

# Kezia Dugdale MSP asks you to Save Our Police Services



A fortnight ago the Scottish Labour Party used its allocated parliamentary business time to discuss Local Police Services in the Debating Chamber. I was delighted to take part in this debate and have the opportunity to ask questions to Kenny MacAskill, the Scottish Government Justice Secretary. I chose to discuss the changes to Police counter services in the constituency I live in, Edinburgh Eastern, where Mr MacAskill serves as the local constituency MSP.

Police Scotland recently carried out the Public Counter Service Provision review that looked at how many people were coming into local police stations across the country and why they were visiting their local station. I was asked as Member of the Scottish Parliament to make a response to the review. In order to do this I felt I needed to speak to some of the communities involved. Just to be clear I've set out below the proposed changes to Police Stations within Edinburgh. It represents a cut of almost 600 hours week, effectively 25 days lost across the City per week.

Station Current Opening Hours Proposed Changes:-

*Portobello 7am – midnight, 7 days per week 8am-6pm, 7 days per week*

*Craigmillar 7am – midnight, 7 days per week Transfer public counter to South-East neighbourhood hub*

*Corstorphine 7am – midnight, 7 days per week Transfer public counter to West neighbourhood hub*

*Balerno 9am – 5pm Close*

*Oxgangs 7am – midnight, 7 days per week Close*

*South Queensferry 9am – 5pm Close*

*Howdenhall 7am – midnight, 7 days per week 9am – 5pm, Monday to Friday only*

*Bonnyrigg, Tranent, Linlithgow, Armadale and West Calder will also close their front counters to the public.*

I wrote out and invited 2,000 people to carry out a survey in regards to the proposed changes and their feelings in regards to local policing. I received 188 responses from residents in Portobello and others from across the Lothians region. Within the Portobello area, where Mr MacAskill was elected to represent, it showed that 96% of respondents did not support the changes to Portobello Police Station, which has been an integral part of Portobello High Street for over a century.

88% also said they preferred face to face interaction with the police and were not convinced that using the 101 non-emergency number would be as effective. This number would also cost 15 pence to call every time you wanted to make contact with a police officer. You can read a full break down of the responses I received by clicking [here](#). They have been anonymised for data protection purposes.

I used my four minutes during the debate to ask Mr MacAskill directly about the stations within his constituency – Portobello, Craigmillar and Howdenhall. I have even discovered that in the last few weeks Mr MacAskill has had his own survey dropping on the doors of Portobello residents as he is concerned on the number of housebreakings that have taken place in the area recently. This at the very same time he is cutting or closing their police stations, you couldn't make it up.

Mr MacAskill's response to me in Parliament was that I should be speaking to the Inspectors at the Police Station. My response was that I had reported the concerns of the local community and that as their local constituency MSP he should be well inclined to hear their views and represent them. Last year alone, according to official figures saw housebreakings

increase by 54% in the Portobello/Craigmillar Council ward.

I would like to note that I am absolutely behind the idea of joined-up services and I regularly visit the Craigmillar hub to meet constituents and community groups. The fact that it has a library, a café and a host of council services is fantastic and I agree that it makes sense to have a police presence as part of that, but when you look at the figures from the Police Scotland review they are telling us that there were 1,201 asks of the station assistant in two weeks – that's a huge volume of demand. Do we want the same amount of people walking into the hub every fortnight or does it suggest that having a police presence at the hub and an active open Craigmillar police station would be a better fit. It shouldn't be one or the other.

I also supported and voted for the creation of a single police service. The single police force was meant to boost support for our police officers on the beat, in our communities. Instead, under the SNP, the concept of local policing is fading. Under this SNP government almost 1,200 police support staff have been cut. There were 7,862 in March 2010 and by June this year that number was down to 6,701. When these cuts take place, it's the frontline police officers that have to step in and become "backroom bobbies", they're not as the SNP likes to tell you, out in the front line of policing; they're doing paperwork in the offices covering for the cuts this government has inflicted on our Police service.

These cuts will only continue further under this government and Police Scotland Chief Constable Sir Stephen House has already said that they cannot keep the number of officers the same under the funding conditions they face. We must do more for our police services and our local communities.

The SNP are causing our thin blue line to get stretched thinner and thinner. I'm supporting the Edinburgh Evening News 'Save Our Stations' campaign and will continue to call on

Kenny MacAskill to condemn the practice of backfilling which is taking our police officers off the street to plug the gaps in staff cuts and to defend local accessible policing that has serves our communities and residents.

He needs to not only do this for the whole of Scotland in his role as Justice Secretary but for his own constituents of Edinburgh Eastern and not chastise those who come forward with views on their behalf.

Submitted by [Kezia Dugdale](#)

