

The Metropolitan Police Authority's Estate Strategy

Briefing for Londoners

Note: Throughout this paper, reference is made to the police 'estate'. This means building and property owned by the Metropolitan Police Authority for use by the Metropolitan Police e.g.: police stations, safer neighbourhood bases, office accommodation etc.

Introduction

The Metropolitan Police Service (Met) faces 2 key challenges. Firstly, the number of police officers and staff employed by the service has increased dramatically since 2000 to 48,000 in 2006. However, the police estate (police stations, patrol bases etc) reached full capacity four years ago. The second key challenge is that irrespective of the capacity problems facing the service, much of the estate is no longer suitable for modern policing or office accommodation. Much of the estate pre-dates 1935, is not Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliant and is no longer 'fit for purpose'. Importantly, the current move towards neighbourhood-based policing means that the estate needs to change to accommodate twenty first century policing.

Despite the issues outlined above, the Met recognises that many police buildings are warmly regarded by local communities and often seen as 'iconic' additions to townscapes across London.

In 2004, the Met took steps to address these building problems, in partnership with the Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) which oversees the police in London, by launching '[Building Towards the Safest City](#)', its estate strategy for 2003-08. In this document, the MPS set out its broad vision for the future including closing out-of-date police stations and opening new, sometimes purpose-built, facilities in their places. The plan included opening 'safer neighbourhood bases' from which newly-implemented Safer Neighbourhood Teams would work.

Unfortunately however, the potential benefits within the estate strategy were not clearly explained to the public which led to fear of the closure of local police stations. The MPA addressed this concern by refusing to approve the sale or purchase of any property until the Met communicated the plan to the public clearly. It took the Met two years and a number of poorly-managed attempts to do this.

Finally, on 19 December 2006, the Met produced two key documents which addressed many of the MPA's concerns and in doing so, gained approval to proceed with the implementation the estate strategy. The two documents were:

1. [The Estate Strategic Plan](#)

Sets out in detail the strategic objectives for the different Met departments and teams including borough-based policing. The strategic plan refers to each borough's 'Asset Management Plan' which contains commercially confidential information about proposed purchases and disposals as well as detail on planned building redevelopment and refurbishment programmes. Versions of these will be publicly available on local Met police websites as and when they are set up. These will be accessible through www.met.police.uk The strategic plan also details the management arrangements for the implementation of the changes and their impact on public perceptions and the natural environment.

2. [The Consultation and Communication Strategy and Plan](#)

Sets out how the Met intends to communicate its plans to the public and key stakeholders as well as conduct consultations, particularly on changes to local police stations. Also details how the Met will communicate the results of local consultations and demonstrate how feedback will be used.

How will the Estate Strategy affect local police stations?

Currently, police buildings are multi-functional (custody, front counters and office accommodation all under one roof) and are replicated across boroughs – this is highly expensive. The MPS has a plan to rationalize its buildings into the following separate facilities in each borough in London:

1. **Custody centres** – where between 25–40 individuals are detained – incorporating custody suites, storage for property and interview rooms
2. **Neighbourhood team bases and contact points** – where Safer Neighbourhood teams prepare for duty and hold surgeries. Will provide small meeting areas and facilities for operational teams. The primary purpose of Safer Neighbourhood Teams is however to be out on the street, not in their bases
3. **Front counters – public interface (contact) points** – convenient for public access providing meeting areas and facilities for operational teams
4. **Patrol bases** – where operational officers prepare for duty and are briefed – incorporating office accommodation, briefing rooms, locker facilities and car parking
5. **Office accommodation** – to provide administrative support to the Borough Commander and police officers from a single office

The MPS has officially pledged that **‘no operational facility (with or without public access/interface) will be closed/decommissioned until the replacement facility is operational’**. However, in many cases, this will not simply mean building a new ‘typical’ police station to replace an older one. The MPS wants to move away from multi-functional facilities and towards separate, single-use buildings. It will be for an individual to decide whether they regard these changes as ‘a replacement’. For some people, this is understandably concerning.

Now that the MPA has given formal approval for the implementation of the strategy, each borough is beginning its local consultations. Some facilities have already been provided and are operational e.g.: Waltham Forest and Enfield patrol bases.

Want to get involved?

All five political parties on the MPA, including the Liberal Democrats, support the strategy. But its actual implementation is a matter for each Borough, especially any planning considerations, and must be done in **full consultation** with the local community.

Here are a number of things you could do to get involved:

1. Find out first from the Borough Commander what is the Borough's Asset Management Plan and what is the timetable for its completion – it may be as much as three years or more for full implementation.
2. Find out what is for consultation (with options and realistic possibilities for change) and what is simply for "public information" where there is really no other option.

3. One of the criteria is to make the police more accessible to the public. Check the proposals for your Borough do that, e.g.: that public access and opening hours on new front counters are at least as good as in the current facility.
4. The future of buildings and sites proposed for disposal is primarily a matter for the local council planners and some of the old "iconic" buildings will be listed. Where appropriate make sure a good planning brief is available for the building and/or site, as that will determine its future use.

Consultation or communication?

Liberal Democrat Members of the MPA have criticised the Met for lacking a true understanding of the difference between 'consultation' (offering options for discussion) and 'communication' (simply information giving). When it comes to making significant changes to the way the police work in London, we believe that it is important to distinguish between these ways of involving the public so that Londoners can be clear about their role in deciding on change. The Met's first attempt at a 'communications' strategy was nothing more than a 'public information' exercise – this has since been improved.

It is true that in some cases, there will be no 'options' for stakeholders to be consulted on because of a lack of available space/property. In this case, we believe that the Met should at least be open about the options it has also considered and discounted. In others cases, options will be available and put to the public and stakeholders appropriately. The MPA has now agreed with the Met to clearly distinguish between situations where plans are being 'communicated' and where they are being 'consulted upon'. If you do not feel that the changes proposed in your area are satisfactory, or you are disappointed by the level of consultation, please contact us using the details below.

Seeking further information?

If you have any questions about the Estate Strategy or this briefing, please contact:

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