, Bettyhill and Broadford.

- An increase in opening hours in 4 offices - Fort William, Aviemore and Nairn (currently open from 0800-2000hrs Monday to Sunday to being open from 0700-0000hrs on those days); and Thurso (currently open 0900-1700hrs Monday to Sunday to being open 0800-1800hrs on those days).
- Reduced opening hours in 2 offices – Wick and Dingwall (currently open 0800-2000hrs Monday to Sunday to being open 0800 -1800hrs on those days).
- Moving to part-time arrangements in 4 offices in Mallaig and Dornoch (where cover is currently 0900-1700hrs Monday to Friday), in Glencoe (where cover is currently 0900-1300hrs Monday-Friday) and in Ullapool (where cover is currently provided 0900-1700hrs (Tuesdays and Thursdays). The pattern of part-time working is still to be determined and will be affected by the consultation with staff currently working in these offices.

2.2 Ward Managers have discussed the changes proposed with members. This has been supported by local police in attendance at some ward meetings and in some cases with wider consultation with community councils. Where opening hours are extended generally this has been welcomed by members. Other changes were noted. However, although the extent of change is not clear from the proposals for part-time arrangements, concern has been expressed by local members on a reduction in the opening hours for two offices in Glencoe and Mallaig. Members feel there should be maximum opportunity for people from a large geographical area to access police staff.

2.3 Other general points made by members are:

- There is a concern that rural and remote areas may feel a greater loss of service and that the model may make more sense in urban areas
- Public perception of the police may be affected negatively if police stations are known to be occupied but no-one responds to a public caller
- Assurance that the 101 contact number will provide an effective response in place of reduced opening times.

2.4 There are likely to be future consultations on rationalising the Police Estate. Seeking early warning of any further proposed changes should enable continued partnership working including shared services and co-location approaches. This offer can be included in the consultation response.

3. Implications

3.1 Resource; Legal; Equalities; Climate Change/Carbon Clever; and Risk implications

The Council has a right to be consulted on changes arising from police and fire reform. By responding to the consultation and by working to find sustainable solutions for the region the Council can demonstrate it is complying with its duties to engage and scrutinise police services and to minimise the risk to

local communities. There are no equalities and carbon clever implications arising from the consultation response.

Recommendation

Members are asked to agree that:

- i. a response is submitted to Police Scotland on police counter changes as set out in paragraphs 2.2 to 2.4 above that includes noting some concern about reduced opening hours in two locations, welcoming the extension of opening hours in other locations and noting the other changes proposed; and
- ii. based on the experience of co-location on six sites with the Council, the Council should seek to explore further shared and co-located services with Police Scotland to enable sustainable service delivery for local communities.

Designation: Depute Chief Executive

Date: 25 November 2013

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