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Estates Transformation Programme 2024

Analysis of responses to the Portobello 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 17 January 2024 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, **116 consultation responses*** were received from **111 individuals** (including 3 Police Scotland employees) and **5** member as a representative of a local community group, community council or residents' association. *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 Portobello station was not manned and frequently shut. Respondents are inclined to disagree with the proposal to dispose of Portobello station.

Factors influencing agreement with proposals

When reflecting on the site, some concerns were raised about the disposal of Portobello Police Station as the building was perceived to be a deterrent to crime and strategically well placed in a central location, close to the town centre. Respondents are particularly concerned about crime during busy summer periods, where the town sees an influx of people. Some respondents felt that the disposal of Portobello Police Station would be detrimental to local policing. The Police Station is perceived by many as contributing significant symbolic value to the community, with respondents keen to maintain the station as a means of face-to-face contact with their local police.

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 five 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 **Portobello Police Station** was launched **17 January 2024** and concluded **13 March 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 Portobello 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 Portobello 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.

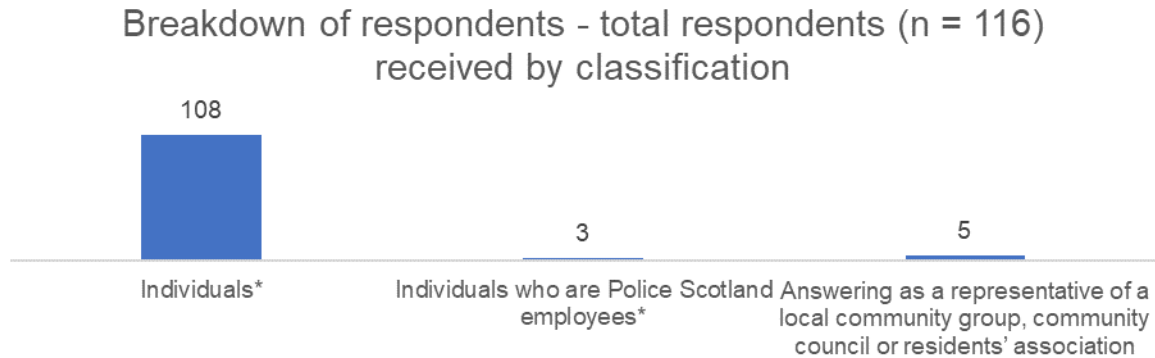
Accordingly, the extent of the analysis is proportionate to the volume of feedback in terms of comments made. An example of the data analysis process leading to the ‘Impressions of Portobello Police Station’ results is attached (see appendix 2). The quotes that are provided through the report are intended 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 **116** consultation responses were received from **108** individuals (3 individual reported they work for Polic Scotland) and **5** representatives of local organisations, MSP, etc.



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.

- Highly visible location on the high street
- Not open to the public and is frequently closed
- Valuable if open and manned
- Limited use of facilities
- Not used as a safe space frequently
- Presence inspires feelings of safety.

Individuals

Individual members of the public represented **93% (108/116)** of respondents, their views drive the prevalence of specific themes at a total sample level.

Local organisation representatives

Responses from local organisation representatives represent **4%** of the sample.

Table 1: response classification

	No. of respondents	% of all respondents
All respondents	116	100%
Individuals*	108	93%
Answering as a representative of a local community group, community council or residents' association.	5	4%
Individuals who are Police Scotland employees*	3	3%

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

2. Consultation Analysis

2.1. Impressions of Portobello Police Station

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

There were 95 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:

- Portobello Police Station has no police officers or staff based in the site, with respondents highlighting the lack of engagement and lack of public access.
- Despite this, some respondents appear unaware of the sites lack of officers/staff, and see the building as important for the local area, especially during peak summer season.

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

There were 60 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:

- Respondents are uncertain of the stations use for operational policing, with many aware that the surrounding stations of Craigmillar, Leith and St Leonards are more utilised.
- Some respondents report frequently seeing police vehicles parked in the vicinity of the station.

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

There were 87 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:

- Portobello Police Station does not provide utility as a safe space for members of the public.
- Portobello Police Station is not being used as a safe space, is not suitable as a safe space as the station is not guaranteed to have policing colleagues there.

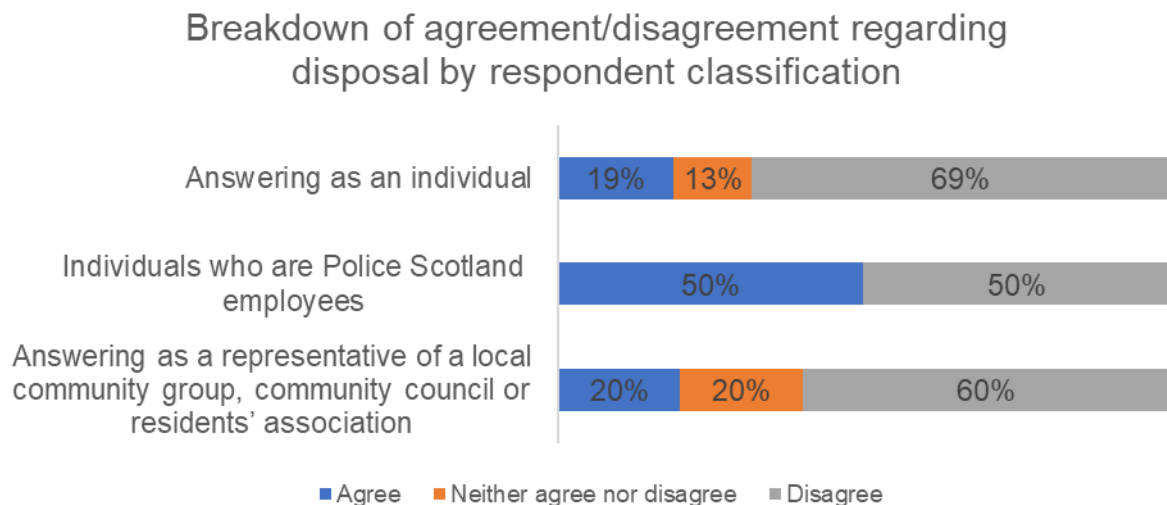
2.2. Perceptions of the proposal to dispose Portobello Police Station

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	115	22	19%	78	68%	15	13%
Individuals	108	20	19%	74	69%	14	13%
Individuals who are Police Scotland employees	2	1	50%	1	50%	--	--
Answering as a representative of a local community group, community council or residents' association	5	1	20%	3	60%	1	20%

“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 Portobello Police Station by classification



3. Conclusions

The consultation for Portobello Police Station provided the opportunity for the public, stakeholders, and colleagues to provide their feedback and perceptions of Portobello 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 lack of access to Portobello 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 Portobello Police Station	Theme	Coding	Response Quotes
	Portobello Police Station used for the public engaging with Police	Not open or accessible to the public	“I understand that there is no police presence there so no engagement with the public”
			“I was under the impression that this function was no longer available”
			“As the station is not staffed the public get little use of it.”
			“It is very difficult to engage with police at the moment as the building is seldom staffed.”
	Unaware of lack of officers/staff	Unaware of lack of officers/staff	“I do use it but often find opening hours inconvenient. I would prefer longer hours to make local engagement more possible and promote feelings of community safety.”
			“The current use of the building is essential as one of the main services that is needed in a town centre.”
	Portobello Police Station used by police officers and staff for operational policing	Not used for operational purposes. Other stations used	“The building serves no purpose to police officers and staff, all of whom are based elsewhere.”
			“I guess most matters could be covered from Leith or Craigmillar”
		See police vehicles parked in proximity of the station	“They go in and out and park cars”
			“I see police cars here regularly”
	Portobello Police Station used by members of the public as a safe space	Building not used for this purpose	“The building is closed most of the time, I do not think it is used for this purpose”
			“Given it is no longer used, my view is it is underused”
“Mostly closed so not often a safe space”			
“It does not provide a safe space as it is seldom staffed.”			