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## **Inverclyde Police and Fire Scrutiny Panel**

Chief Superintendent Gordon McCreadie

Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> January 2024

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**Notes for Police and Fire Scrutiny Panel 25<sup>th</sup> January 2024**

- **Introduction:** Good morning, before we address the important estates matters we are here to discuss, as this is the first time I have appeared before this committee this year, I want to start by wishing all members of the Committee a Happy and Prosperous New Year.
- As the Divisional Commander for Renfrewshire and Inverclyde, I also want to publically note my thanks to all of the police officers and staff, as well as our colleagues in our other emergency services, for the sacrifice they make over the festive period, giving up time with their friends and family in order to keep the communities of Inverclyde safe. I am confident the committee would be supportive in the public recognition of that sacrifice today.
- **Estates:** We are here today to discuss the consultation on the proposed disposal and relocation of Greenock Police Station and the sale of Port Glasgow Police Station which is currently unoccupied and has been unused since 2014.
- Given the importance of this discussion to the communities of Inverclyde, as well as to the officers and staff from Police Scotland who work locally, before we take questions, I would like to cover a number of points to ensure the committee, and anyone who may be watching this session either live, or retrospectively, are properly informed. As the relocation of Greenock Police Station is the most challenging of the two proposals I will focus on that. The main points I will cover are:
  - The need for change - the reasons and rationale behind the proposals,
  - What the future might look like for any future police station if we proceed, including the scale and scope of the service provision and;
  - Some of the matters which we still require to work through if we were to close the existing station and move to a new local site.
- As I reiterated at the previous Police and Fire Scrutiny Panel in November, the committee will get a frank and honest opinion from me today in my role as the Divisional Commander. It is my responsibility to deliver the strongest possible policing service for the communities of Inverclyde with the resource and assets available to me, both locally and nationally.
- To ensure the committee have access to appropriate information to inform their response to the consultation, I am pleased to introduce:
  - Chief Inspector Damian Kane, who you will know as part of my Senior Leadership Team. Damian is the Local Area Commander for Inverclyde;
  - Davina Fereday is a Research and Insight Manager for Police Scotland; and
  - Alan Harris is Police Scotland's Estates Change Manager for the West of Scotland;
- Estates modernisation is an incredibly emotive subject and I recognise that ANY proposals to alter the way in which services are delivered are naturally considered with a degree of apprehension and I know these proposals have been viewed with some angst. I sense this from personal feedback and having read, and heard in various forums people's perceptions of the proposals, which unfortunately at times have been misinformed and, on occasion, alarmist in nature. We also see that in the consultation responses to date, with local engagement being amongst the strongest across Scotland, something I am enthused by as it demonstrates a participative approach and a community within Inverclyde which is passionate about local services.

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- From the outset, I have sought to ensure local representatives had accurate information from me personally, I chaired a drop in session, held online on Monday 18<sup>th</sup> December for councillors, MSPs and MPs. The purpose of that session was to start this conversation and take questions in an open and honest fashion and I am pleased that the meeting was well attended by many members, some of whom sit on this committee. I have also had a number of other discussions with elected members and representatives in other forums – all with the sole purpose of increasing productive communications on this matter. Whilst it may be of less relevance to the committee I have adopted a similar approach internally with officers and staff in the division, encouraging their feedback and have their voices heard in the consultation.
- I genuinely welcome the opportunity to present personally to the committee, and by proxy the public, on this matter. Discussions such as these will help ensure that both elected members, and the public alike, have factual information which will inform meaningful responses to the consultation.
- **WHY – What is the need for Change?** Let me address exactly why we are proposing to close Greenock Police Station and find another Police Station locally to replace it?
- Greenock Police Station was opened in 1975, the year that Renfrew and Bute Constabulary was subsumed by regionalisation into the newly formed Strathclyde Police. At the time, the Police Station was considered as ‘state of the art’ and represented a programme of investment in the police estate across Scotland. The station itself served Strathclyde Police well, however over the 38 years under its care there was a lack of investment in the site, which as a result of its location is more exposed to the elements than many others, and as a result in 2013 Police Scotland inherited a building which was out-dated, approaching its then 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, in need of significant repair and no longer fit for the purpose it was designed.
- In practical terms though, to keep the building compliant with our legal obligations under the Health and Safety at Work Act, it has been necessary for Police Scotland to spend money on maintaining the premises in a condition which is barely just acceptable. Let me assure the committee there has been no “major revamp” as I have seen suggested. This requirement to spend money on such an old building is particularly the case in respect of our obligations around people in custody which is unavoidable and which is rightly heavily scrutinised by external bodies. Given the age and condition of the building, maintenance is not as cost effective, nor as simple as those which take place in a modern building.
- In terms of our capital budget, the Chief Constable has openly stated, most recently at the Scottish Parliament Criminal Justice Committee, that our capital allocation has been a challenge and that it remains low in comparison to other police services across the UK. The effect of this has slowed our ability to transform and give our officers and staff the tools and estate a modern service needs.
- In that vein, the building is not in keeping with the vision of a modern police service, nor does it present an environment which is conducive to staff wellbeing or morale with officers and staff forced to work amidst damp and dingy conditions. I do not believe any reasonable person would be happy to work in such conditions with water ingress, consistently cold temperatures and crumbling facades.

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- In stark financial terms, the estimated cost to make address maintenance which has been categorised as “Priority 1 – Immediate Must Do” is around £2.5m. Bringing the almost 50 year old building up to a modern standard any reasonable person would expect today would cost many millions of pounds more than this.
- The reality is that we believe this money could be invested far better elsewhere, that the existing building is beyond economical repair and is now at ‘end of life’ regardless of our collective emotional and historical attachment to it.
- **WHAT?** What might the future of policing look like if we were to close the existing station and relocate to another site?
- This is a point where there has been significant discussion so let me be crystal clear and set out in the strongest possible terms some facts for members and the public.
  - Firstly, let me assure you, and the public, that should the consultation lead to a decision to close the site, the station would not be closed until a new local site was up and running. The policing of Inverclyde will continue to be delivered from Inverclyde. Whilst officers are far better equipped with the technologies which allow them to be out in the communities they serve and not in a police station waiting for the public to call, the reality is we still need a physical base in the local area.
  - Secondly, I want to talk about Public Counter Provisions. If we were to move to a new site, I can assure you there is no suggestion whatsoever, that as a result of estates changes the current service, with 24/7 cover, would change. Whilst the vast majority of our engagement with the public is initiated by a call from the public for the police to attend and see them at their physical location, there is still a need to maintain a counter provision for people who want to call at the station, for those who are required to report to the Police Station as a result of bail conditions, or for a range of other reasons. So I am clear, a public counter would be maintained and my expectation is that the counter provision would be both appropriately signed so it both visible and accessible to the public.
  - Next, I would like to talk about police resource levels. I have heard discussion of demands there be no reduction in response, community or CID officers at any new site. Whilst I am not sure what is driving those suggestions, there is no agenda, nor proposal to reduce the number of officers who serve Inverclyde as a result of these estates discussions. None whatsoever. Should we conclude the current station is beyond economic repair and that we need to move to a new site locally, it would be designed for the same number of officers and divisional staff who currently work in Greenock. Whilst numbers always fluctuate moderately with retirements, transfers or promotions there is no focus on deliberately reducing officer numbers simply because we are consulting on moving sites.
  - A new site would offer the opportunity to continue existing partnerships, for example the CCTV suite, and it may offer opportunities to further enhance partnerships, for example if we were to co-locate with others. There are good examples of that co-location in other parts of Scotland but all of this would of course require to be worked through and carefully considered.

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- The last significant point I want to touch on is of course the custody estate in Greenock as the existing Police Station has cells at the location. I will cover that in my final point which summarises some of the matters we need to work through should we decide to move sites after the consultation.
- **CONSIDERATIONS?** The Custody provision at Greenock is a significant provision, with 57 cells. Members may recall that my previous responsibility was as the Divisional Commander for Criminal Justice Services Division, the division which oversees the national custody provision for the whole of Scotland and as such I have a good knowledge of the work of that division and the demand profile across Scotland.
- I set out at the start of this session that I would be entirely candid with the committee. As the Divisional Commander for Renfrewshire and Inverclyde, and previously as the Divisional Commander for Criminal Justice Services Division, I am of the opinion that the division does require a cell provision in appropriate travelling distance of Greenock. If we were to close the site, with no alternative local provision, officers from Inverclyde would need to travel to Custody Centres in Glasgow, Clydebank or Saltcoats, dependant on the location of their arrest and demand at that time. This would of course increase travel times, it would place more demand on those centres and consequently it would likely increase waiting times for all officers, not only those in this division. This is something which does not sit easily with me, nor the current CJSD Divisional Commander, and as I have already told members, it is an area we in Police Scotland, and in turn the Scottish Police Authority, will need to consider with forensic scrutiny going forward.
- There are a few key facts that are important to call out for the committee in relation to the cells when you are considering your response:
  - Firstly, the existing cells are dated and would not comply with the standards expected of any new cell provision built today. As I have alluded to, we have already had to spend significant amounts of money on them simply to comply with our statutory duties and Human Rights obligations. The cells are built on a number of levels with officers and staff having to move people in custody up and down stairs at times. When people are under the influence of drink or drugs, or are otherwise vulnerable this is far from ideal. Until recently officers were queueing on stairs with people in custody until they could be processed. This is not acceptable and we had a duty to act on it to prevent officers, or people in custody coming to significant harm.
  - Routinely, the maximum working capacity is limited to an occupancy of 30 cells due to demand and staffing profiles.
  - The cells do not only serve Greenock and are not a dedicated resource for Inverclyde. The cells are a national resource but are generally the default custody provision used for Paisley and officers from Renfrewshire routinely bring persons in custody to Greenock to be detained, interviewed and held in custody for court if required. Additionally, cells are used for people from Glasgow or Clydebank, or on occasion further afield, if there is capacity in Greenock and space is required at other sites, for example over a weekend or for court holidays. As such, these cells are not solely used for arrests from Inverclyde which may be the perception of many.

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People in custody are transported to local courts, for example Paisley or Glasgow Sherriff Courts from Greenock on a daily basis and they have been for many years.

- The building of new cells would likely come at a cost of tens of millions of pounds at a time where fiscal constraints on all public services are significant, but a range of options will need to be carefully considered. For example, do we have the capital monies necessary to build, is there suitable land available locally, do we build a smaller number of cells using 'modular' units which may be more affordable and are routinely used in other parts of the country – for clarity these are not 'portacabins' but substantial pre-fabricated and designed for purpose cell blocks. All of this would need to be worked through in great detail.
- As the Divisional Commander for Renfrewshire and Inverclyde, if it were not financially viable to build a cell provision, my next consideration to ensure there was no detriment to local policing, would be to advocate for an increase in officer numbers to compensate for the increased abstraction caused by travel, and interviews etc. Again, the required increase in officers would need to be carefully considered and evaluated prior to implementation.
- **So What?** – In summary, the proposals being made are to consider transferring local officers and divisional staff from one local building to another building in the same area. That building would need to be both visible and accessible to the public. Any location is yet to be determined and will be informed by the consultation.
- The proposals, and the matters to be worked through would provide consistency with both the long-term estate vision to ensure visibility and presence, improve wellbeing, maintain or increase collaboration, deliver efficiencies and provide productive modern and well-serviced workspaces.
- The proposals are not to withdraw policing services from local communities, nor to reduce resource numbers of front counter provisions. The greatest challenge is the provision of a custody centre within an appropriate proximity for Inverclyde, which will need to be carefully thought through and a plan developed if we are to proceed. If that were not achievable, mitigation would be required to ensure there was no detriment to local policing provision, officer safety and the safety of those in our care.
- With appropriate planning and implementation, officers would continue to be active, visible and accessible and the public would receive the same high level of service from officers within their local area.
- I hope this offers some assurance. As the consultation concludes, and once we have assessed the feedback I will continue to engage and update the committee on options for their information. I believe I have been quite open, honest and engaging with members in person, and on social media and that will continue going forwards.
- As always, I am happy to take questions and have follow up discussions but my final ask would be to urge all members, our communities and our staff to participate in the consultation which is open until 18<sup>th</sup> February for Port Glasgow and the 31<sup>st</sup> March for Greenock. These consultations are available on the Police Scotland Website.
- Thank you.

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