

# Accessing Met Police Services

## Heart of London response

October 2017

### About us

Heart of London represents key parts of the West End including Piccadilly Circus, Leicester Square, Piccadilly and St James's. We operate an alliance of four Business Improvement Districts, representing over 500 businesses and 100 property owners. These are iconic areas of London that experience some of the highest crime rates in London, given the high footfall on the area's streets. Our top priority is the safety of our districts. As such we partner closely with the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), Westminster City Council (WCC) and other key stakeholder groups in the area. This relationship is strong and highly valued, it is the product of many years' work and investment that we need to protect and enhance.

### Executive Summary

We work extremely closely with the MPS, WCC, other BIDs and the West End Partnership (WEP) to deliver a tailored policing approach that focuses on the unique issues affecting the West End. We are keen to continue to develop and boost this strong partnership. In particular we have welcomed the dramatic improvement the Impact Zone has brought to the area with a 34% fall in crime since it was established. However, there are aspects of this draft strategy which could be improved to encourage better partnership working.

Our response to the draft Public Access and Engagement Strategy focuses on the following:

- Our primary concern is that the draft strategy reads as though it is designed with a 'one size fits all' approach. This is an issue we highlighted in our March 2017 response to the Draft Police and Crime Plan, and we are concerned that the draft Public Access and Engagement Strategy is feeding into a wider attempt by MOPAC to implement a blanket approach to policing across London, without considering the individual needs of certain geographical areas and communities. The West End is a mixed use area with a high concentration of businesses and a cultural led offering during the evening and night time economy (ENT). The needs of such an area will, of course, be vastly different from the needs of a residential area in an Outer London borough for example.
- We are disappointed that neither businesses nor Business Improvements Districts are mentioned specifically in the Draft Public Access and Engagement strategy, and that they are not stated as a stakeholder in this context. It is important for businesses to maintain a good relationship with the police, and their specific needs should be considered in the development of any police engagement strategies. Both residents and business should feel that they are policed by consent and can shape policing priorities.
- The main types of crime experienced by businesses in the West End are low-level crimes and anti-social behaviour (ASB) such as shoplifting, pick-pocketing and begging. We have also been concerned by the rise in moped snatch crimes in London and other related smash and grab crimes within the West End. It is important to focus on such crimes, which have a disproportionate impact on businesses and the reputation

of an area, as well as considering the specific policing needs of the ENTE. In order to meet the needs of businesses and protect the international reputation of London, we believe that these types of crime need to be specifically considered in the Public Access and Engagement Strategy. Good handling of low level crime sets the wider tone for policing and businesses should of course be asked for their input on the strategy. We would welcome the introduction of a dedicated resource targeted at low-level crime. This would simplify the process so that MPS and businesses can ensure that such crimes are reported and dealt with in a timely and effective manner. There are concerns that these incidents are not always treated seriously when reported by businesses, leading to a loss of confidence in the MPS.

## Consultation questions on the draft strategy

### 1. To what extent do you agree that the Metropolitan Police Service should improve its current online offer to the public?

- Multiple choice: **Strongly Agree** / Agree / Neither Agree nor Disagree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree / Don't Know

### 2. After reading the draft strategy document, do any partners or other community members have suggestions for possible suitable locations for new Dedicated Ward Officer hubs? (comment)

- We believe that in the West End, Dedicated Ward Officer hubs would be best located in high profile, prominent offices or retail premises. This would provide a suitable space for members of the public to access the police, project the impression that business crime is important to MPS and provide the reassuring visual police presence wanted by all. We are consulting with our members and would welcome a more detailed discussion with the police liaising with businesses over potential locations under consideration in the West End.

### 3. Community Contact Sessions are designed to free up officer time and meet the needs of individual communities across London.

**To what extent do you agree that existing Contact Points should be replaced with Community Contact Sessions?**

- Multiple choice: Strongly Agree / Agree / Neither Agree nor Disagree / **Disagree** / Strongly Disagree / Don't Know

### 4. Do you have any suggestions for how Community Contact Sessions could best meet the needs of your community? (comment)

- Generally, we do not believe that Community Contact Sessions are necessary for the business community that we represent. The low-level crime that our business members typically face is better reported in other ways. We agree that existing Contact Points should be decommissioned, but that they should not be replaced with an almost identical initiative if there is little demand for them.
- Instead, there are a number of excellent existing police initiatives, such as 'coffee with a cop' that takes place in the West End, which we believe should be better publicised to encourage higher uptake. Our members find proactive contact by police officers very helpful, and would benefit from an increase in the number of police officers going door-to-door, providing visibility and offering advice to businesses.

**5. To what extent do you agree that flexible opportunities to contact police officers (e.g. Community Contact Sessions) are a suitable alternative to accessing the police via a front counter?**

- *Multiple choice: Strongly Agree / Agree / **Neither Agree nor Disagree** / Disagree / Strongly Disagree / Don't Know*

**6. Please include any further comments - about flexible opportunities to contact police officers as an alternative to accessing the police via a front counter - in the space provided below. (comment)**

- We believe there is an opportunity here to create a joined-up approach in the West End regarding the way businesses report crimes. There should be a dedicated resource targeted at low-level crime. Having a 'one-stop-shop' for businesses to report and deal with ASB and crime would simplify the process and help businesses build on their good working relationship with officers. Currently, there is very little interest from the police in abandoned or lost property, and there is no system in place to return stolen items to their owners. These are two things that a dedicated low-level crime team could deal with, that would be extremely helpful for business owners, visitors and residents alike.
- Our members understand the need to make savings to the police budget and to invest capital in new technology. As long as receipts from the disposal of property are targeted at maintaining frontline officer numbers there is no objection to the closure of the counter at West End Police Station, given the proximity of Charing Cross which is proposed to remain.

**7. It is proposed some front counter locations are swapped across London, in order to maximise savings and capital receipts. To what extent do you agree that the following changes should take place?**

- As none of the proposed counter swaps are within our area of operation, we respond '**Does not impact me**' to all questions in this section.

**8. After reading the draft strategy document, should we consider low-cost alternatives to front counters for communities over 45 minutes from their nearest front counter? What options should we consider?**

- This question is not applicable to Heart of London.

**9. How can we ensure that hard to reach communities are identified and their voices actively sought on London-wide and Borough-level policing issues?**

- We are sympathetic to the need to consult the views of hard to reach communities and would add that businesses should be specifically consulted on London-wide and Borough-level policing issues. We are disappointed that the draft strategy does not specifically deal with business issues and that businesses are not stated as a stakeholder.

**10. How can MOPAC better enable local communities to be more aware of, and involved, in the work of the local Independent Advisory Groups, Safer Neighbourhood Boards, Independent Custody Visiting and Community Monitoring Groups?**

- We believe that there should be a formal role for businesses in these groups. It is important that businesses have an input in the discussions that take place in these groups to ensure that all views are accurately represented and the needs of businesses are adequately taken into consideration. Heart of London currently works in partnership with local authorities and the police, but believe that businesses should be actively involved in wider strategic conversations and priority setting going forward. BIDs promote an effective way of representing businesses in such ways of working.

**11. How can the Metropolitan Police's community engagement complement and work more closely with the public engagement by local authorities?**

See response to Question 13.

**12. What type of information should be shared by the police to help communities feel informed about policing and crime in their area?**

See response to Question 13.

**13. What type of information should be shared by the police to help communities protect themselves from crime and anti-social behaviour?  
By what delivery method should this information be shared?  
Are there new digital or innovative methods that should be trialled?**

Our answer to questions 11, 12 and 13 is as follows:

- We believe that the business community would benefit from more information and MPS support on how best to design out and counter crime.
- We feel police reporting tools are efficient. On Intelligence sharing, we feel there is a lack of consistency in procedure and approach and that the digital reporting methods should be more widely publicised so that people are aware of them as an option.
- Excellent MPS initiatives in our local area, such as 'coffee with a cop', should be communicated better to ensure maximum use.
- We believe that keeping businesses and their employees updated on issues to do with crime would help to increase confidence in the MPS and reduce the fear of crime.
- We maintain that there should be more advice available to businesses on how to prevent ASB and low-level crimes. Practical information and campaigns targeted at citizens and tourists on how to prevent pickpocketing, petty theft and associated concerns with ASB such as begging would need to be included.

**14. How should the police reassure the public about crime trends and be a trusted source of facts, particularly on social media?**

- We believe that the use of social media to reassure about some aspects of crime trends in specific areas in London could be a useful resource for businesses, and help prevent and raise awareness about crime prevention or new criminal behaviours. However, we would be concerned about this approach being used too widely. Social media updates around major incidents and as a direct route for communicating with the police are very welcome innovations. Nevertheless, a proactive and direct approach to contacting businesses about crime trends and practical prevention advice may be more successful and not risk causing alarm or fear amongst residents, visitors and workers that a blanket social media approach could cause.

**15. How can communities be reassured about real-time events or trends in their area?**

- The use of social media is increasingly important in providing updates about real-time events, and is a first port-of-call for many. We welcome how closely the police work with BIDs, so that they can provide updates on crime to their members. We will continue to develop this relationship to ensure that accurate information can be shared in a timely manner. Social media has proven to be a particularly useful tool in sharing updates about terrorism and resilience. Heart of London have been proactive in communicating messages and safety advice from authorities to business members, and will continue to do so in the future.

**16. How can we empower local citizens to influence Borough and Ward-level policing? How can this be achieved digitally or through other virtual means, so it is not just through physical attendance at Community Contact Sessions?**

- We are sympathetic for the need to empower local citizens and their involvement in local policing. However, we are disappointed that the strategy does not consider how best to empower businesses to influence Borough and Ward-level policing. We would welcome increased opportunities for businesses to engage with the police on the specific issues they face and BIDs provide such a mechanism to represent the voice of business.

**17. What tools or training do local citizens need to feel empowered to assist and work with the police to reduce crime or anti-social behaviour in their area?**

- We would welcome the introduction of training for business owners and staff on how best to deal with low-level crime and ASB. This could take the form of either face-to-face training co-hosted by BIDs, or an online training module to ensure accessibility to all.
- Business can feel disempowered when there is little or no feedback from the police following a crime report. Particularly around low-level crime our members have said they feel that reporting incidents has little or no benefit and can lead to a loss of confidence in working with the police.