

Bedfordshire Police and Crime Panel

Press Statement
May 2014

Bedfordshire Police and Crime Panel Review Backs Commissioners New 'Estates Strategy'

The conclusions of a review by Bedfordshire Police and Crime Panel have helped shape the future of Policing across Bedfordshire. The review considered the Bedfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner's emerging 'Estates Strategy'. While backing the report the Panel put forward a number of recommendations set down to assist the strategy which was published recently.

The Bedfordshire Police and Crime Panel (PCP) is made up of elected Members from all three local authorities in Bedfordshire as well as two independent co-opted members, who cannot be Councillors. One of their roles is to assist the Commissioner in developing his strategies, acting as a critical friend.

A Task and Finish Group of four members looked in detail at the Commissioner's evolving estates strategy. This involved gathering evidence from various sources which included the Commissioner and the Chief Constable as well as further research.

The report produced by the Group, which contained a number of recommendations to the Commissioner, was approved by the full Panel, and then sent to the Commissioner for his consideration.

The Commissioner accepted all of the Panel's recommendations, and used the report to assist with the final version of the estates strategy which has recently been published.

The Chair of the Task and Finish Group, Paul Cain, said "These are very challenging times for Police funding. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary for England and Wales recently published a report showing the good progress made by Bedfordshire Police to address this challenge but that it may soon struggle to identify where further savings can come from.

Our report recognises the need for difficult decisions to be taken but, whilst supporting the Estates Strategy, emphasises the need to ensure that it is implemented in a phased and planned way which will not reduce access to police services. Key to this will be effective communication of the changes facing the Police and the ways in which the public can continue to access the services of the Police."

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

The PCP's report to the Commissioner is available [here](#)

The Commissioner's estates strategy is available [here](#)

The report on Bedfordshire Police's response to the funding challenge, published by the HMIC in July 2013, indicated that although the force has made good progress in meeting that financial challenge and has developed a detailed change programme which allows it to reduce costs while continuing to fight crime, the HMIC considers that Bedfordshire Police faces a more difficult challenge than other forces and that, having taken the range of steps any force would be expected to take to become efficient and effective, Bedfordshire may soon struggle to identify where further savings can come from, with little option but to cut frontline police officer numbers further. Given the need, and the public's wish, to protect frontline policing, this means that all other avenues for reducing spend need to be fully utilised in innovative ways so as to ensure that an effective policing service continues to be delivered to the public. This requires the Commissioner to ensure that the force maximises the effectiveness with which it uses all the resources at its disposal, including its properties.

The Panel's report recognises the need for difficult decisions to be taken but, whilst supporting the Estates Strategy, emphasises the need to ensure that it is implemented in a phased and planned way which will not reduce access to police services and, indeed, offer the public a variety of alternative methods of easy access. It is the Task Group's view that the implementation of the strategy in fact offers the potential to enhance the current level of service by improving the range, convenience and effectiveness of the means by which the public may access that service, provided the strategy is implemented in an efficient and thoughtful way. Effective communication of the existence of those various channels and how to access them, plus providing an understanding to the public of the changes in police contact will, however, be the key to successful implementation.

The recommendations from the review were:

- 1 Having considered the responses received to the Public Consultation and the reassurances provided by the Commissioner and the Chief Constable, the Bedfordshire Police Estates Strategy be supported given its essential role in helping to deliver a balanced budget over the coming years;

- 2 The Commissioner develop a Public Access Strategy in order to make the public more aware of the various channels of interfacing with the Police;

- 3 The Estates Strategy be implemented in planned and well communicated stages, in order to cause minimum disruption to the service offered to the public, and to avoid any potential loss of public confidence in the policing services available;
- 4 No police stations be closed until adequate alternative provision of services is already in place;
- 5 Innovative communication methods be developed and exploited for maximum effect, for example to dispel the misconception that emergency response vehicles are based at Police Stations and to increase public awareness of the channels available to interact with the Police;
- 6 ICT investment is continued to improve accessibility, and enable staff to spend more time on the front line;
- 7 Increased efforts be made to communicate with hard to reach and Black and Minority Ethnic communities across Bedfordshire to enable their views to be taken into account in the future shaping of services;
- 8 Alternative access points should be chosen carefully having regard to the consultation responses received.