

**London Borough of Merton  
Merton Civic Centre  
London Road  
Morden SM4 5DX**

Dear Sir

I am writing to you on behalf of the Merton Park Ward Residents' Association (MPWRA) in response to the survey organised by MOPAC to assess public reaction to their **Public Access and Engagement Strategy**. MPWRA have some 450 member households in the ward, representing more than 1000 adult residents.

This is a very lengthy survey which combines many issues, both strategic and tactical. We doubt that many residents will be able to complete the survey due to its length and complexity. This is unfortunate as all the issues covered are important but they will not receive the attention they deserve because of the sheer size of the survey. For our part, we wish to concentrate on the critical issue of the proposed closure of **Wimbledon Police Station**, easily the closest to our ward.

We wish to make the following summary points:

1. All the **feedback** MPWRA have received from our ward residents **rejects the closure**.
2. Wimbledon Police Station is located at a **major transport hub** - As a transport hub and with its location in the centre of a major town, the police station is a key aspect of our police presence in the borough in practical terms. The front counter at the station is not the only activity that happens at the station but it is the only one which is highlighted in the draft strategy. There are several other police activities which the station can fulfil. If it is MOPAC's view that for security reasons it would be impossible to locate any other activities at the station this calls into question whether police could be located at other, more remote locations to bring them closer to the public.
3. The Police Station is also part of the **reassurance** the Met is trying to provide. It is a potent symbol of police activity in its own right and a means of projecting a visible police presence. Police and residents have long debated and looked for ways to reassure the public that they are safe and that they are being looked after. Hence the repeated calls for "bobbies on the beat". But the physical presence of the police station is another very important signal that policing is in progress. The large and growing number of signatures objecting to closure are a testament to this feeling.
4. Wimbledon Police Station also acts as a **focus and meeting place** where police come together with a chance to exchange views and build a common identity and morale. The long-term impact, on morale and cohesion, of police spending the large majority of their time separated from their colleagues should be considered

5. The **proposed 'contact points' offered to replace police stations have not proved successful** - The questionnaire tells us that MOPAC want to open 150 Hubs around London. But MOPAC admit that people just don't come to these Contact Points! They are proposing as an alternative that there should be Community Contact Sessions even before the Hubs are opened. It is not at all surprising to us that hubs and contact points are not much used. It has been our experience with our residents that people do not want to bother with the police until a crisis arises, at which point they want instant access. To MPWRA, the implication is clear: MOPAC should maintain a physical police station presence and increase community contact sessions (at community venues with no additional cost to the police). In Merton, the police routinely attend all of the Community Forum Meetings in the several centres (Wimbledon, Raynes Park, Morden, Colliers Wood and Mitcham). They also attend numerous residents' association meetings such as our own monthly meetings.
6. The proposal of Hubs emphasises that **other costs would be incurred as a direct result of Wimbledon Police Station closure**. Nowhere in the MOPAC Strategy document are these offsetting costs presented. The proposed closure of the police station would enable MOPAC to realise a **capital** gain on the sale of the property. But the cash constraints MOPAC faces are a lack of **revenue-spending**. One cannot finance the other. In any event, a number of other costs will be incurred if more devolved police positioning is introduced. The net revenue cost saving should be considered.
7. If the objective is to improve Met finances now and into the future it seems wrong that an **outright sale is the only option considered**. There are several potentially attractive alternatives. For example, there is the potential to develop by sale or lease the land around the Station building whilst retaining the building itself. Similarly, the front office and some key services could be retained, while the rest of the building could be reconfigured, providing a financial return. If the whole Station building were to be leased out, the police could realise an income indefinitely, while providing an option to be recovered into use by the service if/when in future it is deemed the right approach. In our borough, the rental income generated from Morden House (within Morden Hall Park) to the benefit of The National Trust is but one local example. A hasty sale now would preclude any future options.
8. In addition, **we do not support the reduction in the number of Custody Suites**. Our understanding is that currently for much of the borough the nearest custody suite is at Sutton. This means that arrests in, for example, Wimbledon Town Centre, can require a journey for police, taking them out of action in potential crime and disorder scenes for long periods. We might have expected there to be more rather than fewer custody suites in the future.

We hope that these comments can be carefully considered as part of the MOPAC consultation.

**Cllr John Sargeant for Merton Park Ward Residents' Association**