

'With this move towards privatisation,

Major restructuring of London's police force into big area commands, rather than borough-wide units, has focused attention on how cuts to crime prevention will affect the safety of our streets.

Some of those on the front line told KAISHA LANGTON about the dangers of closing some of the front counters of police stations – and in some cases entire stations – in South London.

Police station closures planned by London Mayor Sadiq Khan would take cops further away from their beats and might affect their ability to fight crime, campaigners say.

Reception desks could close at Kennington, Streatham, Catford, Deptford, Peckham, Southwark and Wimbledon police stations, under plans which aim to pump £10million back into frontline policing.

Theresa May has ordered Mayor Khan to save £400million over the next three years, which follows £600million cuts since 2010. So budgets must be cut somewhere.

A string of protests against closure have sprung up across the affected boroughs – perhaps stunted in their impact by the fact that many town halls south of the Thames, which could be the focus of campaigns, are ruled by Labour, Mr Khan's own party.

They have blamed the gov-

ernment for not putting enough money into policing, rather than directing their anger towards the man making the tough decisions on which cut has to be made where.

Whoever is to blame, the effects will be felt.

Retired policeman Graham Wettone, who has worked across Wimbledon, Balham, and Tooting throughout his more than 30-year career in the Met, believes that reducing neighbourhood police stations ensures the police move from a proactive to a reactive force.

Mr Wettone, 56, said: "When officers have a significant distance to travel they lose contact with the areas they are policing – they lose knowledge and expertise of the area they are working in and that impacts on protecting the public.

"During my career, I worked in different precincts and the priority was to get to know your local area. You knew the areas that would be busy at different times of the day, the areas that would attract criminality, and you also knew which criminals it would attract. You got to know the local offenders – your prolific problem.

"If you are working on many different areas you are never going to know that, you won't know your local area, you will simply become a reactive force: there will be no prevention; there will be no proactiv-

ity, no recognition of offenders or offences taking place."

Mr Wettone, who retired in 2010 and currently teaches policing across London, believes the closures of police stations illustrate a move towards privatising public sector policing, which will inevitably result in create crime rates across the capital.

He said: "With this move towards privatisation, you will see crime rise even more, you will see offences rise even more, there will be no deterrent, if there were visible and effective deterrents people would be less likely to commit crimes. There is no deterrent. All that will happen is that the police will become reactive instead of proactive."

Chairman of the Lambeth Safer Neighbourhood Board, Nick Mason, said an important bond between police and their community will be lost. He said: "The concern about the reduction of police stations is around neighbourhood policing.

"Whilst these are not the officers that deal with response crimes such as when you dial 999, they are the individuals that appease residents' concerns about levels of crime in their neighbourhoods."

House of Lords representative Lord Brian Paddick has hit back against the closure of local police stations across London, calling the actions of



Above, Met Commissioner Cressida Dick with London Mayor Sadiq Khan. Left, retired police officer Graham Wettone



Kent Association for the Blind

Supporting sight impaired people to live independent lives

We feel that anyone who has a sight impairment should be able to live a fulfilled, healthy and safe life, exercise self-determination and make informed choices, and achieve their own personal goals.

We help make this a reality by providing comprehensive support services to people of any age and any stage of the sight loss journey.

We work in Kent, Medway, Bromley and Bexley.

If you have unwanted clothes, shoes, accessories in useable condition that you would like to donate to help the charity please contact us and we can arrange a collection for you usually within two days.

Call 0208 599 1813 or Email john@ldgps.co.uk

