

REPORT TO THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE 8 FEBRUARY 2012**PORTFOLIO: YOUNG PESONS, ADULT SERVICES, COMMUNITY CARE AND WELL-BEING, HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SAFETY****REPORT FROM HEAD OF COMMUNITY SERVICES****SUBJECT: PROPOSAL TO DISPOSE OF ROCHFORD POLICE STATION****1 DECISION BEING RECOMMENDED**

- 1.1 To note the Essex Police proposal to dispose of the Rochford Police Station and to make them aware of the Council's concerns regarding their proposal based on the information included in section 3 of this report.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Over the past year, Essex Police has been carrying out a review to identify buildings in the Force Estate for which there is no longer an organisational need under the new operational policing blueprint. In comparison to other similar forces, the Essex Police estate is very large, currently comprising over 110 buildings.
- 2.2 The blueprint is part of the Essex Police plan to find £41m in recurring savings by 2014/15, through a combination of cuts in grants and other unavoidable financial pressures. In order for these savings to be achieved, Essex Police is proposing to rationalise its estate and maximise officer resource by having larger teams of officers based at fewer locations.
- 2.3 The outcome of the review has identified approximately 18 buildings across the county that would not be used operationally in the new blueprint structure that could be released for sale, thus benefiting Essex Police with capital income and an ongoing reduction in revenue costs, with Rochford Police Station being one of the buildings identified for potential disposal.
- 2.4 In the summer of 2011 there was also a specific a review of Essex Police front counters around the county, which included engagement with local people through online and face to face surveys, on what they considered to be important about the policing service they receive in their area.
- 2.5 From the results of the consultation, and having monitored attendance by the public at Police stations, Essex Police identified that demand was often very low. Therefore, Essex Police has had to carefully consider the best way they can provide front office counter services to the public, at the same time as providing value for money services, as well as keeping as many Police officers working in neighbourhood policing as possible.

- 2.6 Following completion of this review, the Rochford Police Station front office counter closed on 27 November 2011. However, the Police front office counter at Rayleigh Police Station has remained available and is open to the public from 8am until midnight, 7 days a week.
- 2.7 The Police response team function also moved from Rochford Police Station to Rayleigh Police Station in January 2011 and is due to be relocated again from 1 March 2012 to Southend Police Station and Basildon Police Station, and so the number of services available at the Rochford Police Station has been steadily reduced over the last 12 months.

3 IMPACTS OF DISPOSAL OF ROCHFORD POLICE STATION

- 3.1 There are a number of Neighbourhood Policing Teams currently working out of Rochford Police Station, namely Rochford, Ashingdon and Canewdon and Wakering, along with the Police Community Support Officers (PCSO) and a Neighbourhood Policing Team (NPT) Sergeant. As a result of the disposal of this site, the NPTs, including the PCSOs and NPT Sergeant, will be relocated to Rayleigh Police Station as their base but still patrol their respective areas. However, there is concern that this will have an impact on the amount of time spent in their actual neighbourhood areas, due to the travelling time to and from Rayleigh.
- 3.2 The Police Dog Unit and the Priority and Prolific Offender (PPO) link worker also currently use Rochford Police Station as a base for two days per week, when working in the District. Again, following the disposal of this site, the PPO link worker will also be relocated to Rayleigh on 1 March 2012, with Essex Police still to notify where the Dog Unit is to be relocated.
- 3.3 The District Council would not wish to see the complete closure of the Police Station as there would be a loss of visible Police presence in the centre of Rochford. However, if it is to close, then the Council should seek an assurance from Essex Police that its communications/media team will take into consideration the negative impact this closure is likely to have on local residents and businesses and make them fully aware of how they can still access the Neighbourhood Policing Teams.
- 3.4 Communications would need to provide reassurance to both the Council and the public that all relocated services would continue to be maintained, with no reduction in their visibility and accessibility, in order to avoid any increase in perception of fear of crime and disorder in this area.
- 3.5 The District Council would also seek further assurance that, if the building is to close, then the building and surrounding area will be made secure to reduce the risk of incidents of anti-social behaviour and crime and disorder such as graffiti, criminal damage and use of the rear car park by 2-wheeled motorised vehicles, etc. It would be expected that the condition of the building is monitored (and maintained, if required) to ensure that it does not fall into disrepair and become an 'eyesore'.

- 3.6 Emphasised by the fact that the building lies within the Conservation Area, it should be strongly recommended that the Police consult the Council in its capacity as Local Planning Authority to ensure that the building is properly maintained, if and when vacated, and also that suitable alternative development proposals are forthcoming, with a minimum of delay.
- 3.7 The Police should be encouraged to liaise with Council officers around the facilities operated by the Council, in order to identify opportunities where the Council can help to ensure a local presence and access is maintained. For example, the NPT holding Beat Surgeries or community meetings.

4 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 It will be important that notwithstanding the result of any reviews, Essex Police continue to provide a service of an appropriate level available to all sections of the community.

I confirm that the above recommendation does not depart from Council policy and that appropriate consideration has been given to any budgetary and legal implications.

SMT Lead Officer Signature: _____

Head of Community Services

Background Papers:-

None.

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