

Glyn Gaskarth | March 2016

# Boosting London's Frontline Policing

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A Capital City Foundation Policy Bite

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## About the Capital City Foundation

The Capital City Foundation is a new research unit at Policy Exchange to develop policy ideas specifically for London. The focus of the Capital City Foundation is to protect and promote the prosperity of London – while seeking to ensure that the city is as pleasant, safe and affordable as possible for everyone that lives or works here. The foundation aims to create workable policy ideas that can be implemented by the city's governing authorities.

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## About the Author

Glyn Gaskarth is the Head of Policy Exchange's Crime & Justice Unit. Before joining Policy Exchange, he worked for the Local Government Information Unit and the TaxPayers' Alliance. Prior to this he worked for Accenture. He also served as a Special Adviser to then Shadow Home Secretary the Rt Hon David Davis MP and as a Parliamentary researcher for the Rt Hon Oliver Letwin MP. He has a BSc in International Relations from the London School of Economics.

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## Overview

- The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) closed sixty-three Police Front Office Counters (PFOCs) between 2013 and 2016<sup>1</sup> but they wish to maintain a visible presence in all London Boroughs and have pledged to keep at least one 24 hour PFOC open in each London Borough.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, Transport for London (TfL) has closed its network of London Underground Ticket Offices, with the exception of ticket offices that used to serve the national railway<sup>3</sup> which it would like to close by April 2016.<sup>4</sup> TfL has not yet agreed contracts to rent out this space. They are considering how to redevelop it. They are using some of the disused space as staff accommodation such as Station Control Rooms, other ticket offices are being used to ease congestion in the ticket hall or to provide extra ticket machines.<sup>5</sup>

- The MPS should convert some of the closed Ticket Offices into PFOCs to replace those PFOCs which have already closed. To identify which Ticket Offices to select we have compiled a map which shows: the Ticket Offices and Police Stations that have recently closed; the Police stations which are currently in operation; the Contact Points that the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) own or lease; and the Contact Points which have been established in partnership with a third party.

- The Ticket Offices could be selected for redevelopment into PFOCs based on four criteria:

1. That TfL has not already concluded a deal with a partner to develop the Ticket Office (required).

2. That the Ticket Office is located in a higher crime area (optional).

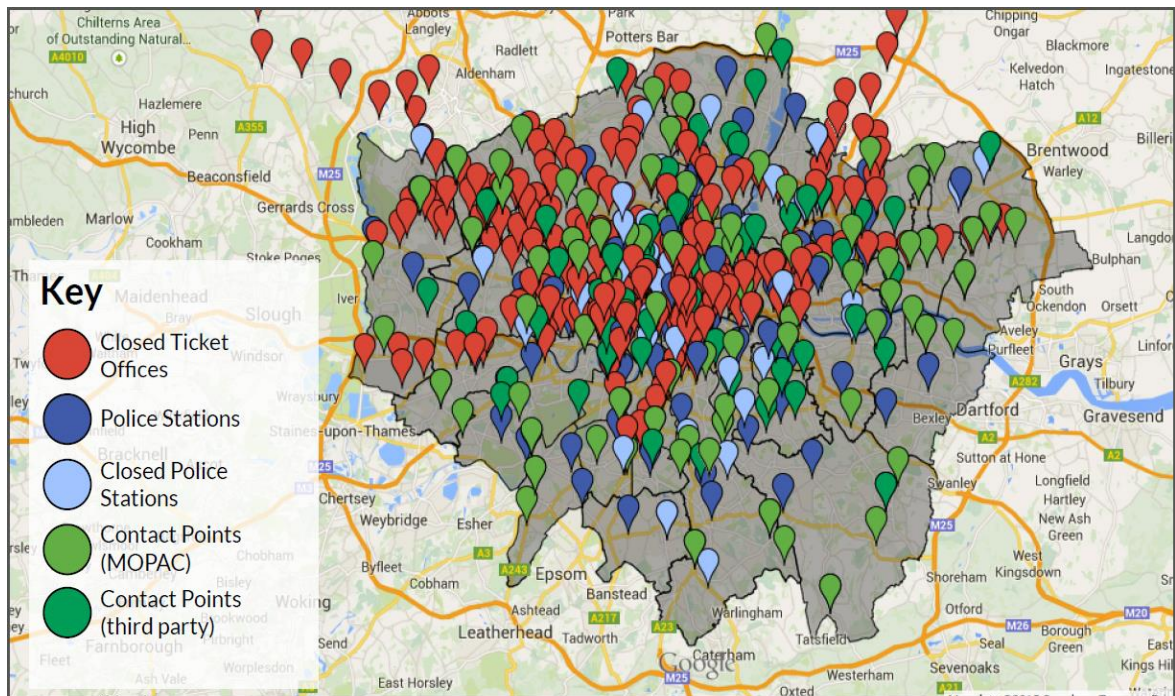
3. That the area has been subject to PFOC closures (optional).

4. And that the Ticket Office is located on one of the tube lines that will be part of the Night Tube, when it becomes operational.<sup>6</sup>

- The Ticket Offices selected would not need to meet all four of these criteria but those that do should be prioritised for redevelopment. The decline in the number of members of the public using PFOCs presents the MPS with a challenge – should they close down these facilities or rethink how they are provided? The Capital City Foundation believes the PFOCs should be placed in areas the public can easily access to increase the numbers using them.

## Map of Potential Ticket Office to PFOC Conversion Sites

A more detailed, interactive version of this map can be found [here](#).



- Many existing Police stations contain both PFOCs and a Custody Suite. In the latter offenders are kept in a cell until the Courts can process them. These functions should be split. The Custody Suite should be provided separately to the PFOCs. The Ticket Offices would be converted into a PFOC without a Custody Suite attached. The existing Custody Suite estate is already being consolidated. Smaller facilities with fewer than fifteen cells are being closed and replaced with larger facilities.
- Separating the two meets the MPS aim to keep victims and criminals apart when they interact with the Police in Police stations. Offenders who are required to regularly attend a Police station as part of their bail conditions and suspected offenders interviewed/processed for an arrest could be dealt with separately in the smaller number of now larger Custody Suites located separate to the PFOC.
- TfL could be paid by the MPS to use the Ticket Offices. This would replace any revenue lost to TfL from not developing the sites commercially. Revenue already achieved from the sale of the existing Police stations could be used to rent the Ticket Offices from TfL and redevelop them into new PFOCs. There would be a cost to

reconfiguring the closed ticket offices because some look like narrow windows set in a wall. New designs should be trialled that would use the space in a more open way - for example, in London Bridge where there is a large sheet of glass in the ticket office or the new Visitor Centre in Kings Cross.<sup>7</sup>

- The Night Tube was set to run services from September 2015 with Tube Stations on the Central, Jubilee, Piccadilly, Northern and Victoria lines open 24 hours on Friday and Saturday nights to coincide with the Rugby World Cup<sup>8</sup>. However, the introduction of this service has been substantially delayed due to a dispute between the trade unions and TfL. Recently, members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport Union voted to accept a deal that could make the Night Tube possible in 2016<sup>9</sup>. However, no firm date for its introduction has yet been set.

- The Ticket Offices in the Tube Stations that will be open 24 hours could easily be converted into 24 hour PFOCs when a Night Tube service is in operation.<sup>10</sup> On the other five days of the week they could operate until the tube closes. Ticket Offices not on the 24 hour tube lines could be converted into PFOCs and operate during the same hours that the Tube Station is open. This idea could be trialled in between ten to fifteen Ticket Offices in a partnership between TfL and the MPS to establish its cost and effectiveness before a larger roll-out across London.

- This policy will help increase public confidence in the MPS, a key objective set by MOPAC in the Police and Crime Plan 2013-2016.<sup>11</sup> Commuters relying on the tube would pass a PFOC at least twice a day when they travel to and from work. If the trial is successful, the MPS could re-locate the existing single 24 hour PFOC they have pledged to keep in each London Borough to a new PFOC in a Tube Station.

## **What are Police Front Office Counters (PFOCs) and what do they contain?**

The PFOC is the physical structure that a member of the public is greeted with on entering the Police station. It will usually include a protective screen with a Police employee sitting behind that screen ready to respond to the public's questions. There is usually a small seating area for people waiting to be seen. There will be a room for interviews where citizens can report incidents of a more sensitive nature, for example, sexual assaults. Police evidence is stored in lockers/filing cabinets, as is lost property that is handed in by members of the public. Space for each of these different features

would need to be found in any future PFOC provision. As part of the research for this Policy Bite the Capital City Foundation visited Belgravia Police Station to see how they operate. A video providing a walkthrough of the layout which shows what can be found in a PFOC can be found on the Policy Exchange website.

## What role do the PFOCs perform?

According to Input Youth, a service that offers young people careers advice, the role of the PFOC staff includes tasks such as the following:

- “Responding to enquiries from the public and providing advice.
- Dealing with missing persons, lost property (including pets) and stolen vehicles.
- Receiving seized or surrendered items, including firearms, knives and driving licences.
- Dealing with and recording cash transactions concerning fines, warrants, permits and licences.
- Recording details of crimes and vehicle accidents, and completing reports.
- Checking and recording details in police computer databases and filing systems.
- Using telephone, fax and radio systems.
- Communicating promptly with police officers, police departments and other services.
- Maintaining security of police premises.
- Taking routine statements and appearing in court if required.
- Looking after victims and witnesses and providing first aid in emergencies.”<sup>12</sup>

## What are the Contact Points and why are they being rolled out?

Contact Points are similar to PFOCs but they are not the same. Contact Points have been rolled out as underutilised PFOCs have closed. The Contact Points are open for a shorter period of time - on Wednesday and Thursday evenings and between 2pm and 3pm on Saturdays rather than 9am to 5pm on Monday till Friday. Contact Points are

located in shared locations e.g. supermarkets and public libraries based on who will partner with the MPS rather than in the Police Station as is the case with the PFOC, so estate costs are lower. The MPS informed the Capital City Foundation that, “Direct estate costs [for setting up the Contact Points] relate to the provision of signage only. Costs totalled £10,000.”<sup>13</sup> Contact Points are a place where members of the public can informally discuss non-emergency matters with a local Police Officer. Contact Points are staffed by a single Police Officer and not a member of Police support staff as with the PFOC.

The MOPAC Police and Crime Plan describes how; “identified contact points within every Borough will be staffed by the Safer Neighbourhood Team at regular advertised times and for at least three hours every week. These contact points will be identifiable through MPS signage and may be in existing neighbourhood bases.”<sup>14</sup> There are 149 Contact Points currently in operation. MOPAC owned or leased ninety-two Contact Points and partnered with third parties in a further fifty-seven Contact Points. The third party partnered Contact Points included two Tube Stations. These were Archway Tube Station and Tufnell Park Tube Station. There was also a Contact Point at Blackheath Rail Station. Other partners included major retailers such as Asda, Tesco, Waitrose, Morrison’s and Sainsbury’s. The MPS informed the Capital City Foundation that other Contact Point partners include; “local authority libraries and community centres, churches, hospitals, post offices, tube/rail stations and shopping centres/smaller retail outfits.”<sup>15</sup> Ninety four of the Contact Points are regarded as core and they are listed on the MOPAC website.<sup>16</sup> A further fifty-five exist but they are being trialled.

The MPS outline the ways the public can use the Contact Points in the list below:

- Report a crime.
- Report lost property or hand in found property.
- Make an appointment to speak to a local officer.
- Hand in self-reporting forms for road traffic accidents.
- Obtain crime prevention advice.
- Obtain advice about police related matters.
- Collect found items by appointment.

- Discuss community concerns.
- Make an appointment to give a statement if they don't want the police to come to their house or place of work.
- Make an appointment to speak to an officer about a complaint against police.<sup>17</sup>

The money spent on providing Contact Points could be saved and used to fund the redevelopment of Ticket Offices to become new PFOCs, or some of the new PFOCs in Ticket Offices could operate like Contact Points. It is likely that where Contact Points are housed in existing MPS buildings the cost of these Police buildings has been treated as a fixed cost and thereby the use of them has not been included in the figure given for the cost of providing the Contact Points.

## Why would it be a good idea to place PFOCs in London Underground Ticket Offices?

The Tube Station is a more easily identifiable landmark than the local supermarket, town hall or library. Tube Stations are well spread across London as they match the population they serve. Around 4 million journeys are made on the Tube each day and millions of Londoners would see a Police station at least twice a day on their journey to and from work<sup>18</sup>. This would improve the visibility of the Police. Twenty- eight per cent of the public never saw a Police Officer on foot patrol in their local area in 2013-14 according to the Crime Survey for England and Wales.<sup>19</sup> It may also improve public confidence in the MPS as the Office for National Statistics reveals that higher Police visibility is associated with greater confidence in the Police.

Each Ticket Office already accommodates a couple of TfL staff. It could accommodate a similar number of Police personnel. Different designs for PFOC could be trialled and their cost and effectiveness assessed. The exclusive use of the former London Underground Ticket Offices would help reduce the security fears that co-location of Police facilities can create. For example, the Police fear that the secrecy of their case information could be compromised if they share an office. However, these facilities could be shared if the pilot was conducted with the Police Points open for a limited duration, as is the case with Contact Points where the service is already run from a shared premises.



## How would this work in practice?

Between ten and fifteen Ticket Offices could be chosen for an initial pilot to explore how the conversion of Ticket Offices into PFOCs could work. The full list of Ticket Offices that have been closed and the redevelopment dates can be found [here](#).<sup>20</sup> The Ticket Offices could be selected on the basis of four criteria. First, that there is no prior commercial contract to redevelop the Ticket Office selected. If there is a commercial agreement in place the MPS would not be able to access the facility unless the commercial contract fell through. TfL informed the Capital City Foundation that contracts to redevelop the Ticket Offices have not yet been agreed. Second, whether the Ticket Office is located on a tube line which will operate the Night Tube. Third, whether the Borough has been subject to the closure of PFOCs. These are shown on the map the Capital City Foundation has compiled showing the location of the Ticket Offices, Police stations and Contact Points. Fourth, whether the Ticket Office is located in an area of high crime. This information could be obtained from the Police Crime Maps, which are already compiled by the MPS.<sup>21</sup> These areas might require a more permanent Police presence.

Candidates for the first round of Ticket Office conversions into PFOCs would not need to meet all four criteria but Ticket Offices in areas fulfilling all four criteria should be prioritised for re-development. The Police and Crime Plan 2013-2016 states that every London Borough still has at least one PFOC open 24/7.<sup>22</sup> There are also forty PFOCs with non 24/7 operating hours<sup>23</sup>. The physical presence of the MPS (their physical estate) in communities has shrunk. However, the MPS do recognise the need to preserve a dispersed network of PFOCs which the public can use to contact the Police.

## What would need to be stored in the new PFOCs?

London Police Officers do not commonly carry guns. Therefore, there does not need to be a large gun storage facility in each PFOC. Each Ticket Office could have a secure facility for the rare occasions when it would be needed to store guns and knives handed in by members of the public. These are routinely collected by Criminal Exhibits for storage in external depots. Firearms handed in would not need to be stored at the PFOC for the long term. Larger firearm storage facilities could be included in the few areas with a significant gang problem, or in places that are subject to a high chance of being subject to a terror attack.

Police staff could be given locker space to store their personal belongings. Police staff could arrive at the office via the tube, removing the need for any workplace parking. Lost property can be handed in at a PFOC. It would need to be stored until it was claimed or until the people who originally handed it in can legitimately claim it, which is after 28 days. The MPS no longer take non identifiable and low value items such as umbrellas so the physical space needed to accommodate these items would not be too large.

Where members of the public wanted to hand in items found on the London Underground the MPS could agree with the British Transport Police (BTP) how this would be processed. Police records could be stored using Police Cloud facilities although physical evidence would continue to need to be physically stored. This evidence would also be collected on a regular basis for storage in combined external depots so this storage facility would also not need to be large.

## **What potential problems are there?**

First, the MPS do not have jurisdiction over the transport network. They would need to refer individuals to the BTP. This would be an easy task for the MPS but may create some issues for members of the public who might not understand the division of responsibilities between the two Police forces. They would expect the MPS to handle their cases. The answer to this is that there is no reason why the MPS could not partner with the BTP to provide the PFOC. Even if they did not the public has a right to expect the MPS and the BTP to cooperate on a daily basis. Co-location would enhance that cooperation but a joint agreement to coordinate how to manage interactions with the public could be reached in the absence of any deeper cooperation.

Second, there could be a fear that Police Officers will be inundated with enquiries by TfL passengers asking questions regarding their tickets. The answer to this is for the TfL staff currently employed in the ticket stations to be stationed by ticket machines and on tube platforms to respond to these requests. TfL have already adopted this policy.

Third, there could be fears that the new PFOCs will not afford sufficient space to replicate the functions performed by the existing Police station. But the purpose of this exercise is not to replicate the Police stations but to redesign how policing works. The functions of the Police station would be split between larger Custody Suites, police offices where administrative work is undertaken and the branch network of PFOCs that have been converted from Ticket Offices. The role of the Police station needs to

change. The public want the Police to be on patrol and not behind a desk doing paperwork or in staff meetings. Changing the physical infrastructure the Police operate in is a useful means of achieving effective change in their deployment practices.

TfL informed the Capital City Foundation that, “The size of the Ticketing Suites we are planning to close range from 25m<sup>2</sup> to 275m<sup>2</sup>, the average area is 50m<sup>2</sup>. We do not hold exact measurements of the ticket offices being closed.”<sup>24</sup> The MPS were unable to provide an equivalent figure for the size of the PFOC in time for this report’s publication but they did kindly agree to allow the Capital City Foundation to film inside a PFOC to give people an idea of what is contained in this facility and the size of it. Clearly the Police would need to agree rental arrangements with TfL for the Ticket Offices that did meet their spatial requirements. The wide range of different size ticket offices suggests there would be suitable size facilities for the MPS to rent.

Fourth, that the MPS staff would not be able to replicate their secure computer system in the new PFOCs. Police currently access four main programmes: CARMS, where Police can log their time, CRIMINT; where they can do intelligence checks; and MERLIN to search for missing or vulnerable people and CRIS for crime and incident reporting. This could hamper criminal record keeping. Consultations with the MPS conducted by the Capital City Foundation revealed this is also a problem with the existing Contact Points. Police Officers often record information on paper to then manually input it on a computer on their return to the Police station.

Fixed, desktop computers are present in the existing Police stations. They could be included in the new PFOCs. The fixed nature of the new PFOCs would allow the Police to put in permanent secure servers at each site to ensure the same functions could be performed. There is also no reason why PFOC employees could not be issued with iPads and keyboards to save space if the existing secure websites were to be updated to allow mobile access. The Police are already trialling the roll-out of iPad minis for frontline Police Officers to allow them to compose crime records without returning to the Police station.<sup>25</sup>

The pilot scheme would be an opportunity to try a new technology set up in the new PFOCs.

## Haven't the Ticket Offices already been leased to commercial partners?

The Capital City Foundation asked TfL to confirm whether the London Underground Ticket Offices had already agreed a contract with any private developer to rent the Ticket Offices. TfL confirmed that, "At present there are no plans to seek a commercial partner regarding the usage or redevelopment of London Underground ticket office space."<sup>26</sup> They also said, "There are no completed leases" and "The ticket office space will be redeveloped on a case by case basis as described above. We have not finalised the number of locations that could be used as a potential commercial opportunity."<sup>27</sup>

So this space is available and there are no current agreed plans for its future use. TfL stated, "In the majority of instances the space will be utilised as staff accommodation – such as a station control room. The space may also be used for improved customer information zones or to ease congestion in the ticket hall. TfL is also exploring a range of opportunities for developing new commercial spaces."<sup>28</sup> The MPS should be able to approach TfL to use the Ticket Office space as it has not yet been assigned to any third party. The cost of renting the space would be for the MPS and TfL to agree.

## What sort of income do TfL expect to generate from renting the Ticket Offices and how much will they cost to redevelop?

In 2015 the Capital City Foundation asked TfL to quantify both but they were unable to release the figures for either at that time. They revealed that, "while our Commercial Development team have high level ideas on how much may be earned from leasing the ticket office space, these ideas have not been consulted upon or scoped as part of a programme. As stated above the plans for the stations are not yet finalised and no decision has yet been made on how many ticket offices will be converted into retail space."<sup>29</sup> They also stated that, "As the plans for the stations are not finalised as yet, we do not hold information on how much money has been assigned to meet the cost of redeveloping the ticket offices."<sup>30</sup>

The cost of redeveloping a Ticket Office into a PFOC would need to be established. This could be achieved by the MPS and TfL agreeing to pilot the idea in a small number of

different Ticket Offices, the Capital City Foundation would suggest that it be trialled in between ten and fifteen different locations. Different PFOC designs could be developed to compare the cost and effectiveness of different options before a larger roll-out. These ten to fifteen PFOCs in Ticket Offices could be called ‘Underground Police Points’.

## How could the effectiveness of the Pilot be judged?

A series of criteria would seem to be appropriate:

- First, the cost of managing the new facilities compared to the previous Police facilities and Contact Points established by the MPS.
- Second, the number of individuals using the new “Underground Police Points” for their intended purpose, e.g. to report crimes.
- Third, the Police confidence rate of the overall population in areas where Ticket Offices are converted into PFOCs.
- Fourth, the visibility rating of the MPS among London residents, post the changes compared to prior to them.
- Fifth, the amount of time Police Officers spend out of the office and on patrol in the areas where Ticket Offices are converted into PFOCs.

## Conclusion

Putting the following facts together the need to place PFOCs in the Ticket Offices and the benefit of doing so is very apparent. The public want the MPS to be more visible. The MPS want to save money on their provision of PFOCs. The TFL want to develop the Ticket Office space. A 24 hour Tube network is being created in the next few years. The MPS recognise the need to be where the public are and to separate their interactions with victims/members of the general public and suspected offenders/offenders. The MPS would be where the public are. They could share this facility with other public services. They could then consolidate their Police offices and Custody Suite provision. The MPS should trial this idea in between ten to fifteen Ticket Offices before rolling it out across London. The new Underground Police Points would reassure all Londoners by providing a visible Police presence in their community.

## Endnotes

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