

West Mercia Police and Crime Panel

Thursday, 4 February 2021, Online - 2.00 pm

Present:

Minutes

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

Also attended:

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. Presentation slides for the West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioners Proposed Precept and Budget 2021/22
- C. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 27 November 2020 (previously circulated).

(Copies of documents A and B will be attached to the signed Minutes).

364 Welcome and Introductions

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the Meeting.

365 Named Substitutes

None.

366 Apologies and Declarations of Interest

Apologies were received from Cllr Kuldeep Sahota (Telford and Wrekin Council) and Aled Luckman (Independent Lay Member).

A declaration of interest was made by Cllr Steve Mackay as he was a retired Police Officer in receipt of a Police Pension (not West Mercia Police).

367 Public Participation

The Chairman reported that a request for public participation had been received from Mr Nash. A summary of the points made was:

- What was the planned action for the constant speeding through Major's Green area, some vehicles were speeding up to 70mph in a 30mph zone? The vehicles were mainly transient through the area from the motorway

368 Confirmation of the Minutes of the previous meeting

- There was a lack of police officers in the area, Mr Nash felt that it was a forgotten area
- The Policy on county lines - the area had been hit extremely hard in last few years with burglaries and attempts. He questioned whether there was any consideration of setting up an operation to identify the culprits?

The Chairman thanked Mr Nash his comments and questions which had been noted and advised that he would receive a written response after the meeting.

The Minutes of the meeting held on 27 November 2020 were agreed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman.

369 West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioners Proposed Precept and Budget 2021/22

The West Mercia Police and Crime Panel (PCP) was asked to consider the:

- (i) West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner's (PCC's) Proposed Budget 2021/22 and Medium Term Financial Plan 2021/22 – 2024/25;
- (ii) report of the PCP's Budget Scrutiny Task Group; and
- (iii) provide a report to the PCC on the proposed precept, including any recommendations, outlining whether it vetoed the precept or not.

West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner's (PCC's) Proposed Budget 2021/22 and Medium Term Financial Plan 2021/22 – 2024/25

The PCC gave a presentation to the Panel on his proposed budget, the slides had been shared with Panel members prior to the meeting and were attached to these minutes. The highlights from the presentation were as follows.

The proposed Budget overview was:

- a net revenue budget after savings of £244.679m (£8.874m on 2020/21)
- Central funding of £138.202m (£7.484m on 20/21)
- A Council Tax for a Band D property of £240.20 (an increase of £15 on 2020/21)
- There was provision for an additional 91 police officers (totalling 399 since 2016)
- Investment to continue in force modernisation
- Building further Police focus on community

priorities

- Provision to mitigate significant risks.

1,395 responses had been received from the Consultation process, with a clear majority of respondents supporting paying more for policing. Community priorities were around police visibility, engagement, and action, as well as community safety. 67% of respondents were worried about levels of crime.

West Mercia had the lowest increase in precept across England and Wales in the current PCC term.

Budget Scrutiny Task Group

Cllr Wood (Lead Member of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group) introduced the Task Group report and thanked the PCC and his staff for their clarity and time in facilitating the meetings of the Group. Unfortunately, in addition to the Lead Member only 2 Members of the Task Group were able to attend both of the meetings set up in December 2020 and January 2021.

The Task Group met with the PCC and his officers to discuss the proposed budget for 2021/2022, the Medium Term Financial Plan through to 2024/2025 and the proposed Precept for 2021/22 in context of the Policing Plan and the Commissioner's election promises. The Report was attached to the Agenda.

Subject to the results of the PCC's 2021/22 Budget Consultation which closed on 20 January, the Task Group was supportive of the PCC's financial strategy for the Budget Proposals for 2021/22 and the MTFP through to 2024/25 in the context of the West Mercia Policing Plan, although there were reservations about the affordability of the 6.6% Council Tax increase for residents given the current economic climate.

During the discussion, the following main points were made:

- The precept proposal recommended to the Panel was to increase the precept by 6.6% for 2021/22, adding £15.00 to the annual Council Tax bill for a typical band D home. It was acknowledged that this was a difficult decision at the current time.
- Cllr Kent highlighted from the presentation the point about the clear majority of respondents to the Consultation supporting the increase in the precept ie paying more for more policing, a point

which he echoed. The proposed Community Policing Charter was very welcome, especially if it was simplistic and reduced the bureaucracy around community involvement. The investment in digital transition was also welcomed.

- In response to the suggestion that the size of the Agenda pack for the meeting should be reduced, the PCC pointed out that the Budget Report in particular represented a significant amount of work, however the information provided as part of performance reporting was on the radar in terms of complexity and amount of information provided.
- A Member referred to slide 8 “Tackling the issues that matter most to you” and in doing so reminded the PCC that the new format of the Safer Neighbourhood Team (SNT) Reports provided to Parish Councils were not detailing the Parish areas. Parish Councils had reported that it was helpful if the relevant parishes were detailed in the report. The Chief Constable acknowledged that there was an issue internally, but provided reassurance that it wasn’t due to a lack of commitment to provide information and he believed that the Community Charter would address this.
- A Member questioned why £2.7m had been identified as a key risk for the delay in the delivery of savings leading to an overspend in the year (with no specific provision for earmarked reserves). In response the PCC advised that not all of the savings were within West Mercia’s gift and that some services were still being provided to Warwickshire; that said he was reassured of West Mercia Police’s ability to deliver the savings and they had a good track record.
- The PCC confirmed that Athena was now fully embedded and was a good example of the digital transformation process. There was still further development required to maximise the use of Athena and automate more of the processes. Currently, West Mercia had a shared IT infrastructure with Warwickshire for transactional services, forensics, and file storage which (except for file storage) was due to end by spring 2021.
- A review of estates services had been undertaken and new arrangements were being implemented, following Worcestershire County Council’s decision to serve notice and withdraw from the joint venture company Place Partnership Limited. The PCC and Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service were working in partnership to

create a joint estates service. This new estates service would deliver efficiencies whilst creating an improved bespoke service for both emergency services.

- A Member questioned why the PCC had increased the precept by 26.69% during his tenure (2016/17 – 2021/22) equating to just over £50. The PCC advised that when his tenure began, he had inherited declining police officer numbers and an increasing council tax, he taken the opportunity to freeze the council tax and had increased the numbers of police officers over the period. 14% of the increase was attributable to inflation and 12% was linked to 20% uplift in police officers. The PCC was very clear that he wanted to deliver a balanced budget and this Budget was a 'more for more' budget, in the interests of community. He believed that he had delivered on his promises.
- The PCC confirmed that the separation costs from the split from the Alliance with Warwickshire had been funded from reserves.
- The PCC advised that there had not been any significant capital receipts during his tenure, but if there had been, the money would have been reinvested in capital spend. When applicable, the details of assets sold and how the money from the sale was invested, was publicly available via the PCC's website.
- The plans for Hereford Police Station and outstations were discussed, the PCC advised that officers were looking at a business case to either rebuild the station or re-furbish the existing building. The PCC was working with the Fire Service in respect of co-location in Leominster.
- In response to a Member question about the priority of road safety in the Budget, the PCC confirmed that this was business as usual and signposted the Member to page 34 of the Agenda for further detail.
- A Member highlighted specific local policing issues in Highley, which the Chief Constable was aware of. The Community Charter would hopefully provide the mechanism for local accountability.
- In response to a question about what would not be delivered without a 6.6% increase in the Council Tax, the PCC explained that the increase would support the investment in extra police officers, modernisation of estates, the IT upgrades and reiterated that the proposal was for a 'more for more' budget.

**370 Police & Crime
Plan Activity
and
Performance
Monitoring
Report (October
- December
2020)**

Decision

On being put to the vote, the precept proposal recommended to the Panel to increase the precept by 6.6% for 2021/22, adding £15 to the annual Council Tax bill for a typical band D home was agreed.

A letter informing the PCC of the Panel's decision would be sent. It was noted that the PCC was required to have regard to the Panel's report and provide a response which would be published.

The Vice-Chairman suggested that there should be a review of the method of scrutinising the PCC's precept proposal including the merits of a task group.

The meeting adjourned from 15.40pm to 15.45pm.

The Panel considered the Police & Crime Plan Activity and Performance Monitoring Report (October-December 2020).

Following the PCC's introduction of the report, the following main points were made:

- The PCC confirmed that the HMICFRS Inspection (Nov 2020) Hot Debrief Results were taken very seriously and used in the holding to account sessions with the Chief Constable.
- In response to the suggestion that it would be helpful to have year on year comparative information included in the performance summary, the PCC asked that a detailed request be put in writing, which he would consider. The Chairman suggested that this should be part of a wider discussion on the format of the performance information that he would follow up outside of the meeting.
- A Member queried whether the PCC carried out any analysis of freedom of information (FOI) and subject access requests (SAR's) received. The PCC confirmed that some analysis was carried out on trends but didn't believe that the number of requests received were unmanageable and the responses given were proportionate.
- The PCC confirmed that the Road Safety Strategy had been published and the action plan was being developed.
- A Member referred to page 100 of the Agenda regarding the work with partners to increase the proportion of hate crimes reported to the Police. It was

**371 The West
Mercia Police
and Crime
Commissioner's
End of Term
Report**

questioned whether this was because hate crime was currently under reported, the PCC agreed to check and report back.

- It was noted that the performance in respect of the % of 999 calls answered in 10 seconds and the % of 101 calls answered in 30 seconds had declined. The PCC explained that 999 calls were currently being prioritised and that a sustained increase of online reports would help to alleviate the pressure on 111 and improve performance, which had been adversely affected by COVID-19.
- Concern was expressed about the backlog of cases in the criminal justice system and the impact on victims. The PCC advised that he was disappointed about the backlog and that there had been insufficient progress made to reduce it. The Magistrates Court had made progress in clearing its backlog, meanwhile the backlog within the Crown Court had continued to grow. The PCC was actively working with national, regional, and local partners to address the challenges. It was agreed that the Chairman would write to the Secretary of State to express the Panel's concerns and lobby for a quicker solution.
- In response to the suggestion that front line police officers should be prioritised for the COVID-19 vaccine, the PCC advised that the Home Secretary was giving this consideration.

The report was noted.

The PCC was elected in May 2016 and his term of office was scheduled to end in May 2020. In March 2020, the Government announced that both the local government and PCC elections were to be deferred for one year because of the coronavirus pandemic. In February 2020, the Panel was presented with the PCC's draft End of Term Report outlining key PCC activity, priorities and outcomes during his current term of office. In light of the PCC's extended term in office, the End of Term Report had been refreshed and updated to include activity and outcomes from the additional time period.

The Report was noted.

**372 Police & Crime
Plan Overview
of
Commissioning
Activity Report
(2020- 2021)**

Members had before them an overview of the commissioning activity undertaken by PCC in support of his Safer West Mercia Plan since the start of 2020/21 and the Coronavirus pandemic.

2020/21 had seen a lot of development and change in the commissioning of services, particularly those relating

**373 Work
Programme**

to victim service provision. Much of this change had been assisted by successful funding applications exceeding £1.6m for the year, which was encouraging given the circumstances and challenges, which had been faced by many.

During the discussion, the following main points were made:

- A Member suggested that Operation Snap, which encouraged members of the public to submit digital footage showing potential traffic offences should be publicised more to encourage take-up and ultimately influence changes in behaviour
- Use of the Victim Advice Line (VAL) was not at the level anticipated but was a continued area of focus for the PCC.

The report was noted.

It was agreed that:

- The PCC areas of commissioning would be added to the work programme, for further Scrutiny
- The Chairman would discuss with the PCC the format and information provided for performance monitoring.

The meeting ended at 4.30 pm

Chairman