



# Re-inventing the police station

Police–public relations, reassurance and the future of the Police Estate

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with **TOM HOUSTON**

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## Reinventing the police station

*'It's just a cop shop. Their business is to bang people up. You don't go there unless you have to.'*

*'I think they've designed it on purpose to be as impersonal as possible. It's not a friendly place.'*

*'The community aspect is way down their list of priorities, I would imagine.'*

*'They're not particularly user-friendly buildings.'*

*'A lot of police stations are intimidating.'*

*'I felt like I was being punished as well.'*

*'Just like fire stations have open days which bring them into contact with the public, the police could do themselves a great service by taking people behind the scenes and showing them how things are run.'*

*'Who goes into the foyer of a police station? . . . Very few people. Whatever message the police have, has to be disseminated through out the community.'*

*'It's just a place really. Who wants to have lunch outside a police station? It's not the kind of place you want to go and sit down, is it? I definitely wouldn't. I walk past it as fast as I can.'*

Comments by members of the public in ippr's video documentary  
*Police Stations: The View From Outside*, see page 18 for details.

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## Executive summary

With the police estate undergoing dramatic change, this report examines the ways police buildings shape people's confidence in the police, their fear of crime and sense of security, and identifies means of raising standards in the design and management of the police estate.

The police have a proud design history, but they have failed, recently, to build on it. All too often police facilities send off the wrong messages about the attitudes and working of the police. We argue that there needs to be something close to a revolution in the way the police and the Home Office approach police buildings – that they have to become much more sensitive to the contribution the estate can make to strengthening relations between the police and citizens, and reassuring the public.

### The police and their public

Public Services depend on a trusting cooperative public for their success. This is true of policing - perhaps particularly true. Public attitudes towards the police are complex. While the police remain one of the most trusted of public services, they cannot afford to be complacent. Trust in the police has fallen in recent years across all age groups and all classes.

People will trust the police and work with them in the way the police need, only if they are seen to be fair and accountable, to listen and respond to people, and learn from their mistakes. The public place a particular value on a police service that is 'personable' – they expect the police to be sensitive, adaptable, and efficient in their dealings with the public.

But the police don't only need to work to promote trust and co-operation, they also need to ensure that the public feel safe and reassured. Here too, the way the police interact with the public is crucial. It is now widely agreed that promoting a visible public presence on the part of the police reduces fear of crime and feelings of insecurity, and that this is a legitimate object of police activity.

The government and the police have introduced, or are proposing to introduce a large body of reforms – giving local communities greater say over the way they are policed, making police authorities more democratic, promoting the use of neighbourhood wardens or community officers – aimed at making the police more accountable, and strengthening relations between the police and the people they are meant to serve. Nevertheless the contribution that the police estate could make to improving police-public relations and promoting reassurance has not been properly recognised.

### The role of the police station

While the design and management of the police estate won't alone transform confidence in the police, well designed, public minded police stations can enhance the image of the police among victims and public. It can also decrease feelings of vulnerability among the public at large.

Little research has been done into public use of police stations but it is clear that the public still use police stations for a wide variety of purposes, including reporting serious crimes. It is estimated that one in three people visit a police station every year.

The familiar town centre police station was designed to make the police force both visible and legible. It was an effective symbol of security and public order. The police have largely failed to build on this legacy. A series of reports and our own investigations suggest that estate remains a low priority for most forces and that design quality of new buildings is generally poor.

This lack of concern with the design and management of the police estate is reflected in the public experience of many police stations which are often intimidating, or alienating places to visit. Virtually none provide space for public meetings or exhibitions and very few make the most of the admittedly limited aspects to them which might appeal to the public.

We recognise that traditional police station is increasingly out of date – many have closed and more will be so in the future. A wide range of factors bear on the future of the estate. Some of these – new security threats, growth of police specialisation – pose a challenge to the goal of improving relations between police and public. Others, like a greater focus on communities, offer new opportunities. Our point however, is not to endorse or object to the developments shaping the police estate but to argue that the estate will continue to play an important role in effecting public confidence in the police and that great care needs to be given to the design and management of all police buildings.

# Introduction

Our police have a proud design history. Like the British Bobby's distinctive hat, truncheon and tunic, the blue lamp outside every police station was once an internationally recognised symbol of a safe, professionally policed public realm. Those responsible for the police estate, however (first and foremost the UK's 52 police forces and the Home Office) have not always built on this legacy. There are some admirable exceptions, but police stations tend to be run down, out of date or unwelcoming. New developments are often ill-thought-out or positively alienating. All too often police facilities send out the wrong messages about the attitudes and working practices of the police.

Yet the police depend crucially on good relations with the public for their success. With the police estate undergoing dramatic change, this report examines the ways police buildings shape people's confidence in the police, their fear of crime and sense of security, and identified means of raising standards in the design and management of the police estate.

We argue, in short, that there needs to be something close to a revolution in the way the police and the Home Office approach police buildings: that they have to become much more sensitive to the contribution they can make to strengthening relations between the police and citizens and reassuring the public. And we make a number of recommendations directed toward the Home Office and the police, as to how they might improve the development and design of the police estate.

It should be stressed at the outset that we appreciate that well designed police stations will have many benefits beyond improving confidence in the police – good design can save on running costs, improve a building's flexibility, and promote the productivity, health and well-being of all those who work in them (CABE 2002). If we have focused here exclusively on the how police buildings shape police-public relations, this is only because this seemed to us a particularly important, and rather neglected issue – and because we did not have the resources to look at everything.

## Elements of the Project

This report represents the culmination of a four month ippr project and draws on the following elements from the project:

- a desk-based review of research relating to trends in policing, factors bearing on police–public relations and developments in the police estate;
- desk-based research into best practice in design and management of police building and public buildings more generally;
- face-to-face interviews with key experts and stakeholders including police officers, Home Office civil servants, and designers;
- visits to police stations;
- the production of a video documentary *Police Stations: the View from Outside* about public perceptions of police stations (this video is available from ippr, see page 18);
- an expert seminar, which included contributions from Professor Mike Hough, (Institute for Criminal Policy Research, Kings College, London) John Jenkins, (Partner, Haverstock Architects) and Peter Neyroud, (Chief Constable, Thames Valley Police);
- a day long conference, held at CABE, which was addressed by, among others, Hazel Blears, (Home Office Minister), and Chris Fox (President, Association of Chief Police Constables), and Joanna Averley (Head of Enabling, CABE).

## Acknowledgements

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## About the Authors

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# 1. The police and their public

This project explores the way in which the deployment, design and management of the police estate shapes relations between the police and the public and makes recommendations as to how standards in this area can be promoted. As a first step, this background chapter looks at some current developments in policing, and reviews factors known to shape public perceptions of the police, and of crime and disorder.

As is widely recognised, the public services depend on a trusting, cooperative public for their success. Doctors need patients willing to turn up to appointments, follow medical advice, and accept, say, waiting for non-urgent operations. Schools need parents willing to send their children to school, help them with their homework and join parent teacher associations and governing bodies. This is true also of policing, perhaps especially true. Without victims willing to report crimes, witnesses agreeing to testify in court, and citizens ready to serve on juries, to take a few examples, their task would be impossible (Crawford 2001, Neyroud 2001). The belief that police are ineffective, unresponsive or prejudiced, in turn, tends to spur cynicism and disengagement: 'As the British Crime Surveys shows, contacting the police to report a crime is a choice – fewer than half of their victim respondents inform the police about the crime that happened to them' (OPSR 2003: 1).

It follows that public services in general and the police in particular, have to be sensitive to the way they relate to the public. Indeed, a major concern of public service must be to keep the public on side. As MORI has put it:

*Trust can impact on the way the public engage with public organisations. For example, lower trust appears to cause people to lose confidence in services, reduce contact with them, and make them less likely to engage positively in helping and planning services. In particular those who distrust the police are much less likely to give evidence or help the police in their inquiries. (MORI 2003b: p.4.)*

## Trust in the police

How well are the police doing in winning the trust of the British people, and engaging them in the police service?

The picture is a complicated one. The police – along with doctors, teachers, and soldiers – belong to a select group of public servants held in very high regard. Moreover, they are the most trusted of all the services and institutions that make-up the criminal justice system (British Crime Survey 1998).

However, they are the least trusted of the major health and emergency services – the ambulance service, fire service, NHS hospitals and GPs all do better (People's Panel Wave 5). More worryingly, trust in the police has declined in recent years, across all age groups and for men and women – and in a way which has not been paralleled for most other professions. The proportion of people expressing confidence in the police has fallen from just over 90 per cent in 1982 to around 75 per cent in 2001/2. The proportion saying that their local police do a very good job has fallen from 43 per cent in 1982 to 14 per cent in 2001/2. Satisfaction among victims of crime (a group with whom we should be particularly concerned) has followed a similar pattern: it is down from 68 per cent in 1984 to 58 per cent in 2001/2 (Flood-Page and Taylor 2003).

And where most people's estimation for doctors and teachers goes up after having had an encounter with them, the opposite is true for the police. One poll shows that respondents who had been a victim of crime in the last year rated their local police lower than non-victims: 67 per cent of victims said that their local police do a very or fairly good job, compared to 78 per cent of those who had not been a victim of crime. (MORI 2003a: 6-7).

Clearly, the police can't afford to be complacent.

### Visiting a typical police station

The low priority accorded to the design of the police estate is all too obvious from a visit to almost any police station. True, victims of rape and other violent crimes are now often provided with special rooms or 'havens', outside police stations, where they can be interviewed and supported and examined. But at a time when people increasingly want personal and responsive services, police stations tend to remain intimidating or alienating places. Virtually none provide space for public meetings or exhibitions and very few make the most of the admittedly limited aspects to them that might appeal to the public: horses and kennels remain hidden away, officers are provided with separate entrances, and their offices are removed from public view.

The reception area of the great majority police stations - the only public space at all in most of them - could scarcely be less hospitable. They generally take the form of a small boxed room, a small fraction of the over-all police building, which offer no insight into the working of the police station or the larger police force. Seating is often inadequate; even where there is enough of it; it takes the form of metal benches fastened to the floor. Members of staff are separated from the public by one or sometimes two bullet-proof glass screens. And this is usually the only public space at all in what is frequently a massive and illegible building.

Ironically, the atmosphere in the custody areas of police stations tends to be friendlier than in the public reception area, with police milling about both side of the custody counter, and chatting to each other and to detainees, their lawyers and others passing through.

### What shapes trust in the police?

There is a growing body of evidence about the factors that shape confidence in public services. It seems that, the public have quite reasonable expectations of public services. They don't expect doctors to cure every illness, teachers to achieve to results for every child or police officers to eradicate all crime.

The public want their public service professionals to:

- be publicly accountable;
- be honest and open about mistakes;
- be fair and unprejudiced;
- listen and respond to views of service users and public; and
- treat people well.

MORI and the Audit Commission have put a particular emphasis on the importance of public organisations being 'personable' in the way they deliver services and communicate. 'This encompasses the information they provide, the visibility of services, and direct contact with service users (for example friendliness and helpfulness)' (MORI 2003a: 6).

When it comes to the police, researchers have found that while the public think the police have relatively high quality leaders, and are satisfied that they are controlled by an independent body, they complain that they are poor at providing information about their services, and fail to treat people

equally irrespective of race, religion or colour (Mori 2003b:10). (This complaint is particularly pronounced among people from black and minority ethnic groups (Mori 2003a: 24–26)). And findings show that people’s confidence in the police is driven, to a significant degree, by the extent to which they feel they are well treated by the police officers when they encounter them – that is by the extent to which they judge the police to have been fair, and to have taken their concerns seriously. Indeed, surveys of public-initiated contact with the police (as distinct from police-initiated contact with the public) shows that the way people feel they were treated by the police has as much, if not greater, impact on their overall satisfaction with the service than how quickly the police respond to the initial call for both non-emergency and emergency (999) calls. Those who are very dissatisfied with their encounter, moreover, clearly report that it is the way that they were treated that is the main driver of dissatisfaction (Office for Public Service Reform 2003: 11).

This suggests that if the police want to win and keep the confidence of service users, they have to ensure that they are seen to treat the public well, listen to them, engage with them and take their concerns seriously.

## Reassurance?

We have been examining the factors that drive trust and, indirectly, satisfaction in public services in general and the police in particular, and highlighting the importance the public attach to accessibility and responsiveness. But the police don’t only need to work to promote trust and co-operation; they also need to ensure that the public feel safe and reassured. Indeed, in a significant development in policing strategy, the Home Office and the police themselves have come to place a new emphasis on public reassurance as a proper and important aim of policing [Povey 2001]. Here too, the way the police interact with the public is crucial.

Despite falling levels of most crimes, research shows that the public feels increasingly insecure about their safety and well-being within their home and in public spaces. The police, it is true, cannot control all the factors that drive people’s sense of security. Alarmist reporting in the media, for instance, along with negative campaigning of opposition politicians, works to exacerbate public fears about crime and disorder. Graffiti, litter, anonymous, run-down and unattended public spaces, all contribute to people’s feelings of vulnerability. At the same time, a well established body of evidence shows that the public wants the police to maintain a high level of public visibility and accessibility – most obviously by patrolling the streets on foot, horse-back or bicycle – and that high levels of visibility *do* make citizens feel safer and more secure (Povey 2001).

As Sir Keith Povey argued in his influential Home Office report *Open All Hours*, it isn’t enough to promote visibility as the first aim of policing. First, the nature and quality of the presence matters. As one Assistant Chief Constable quoted by Povey succinctly put it:

*A police officer in uniform on an unhurried foot patrol suggests all is well with the world. However, a marked police vehicle with blue light and sirens activated sends a different message. This is currently visible policing but we would suggest it is far from reassuring (Povey 2001: p.23).*

It is important to ensure, in other words, that the police presence is reassuring rather than disturbing or alienating.

Second, the police have to continue to focus on what the police themselves tend to see as their primary or ‘real’ task – that of deterring crime, apprehending criminals and ensuring their conviction. It is naïve to think that placing every Bobby on a street corner would be an effective use of police forces. The police have to make difficult strategic choices about how best to allocate resources between the many conflicting demands made on them. But at least part of the trick is to ensure that even as they go about doing their other work, they do so in a way which ensures that they maintain a high and reassuring public profile and engage with as many citizens as possible, in as personable a way as possible. As Sir Keith Povey himself stated it, ‘continued success in reducing crime and disorder, within the context of a visible, accessible and community-focused policing style, will deliver enhanced public reassurance’ (Povey 2001: p.1).

## **Trust, confidence and the police estate**

As this chapter has indicated, police–public relations are crucial to determining the effectiveness of the police service. People will trust the police and work with them in the way the police need, if and only if they are seen to be fair, independent, and accountable, to listen and respond to people, and learn from their mistakes. And high levels of police visibility and good contacts between the police and the public can help in the battle to diminish the fear of crime and to some extent, crime itself.

All this is widely recognised. The government and the police have introduced or are proposing to introduce a large body of reforms – giving local communities greater say over the way they are policed, making police authorities more democratic, promoting the use of neighborhood wardens or community officers – aimed at making the police more accountable, and strengthening relations between the police and the people they are meant to serve (Home Office 2004a, 2004b).

At the same time, the government, and associated agencies like CABI, have been emphasising the importance of investing in good public buildings and not just on the grounds that well designed buildings can save on energy, personnel and other costs, but because they promote confidence in public services and the public realm more generally and re-enforce a sense of shared identity (CABI 2002, Rogers 2004b).

Nevertheless, as we argue in the next chapter, the contribution that the police estate could make to improving police–public relations and promoting reassurance has not been properly recognised.

### **Learning from other services**

#### **NHS ‘A&E Patient Experience Champion’**

The NHS has an ‘A&E Patient Experience Champion’, whose role is to improve patient’s visits to A&E, and whose work is documented with progress reports, and who has assisted A&E departments nationwide. A&E departments shares some conditions with police station front offices; both need to offer 24-hour public access and both have to deal with the varied needs of a broad mix of individuals. Jonathan Asbridge, the present Patient Experience Champion commented that improvements to the A&E departments were often just ‘as simple as good lighting, comfy seats and a good standard of cleanliness that can help people feel more relaxed and positive about the care they receive’. But more imaginative changes - the introduction of plants, moveable seating, clearer displays of information, and steps to make the A&E process more legible, have all had proven benefits.

#### **Schools for the Future**

Like most police buildings, most schools are run-down and out of date. Determined to raise the lackluster standard of most school design, the DFES has commissioned eleven leading architects to develop ‘exemplar designs’ for schools of the future. The designs are intended to ‘develop a shared vision of what are ‘schools for the future’; create benchmarks for well designed schools; push forward the boundaries of innovation and inspiration; support the delivery of Building Schools for the Future; and encourage industry to develop new ways of delivering school buildings’. The exemplars received a huge amount of publicity and have become reference points for many new developments.

Source: [www.bsf.gov.uk/bsf/exemplars\\_secondary.htm](http://www.bsf.gov.uk/bsf/exemplars_secondary.htm)

## 2. The role of the police station

In the last chapter, we highlighted factors known to promote public confidence in the police and alleviate the fear of crime and disorder. It would be foolish to suggest that the way police buildings are positioned, designed and managed is a single key to maintaining trust in the police or boosting people's sense of security. Nevertheless we argue that an imaginative up-to-date police estate has an important, and much neglected, contribution to make to improving public confidence in the police and alleviating the fear of crime. Or as Hazel Blears has put it: 'Police stations, their physical appearance and approachability, often act as signals within the community' (Blears 2004).

It seems obvious for instance, that a victim's sense of the extent to which the police are 'personable' – a crucial driver of confidence in the police – will be shaped by their experience of visiting a police station. Likewise the public's sense of the extent to which the police are an open and accountable force is likely to be influenced by the way police stations look and feel both outside and in (whether they appear more like prisons, than libraries, say, or armories than schools) and by the sort of provision they make for the communication of information to the public or the hosting of public meetings – to the extent to which they are open, civic-minded places.

Again, decisions about the placing or management of a police station can influence people's feelings of vulnerability. A local police station, open 24 hours a day, or even a modest high street 'cop shop', can offer a reassuring sense of security, even if in practice, the public uses it relatively little. A touring or mobile station can do the same.

Indeed well designed, long lasting police stations can do much more than inspire trust in the police; they can work, like all good public buildings, to embody and sustain the values of the public realm: values of democracy, citizenship and public service. Public buildings have a vital role to play in fostering a sense of belonging to unique and rooted civic community enduring through time (Rogers 2004a and 2004b).

### Easy wins:

- make stables and kennels accessible;
- introduce well designed police boxes or Kobans;
- hold police station open days;
- provide information in reception areas;
- create informal atmosphere in reception areas with historical artifacts and other displays;
- provide computer terminals in reception areas, offering access to police and other public services;
- provide space for public meetings;
- experiment with small crime and safety museums and 'exploratories' in police stations, providing information about crime trends and approaches to crime reduction.

### Public use of police stations

There appears to be very little research into public use of police stations. Nevertheless, it is clear that they remains a vital point of interface between the police and the public. While more than eight out of ten people who contact the police do so by phone (84 per cent), seven per cent contact the police by way of a visit to the police station, making this the second most popular means of contact (Office for

Public Service Reform, 2003: 8). All-in-all it has been estimated that around one in five adults visits a police station each year and that a third of adults visited a station in the last three years (Hough 2004, based in part on Fitzgerald *et al.* 2002).

The majority of people who contact the police (65 per cent) do so to report a crime, and it seems likely that a majority of people contact the police by calling at a police station do so for the same purpose (Office of Public Service Reform 2003: p.7). There is reason to believe, moreover, that people who approach the police in this way are often particularly vulnerable or victims of particularly serious crimes. Professor Peter Waddington has suggested, for instance, that when victims of domestic violence, sexual abuse, racial harassment, or bullying reach breaking point and decide to turn to the police, they typically report to a police station, rather than pick up the phone (private communication with the authors). A recent national analysis of robbery showed that 45 per cent of people reported a robbery via a 999 call but a high 28 per cent did it at a police station. The use of police stations moreover was higher still among victims of robbery who were unemployed (56 per cent, compared to 28 per cent who rang 999) (Smith 2002).

But of course people do not just go to police stations to report crimes. More than half of arrests take place in pre-arranged meetings in police stations. Others come to submit driving licenses, take part in identity parades, ask for directions, report missing persons or lost property, inquire about associates who have been arrested and placed in the cells, complain about anti-social neighbours, report being a witness to a crime or alert the police to behavior they deem suspicious. The British Crime Survey found that between one and two per cent of people who contact the police do so for a 'social chat' (Home Office, 2003).

And as already suggested, a police station can provide a comforting presence for local people in general, whether they use it or not. They remain, in the words of the Audit Commission report *Action Stations* 'a visible form of reassurance to the public'. They rank second only to the sight of the Bobby on the beat as a symbol of order (Audit Commission 1999: 100). This is why, as Hazel Blears has pointed out, the closing of a police station invariably provokes public outcry (Blears 2004).

### **Kobans and Chuzaisho: learning lessons from Japan**

The Japanese police have tended to attach a greater priority to visibility and reassurance than their British counterparts. This is reflected in the widespread distribution of urban *Kobans* or police boxes and *Chuzaishos*, rural police sub-stations. *Kobans* are usually manned 24 hours a day, and are staffed by rotating teams of two or three community officers who use them as a basis for foot patrols. Community officers are expected to visit every home on their beat twice a year. Sometimes housed amid a row of shops or public building (school or library), they are more often small independent structures with a reception area and back office. They tend to be well designed - a few are strikingly modern - and provide a popular interface with the local police.

*Chuzaishos* house a police office in the front, and family accommodation to the rear, and are relatively cheap to run. Ironically, both types of building were only introduced into Japan after Second World War, and while the *Chuzaisho* resemble old style British rural police stations, the *Koban* is actually influenced by the traditional British police box.

### **The condition of the estate**

The police have a proud design history. The Victorians and Edwardians, in particular, great builders of public institutions, understood the important role that the estate plays in shaping perceptions and relations, and invested in it accordingly. The familiar town centre police station, housing reception area and front desks, offices, cells, exercise yard, and stables (and often sharing a site with the fire station or local court), reflected, in built form, the varied responsibilities of the British police service, and helped make it both visible and legible. At their best, as in Woodhouse, Willoughby and Langham's London Road Station in Manchester, these buildings were fine works of architecture. But

even the standard example, with its solid brick façade, formal entrance, open front desk and blue lamp, worked as a readable, reassuring, symbol of security and public order. Along with the British Bobby's truncheon, tunic and coned hat, it was a world-recognised icon – an exemplary piece of branding.

As a general rule, however, the police have failed to build on this legacy. The *Action Stations* report found five years ago that:

- an increasing number of stations were outdated and unable to cope with modern technology;
- police buildings were worth 2.6 billion and cost £170 million a year to run, but their management and maintenance had been neglected;
- forty per cent of forces had not reviewed their buildings to assess how well they meet operation needs;
- one fifth of police buildings were more than 70 years old, while a history of under-investment had left every force with a sizeable back-log of repairs.

More recently the Office for Public Service Reform (Office for Public Service Reform 2003: 5), summarising a series of interviews and focus groups with a wide variety of police staff, identified a number of barriers to good treatment of users of the police service including:

- lack of standards for police-public contact;
- failure to see the service through the eyes and experience of the users;
- a low priority given to improving front counter environments.

ippr was not able to undertake detailed research to review or update these findings. Nevertheless, while we found examples of good practice, these were isolated examples. Nothing we discovered in the course of this project suggested that the police were in general taking a more enlightened approach to their estate, and we found some evidence that if anything, the situation has worsened since the Audit Commissions 1999 report:

- Since the Audit Commission *Action Stations* report, the Home Office has stopped ring-fencing capital investment in the estate, with the result that investment has, if anything, fallen, with resources redirected to tackling shortterm problems.
- Many forces still lack a developed estate strategy, and those that do have one have been slow to make good design a priority. The statement recently issued by the Metropolitan Police regarding their plans for the future of their estate scarcely alludes to design.
- While the Home Office has encouraged the appointment of Design Champions in every force, not all forces have appointed them, and few forces have made good use of them. Design Champions are rarely senior figures in the force, with the authority to ensure that design is treated as a priority.
- Police facilities are expected to be built at a significantly lower cost than other criminal justice buildings such as courts.

In addition we note that:

- In comparison with efforts of some other government departments, the Home Office has been slow to develop a far-reaching and effective strategy to promote the quality of police buildings. (Though the issuing of new guidelines next year (2005), on the design of police buildings, which, unlike the last guidelines will seek to promote good design, represent a welcome development.)
- There has been very little research, Home Office funded or otherwise, into public use of police stations. Very little is known about who uses police stations, where and when. Such research is vital if the police want to promote public satisfaction with police services.
- No police station has made it into the short-list of CABE's better public buildings.

Chief Constable Peter Neyroud gave a presentation to our expert seminar, in which he underscored the inadequacy of his own estate, made up largely of rundown, unattractive and ill-sited buildings, congested offices and over-crowded car parks. He also made it clear that in his view, the police in general didn't fully appreciate the case for investing in the estate or give it the priority it deserved.

## Old Estate - New Pressures

We reiterate that older models of the police station are in many respects out of date. Around one in four police stations in England and Wales have closed in the last decade: in 1990 there were 2,729 police stations compared with 2,099 in 2000. And this process looks set to continue. The Metropolitan Police, for instance, are planning to sell off more than 200 properties worth £900 million in the next decade or so. A dozen buildings, including eight police stations have been earmarked for the first wave of sales (Metropolitan Police Authority 2004).

A range of new factors bare on the design and development of the police estate:

- As the population has moved out of town and city centres, into suburbs, so forces are under pressure to close old police stations and open new ones.
- The police are under pressure to move to edge of town sites, for reasons of economy, or to make it easier for rapid response units to meet response targets
- We are seeing a growth in specialised units, many of which – like those specialising in corporate crime, internet crime, benefit fraud, people trafficking, anti-terrorism – don't have much of a public face or are need to remain anonymous.
- New technologies are providing the police and public with new means of communication, so lessening occasions for face-to-face encounters
- The police are being encouraged to work in closer partnership with other public services and third sector bodies, including social services, environment services, probation services, community groups.
- Resources are being targeted on deprived high crime areas and the police are being encouraged to develop closer contacts with local communities, especially poor communities.
- There is a greater role for the private sector in everything from providing facilities to transporting and processing offenders.
- Police cells are being moved from police stations and in-house specialist facilities.
- There is a growing concern with ensuring that police facilities are safe and secure, and protect those who work in them and use them. There are many units whose activities are secret and whose premises need to be extremely secure. Undercover police mustn't have their identity exposed. People who work in police stations, both police and civilian staff, are inevitably a target of violence, premeditated or otherwise perhaps even terrorism.

Some of these factors are more of the nature of a challenge to those interested in maintaining and strengthening police–public relations. There is no doubt for instance, that while edge of town police stations will improve rapid response times, they also distance the police from the public. Anti-terrorist and other safety measures tend similarly to detract from the openness and ease of accessibility of police facilities. Some perhaps are neutral in nature. As ippr has argued, public–private partnerships can, according to circumstances, represent a good or a bad deal for public services (ippr 2001). There is no reason, for instance, why a building build and managed by the private sector should not be of the highest standard of design (CABE 2003). Some of these developments, finally, seem clearly to offer new opportunities. E-technology can create new connections between police and public, as can the introduction of local, mobile and high street stations. The development of closer partnership between the police, local government and other public services should allow the police forces to open help offices or help desks in town halls, schools, hospitals, libraries, community centres and housing estates offices.

Our point however, is not to endorse or object to any of the developments identified above; they are largely given. Instead, we argue:



- first, that the police estate will continue to play an important role in shaping public attitudes to the criminal justice system and perceptions of crime and disorder;
- second, that the impact that any development will have on police-public relations needs to be considered;
- third, that care needs to be taken over deployment, design and management of police facilities, ensuring that they promote public confidence in the police and the rule of law.

### 3. Recommendations

This report has argued the case for raising standards in design and management of the police estate. Here we make recommendations to this end:

- Every police force should have a designated design champion. The Design Champion needs to be high-up in the force – ideally a member of the police authority – with proven commitment to raising design standards. Design champions must be offered full support and training.
- Every police force should have a developed estate strategy.
- The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) and Association of Police Authorities (APA) should establish estate development sub-committees to promote and oversee strategic investment in a well designed police estate.
- Home office, ACPO, and APA should study how other departments, especially Department for Education and Skills, Department of Health, Department for Work and Pensions, and Department for Constitutional Affairs (DCA), are raising design standards.
- The Home Office should lead in setting up a joint Home Office, ACPO, APA and Police Property Service Managers Group (PPSMG), working party to look at estate design issues in more detail, with the possibility of working with criminologists and designers to develop models or prototypes.
- More resources should be devoted evidence-based research evaluating the costs and benefits of different estate strategies. More research is needed in particular into the way the design of police buildings effects relations between the police and public.
- The Home Office should work with ACPO, APA and PMSM to set up a Design Champion network, dedicated to sharing and promoting best practice.
- Police forces and their private sector partners should use competitions in short-listing architects and designers.
- Home Office, ACPO and APA should explore the possibility of an architectural competition for the design of model police stations, ranging perhaps, from force headquarters, down to small community stations and police boxes. This could draw attention to the benefits of good design and offer new ideas.

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## List of Abbreviations

ACPO	Association of Chief Police Constables
PPSMG	Police Property Service Managers Group
CABE	Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment
APA	Association of Police Authorities
DFES	Department for Education and Skills
DCA	Department for Constitutional Affairs

## *The Police Stations: The View from Outside*

ippr has made a 15 minute video about public views of police stations. Copies are available for £80 including post and packaging. Please e-mail: [b.rogers@ippr.org](mailto:b.rogers@ippr.org)