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Our reference: 2024-00710

Andrew Mitchell MP
Sent by email only:
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29 July 2024

Dear Mr Andrew Mitchell MP,

Introduction

Thank you for your letter dated 16 July 2024, that was received by my office on 22 July 2024 and was brought to my attention on 26 July 2024. I am grateful to you, for taking the time to write to me about Sutton Coldfield Police Station. There has been considerable discussion, regarding this Police Station over a number of years.

I refer you to the most recent Estates Strategy Review, that was finalised at my Strategic Policing and Crime Board on 24 October 2023. You can access the Background Paper to the Estates Review here: [SPCB-24.10.23-Agenda-Item-5-Estates-Review-2023.pdf](#).

I am aware of the understandable public interest that relates to Sutton Coldfield Police Station. As you might be aware, the current position regarding Sutton Coldfield Police Station, dates back to an Estates Strategy Review and a decision to dispose of the police station, that was originally taken in March 2018, over 6 years ago.

Please forgive me, but I am confused by the second paragraph of your letter, because I know that you are well aware, that I was democratically re-elected as the Police and Crime Commissioner for the West Midlands on 2 May 2024. That was with my own democratic mandate with all of the duties, powers and responsibilities of a Police and Crime Commissioner, pursuant to the Police, Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011. For reasons unknown, your letter appears to have been written without any acknowledgement, reference to, or apparent understanding of, that material fact.

Background

I am aware of the serious concerns that the people of the West Midlands, including Sutton Coldfield, have in relation to crime, policing, community safety and our criminal justice system, as a consequence of ill-advised, misconceived and poor decision making on the part of successive central governments over the previous 14 years. All of those decisions were supported by, voted for and implemented by you, as an MP representing that government. I respectfully submit, that you must take personal responsibility, for your own actions.

Between 2010 and 2020, your own government imposed reckless financial cuts on West Midlands Police of £175 million. As a consequence of that, we in the West Midlands lost 2,221 of our police

officers - 25% of our police officers - as well as hundreds of essential police staff, including 400 police community support officers – 50% of our PCSOs and community policing was dismantled.

That was a big mistake. It was counter-productive and a false economy. We have all been left paying the price with less justice, safety and security. All of this, had a serious adverse impact on police presence, response times, the conduct of investigations, people's perception and experience of crime, the rights and welfare of victims, community safety and the ability of West Midlands Police to prevent, tackle and reduce crime, all of which has been to the serious detriment of the people of the West Midlands, including our own constituents in Sutton Coldfield.

Following the so-called national police uplift, we still had about 1,000 fewer police officers than we had in 2010 and about 500 fewer Police Community Support Officers; a national police funding formula that costs West Midlands Police £40 million a year, the equivalent of 800 police officers; people are paying more local Council Tax for less local policing; West Midlands Police received the fifth worst percentage 2023/24 police grant settlement in the country; and had to make cuts of £28 million in 2023/24 and faced a further £28 million budget deficit in 2024/25.

These are all matters that have contributed, to exactly the adverse consequences, you claim to be concerned about and that are referred to in your letter. However, inexplicably and for reasons unknown, these do not appear, to be matters about which you have expressed any concern whatsoever. Again, please forgive me, but I am having difficulty in reconciling, the inconsistent and selective way in which you express your concerns, about the ways in which policing has been adversely impacted, during the course of the past 14 years.

I trust that the people of Sutton Coldfield and the wider West Midlands region, will not forget this reckless decision making on the part of your own government, all of which was supported by, voted for and implemented, by the elected representatives of your own government, including your good-self.

Police Stations

I think it is very important that the national, regional and local context is fully considered and understood when discussing police stations. The fact of the matter is, that for the previous 14 years we have had a government, that does not believe in and is not prepared to invest in local community police stations. That has led to the closure of about 640 police stations across the country.

Police Stations are important, because they provide a reassuring and visible presence for communities. Sadly, as a consequence of the severe financial pressures placed on Police Forces across the country, including in the West Midlands, tough choices have had to be made, between maintaining and prioritising police officer and staff numbers or police buildings.

When faced with the choice, between maintaining police officer and staff numbers or police buildings, I am sure that you and the residents of Sutton Coldfield will agree with me, that the priority must always be maintaining and protecting police officer and staff numbers. It is police officers and police staff that prevent, tackle and reduce crime, protect the vulnerable and ensure access to justice, safety and security, not police buildings.

It is also important to understand, that decisions relating to the Police Estate are based on the independent, objective and impartial, operational policing judgment of the Chief Constable, as to what he requires to provide an effective and efficient police service, across the West Midlands, including in Sutton Coldfield.

Key Matters

- The commitment to retaining 10 public contact police stations, across the 7 Local Policing Areas remains.
- The number of proposed response hubs will now increase from 8 to 23.
- The number of custody centres has increased from 4 to 6.

- There will be investment in modernisation of police buildings, so as to provide a police estate fit for the 21st Century.
- The essential revenue savings of £6 million per annum, will protect 120 police officers without which, police officer numbers would fall further.
- The retention of the police buildings/stations, that are due to be disposed of within the Estates Strategy, would risk the loss of up to 820 police officers.
- The strategy will eliminate the current £22 million in backlog maintenance costs.
- Neighbourhood Policing Teams will be re-located or co-located locally, for example in community fire stations or local authority buildings, to ensure they remain at the heart of local communities.
- The strategy will ensure there is a focus on delivering a greener police estate.
- In the event police buildings are to be disposed of, best value will be sought, whilst seeking to identify any opportunities to maximise social value.

Sutton Coldfield Police Station

For many years, as a consequence of financial cuts imposed by your own government, Sutton Coldfield Police Station has been significantly under-occupied. That is not effective or efficient and it does not provide the tax payers of Sutton Coldfield and the wider West Midlands with value for money.

The current intention, in accordance with the Estates Strategy, which I approved on 24 October 2023, is that Sutton Coldfield police station will not be disposed of before the Winter of 2025. I set out below a statement that I published on 18 July 2024:

“The decision to dispose of Sutton Coldfield police station was taken over six years ago in March 2018. It is to be sold, because it is a building that is now, far too large for the needs of front-line policing.

However, West Midlands Police will remain in Sutton Coldfield at a more appropriate, proportionate and fit-for-purpose base, within the same footprint of the existing property, accessible from Anchorage Road.

This solution supports the policing model, makes best use of the site to be retained, reduces operating costs and, most importantly, maintains the operational policing presence on the same site.

We want to reassure residents in Sutton Coldfield that the Public Contact Office, neighbourhood and response officers will relocate to their new base, before the current site is sold.

Sutton Coldfield will continue to have a reassuring, strong and visible West Midlands Police presence stationed in the town centre, to keep people, families, businesses and the local community, safe and secure.”

That has always been and remains my pledge. So, to address the particular matters referred to in your letter: the people of Sutton Coldfield will continue to receive effective local policing. There will not be worse response times. There will not be a reduced police presence. As a consequence, it will be evident to you and any independent, impartial and objective observer, acting in good faith, contrary to what you erroneously assert, that what is being proposed, is entirely consistent with my pledge, to continue to rebuild community policing.

Equally and with all due respect, what is being proposed, is consistent with and meets all of the matters you have raised. The people of Sutton Coldfield will retain a Police Station on the same site, with a public contact office and that will be a base for the local neighbourhood and response teams.

For the avoidance of any doubt, I have had regard to your request to reconsider the plan for Sutton Coldfield Police Station, but because it is consistent with and meets all of your concerns, a reconsideration of the plan, would serve no purpose.

Safeguards have also already been put in place to ensure that, before any buildings are sold, the local policing presence is guaranteed and social value from the sale, has also been carefully considered and explored as well.

Rebuilding Community Policing

My top priority is rebuilding community policing. On 5 December 2022, I appointed a new Chief Constable. On 3 April 2023, he launched a new Neighbourhood Policing Operating Model. It is therefore important that you and local residents have regard to the work that is taking place, to continue to rebuild community policing.

The effect of this has been, that the 7 Local Policing Areas within the West Midlands, now have significantly greater resources allocated to them, in terms of community policing, force response and investigations.

Like all change, it will take time to be implemented to full effect. However, I believe that it will significantly improve the ability of the Local Policing Areas to meet and respond to the demands and needs of the communities that they serve and that includes Sutton Coldfield.

Force Contact and Response

I would also draw your attention to the following:

1. The performance of 999 and 101 has been transformed and is now one of the best in the country, with the effect that the ability of the public to access the police service, has significantly improved. This will benefit the people of Sutton Coldfield, as it will the people of the wider West Midlands.
2. There have been significant improvements in the delivery of faster emergency response times, which includes an average response time of 11 minutes, for Urgent 999 response times. This will benefit the people of Sutton Coldfield, as it will the people of the wider West Midlands.
3. There has been a reduction in police recorded crime within the West Midlands of 10.3%, which amounts to 35,000 fewer crimes, within the West Midlands. This will benefit the people of Sutton Coldfield, as it will the people of the wider West Midlands.

However, further constant and unremitting action is required to ensure continuous improvement in the performance of West Midlands Police. I will continue to hold West Midlands Police to account, on behalf of the people of the West Midlands, including Sutton Coldfield, to deliver continuous improvement.

Conclusion

If you require further information or have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Simon Foster

Police and Crime Commissioner for the West Midlands