

Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board

Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board considered the proposals at its meeting on 18 July 2017 when the Deputy PCC attended to respond to questions. The comments made by the Board are set out below.

Comments on the Business Case – Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board

2. It was suggested that Business Case was not strong or clear enough and didn't evidence how £6.5m savings would be made. The Deputy PCC advised that if the initial Business Case was agreed, a further more detailed Case would be developed involving consultation with the staff in the enabling service areas.
3. Paragraph 6.7.5 (of the business case) which stated "Thereafter, from April 2019, the PFCC would be expected to review the senior command and leadership teams, to begin to release any redundant posts and deliver the transformation plan" gave the impression that it was a first step towards joint operations for a West Mercia Fire and West Mercia Police. The Deputy PCC advised that the Business Case was about the governance of the fire and rescue services and that Beckford Consulting had perhaps taken a step further to say, that in future there may be further joint collaborative working. This however, would be a matter to be determined at the time. The current proposal did not relate to any chief officer posts but savings from sharing the enabling services.
4. In response to the suggestion that the implications of the electoral complexity had not been taken into account, the Deputy PCC advised that currently, local councillors who sat on the two fire authorities, although all elected, were only elected to represent their divisions upon their Councils. They were not directly elected to the fire authorities but nominated by councils without consulting the public. If the changes were to go ahead, in 2020 residents would have the chance to directly elect a local Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner with every voter having an equal say and thus increasing democratic accountability.
5. It was envisaged that the Police, Crime and Fire Commissioner would be scrutinised and held to account in the same way as the PCC was now held to account, by expanding the role of the West Mercia Police and Crime Panel. Further guidance from Government was awaited.
6. The Deputy PCC said that 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 now. Their names and branding etc. would not be affected and they would still serve the same communities. Two separate precepts for police and fire would also remain.
7. It was acknowledged by the DPCC that in addition to the Chairmen of the Fire Authorities and the Chief Constable, Beckford Consultants could have spoken to the current Chairman of the West Mercia Police and Crime Panel to inform the Report.
8. Confirmation was given that the proposal would not have a direct impact on the West Mercia and Warwickshire Policing Alliance.

9. Although the legislation addressed all blue light services, there was no reference to the West Midlands Ambulance Service in the Business Case. The Deputy PCC suggested that as it was intrinsically linked to health services it was considered a 'step too far' at this stage, but may be looked at in the future.

10. A member asked how joint governance could improve Hereford and Worcester Fire Service, when there were already examples of the Service working collaboratively and proactively. The Deputy PCC suggested that it was more about whether the current governance arrangements were as effective as joint governance arrangements would be with a single body overseeing all three organisations.

11. It was suggested by members that the Business Case was lacking in detail and it was not possible to understand whether it was viable or not. The tone of the Case was 'leading'; the timescale too fast and it didn't include the Ambulance Service. The Deputy PCC reiterated that this was an outline Business Case, with a standard 3 month consultation and that the timeline had been set by Government. Any comments made as part of the Consultation would be included in the enhanced Business Case

12. It was suggested that as the Fire and Police Services were already working collaboratively, the £4m savings from back office efficiencies could be made anyway without the need for joint governance

13. Some members expressed the view that as the public perception of the Police and Fire Services was very different, the Business Case was about gauging public reaction. The Deputy PCC firmly believed that joint governance would be beneficial to the public and whilst acknowledging the difference in brand between the two services, joint governance would allow for a strategic overview of both services, which in turn would enhance the service for the public.

14. It was confirmed that the Beckford Consultants Report cost in the region of £30,000 which was paid for by central Government.

15. It was suggested by the DPCC on a number of occasions, that a significant advantage of the services working collaboratively was that the Fire Service would have a broader role in helping to identify those families and vulnerable people in need of help. Members suggested it was, however important to be mindful about right of entry to people's homes and that it may not be possible for the role to be as broad as envisaged.

16. The capacity of the PCC to take on the expanded role of Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner if the proposal went ahead was also mentioned as a concern.

17. Members suggested there was very little financial information or information on the operational savings to be made and a feeling that the changes were heading towards being one organisation eventually. The PCC pointed out that a number of options were considered and the Business Case was giving a flavour of what could be achieved if the Joint Governance option was adopted.