



John Apter, chair of Hampshire Police Federation

## Closing the doors on the public

Hampshire Constabulary recently announced that of their 47 police stations across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, 18 will be sold off to help achieve a £50m budget saving. This figure does not include the closure of other Hampshire Constabulary-owned buildings.

The chief constable has made it clear that before the stations are sold off the safer neighbourhood teams will be relocated in the same area but sharing facilities with the fire service, schools, libraries or supermarkets. I have always maintained that you don't need a police station on every high street to provide a good service, but to lose these buildings is a sad indictment of the unfair cuts forced upon us by a government who don't seem to care of the consequences.

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Once our police stations are gone they are gone forever. While we accept savings need to be made it is the public who will suffer, especially the more vulnerable or those who live in rural areas. Yes this is an emotional argument, but policing has evolved over many years adapting to what the public want. Police officers are sad that their stations are being shut down, but understand the financial mess is not of the chief constable's making. We must ensure whatever changes are made do not negatively impact on those we serve, and if they do then be honest about it.

At the same time of announcing police station closures Hampshire Constabulary unveiled plans to modernise their custody provision across the two counties. This will see four new custody suites built to support three existing suites. Fortunately the chief constable is not entering into a private financial initiative with a profit-hungry business. They will be owned and run by the Constabulary, funded by the sale of other police estate.

Well-designed and well-managed custody is a must if we are to make the best use of a reducing workforce. Although the plans will not see all the custody suites up and running for a few more years we have to see this as a positive, we don't get many of those at the moment.

I hear some chief constables proclaiming to the Home Office that they can still provide an excellent service despite 20 percent cuts. I would ask those leaders to look their public in the eye and say the same to them.

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The Federation has always accepted that the service should take its fair share of pain, but the way the police service has been treated has made it feel like a personal attack. Cops are loyal servants to the Crown, they and the public deserve better.