



West Mercia Fire and Rescue Governance

Consultation Q&A

Will this mean I get a better or worse service when I need help from the police or fire crews?

In itself, a change in governance does not directly impact frontline services. It does not affect frontline firefighters or police officers and most things would stay exactly the same at first. One aim of bringing governance together is to make it easier for our police and fire services work together more to improve the service you get.

Will frontline officers be lost as a result of this?

No. If anything, this proposed change of governance would actually help protect frontline officers. Our police and fire services need to find efficiencies at the moment. Working together more would help them find those efficiencies in support functions, rather than on the frontline.

Will specialist equipment be lost from our police or fire services?

No. That would not be acceptable and is certainly not part of these proposals. Police and fire services would work more closely though on joint procurement and sharing best practice to improve resilience.

Would this mean a reduced presence or visibility from our police or fire services in local communities?

No. The PCC is already working to improve community visibility for police and would not compromise that for either service. In the future it could be that, for example, our police and fire services share more buildings, but they would still retain their community presence.

Would these changes mean a loss in local identity for our fire services?

No. Both fire services would still exist as individual organisations, as would West Mercia Police. The same local police and fire teams would be responding to incidents as we have now. Their names and branding etc. would not be affected and they would still serve the same communities they do now.

Will this mean that funding from one area, which currently goes to one service, could be used to prop up other services in different areas?

No – this could not happen. Each service would retain its own budget, income, expenditure and reserves. These would all be ring-fenced to each specific service and geographic area.

Would the fire services be merged together? Would they be merged with the police?

No, the services would work more closely together, but they would not be merged. This would help maximise the benefits of collaboration, without losing the identities, brands and public confidence of the organisations.



Would I still pay separate council tax contributions for police and fire services? Will they still have separate budgets?

Yes, because the organisations are not merging and still have their own ring-fenced finances. You would still pay an amount towards policing and a separate amount towards your fire service. From a public perspective, nothing significant would change in terms of how services are paid for via council tax or financed more broadly speaking.

What are the benefits here in terms of finances or efficiencies?

A change in governance would enable a saving of around £4m to the taxpayer. This would be from the efficiencies that can be achieved by our two fire services and our police force working more closely together and sharing more support functions.

Do our police and fire services need to save money? Would this change help with that or not?

Both our fire services and our police force have been well governed up to now, but they haven't worked together as well as they can. All three organisations do need to find further efficiency savings in the coming years. In percentage terms, our two local fire services are facing the largest savings targets of any nationwide. West Mercia Police is implementing savings of £9.5m this year, with a further £21.9m projected by the end of 2020/21.

These proposed changes in governance will not single-handedly solve these challenges. However, they would save an estimated total of £4m per year and help ensure that each organisation is squeezing as much efficiency from its back-office function as possible, and therefore offering some increased protection to frontline services.

Does the PCC have the experience to run fire services?

Much like the Chief Constable runs the Police force, there would still be a vastly experienced and professional Chief Fire Officer who would run their fire service as well.

These proposals are about governance – providing a strong voice for communities, holding those chief officers to account, ensuring the public get an effective, efficient service and making sure services respond to community needs. This is a role the PCC already fulfils for policing and crime and would be expanding to cover the fire services as well in the best interests of public safety.

What if there are major objections to these proposals, will they go ahead regardless?

If there are objections from top tier councils or there is not a local appetite for these changes they don't have to go ahead. The proposals would be independently reviewed and the final decision would rest with government.

Who is driving these proposals? The government or the Police and Crime Commissioner?

The Police and Crime Commissioner is the person driving this forward. The PCC commissioned the piece of work to look into the possibilities here and has ultimately decided



there is a proposal which is worth exploring further in the best interests of public safety and services.

Is this just the Police and Crime Commissioner ‘building an empire’?

This is purely and simply about what is best for our emergency services and our communities in the short, medium and long term. The recommendations for these changes have come from independent experts who have conducted an in-depth review of the current arrangements and what is possible going forward. If there was no prospect of improving effectiveness and efficiency then the PCC would not be pursuing these proposals.

How would this impact rural communities?

By getting the police and fire services to work together better we should be able to provide a better and more resilient service in our more remote areas.

What will happen to the Chief Officers who are currently in charge of the police and fire services?

These arrangements will not be affected by these proposals. Our police and fire services will continue to be run by experienced, professional officers who are experts in their fields.

If these changes make our emergency services more efficient, would that leave them vulnerable to the government reducing their budgets?

The PCC has lobbied the government for fairer funding for policing since his election and would continue that campaign if he was in charge of governing fire services as well. By being able to demonstrate to government that local police and fire services are as efficient as possible already, it would strengthen the case for fairer funding, with a particular focus on providing services in rural communities.

Is it less democratic to have a single person in charge of governance of our local fire services?

There are currently 40 local councillors who sit on the two fire authorities, who would be replaced by a single directly elected person if these proposals go ahead. Whilst these councillors are all elected, they are only elected to represent their wards. They are not elected to the fire authorities. Fire authority members are nominated by councils without consulting the public.

If these changes go ahead, in 2020 our communities would have the chance to directly elect a local Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner. Every voter would have an equal say. This proposal will increase the democratic accountability of our fire and rescue services.

Could we get better collaboration and integration between our police and fire services without this change in governance?

In theory it is possible, but the reality is that it has not happened. Collaboration between our police and fire services does go on, but it is limited and does not go far enough to maximise the possible benefits to our communities. A change in governance to have a single body



overseeing all three organisations would help provide the catalyst to get this progress moving forward.

What are the alternatives to these proposals? Why aren't they possible?

There are a couple of alternatives.

1. Maintain the status quo of having a PCC and two fire authorities. This option would not realise any of the potential effectiveness and efficiency benefits of single governance.
2. Create a 'single employer', and have our police and fire services as part of one big organisation. This is not proposed as an option as it could blur the lines between policing and fire and could risk compromising the specific professional skills of each service.

Would our local councils still have a role to play in fire governance?

Yes, the Commissioner is proposing a system whereby each top-tier local authority would be asked to nominate fire representatives. These Councillors would help inform and support the PCC in his work.

How would this affect the police alliance between West Mercia Police and Warwickshire Police?

This would not have a direct impact on the policing alliance.

Are the ambulance services involved in this at all?

No, they aren't. They have indicated that they do not wish to be at this stage.

Communities have different relationships to their fire services than they do with their police. How would these changes impact on that?

This is acknowledged and these changes would not necessarily impact on that directly. The police will still be the police, fire services will still be fire services. This change in governance would not directly affect those community relationships, although with the Commissioner's responsibilities around community engagement, responding to community concerns and providing a strong voice for the public, if anything this change would hopefully improve relationships for both services and develop safer communities through effective, efficient collaborative working.

Who would hold the Commissioner to account if he were to take over governance of the fire services?

The electorate would still hold the Commissioner to account as at present. Currently the Commissioner is scrutinised by West Mercia's Police and Crime Panel. If these proposals go ahead, their role would also be expanded to become the Police, Fire and Crime Panel.

Will the PCC get paid any more for this?

The PCC's salary is fixed by Parliament. In time it could be that they review his pay, however this has not been discussed by any party at this point. This is not the driver for the proposed changes in governance, this is purely about the effectiveness and efficiency of our police and fire services.



Who has made these recommendations? Can we trust that they know what they are talking about?

The PCC engaged independent business consultants to assess this issue. They included Doctors and Professors who are experts in their fields. The lead consultant has 30 years of experience working with businesses across the public, private and third sectors, reviewing their processes, organisational structures and operations in order to maximise their effectiveness and efficiency. The consultants gathered and analysed evidence, including from talking with senior police and fire officers, the local Fire Authorities and partner organisations, before presenting their conclusions.