



# Changes to Surrey Police

**Results of local consultation, March 2010**

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## Introduction

In late 2009, the Chief Constable set out plans for significant changes to the structure of Surrey Police to the Authority for their consideration and approval. These changes involve significant internal restructuring of the force and replacement of some police buildings with alternative points of access, measures which will put the force on a more sustainable financial footing and allow for the recruitment of up to 200 additional constables for Surrey. Following lengthy discussion, the Authority gave its in-principle agreement to the plans and began the process of consultation with local residents. This report outlines the initial results returned to us about the changes.

Many of the planned changes, such as the reduction in senior officer posts and the management structure of the force are ultimately for the Chief Constable to decide. However, the Authority wished to consult with local residents on the future of the police estate to help understand views on police buildings and inform decisions about how the plans could be taken forward.

SPA prepared a short questionnaire about local access to Surrey Police. A total of 2,674 people completed the questionnaire via the Citizens' Panel. A further 90 additional responses were received through the website. The Authority also put the questionnaire to a small sample of young residents which is also referenced in this report.

Members should note that, given the extremely tight timescales involved, there has not yet been time to explore the data beyond the 'top line' results. Accordingly, this report sets out these key headline findings of our research on the changes. We will be examining the data in more detail (e.g by Borough, gender, ethnicity) in the coming weeks and will update the Citizen Focus Panel and the OPR Team in due course with any points of note that emerge from this further analysis.

This consultation carried out by SPA represents the first steps into a thorough process of local consultations about access to the police. Surrey Police is currently developing comprehensive plans for the more detailed local consultation with residents which will come before the Authority in due course.

This report covers the following subjects:

- **Do people support changes to Police buildings to protect the front line?**
- **How important are different aspects of the OPR to people?**
- **Contacting the police**
- **Using police stations**
- **Questions about police front counters**
- **New police locations**
- **Working in partnership**
- **Changes to local access and different age groups**

## Do people support changes to Police buildings to protect the front line?

We wanted to know if residents support changes to the police estate to help put more officers on the beat. We first asked if they supported relocating the publicly-accessible part of their police stations - the front counters - to help provide more officers on the beat:

### **Front line policing is what matters most to me. I would support relocating front counters to provide more officers on the beat**

Agree - CP 84.8% Web 82.5%  
Disagree - CP 5% Web 10.9%  
Don't Mind - CP 6.4% Web 6.8%

We then asked respondents about police stations as a whole – would they prefer to keep existing police stations even if it meant fewer front line officers or to protect front line strength even if it meant losing their current police stations?:

### **Keeping my current local police station is what matters most to me, even if it means fewer police officers on the street**

Agree - CP 18.8% Web 24.4%  
Disagree - CP 55.6% Web 58.1%  
Neither - CP 18.2% Web 17.6%

The results show that, when asked to make this difficult decision, the majority of respondents choose to put front line officer numbers before keeping their current police stations. This supports the measures put forward by the Chief Constable.

## Changes to local access and different age groups

It is possible for us to look at the data generated by the Citizens' Panel and see how different age groups answered these questions. One notable finding that has quickly emerged is that residents over the age of 65 are more concerned about changes to their police stations than residents in the 18-65 age group:

### **Keeping my current local police station is what matters most to me, even if it means fewer police officers on the street**

	17 - 34	35 - 44	45 - 54	55 - 64	65 - 74	75+
<b>Agree</b>	18.09%	16.95%	17.68%	18.41%	27.73%	35.08%
<b>Disagree</b>	61.74%	66.17%	61.64%	63.05%	55.40%	37.90%

What makes this finding particularly interesting is that when the question is limited to front counters, support remains far more consistent through the age groups:

**Front line policing is what matters most to me. I would support relocating front counters to provide more officers on the beat**

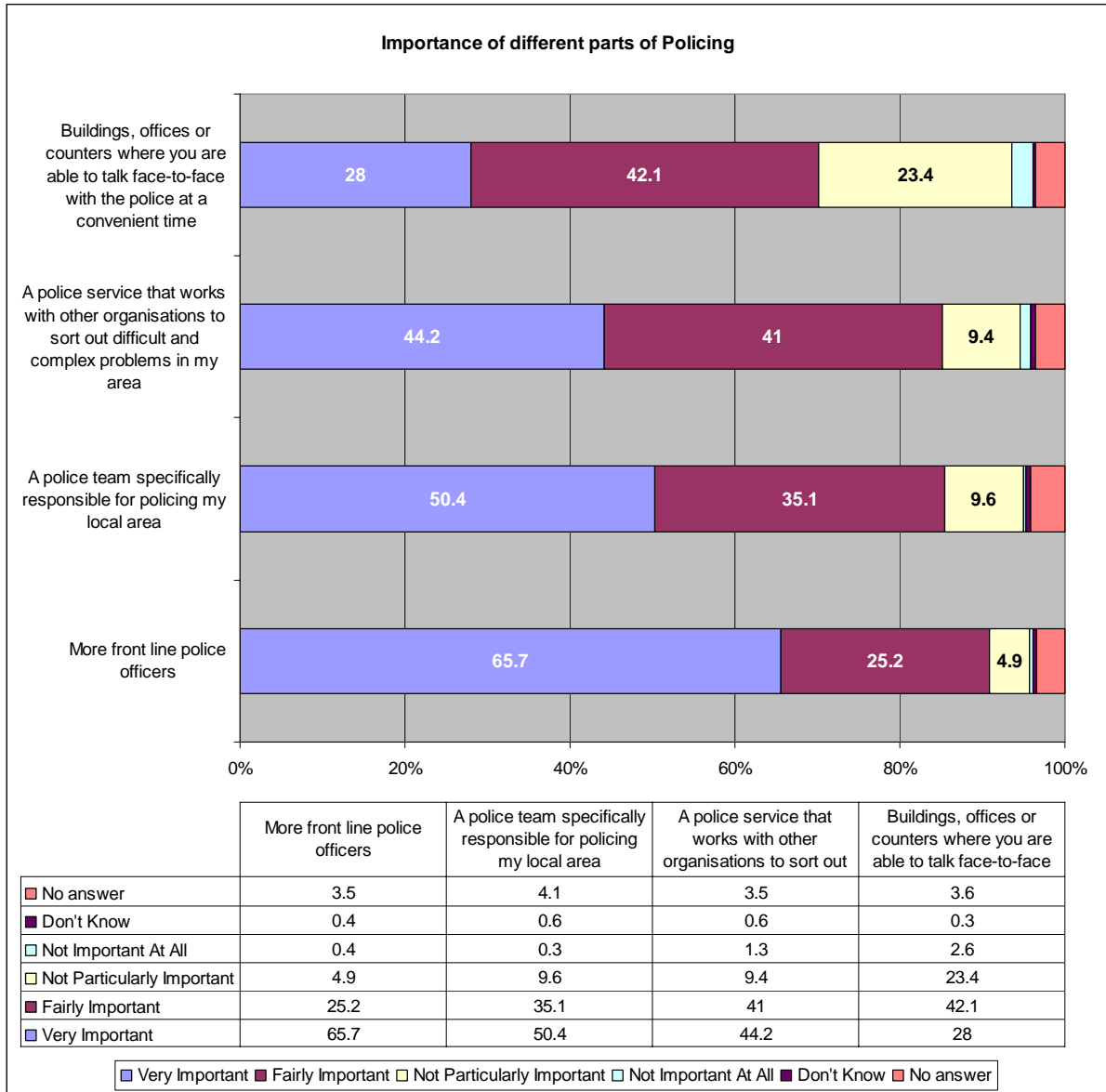
	<b>17 - 34</b>	<b>35 - 44</b>	<b>45 - 54</b>	<b>55 - 64</b>	<b>65 - 74</b>	<b>75+</b>
<b>Agree</b>	81.99%	85.79%	86.58%	89.48%	85.43%	80.55%
<b>Disagree</b>	7.13%	5.36%	5.32%	2.79%	3.10%	2.74%

Evidently there is work to be done to engage with residents over the age of 65 to better understand the reasons for this strong attachment to the police station and to allay any concerns that change may bring about.

In addition, SPA put these questions to a sample of around 70 young residents under the age of 17 at the recent Mock Trials competition. Support for relocating front counters is again strong with 73% of respondents supporting the move. However, 58.7% of respondents felt that they would rather keep their existing police station, even if it meant fewer officers on the beat. It may be insightful to undertake further consultation with this age group and to consider future engagement with Surrey's under-17s to help educate them about the changes and again address any concerns they may have.

## How important are different aspects of the OPR to people?

We asked respondents to tell us the importance to them of four of the aspects of policing closely affected by the changes – officer numbers, neighbourhood policing, partnership working and buildings, offices or counters where it is possible to speak to the police face-to-face.

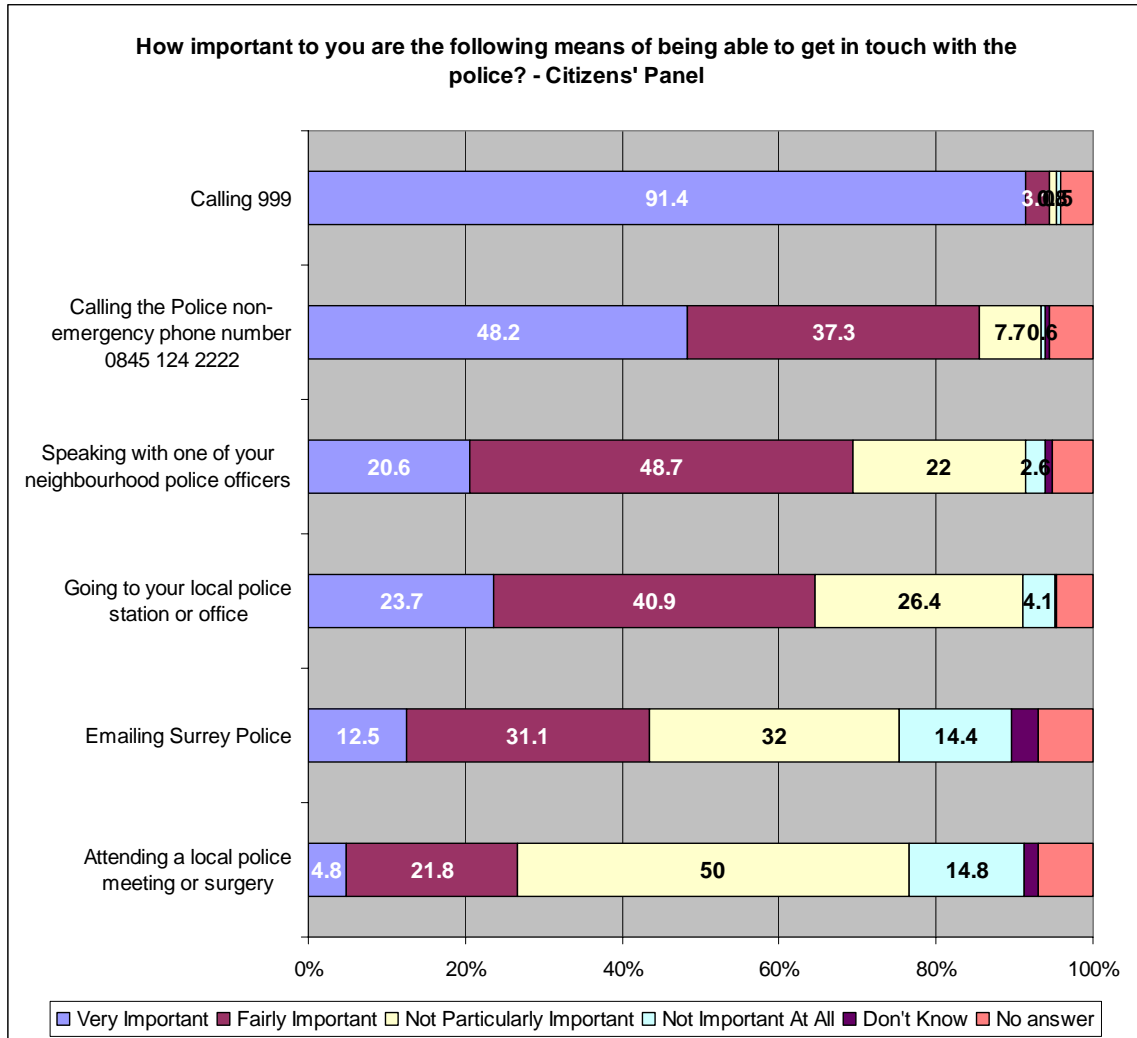


Supporting the responses given to the questions referenced earlier in this paper, having more police officers on the front line is clearly considered to be the most important of the aspects by Citizens' Panel respondents relative to the others. However, the results demonstrate that every aspect is important to the majority of respondents.

The web survey results support these findings. Again, more front line officers is considered to be the most important, with 72.7% of respondents considering this to be very important. As with the Citizens' Panel, web survey respondents consider every aspect ultimately to be important.

## Contacting the Police

Respondents were asked about which means of contacting the police were most important to them.



Unsurprisingly, calling 999 is by far the most important to respondents. The majority of respondents also felt that the non-emergency phone number, speaking with neighbourhood police officers and going to the local police station or office were also important. Slightly more respondents felt that speaking to a neighbourhood officer was important than going to the local police station or office, but more people felt that the local station was very important.

Online respondents shared these views – calling 999 is by far the most important, followed by the single non-emergency number. The next most important option was speaking to neighbourhood officers, followed by visiting the local police station or office.

<b>Online responses %</b>	<b>Important</b>	<b>Not important</b>
Attending a local police meeting or surgery	33.8	66.2
Emailing Surrey Police	59.4	39.2
Going to your local police station or office	61.3	38.6
Speaking with one of your neighbourhood police officers	76.4	23.6
Calling the Police non-emergency phone number 0845 124 2222	93.2	6.8
Calling 999	97.4	1.3

We asked respondents how they would be most likely to contact Surrey Police for non-emergency matters.

	<b>CP</b>	<b>Online</b>
<b>Call the police non-emergency phone number 0845 125 2222</b>	50	52.6
<b>Go to your local police station or office</b>	18.3	18.4
<b>Speak to one of your neighbourhood police officers</b>	6.2	11.8
<b>Email Surrey Police</b>	6.2	11.8
<b>Call 999</b>	2.6	1.3
<b>Don't know</b>	1.8	1.3
<b>Attend a local police meeting or surgery</b>	0.3	2.6
<b>Other</b>	0.3	0.2

The results show that the non-emergency telephone number is the leading method by some distance. In second place is attending a police station - this underlines the importance of providing alternative locations where people can speak face-to-face with police teams.

## Using Police Stations

Looking at police stations and how respondents use their local station, more than 88% of Citizens' Panel respondents agreed that they knew where their local station was. 96% of online respondents knew where their station was.

Reflecting the usage statistics for our police stations, only 5% of Citizens' Panel respondents visited their local police station more than once in the past year. 75% had not visited their local station at all. Respondents to the online survey were more likely to have used their local station, with 27.4% visiting more than once in the past year. Again however, the majority – 54.8% - had not visited their local station.

The most popular reasons given by those who had used their local station were:

<b>To ask for help or advice –</b>	CP 20%	Web 12%
<b>To ask for information –</b>	CP 13%	Web 10%
<b>To report a crime –</b>	CP 17%	Web 5%
<b>To speak to an officer about local issues –</b>	CP 7%	Web 12%
<b>To report, hand in or claim lost property –</b>	CP 15%	Web 3%

## Questions about Police Front Counters

Focusing in further, we asked respondents specifically about the public-facing front counter services in the police station.

Do residents prefer the current locations or different locations?

### **I would prefer to keep front counters in their present locations**

Agree –	CP 32%	Web 38.7%
Disagree –	CP 23%	Web 32%
Don't Mind –	CP 39%	Web 29.3%

### **I would support front counters moving to town centre or high street locations**

Agree –	CP 74%	Web 78.7%
Disagree –	CP 9%	Web 14.6%
Don't Mind –	CP 14%	Web 4%

The results suggest that respondents, both Citizens' Panel and online, whilst not unhappy with the location of their current police front counter service, would favour relocating these services to busier locations like the high street.

## New Police Locations

Would other meeting points be accepted?

### **I would prefer to speak to the police as part of my day-to-day life (eg at the supermarket or shopping centre) than go to a dedicated police front counter**

Agree –	CP 41.8%	Web 44%
Disagree –	CP 25.2%	Web 33.4%
Don't Mind –	CP 29.4%	Web 20%

The results suggest that it is important to continue to provide a dedicated police front counter service, but also that there would be support from a significant number of respondents for alternative meeting points in other locations.

## What do people think about the possible new police locations?

We listed some of the options for new locations raised in the initial communications about the changes and asked respondents to indicate whether or not they would support them:

### **A front counter based in council offices**

Support – CP	42.8%	Web	44%
Oppose – CP	25.8%	Web	28%
Neither - CP	27.5%	Web	28%

### **A front counter based on the high street**

Support – CP	64.1%	Web	59.8%
Oppose – CP	12.8%	Web	19.5%
Neither - CP	19.9%	Web	20.8%

### **Regular police surgeries in local halls**

Support – CP	39%	Web	40.8%
Oppose – CP	14.9%	Web	19.8%
Neither - CP	40.6%	Web	39.5%

### **Regular police surgeries in shopping centres/supermarkets**

Support – CP	40.3%	Web	40%
Oppose – CP	23.7%	Web	25.4%
Neither - CP	30.9%	Web	34.7%

### **Regular police surgeries in local libraries**

Support – CP	38%	Web	38.1%
Oppose – CP	20.2%	Web	26.3%
Neither - CP	36.9%	Web	35.5%

Support outweighs opposition in every case for these possible locations. What is notable is the significant percentage of respondents in the 'neither support nor oppose' category. This would indicate that more work is needed to explain to residents what a police presence in these kinds of places would look like, to allow them to form firmer views.

## **Working in Partnership**

We also raised the subject of partnership working, which is central to the changes put forward in the OPR. We wanted to know what the public thought about Surrey Police working with partner agencies and what should drive this partnership work

### **I expect Surrey Police to work with partners to...**

#### **Solve local problems**

Agree -	CP 93.3%	Web	96%
Disagree -	CP 0.9%	Web	4%
Neither -	CP 2.8%	Web	0%

### **Save money**

Agree -	CP 64%	Web 77.3%
Disagree -	CP 8%	Web 23.7%
Neither -	CP 23.7%	Web 16%

### **Make services easier for the public to access**

Agree -	CP 82.7%	Web 82.9%
Disagree -	CP 2.6%	Web 10.5%
Neither -	CP 11.2%	Web 6.6%

Clearly there is strong support for Surrey Police working in partnership with other agencies to achieve all of the above aims. However, it is solving local problems that matters most to respondents, which would support moves to co-locate Neighbourhood Policing Teams with their council colleagues to better co-ordinate their response to complex local issues.

## **Conclusions**

- The majority of respondents support changes to police stations and police front counters if it means more police officers on the beat
- Officers on the beat are the most important aspect of policing for respondents
- Telephone is the most important method of contacting Surrey Police for the majority of respondents. Speaking to local officers and attending a local police station or office are also important to a majority.
- The majority of respondents are aware of the location of their current police station, but do not visit regularly.
- There is appetite for new and different police locations in addition to front counters
- Respondents are receptive to the suggested different locations for accessing the police, but a large number are 'on the fence' which suggests a need for clear briefing on what a police presence in different settings might look like.
- Respondents expect Surrey Police to work with partners, with solving local problems the most popular reason for doing so
- Respondents over the age of 65 or under the age of 17 are more concerned about the changes to police buildings. Further work to understand these concerns and alleviate them would be advisable.

These findings suggest that Surrey Police is broadly on the right track in difficult financial times by making changes and reallocating resources to prioritise front line strength. They also suggest that working with partners and offering a range of different opportunities for local access to police teams are supported by the public.