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Estates Transformation Programme 2024

Analysis of responses to the Balerno Police Station consultation exercise

Report

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Research and Insight

Strategy, Insight and Engagement



**Estates Delivery
Group**

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Executive Summary

Following SPA approval, Police Scotland announced on Thursday 14 December 2023 proposals to close a number of police buildings across the country and invite members of the public, stakeholders and staff to give their views.

Our objective is to listen to communities, colleagues and stakeholders and respond to their needs through an open and inclusive consultation on the proposed Police Scotland estates transformation. Strategic outcome three within our [Joint Strategy for Policing \(2023\)](#) sets out our commitment to **keep public, communities and partners engaged and involved so they have confidence and trust in policing**.

Maintaining public confidence and trust involves keeping communities involved and engaged in what and how we do things, ensuring our policing model is effective that we can adapt how we connect with communities to enhance safety and protection.

Consultation and engagement approach

Launch of a national conversation

The consultation began on 14 December 2023 to support an open continuous conversation at a national level on our strategic approach to transforming our estate, hosted on our [Engagement Hub](#).

Opportunity for local engagement

At a local level, each site for consultation had its own dedicated area on our engagement hub with information about the site and proposed changes. Co-designed with colleagues, the level and scope of engagement is determined by the potential impact of proposed changes to local communities and stakeholders. This assessment takes into consideration the drivers of public confidence, user experience and accessibility of local policing.

Risk-based assessment

The level and scope of engagement was based on the impact of estate closures on communities and stakeholders and within the drivers of public confidence (i.e., visible, engaging and proactive local policing teams) – as summarised in appendix 1.

Engagement themes

The consultation includes qualitative and quantitative questions to capture agreement with the proposals and people's understanding, perceptions, and use of their local police buildings. The information was used to inform local communications and engagement, address areas of concern and impacts for informing decision-making and local scrutiny.

Communications

A co-ordinated, consistent, approach in efforts to raise awareness with at national and local level, public and stakeholders was designed by colleagues in communications. A toolkit was designed for use by divisional colleagues to support the national conversation on estates and the local engagement at divisional level of individual building closure proposals. Assets included a video of ACC Steve Johnson outlining

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the changes proposed, a BSL version of this video for national and local dissemination, and social media materials promoting the consultation.



Response

In total, **95 consultation responses*** were received from **92 individuals** (including 1 Police Scotland employee) and **2** members of local organisations and **1** from an educational establishment. *Note that the question “In what capacity are you completing the survey?” was optional and therefore not all consultation respondents provided this information.

Key findings

Overall, the findings show the importance of maintaining visible, accessible and proactive policing in local areas and keeping communities engaged and informed on next steps.

Agreement with proposals

Most respondents reflected the longstanding inaccessibility of Balerno Police Station, highlighting the perceived minimal use of the site by police officers, police staff, and the public.

Factors influencing agreement with proposals

While respondents identified the relative inaccessibility of Balerno Police Station, it is important to note that when reflecting on the site, some concerns were raised about the disposal of Balerno Police Station as the building was perceived to be a deterrent to crime.

1. Introduction

Police Scotland inherited a very large and ageing estate, much of which was not fit for purpose, with high maintenance costs, environmental inefficiencies, and in locations that no longer meet the requirements of local communities. Police Scotland currently owns over 320 buildings many of which are located less than 5 miles from the next nearest Police Scotland building.

Following SPA approval, Police Scotland announced on Thursday 14 December 2023 proposals to close a number of police buildings across the country and invite members of the public, stakeholders and staff to give their views.

The consultation included qualitative and quantitative questions to capture agreement with the proposals and people's understanding, perceptions, and use of their local police buildings.

An Engagement Hub went live on 14 December which allowed our staff, stakeholders and the public to take part in a national conversation as well as local consultations that will help us shape our estate for the future.

1.1. The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 asserts to empower community bodies through the ownership or control of land and buildings, and by strengthening their voices in decisions about public services. A significant part of this act refers to participation in public decision-making whereby Scottish public authorities must promote and facilitate the participation of members of the public in the decisions and activities of the authority, including in the allocation of its resources.

The level and scope of engagement should be based on the impact of estate closures on communities and stakeholders, with consideration of the drivers of public confidence (i.e., visible, engaging and proactive local policing teams). The relative risk necessitates a proportionate response, meaning if 'high risk high participation', all preceding methods will be used (see appendix 1).

For determining risk, we sought information to understand:

- How the buildings are being used by colleagues, communities and stakeholders and the alternative options for continuing to meet needs
- How is local policing maintaining and/or enhancing visible, engaging and accessible services as part of the future policing model
- Viability of the estate for community asset transfer.

The risk assessment will be undertaken with each affected local policing division which will determine the level of engagement. The approach and methods of engagement are based on Police Scotland's Public Engagement and Participation Framework.

The local consultation for **Balerno Police Station** was launched **14 December 2023** and concluded **18 February 2024**.

1.2. Analysis and reporting

This report presents a question-by-question analysis of the responses and comments made to the local consultation for Balerno Police Station. All responses were gathered via our online Engagement Hub; no submissions were received via any other means.

The qualitative feedback is presented according to the balance and nuance of opinion relating to the impressions and perceptions of the site, in this instance of Balerno Police Station.

Respondents to any public consultation or engagement are self-selecting, and the responses may not be representative of the population.

For each of the consultation questions the issues or common themes frequently raised by respondents are presented. Please also note that often respondents answer “None” or “No idea” or singular word responses without providing additional information to explain their response further.

The open questions did not have a fixed response, or a limit to the length of the response, allowing the respondents to answer in their own words and in as much or as little detail as they liked. Consequently, thematic analysis was used to analyse the open question survey responses. This meant that each response was read by a member of the research team and the codes (main points) were identified. The next step was then to read across the responses to systematically identify any common ideas or patterns of meaning. Themes were discussed across the research team to allow for comparisons and contrasts until consensus was reached among the team on the final structure.

Accordingly, the extent of the analysis is proportionate to the volume of feedback in terms of comments made. An example of the data analysis process leading to the ‘Impressions of Balerno Police Station’ results is attached (see appendix 2). The quotes that are provided through the report are intended to illustrate some of the points in respondents’ own words and to capture some of the themes as they were written.

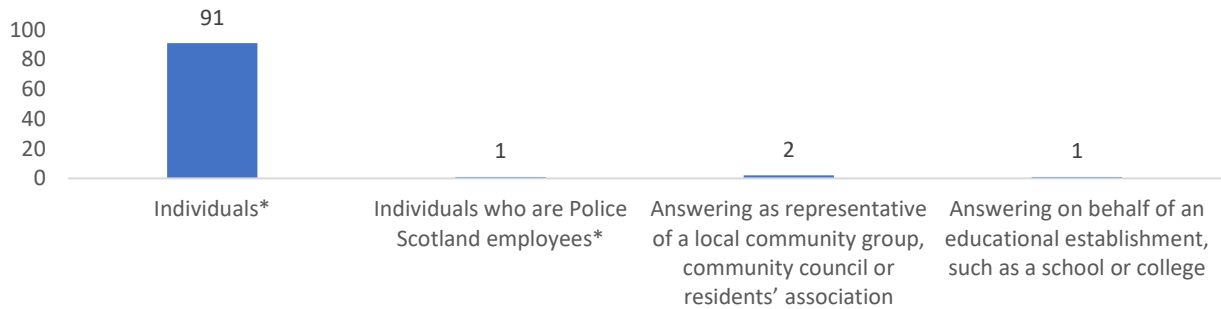
This analysis did not seek to provide a comparative or quantitative account of the issues that were raised but sought to summarise the range of topics and responses that were provided. However, descriptive terminology is used to add clarity on the views. For example, ‘some’ or ‘many’. It was not the intention to quantify the views, but it should be noted that in general, ‘many’ or ‘most’ refers to views that were shared across a large section of the responses. Use of the term ‘some’ is used to reflect an idea or viewpoint that came up less frequently than ‘many/most’.

Finally, the singular quantitative question on agreement relating to the proposed disposal of the site should not be taken independently from the qualitative context and narrative with which we thank respondents for providing.

1.3. Overview of respondent profile and responses

A total of **95** consultation responses were received from **92** individuals (1 individual reported they work for Polic Scotland) and **3** representatives of local organisations, MSP, etc.

Breakdown of respondents - total respondents (n = 95)
received by classification



Listed below are the **6** most prevalent themes at a total sample level. This is to provide an understanding of the issues reported across the total sample. Themes are not presented in an order of magnitude.

- Lack of access
- Valuable if open
- Extended period of disuse
- Limited use of facilities
- Not used as a safe space
- Presence inspires feelings of safety.

Individuals

Individual members of the public represented **97% (92/95)** of respondents, their views drive the prevalence of specific themes at a total sample level.

Local organisation representatives

Responses from local organisation representatives represent **3%** of the sample.

Table 1: response classification

	No. of respondents	% of all respondents
All respondents	95	100%
Individuals*	91	97%
Answering as representative of a local community group, community council or residents' association	2	2%
Individuals who are Police Scotland employees*	1	1%
Answering on behalf of an educational establishment, such as a school or college	1	1%

*NB: The total "Individuals" number includes deducting the total number of individuals who work for Police Scotland

2. Consultation Analysis

2.1. Impressions of Balerno Police Station

Impressions of how Balerno Police Station is currently being used by the public for engaging with the police.

There were 69 responses to this open-ended question. Please note that this question did not capture quantitative data and accordingly only substantive themes/points raised by respondents are presented. The most frequently made points were that:

- Balerno Police Station is currently closed to the public and therefore inaccessible. Responses mentioned how this precludes engagement.
- Relatedly, respondents mentioned that if Balerno Police Station were to be opened it would be a contribution to the area and support engagement.

Impressions of how Balerno Police Station is currently being used by police officers and staff for operational policing.

There were 63 responses to this open-ended question. Please note that this question did not capture quantitative data and accordingly only substantive themes/points raised by respondents are presented. The most frequently made points were that:

- Balerno Police Station has had an extended period of disuse. Therefore, many respondents state not seeing any police presence associated with the station.
- For those reporting seeing a use of the site, respondents refer to the use of Balerno Police Station as a touch-down location for officers, and occasionally used for its parking capacity.

Impressions of how Balerno Police Station is currently being used by members of the public as a safe space.

There were 66 responses to this open-ended question. Please note that this question did not capture quantitative data and accordingly only substantive themes/points raised by respondents are presented. The most frequently made points were that:

- Balerno Police Station, because of the lack of public access, is not used a safe space by the public.
- The use of Balerno Police Station, were it to be accessible, would inspire feelings of safety as the site is perceive as a deterrent for crime.

2.2. Perceptions of the proposal to dispose Balerno Police Station

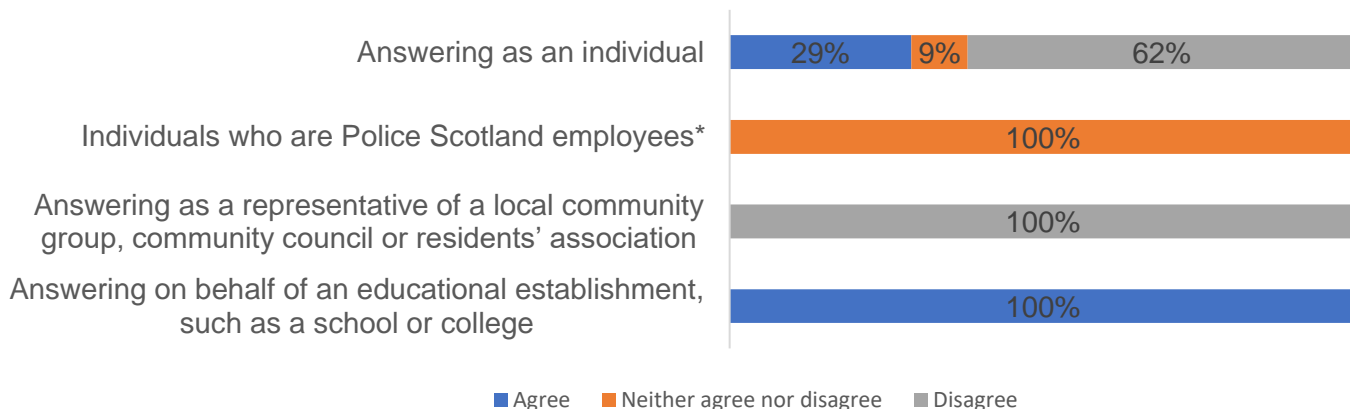
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to dispose of this building for the reasons stated at the start of this section?

	Total	Agree*		Disagree*		Neither agree nor disagree	
	N =	N=	%	N=	%	N=	%
All respondents	93	27	29%	57	61%	9	10%
Individuals	91	26	29%	55	62%	9	9%
Individual(s) who are Police Scotland employees	1	--	--	--	--	1	100%
Representative of a local community group, community council or residents' association	2	--	--	2	100%	--	--
Answering on behalf of an educational establishment, such as a school or college	1	1	100%	--	--	--	--

“Strongly agree” and “Agree” have been combined into “Agree” as well as “Strongly disagree” and “Disagree” being combined into “Disagree”. “Don’t know/No Opinion” and blank responses have been omitted.

Graph 1: Agreement and disagreement on disposal of Balerno Police Station by classification

Breakdown of agreement/disagreement regarding disposal by respondent classification



3. Conclusions

The consultation for Balerno Police Station provided the opportunity for the public, stakeholders, and colleagues to provide their feedback and perceptions of Balerno Police Station in response to the proposed estate transformation programme.

Although this approach provided a way for people to submit their views, given the relatively small number of responses, it cannot offer a complete or representative view that reflects the concerns and insights of all individuals and organisations.

Findings indicate the long-standing lack of access to Balerno Police Station is a driving influence on the impressions of its function in community policing in the local area.

Next steps

This report provides a summary of the consultation analysis in support of a consistent, co-ordinated, and open dialogue between Police Scotland and the public, stakeholders, and colleagues regarding the proposed estate transformation programme.

These results will be shared to the appropriate governance mechanisms within Police Scotland and will be shared with the public via the Engagement Hub in due course.

The next steps are summarised below as:

- A report will be prepared (which will include this consultation report) to Corporate Finance and Investment Board with evidence to inform decision-making.
- If approved to progress, a paper will be prepared for the Scottish Police Authority Resources Committee with a proposal.
- Police Scotland will progress the activities within the proposal to either dispose of a building (which may include selling), support a community asset transfer of a building, or invest in a building.
- Feedback to the public, communities and stakeholders will be shared and published in the form of 'you asked, you said, we listened' on our [Engagement Hub](#) where the consultation was hosted. Copies of the consultation findings will also be published.

Scottish Police Authority meetings are public and they [can be viewed online](#) via the SPA's website.

Appendix 1: Risk based assessment approach

Citizen Participation	Local Risk		
	Low	Medium	High
Low	<p>Inform (by distributing or making information accessible on policies, decisions, services and legislation).</p> <p>Inform Method: Website, Social media, Bulletins, Reports, Media releases.</p>		
Medium		<p>Discover and Review (by consultation); identifying local needs, concerns and feedback with the proposed estate changes, perceptions of modernisation and estate strategy. Understanding local reactions to and reflections of the proposal and using these to inform decision on disposal.</p> <p>Review 1: National Conversation (online feedback)</p> <p>Review 2: Local Estate Survey (online feedback, localised)</p>	
High			<p>Community Empowerment: Community meetings, workshops, focus groups to promote two-way communication and proactive, visible, participation</p> <p>Consensus building: deliberative forums to promote deeper engagement via public assemblies.</p>

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Appendix 2: Example qualitative coding matrix

Impressions of Balerno Police Station	Theme	Coding	Response Quotes
	Balerno Police Station used for the public engaging with Police	Inaccessible	“We can’t engage with them, they aren’t there”
			“It’s not used”
			“It is closed to public so no use.”
			“The building seems permanently closed and not in use at all”
	Valuable if open	Valuable if open	“Brilliant to have it here in Balerno and valued.”
			“This would have been my first stop if engaging police”
			“Nevertheless, it remains a physical, “on the high street” presence which I’m sure some people might find reassuring—if it was open to the public!”
			“Since the building is effectively not accessible by the public, it does not provide opportunity for meaningful engagement with police.”
	Balerno Police Station used by police officers and staff for operational policing	Extended period of disuse	“The assumption would be that it is used by operational staff but you rarely see any activity or evidence”
			“I’ve never really observed it being used (and I’ve been in Balerno for more than 25 years)”
“Not used for this as far as I am aware.”			
“the building has been abandoned by the police force and left to deteriorate”			
“Underused, a wasted opportunity”			
Limited use of facilities		“Sometimes see police vehicles parked outside and others entering the building”	
		“Occasional touch point for officers but no public counter” “Occasionally it provides a parking space for public sector operations.”	
Balerno Police Station used by members of the public as a safe space	Not used as a safe space	“It’s closed to the public and has been for years”	
		“No access to the public so not at all”	
		“As it has been Closed for some time it is not needed by Police services, nor do the local public seem to lack the police on the premises so disposal is reasonable proposal.”	
	Presence inspires feelings of safety	“It brings confidence that there is some form of Police presence in the area, even if it’s not manned permanently.”	
		“Its great in the knowledge knowing that there’s officer always jist in the area or down the road and at least not miles away from where they are need in an emergency these thing are time critical and the further an officer is away to help the more crime can happen”	
		“It is a safe place for the public. A deterrent for others also if they see a police station lit up.”	
		“It feels like a safe space, and this is reassuring for the 6000 residents of Balerno, many of whom will resist reporting crime in Wester Hailes because of its intimidating presentation/locale.”	