



STRATEGIC POLICING AND CRIME BOARD 2 December 2014

Force Contact – Front Offices

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To outline to the Strategic Policing and Crime Board the Front Office Project and the decision regarding the future model.

BACKGROUND

2. Police station front offices provide a physical access point for the public to have face to face contact with the police. Due in part to developments in local practices and legislative police responsibilities their provision currently includes a wide range of functions, including reception duties for staff working within the building (often including custody facilities), crime reporting, document production, etc.
3. Front office environments have also evolved over time to provide functional reception areas that are not oriented to any great degree around the needs of visitors. National and local feedback has highlighted that the presence of a front office is perceived by many members of the public as an important visible and often reassuring policing presence in the community.
4. In April 2012, WMP reduced the opening hours of 12 front offices following a review by the Contact 'Interim Team'. The weight of public feeling expressed at the time of these changes demonstrated how sensitive an issue front offices are for many people, particularly in the on-going context of public perception of financial cuts impacting on policing services. At this time a decision was made to make no changes to front offices until a full review had taken place.

INTRODUCTION

5. The front office project was commissioned to understand the current operation and activity of front offices. The vision was to design a cost effective public access model that redefines the way West Midlands Police (WMP) provide services using face to face interaction, partnership collaboration and innovative use of technology.
6. The key drivers for the project are:
 - An improved customer experience using multi accessible, multi-channel services to internal and external customers served by WMP
 - Increased efficiency through streamlined processes
 - Opportunities for financial savings and reduced costs
 - A consistent high standard of service across all front office provision

CURRENT OPERATING MODEL

7. A review of the operating model has been documented to understand all aspects of current service delivery.
8. There are 41 front offices within WMP, 31 are staffed by Force Contact supported by a number of different shift patterns, a further 6 are staffed locally by PC/PCSO and 4 volunteer locations. There are 11 x 24/7 front offices and one partnership location at the Bluebell Centre, Solihull. 174FTE are required to staff the 31 Force Contact front offices at a cost of £5,585,175.

INDEPENDENT FOOTFALL RESEARCH

9. Independent footfall data was key to understand the demands placed on front offices. BMG Research were commissioned through a tender process at a cost of £100,000 to undertake this footfall research. The results have helped to make an assessment and support the decision making process. The data has also been used to understand the costs associated with the delivery of services.
10. The objectives of the research were to:
 - Understand footfall demand including numbers, reason for attendance, alternative contact methods considered and demand value / failure
 - Understand internal demand
 - Understand the wider communities thoughts/perceptions of service provision
 - Understand why do the community need a front office service at that location

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

11. The research was split into three phases:
 - Interviews with the wider community (through the FTD survey) - 4525 Interviews
 - Monitoring footfall at 41 front offices
 - Interviews with users of the front offices – 2532 Interviews
12. The force has reviewed how people currently engage with the police and how they want to do so in the future. This could be either 'face to face' in police stations, in non-police buildings such as partner agency premises or by using technology as another means of contact.
13. In total over 7,000 people were interviewed and footfall across 41 front offices monitored against the running costs in staffing front offices, many of which are open 24/7. Another 320 people shared their views via an online survey.

RESEARCH RESULTS

14. The research, conducted by an independent research company (BMG Research) on behalf of West Midlands Police, showed 92 per cent of people would prefer to contact the police by telephone.
15. 8% of those surveyed had visited a police front office in the last 12 months, 4% of these were required by the police to attend a front office and 4% of the visitors attended by choice. Of the 4% who attended by choice, half of these would prefer to continue to contact the police using a front office.

COST

16. The footfall research and operating costs have been analysed to determine a cost per transaction for each front office and how these costs compare with our other contact methods:

Highest Cost Per Transaction	Lowest Cost Per Transaction	Force Contact staffed average per transaction	Force Average	Non-Emergency Contact Centre	Emergency Contact Centre
• £61.35	• £1.26	• £18.29	• £20.41	• £3.38	• £5.58

17. The highest cost per transaction was from a front office staffed by a police constable/police community support officer at £61.35. The lowest cost per transaction is £1.26, from a front office staffed by volunteers. When comparing the average cost per front office transaction of £20.41 with transactions via the telephone, front offices do not offer the same value for money.

OPTIONS DEVELOPMENT

Value Matrix

18. The project recognised that footfall should not be considered on its own when deciding which front offices should remain open in any future model. A Value Matrix was designed consisting of a number of key categories; these were then weighted according to importance to WMP and the public to determine a scoring methodology to compare the 41 front offices.

19. Value Matrix categories:

- Transactions per hour
- Cost per transaction
- Contact preference
- Reported Crimes (vulnerability, threat, risk, harm)
- Reported incidents
- Distance travelled
- Access for car drivers

20. The Value Matrix resulted in a ranking which alongside other factors such as geography assisted in the development of options for consideration.

FUTURE MODEL

21. A number of options were presented to the Force and the Police and Crime Commissioner and the decision on the future front office model has been made.

22. The future model includes 27 front office closures. Ten front offices will remain. Nine will be open between 8am and 10pm and Birmingham Central will remain open 24/7. There will be 4 volunteer locations remaining as contact points which will be managed locally. All closures will take place in a phased approach over the next 12 months and every effort will be made to redeploy staff affected by the changes.

23. The new model will result in a reduction in FTE saving the force approximately £3 million per year. As part of these changes there will be a reinvestment into front offices to improve the environment, provide staff training and explore opportunities for the public to access services using alternative contact channels and new technology.

