

# Replace police stations with 'cops in shops'

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The police could save money and offer a better service to the public by closing out of date police stations and opening more local police offices in shopping centres, post offices and other popular public locations.

A new report, "Rebooting the PC," by think tank Policy Exchange and authored by Professor Martin Innes of the Universities' [Police Science Institute](#) urges police chiefs not to put 'buildings before bobbies'. It says that the nature of the emergent financial and [social challenges](#) that British society faces over the next decade means the police service needs to become more imaginative in how it interacts with the public. This should include "managing the police estate in a smarter fashion" by

closing out of date police stations. Moves that increase police visibility and availability such as placing officers in local high street shops and offices will save the [taxpayer money](#). It will also make it easier for members of the public to report crime such as Anti-[Social Behaviour](#) incidents, only a third of which are actually reported to the police.

The paper highlights the fact that the majority of people hardly ever walk in to a police station to report a crime. The dramatic decline in front counter use means that some stations see fewer than seven visitors every day. According to one survey, 20% of people visit the front counter of a police station to report or hand in lost property and 12% of people visit front counters to seek general information or simply to ask directions.

In London alone, the number of people reporting crimes at front counters has fallen by over 100,000 – almost half – since 2006/07, as people turn to other forms of communication, including online. In fact, of all the crime reports received by the Metropolitan Police Service in 2011/12 fewer than 1 in 8 were reported at front counters.

The report also recommends:

- The introduction of a modern version of the 'Tardis' police box. These would be technologically-enabled police contact points, featuring two-way audio-visual technology so that members of the public could communicate directly with police staff. They could be used to report crime, provide witness statements, discuss concerns and access information.
- The establishment of a set of 'Hubs for Innovation in Policing' (or HIPs), pursuing a different agenda from the College of Policing. These would be located in universities across the country and would allow local police forces to work with academics and the private sector to develop new techniques

suitable to local crime prevention needs.

Professor Martin Innes, of the Universities' Police Science Institute based in Cardiff University's School of Social Sciences said: "Around the country there has been uproar whenever Chief Constables or PCCs suggest they might want to close some police stations. However, the truth is that most crime is reported by phone, many stations are getting old and increasingly expensive to maintain and are often located in the wrong places, away from key population centres."

"Rather than just thinking about closing police stations, it might be more productive to engage local people in conversations about replacing out-dated police stations with more local police offices. These offices could even serve as operational bases for local Neighbourhood Policing teams."

Provided by Cardiff University

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