

Information relating to Custody and Estates, as requested by PCC candidate

1. Why has it taken so long to start briefing local members if as you say in your letter you have been working on options for several years?

Different options have been scoped for the purpose of providing a feasible, sustainable and affordable custody solution, even prior to the receipt of the HMICFRS report. That work led to the conclusion that some options were not affordable, included the renovation of an existing police station with some custody units, nor would those options deliver the required amount of cells, or achieve the standards that are required to be met, as set out by the Home Office, and which formed the basis for HMICFRS custody themed inspection that took place last year.

Earlier this year, however, a land plot became available that did provide an opportunity, and which delivered all the requisite features when subjected to all the above-mentioned tests of affordability, feasibility, and sustainability. The Police Reform & Social Responsibility Act 2011 sets out that all policing assets belong to Police & Crime Commissioners, and thus it is their responsibility to make decisions on use of assets. As such, it was appropriate to scrutinise that opportunity in order to be satisfied that this represented the best use of public monies and that it would enable the policing operations to be as effective and efficient as possible. This was concluded in July 2020, and engagement then commenced with the Police & Crime Panel, local MPs and council leaders.

2. MP's were briefed in July why were local members not afforded the same opportunity?

This is an issue of scheduling according to availability, rather than intention. Not all MPs were briefed in July, and indeed some councillors were briefed prior to MPs. In order to accelerate mass communications to all elected individuals, however, a letter was sent by the PCVC to all elected individuals in County Durham and Darlington in early October 2020.

3. What are the contingency plans if the planning application is rejected or an appeal is made?

The options appraisal showed that there are currently no viable alternatives or contingency plans to the custody solutions presently being pursued, hence why the centralised option is being pursued. There is no secondary site which has been identified as being suitable for a custody build. However, it is prudent to expect that the planning application could be rejected as well as approved. If this were to occur, the OPCVC and Force would have to re-examine options, including considering the relative strength of any potential appeal, and re-commencing the scoping work around affordability, sustainability and operational feasibility of possible solutions. This would necessarily need to include seeking alternative land as potential development

sites, because of the limiting factors, above described, that exist in respect of refurbishment of current custody facilities.

4. Will the new custody suite involve PFI arrangements?

No. The proposed centralised custody suite is based on the OPCVC purchasing a 999-year ground lease on which it is hoped that the facility will be built. The procurement for construction of the building is most likely to involve standard industry tendering procedures. PFI is not being considered.

5. How has the annual £400K saving been calculated and what assumptions are being made where will savings be invested/directed to?

Whilst precise details need to be calculated it is expected that the new facility will save between £250k-£300k on salaries with the remainder being saved on overtime, ICT costs and reductions in the cost of healthcare provision for detainees who are brought into custody. Savings can either be redirected to the front line in terms of officer time or they can be 'cashed in' to contribute to any future budgetary pressures.

6. Are Durham planning to use a private company apart from existing arrangements to provide any staff in the custody suite?

We can confirm that there are no plans by Durham Constabulary to use a private company for the staffing of the custody suite, though it should be noted that it is anticipated that ancillary services will be continue to be provided by other public sector partner agencies, such as Tees, Esk & Wear Valley NHS Trust for the liaison and diversion service, and those commissioned by NHS England for the purposes of providing health care and medical examinations to detainees.

It should also be noted that some ancillary custody services are commissioned and contracted by the Home Office, for instance, prisoner transport, which is presently delivered by GeoAmey.

7. Who estimated the cost of renovating the 4 existing custody suites and how much was this estimated to be?

The estimated cost of the renovating the existing four suites was based upon a comprehensive feasibility study that was undertaken to examine the viability of redeveloping an existing police station with some custody cells into a modern custody suite. Contemporaneous costings were used at the time. That exercise was subsequently peer reviewed in order to ensure it represented a robust appraisal. Two aspects made that option unviable: the first was that the cost of redeveloping an existing facility was found to be a third higher than it would cost to build an offsite new facility; and, secondly, it was also determined that extensive refurbishment of an existing custody suite could not achieve the requisite Home Office custody compliance standards.

8. Who has implied that the existing custody suite cannot achieve home office standards?

This is the professional view of the Estates staff within the Force, and Estates staff are Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) qualified. Even for Force and OPCVC staff who are not qualified Estate professionals but possess a basic understanding of HO requirements, it is evident the existing custody facilities cannot be retrofitted to achieve HO compliance, As such, public funds have not been used to pay for external second opinions, other than for the feasibility study that was carried out at Spennymoor. While this could be done, it would take several months to complete, involve substantial cost and would increase the existing risk that is presently being managed by the Force and OPCVC.

It should also be noted that the Force are recommended to be compliant with Home Office standards in the operation of custody facilities, and the lack of compliance was picked up in the HMICFRS report on custody, in July 2019, which can be found here:

<https://www.justiceinspectrates.gov.uk/hmiprisons/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2019/10/Durham-police-Web-2019.pdf>

Since July 2019, the Home Office standards have been updated and the new September 2019 guidelines present wider recommendations in relation to equality, security, privacy and dignity.

9. What would be the increased costs of delaying the decision until after the election?

It is very feasible that the cost of delaying the scheme would result in the loss of the existing opportunity to acquire the preferred site. Delay is also likely to result in inflation increasing the building cost, and a delay in realising efficiency savings. In addition, as is the practice with proposals that represent major projects in respect of delivery, impact and spend, we have contracted a multi-disciplined design team consultancy to assist with progressing the scheme. Delay in the progress of this initiative would effectively mean standing down that service, thus the associated expenditure would become largely abortive and loss of continuity may occur if the project is resurrected at a later date.

10. 'What appears to be a suitable location' – who have you spoken to about its suitability?

The Force have informed the location site, based on its operational requirements and upon additional factors, including ecological suitability, avoidance of flood plains, travelling time, proximity to major arterial roads, and avoidance of proximity to major residential areas.

The location was selected as follows:

- Demand analysis by Custody Management who subsequently provided a 'search corridor' plan;
- This search corridor was taken to the local planning authority in the first instance, to identify potential locations that would be suitable for the use in principle;
- A site search was undertaken of available sites on the local market; and,
- The proposed site was selected from a small shortlist as having best connection to local road networks, public transport routes, being central to the county, distant from residential use and not expensive prime real estate.

11. What is the planned use of the 4 custody suites if they are redundant?

The current custody suites are located in busy police stations, which house many other officers, staff, teams and functions. The custody suite areas within these stations will be 'mothballed' as they cannot be demolished due to their location. Moving custody officers and staff out of those existing sites will have a very minimal impact on overall officer and staffing levels in the stations.

12. How many staff will be required to work at the proposed custody suite?

It is expected that there will be approximately 20 Sergeants will be needed to run the new custody suite. It is also proposed that a number of other officers will be relocated as their units directly link to the custody function, including Prisoner Handling Team, Offender Management, some CID and Safeguarding. Staff who will be relocated, if approved, include Crime Scene Investigation and Property teams. Work is ongoing to determine the precise staffing needs in terms of Custody Sergeants and Detention Officers, but a reliable working assumption is that the new facility will require fewer resources to run.

13. How will Durham avoid the problems encountered by Cleveland 50 cell custody suite such as congestion, lack of privacy etc?

We have regular contact with colleagues in Cleveland and are not aware that is an issue. We have visited other sites where this wasn't an issue, for instance, Forth Banks and North Tyneside. The new Home Office custody guidance provides better privacy than our existing sites, which can be better illustrated through the site visits that have been offered.

14. On the basis of the 10,950 through-put of detainees, how much more travel will be involved getting them to Durham Gate?

This is difficult to estimate as it will depend upon the point of arrest which may vary over time. For some detainees travelling time will be reduced. It has been stressed in presentations that additional travelling time will be offset by quicker handover times. It should also be noted that due to ICT software and

hardware upgrades, policing in Durham is delivered in a modern agile way, that does not require officers to return to stations.

15. Who transports detainees to magistrates' court currently, and will this proposal save money?

GeoAmey are presently contracted by the Home Office to transport detainees to court, thus transport has not been factored into the predicted savings. It should be noted that GeoAmey's local base is in another part of the same estate where the new facility is proposed.

16. Can you explain the assurances given that the proposed custody provision will not 'in any way' impact on where officers are currently based or patrol and neither will it negatively impact on the continued provision of the neighbourhood policing model, particularly in areas like Peterlee.

It has previously been expressed that travel times for some officers will increase, but we are confident that this would be offset by a quicker handover process. It is also important to note that the Force is to receive additional police officers over the next two years who will be allocated to response policing, which will improve levels of visibility in communities. As mentioned, the Force has invested in new technology which enables officers to remain visible for longer and spend less time in stations.

17. What will happen to Consett and Spennymoor contingency suites?

These will remain – there are no plans to alter these provisions.

18. What will be the impact on reserves after the £21M has been spent?

The amount that has been estimated includes a contingency provision, which is normal practice with major developments. If the proposal does receive approval, the development spend will deplete the vast majority of reserves, though a series of earmarked reserves and a working balance will be maintained, as required by External Audit.