

Chairman of the Police and Crime Committee



Steve O'Connell AM  
Member for Croydon & Sutton

City Hall  
The Queen's Walk  
More London  
London SE1 2AA  
Telephone: 020 7983 4000  
Web: [www.london.gov.uk](http://www.london.gov.uk)

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**Sophie Linden**

Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime  
MOPAC

(via email)

Dear Sophie

**Public access and engagement strategy consultation**

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your consultation on access and engagement. We do not intend to respond to each specific question set out in your paper, but have set out our feedback below, based on our previous work and discussions with you and other stakeholders.

**Front counters and contact with the police**

It is for individual Assembly Members to submit their own views on specific front counter closures in their areas. We have heard that, broadly, stakeholders understand that closing underused front counters may be a way to make financial savings and move towards a more modern police service.<sup>1</sup> Many, however, remain concerned about the specific decisions about which front counters will close. The savings and benefits that can be achieved, and what they will be used for, will need to be made clearer to the public so that they understand the reason for change.

The public continues to place a high value on having visible police officers in neighbourhoods and this is a driver of confidence. This committee has for some time raised the issue of officers having to travel long distances to reach their ward when starting their shift, and we look forward to examining the impact of dedicated ward officer hubs on the amount of time officers have to spend engaging with local people.

The consultation paper notes that new community contact sessions will be “flexible and convenient”, with local officers using their knowledge to determine where, when and how sessions take place in a ward. In our discussions about the then draft Police and Crime Plan we

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, the discussion that took place at the Budget and Performance Committee on 19 July 2017.

heard that Dedicated Ward Officers (DWO) should be encouraged to remain with their ward, so they can build up knowledge and relationships with the community. With the onus placed on DWOs to make these sessions a success, this is something MOPAC and the Met will need to keep in mind. MOPAC may also wish to consider how it can support DWOs to choose locations that are accessible to all, for example, with suitable disabled access and any provision for those with English as a second language.

MOPAC and the Met will need to consider how it can help publicise the availability and use of community contact sessions. Part of the reason contact points were not a success may have been because so few people knew about them: demonstrated by the fact that, as the consultation notes, “the closure of some of them seems to have gone unnoticed”. Community contact sessions risk being under-utilised, just as contact points have been, if no one knows about them. MOPAC and the Met will need to closely monitor the usage of these sessions, and ensure that local officers can share good practice across wards and neighbourhoods.

With police counters closing, attention needs to be given to how people will be encouraged to report crimes, particularly underreported crimes. We are concerned at the delays in answering 101 calls and would appreciate further information on the activity currently underway to address this problem and plans to handle any future increases in call numbers. More broadly, we have heard that there needs to be more clarity on how to report a crime, particularly in relation to reporting online. You have told us that “without any publicity, communication, or driving of people to use the website” the number of reports of crimes to the Met on its website has already increased, but MOPAC should set out how it will use its unique position to increase Londoners understanding of the ways in which they can report.

## **Engagement with the public**

The involvement of people in Safer Neighbourhood Boards (SNBs), Ward Panels and other community based groups is unlikely to improve if people do not know that they exist, or the work that they are doing.

This committee has stressed the importance of SNBs and Ward Panels as a mechanism to engage the public. In its 2015 report, ‘Safer Neighbourhood Boards: two years on’, for example, the then committee highlighted the progress made by SNBs in delivering valuable work, but found a lack of consistency in how they engage with the public—with some only holding one public meeting per year or having no website—and raised concern about the capacity of SNBs to deliver the types of projects MOPAC expects from them. It recommended that MOPAC:

- promote the work of SNBs through its website and social media channels
- publish details of the types of projects SNBs fund and their outcomes
- carry out a public review of the core funding it provides to SNBs to ensure it is supporting them to carry out their key functions - holding public meetings, publicity and administrative tasks
- help SNBs to carry out a “diversity audit” and develop an action plan to widen the representation of their membership<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Safer Neighbourhood Boards: Two years on](#), December 2015

We are pleased to hear that you support the current structure of Ward Panels and SNBs, and recognise that less well performing groups need help to improve. MOPAC should now revisit the recommendations made above and implement them. In the same respect, MOPAC should, in any assessment of Ward Panels, aim to identify and share good practice that would see them strengthened in terms of coverage, diversity and representation. In discussion at our meeting on 20 July 2017, you put the onus on the individual SNBs to promote their work. However, MOPAC should help promote messages about SNBs, Ward Panels and other groups across all boroughs, and consider how it can help to have an impact on awareness and engagement. The introduction of an effective liaison team within MOPAC that SNBs and Ward Panels can interact with should be explored.

## **Best practice**

Finally, we would like to raise our concern about the consultation. We welcome the public engagement events being held across each borough as an important way of engaging local residents, but are surprised at the lack of timely and easily available detail about them. The quality of the consultation document also raises concern. As highlighted to you in our meeting on 20 July, many of the questions being asked appear loaded, and intended to steer respondents to a particular answer. The question 'Do you agree that it is right that the Metropolitan Police Service prioritise police officers over poorly-used front counters?' is a striking example of this. In addition, the data available in the consultation is poorly presented, giving little referencing or context. We suggest that MOPAC reflect on whether it is meeting best practice guidelines in its consultation efforts.

Yours sincerely



**Steve O'Connell AM**

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