

SPECIAL MEETING OF CENTRAL DUDLEY AREA COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 29th November, 2011 at 6.30 p.m.
In the Council Chamber at the Council House, Priory Road, Dudley

PRESENT: -

Councillor Ahmed (Chairman)
Councillor K Finch (Vice Chairman)

Councillors Ali, Miss Arshad, Mrs M Aston, M Davis, Mrs Roberts, Zada and Mr Rodney

OFFICERS:

The Assistant Director of Policy Performance and Resources (as Lead Officer to the Committee) Directorate of Adult, Community and Housing Services, the Senior Solicitor and Ms K Farrington – both Directorate of Corporate Resources

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

Chief Superintendent Keith Baldwin and Sector Inspector Richard Jones, West Midlands Police

Councillors Caunt and Foster as the Council's representatives on the West Midlands Police Authority

11 Members of the public

40. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of Councillors Cotterill, Miss Cowell, J D Davies, A Finch, Sparks, Waltho, Ms Wood; Mrs Oakes, Mr Lawley and Mrs Little.

41. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No Member made a declaration of interest in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct in respect of any matter to be considered at this meeting.

42.

WEST MIDLANDS POLICE PROPOSALS REGARDING THE OPENING HOURS OF POLICE STATIONS

A report of the Director of Corporate Resources was submitted on the proposals of the Police regarding the opening hours of front offices at a number of Police Stations in the Dudley Borough.

The Area Liaison Officer outlined the report circulated to the meeting and in doing so referred the Area Committee to the proposals of the Police set out in the letter attached as an appendix to the report.

The Chairman then invited the comments of the Area Committee. A number of concerns were raised by Members and members of the public as follows:-

- The effect the restrictions would have on the services to the public. The view of the Area Committee was that residents of Dudley felt safe and protected with the knowledge that an operational and accessible Police Station was located in Dudley Town Centre. The perception was that if further restrictions to the opening hours of front offices were permitted, an increase in potential crime and disorder would occur.
- Concerns were raised in relation to the nature of impact assessments carried out to justify the closure of front offices in terms of extent and comprehensiveness. The fear of the Area Committee and members of the public was that the proposed proposals were the first step to the closure of Dudley Police Station.
- Concerns were raised at the very limited time made available for public consultation and the method the Police used to advertise the consultation process. It was noted that a petition was currently being created and would be handed to Dudley Police Station direct.
- Concerns were raised that the only Police Station operating a 24-hour front office would be Brierley Hill Police Station.
- Mention was made of the City Status application for Dudley and a comment was received that Dudley Town Centre had been declining over a number of years. It was alleged that the 999 services was not very good and buildings were being destroyed.

- Concerns were raised in that residents felt that there was not a solid Police presence in the Dudley Borough and that crucial contact points were being reduced. A number of Members made the point that the public were generally comfortable with personal interface with the Police at a police station rather than through social media or telephone contact. It was also noted that not all residents had use of a mobile phone. Members also indicated that the top ten most deprived wards in the Borough were located in the Central Dudley area.
- Mention was made of the new college development, which was anticipated to open in August 2012 and of the increase in the number of students whom would be using Dudley Town Centre, especially at night. Concerns were raised that potentially this would increase crime and disorder in the Dudley area.

Chief Superintendent Keith Baldwin and Sector Inspector Richard Jones responded as follows:-

- That West Midlands Police were exploring new ways of running the front offices and working with partners to share buildings, reduce costs and make services more joined up. A review had taken place, over a three-week period to assess the footfall at various times throughout the day and evening. Evidence had found that the public demand of front offices during the evening and overnight was very low. Approximately four people on average had visited Police Stations during that time. Following the evidence found, it was stated that staff could be redeployed into contact centres to increase the efficiency of call handling and to improve front line policing.
- Assurances were given that only proposals to close front offices during the evening and overnight were being consulted on and that there was no intention whatsoever to close Dudley Police Station altogether. It was confirmed that there would continue to be a Police Station located in Dudley and that all other operations would remain unchanged. It was also confirmed that there was no intention at the moment to reduce the size of Dudley Police Station or the current level of police officers. It was noted that the Police were modernising their approach in which residents could contact police officers and it was stated that an increasing audience were making more use of social media and mobile telephones. It was also noted that it was not possible to expand or modernise the building at Dudley Police Stations to cope with modern policing.

- An assurance was given that residents would not be more than four miles away from a 24 hour Police Station and that should anyone wish to speak to a police officer during the times the front offices at Dudley Police Station were closed, an external telephone system would be installed directly linked to the 24 hour Force Contact Centre. It was also confirmed that police officers would be stationed at Dudley Police Station until midnight. It was proposed that the provision of a front office would cease during 6.00pm and 10.00am and that the Police were committed to allocating resources to identified “hot spot” areas in the Central Dudley area.
- It was clarified that the consultation period would run through the whole of December.
- Mention was then made of a similar survey carried out in July 2007 when the footfall was assessed. Following that review, a pilot scheme was carried out to close Dudley Police Station at 11.00pm each evening. At the end of the pilot scheme a decision was taken to close the front offices at that time and it was confirmed that no complaints had been received.

In responding to questions in relation to what the estimated saving would amount to by closing front offices during the evenings and overnight, Chief Superintendent Keith Baldwin undertook to investigate this issue and respond to the Members direct.

In concluding, Chief Superintendent Keith Baldwin and Sector Inspector Richard Jones indicated that they were committed to protecting the services they provided at the level expected.

The Chairman then expressed gratitude to Chief Superintendent Keith Baldwin and Sector Inspector Richard Jones for attending the meeting.

RESOLVED

That the Central Dudley Area Committee expresses its extreme concern to the Police on the proposed extension of the closure of Dudley Police Station from 6.00pm till 10.00am. The people of Dudley and Dudley Town deserve a fully staffed and operational Police Station that is open and accessible at all hours of the day and night. The Central Dudley Area Committee strongly opposes the closure and, in the best interests of the residents of Dudley, urges the Police not to proceed with the closure proposals. The Central Dudley Area Committee also ask that the Council's Police Authority representatives convey in the strongest possible terms its anger over the closure and lack of consultation.

The meeting ended at 7.40pm.

CHAIRMAN