

West Mercia Police and Crime Panel

Friday, 27 November 2020, - 11.00 am

Minutes

Present:

Mr S J Mackay (Chairman), Mr M Wood (Vice Chairman), Mr R C Adams, Mr S Bowen, Mr S Cronin, Ms H Dyke, Mr R Evans, Mr J Grubb, Mr A D Kent, Mr J Lavery, Mr A Luckman, Mr W Parr, Mr K Sahota, Mr D Tremellen and Mr T A L Wells

Also attended:

John Champion, West Mercia Police & Crime Commissioner
Andy Champness, Chief Executive, Office of the West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner
Anthony Bangham, Chief Constable, West Mercia Police

Tim Rice (Senior Public Health Practitioner),
Sheena Jones (Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager) and Samantha Morris (Scrutiny Co-ordinator)

Available Papers

The members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated);
- B. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 21 September 2021 (previously circulated).

(A copy of document A will be attached to the signed Minutes).

356 Welcome and Introductions

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the Meeting and explained that it was being held online to comply with regulations issued for the coronavirus pandemic which enabled Panel meetings to take place, visible to the public, whilst they could not take place at a specific place such as County Hall.

357 Named Substitutes

Councillor Julian Grubb was substitute for Councillor Nyear Nazir (Redditch).

358 Apologies and Declarations of Interest

Apologies were received from Cllrs Durkin and Nazir and also from Mrs Clive (Co-opted Independent Lay Member).

Declarations of interest were made by:

- Cllr Mackay as he was a retired Police Officer in receipt of a Police Pension (not West Mercia Police); and
- Cllr Julian Grubb as he was a retired Police

		Officer in receipt of a Police Pension (not West Mercia Police).
359	Public Participation	None.
360	Confirmation of the Minutes of the previous meeting	The Minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2020 were agreed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman.
361	The Impact of COVID-19 on Policing in West Mercia	<p>The Panel was provided with overview of the impact COVID-19 on policing in West Mercia. The report set out how West Mercia Police had responded to the pandemic and used its resources to address the demands it had faced including strategic planning, partnership working, the impact of COVID-19 on the nature and scale of crime and incidents and the Police and Crime Commissioners (PCC's) governance and oversight of the Force response.</p> <p>During the introduction to the Report, the PCC highlighted that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COVID was the second major incident of the year, flooding being the first • to fulfil its duties in light of the pandemic, West Mercia Police had adopted a gold, silver and bronze command response • overall, although not perfect the PCC was pleased with the how the COVID situation had been handled and how the community had been supported by the Police. The PCC thanked all staff for their hard work and dedication during the pandemic • some of the costs around COVID were yet to be quantified and some funding had been provided by Government • he was continuing to hold the Chief Constable to account (as appropriate). <p>During the discussion, the following main points were made:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Member reported that the new format of the Safer Neighbourhood Team (SNT) Reports provided to Parish Councils were not detailing the Parish areas. Parish Council's had reported that it was helpful if the relevant parishes were detailed

**362 Police & Crime
Plan Activity
and
Performance
Monitoring**

in the report. The PCC agreed to look into the matter and report back.

- In response to a question about how employees' mental health was being supported, the Chief Constable advised that the health and well-being of staff was at the forefront of the organisational leadership. Initially, at the start of COVID staff were anxious about the sufficiency of personal protective equipment (PPE), but this had now lessened as supplies became more readily available. It had been noted that during the first wave of COVID, staff attendance was higher and they had felt that there was a greater appreciation of the of role of the Police and generally felt more valued.
- The PCC's November holding to account session with the Chief Constable had taken place on 25 November and notes from this were available from the PCC's website. Public involvement and engagement in this process was more difficult but moving forward, the PCC was planning a more interactive approach to engagement, which would hopefully achieve a stronger public voice.
- It was noted that £466,243 had been received from Government to support more visible policing in West Mercia around coronavirus. Approximately £300k of this was supporting overtime allocations for staff and the remaining funding was being put toward messaging communities and the demand coming into the organisation to ensure that the COVID response wasn't overwhelming the emergency response. There were a number of pressures arising, which would need to be reviewed as part of the budget setting process.
- The PCC confirmed that the recruitment of new Police Officers was going well and in addition, the recruitment of Special Constables had commenced too.

The Chairman thanked the PCC for his report and asked that he ensured that going forward PPE was in sufficient supply for Police Officers to be enabled to their job safely.

The Panel considered the Police & Crime Plan Activity and Performance Monitoring Report (July – September 2020).

The PCC highlighted some examples of recent activity in support of the Safer West Mercia Plan's four key

Report (July-September 2020)

objectives:

- In 20/21 so far, the PCC had been successful in securing over £1.5m of additional funding from a variety of sources to support victims of domestic abuse and reduce criminality in West Mercia. Over £0.5m was given earlier in the year to support services that worked with victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence. The remainder of the fund was recently awarded to Brookside, Telford, to improve the lives of its residents and make sure the area was as safe as possible. This included funding a number of crime prevention measures and building up the community cohesion. Funding had also been awarded for the DRIVE Programme in Herefordshire.
- The PCC was disappointed about virtual remand hearings and had written to both the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Justice to voice his concerns about the current situation around court backlogs and the video remand hearings that had been introduced. He sought support for the system to be made better for victims and for it to not affect policing.
- The Courts Service had agreed to enable a live link between the Telford Court building and Kidderminster Magistrates Court so that remand hearings could be heard remotely. This removed the need for detainees to be transported from Shropshire to Kidderminster. While this was only a temporary arrangement, it was a welcome development.
- Preparations were underway for the withdrawal of the PCC from Place Partnership Limited for the delivery of property management services. This would take effect from 31 March 2021.
- In October 2020, the PCC launched a public consultation seeking views on priorities. The survey had revealed that there was good support from the Public, their priorities were roughly in line with those of the PCC and that they would like to see a focus on some of the lower harm issues.

During the discussion, the following main points were made:

- The bids received for the Safer Roads Grant were currently being assessed and following the allocations would be reviewed to see if any further funding would be made available

- A number of members expressed concerns that speeding was a key issue for communities. This issue was discussed at length and the points made included:
 - The suggestion that data led policing could assist with reducing speeding
 - The need for education campaigns to make speeding socially unacceptable in conjunction with speed enforcement in a similar way to the campaigns around drink driving
 - Lobbying of ministers to ensure a national focus
 - The need for Councils to consider road safety implications when approving planning applications.

- The PCC explained that he held the Force to account for appropriate use of resources and was assured that there was an appropriate focus on speeding. It was however a responsibility of all partners not just the Police. The Chief Constable advised that he was involved with speeding initiatives at both a national and local level as well as other crimes associated with speeding. Road safety, however, wasn't just about speeding - not wearing a seat belt, drink/drug driving and using mobile phones whilst driving were all major harm factors on the roads. West Mercia was investing as much as possible to target high harm offenders.

- A Member suggested that increasing public confidence in the Police was important and gave a couple of examples where the public had reported issues and had not received feedback. The PCC found this disheartening and acknowledged that there needed to be a relentless focus on improving public satisfaction. He would follow up on the specific incidents outside of the meeting.

- In response to a question about how the Survey seeking people's views on priorities had been made accessible, the PCC confirmed that a variety of methods had been used including signposting via the Media, the use of social media, parish council network, neighbourhood watch, voluntary and community service networks and the SNT's.

- A Member expressed concerns about the delays in the criminal justice system and the effect on victims and communities. The PCC explained that during COVID restrictions, there were delays

which had resulted in a latent backlog of demand and a robust plan was needed to deal with this with buy-in from all partners. The PCC was reassured that all courts were now operating, but it would take a while to deal with the backlog. He believed however, that technology could have been embraced more quickly. Although the PCC was pleased that progress had been made, it needed to be faster. The PCC assured the Panel that he would continue to lobby for further improvements.

- It was noted that the PCC had written to both the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Justice to voice his concerns about virtual remand hearings and the current situation around court backlogs. Although video remand hearings had been introduced, he sought support for the system to be made better for victims and for it to not affect policing. The PCC explained that he had offered to be a Pilot Scheme for a video remand system in Kidderminster, which didn't work out as the criminal justice system wouldn't provide the ongoing revenue needed for the Pilot despite the PCC providing the use of estates. It was noted that Local Member support and lobbying in this area was both important and welcome.
- The PCC confirmed that in addition to the recent survey seeking people's views on priorities, he would also be carrying out the usual consultation on budget proposals. However, at the moment, it was unclear when the draft settlement would be received.
- It was noted that there were number of Police Officers not engaging with victims' advice line and more work in this area was needed. The PCC acknowledged that there were barriers that were needed to be overcome. The Chief Constable advised that work had been undertaken to understand how this could be improved.
- The PCC agreed to look at the data provided around delivering effective core practices with a view to including those charged for offences as well as the number on bail under investigation to ensure a full picture.

The Panel considered the Work Programme, which was agreed subject to the following additions:

- Victim Witnesses Strategy
- Annual Report of PCC (before the May elections)
- The contribution of the Police in planning

- applications in respect of road safety
- Panel to visit the Operation and Communication Centre.

The Chairman also agreed to discuss the format of the Police & Crime Plan Activity and Performance Monitoring Report with the PCC.

The meeting ended at 1.15 pm

Chairman