

Minutes of the West Mercia Police and Crime Panel

County Hall, Worcester WR5 2NP

Friday, 3 February 2023, 11.00 am

Present:

Cllr Barry Durkin (Chairman), Cllr Rob Adams, Cllr Jeff Anderson, Cllr Sebastian Bowen, Mrs C Clive, Cllr Roger Evans, Cllr Nigel Lumby, Cllr Steve Mackay, Ms B McDowall, Cllr Vivienne Parry, Cllr James Stanley and Cllr Paul Watling

Also attended:

John Champion, West Mercia Police & Crime Commissioner
Gareth Boulton, Chief Executive, Office of the West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner
Chief Constable Pippa Mills, West Mercia Police
Paul Benfield, Treasurer, Office of the West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner

Paul Kinsella, Senior Public Health Practitioner
Phil Rook, Director of Resources, Worcestershire Children First
Sheena Jones, Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager
Samantha Morris, Overview and Scrutiny Manager

Available Papers

The members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated);
- B. Presentation handouts for West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner's Proposed Budget and Precept 2023/24 (circulated at the Meeting)
- C. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 23 November 2022 (previously circulated).

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

464 Welcome and Introductions

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting in particular the new Panel Member, Cllr David Wright (Telford and Wrekin Council) who had replaced Cllr

Jim Lavery. Thanks were recorded to Cllr Lavery for his services to the Panel over the last few years.

465 Named Substitutes

Cllr Steve Mackay (Worcestershire) for Cllr Aled Luckman.

466 Apologies and Declarations of Interest

Apologies were received from Cllrs Graham Ballinger (Wyre Forest), Helen Jones (Bromsgrove), Aled Luckman (Worcestershire), Nyear Nazir (Redditch), Tom Wells (Malvern) and David Wright (Telford and Wrekin).

Declarations of interest were made by Cllrs Steve Mackay and Nigel Lumby who were retired Police Officers in receipt of a Police Pension (not West Mercia Police).

467 Public Participation

None.

468 Confirmation of the Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 November 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

469 West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner's Proposed Budget and Precept 2023/24

The Panel was asked to consider the:

- (i) West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner's (PCC's) Proposed Budget 2023/24 and Medium Term Financial Plan 2023/24 – 2027/28;
- (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 vetoes the precept or not.

The PCC gave a presentation to the Panel on his proposed budget (copies of which had been circulated to the Panel). In doing so, the following main points were highlighted:

- The precept proposal recommended to the Panel was to increase the precept by 5.94% for 2023/24, adding £14.84 to the annual Council Tax bill for a typical band D home. The PCC pointed out that even if the Panel approved the precept proposal, it wouldn't solve the financial challenges for 2023/24 and a budget deficit of £11.2m would still remain.

- The four pillars of the Safer West Mercia Plan (Putting Victims and Survivors First, Building a More Secure West Mercia, Reforming West Mercia and Reassuring West Mercia's Communities) were at the heart of the proposed investments for 2023/24.
- In terms of how success would be measured, a suite of key performance indicators (KPI's) had been developed covering the four pillars of the Safer West Mercia Plan.
- The PCC explained that he had never previously sought to maximise precept funding but on this occasion he believed that flexing the precept was the right thing in order to maintain service levels. Even with an increase close to the maximum uplift, there was still an £11.2m budget deficit and operational implications as a result.

The Lead Member of the Budget Task Group introduced the Report and thanked the Members of the Task Group and the supporting Officers involved for their hard work and commitment. The following main points were made:

- This year, the PCC ran the budget consultation as a two-stage process. The first part ran from the 27 April 2022 until the 11 July 2022 and was to understand the views of the public on local policing, contact and engagement and crime and anti-social behaviour issues. This was followed by the budget consultation which was launched on 6 December 2022 and closed on 6 January 2023. Members of the Task Group welcomed the earlier engagement in the Budget Consultation process this year and emphasised the importance of demonstrating in the Budget Consultation document the impact of the funding against outcomes.
- The Budget Task Group had conducted a more rigorous scrutiny this year as could be seen from the Schedule of Activity detailed at Appendix 1 of the Task Group report.
- Members of the Task Group had recommended that the Panel supported the PCC's proposal for an increase of Council Tax to £14.84 (equivalent to 5.94%) providing that the Panel received a quarterly budget monitoring report which included key performance indicators (as detailed in Appendix 2) to monitor the outcomes against the Budget so that it was possible for the PCP to identify trends, service improvements and satisfaction against the commitments in the West Mercia PCC's Safer West Mercia Plan. This recommendation also set out to ensure that in future years base budgets have been maintained to maximise investment and flexibility.

During the opportunity for discussion, the following main points were made:

- Whether the communities of West Mercia would be able to see the operational implications of the funding if the 5.4% precept proposal was not implemented, in particular the protection of the Force's problem-solving capability and key organisational enabling services. The PCC advised that although the Police would respond to reports of crime, the proactivity of the Force's response would be a casualty of not approving the 5.94% increase to the annual Council Tax.

- The increase of the precept would allow for the bridging of the financial deficit as well as investment in services.
- The Panel welcomed the KPI's which would provide the Panel with the opportunity to monitor the outcome of the investment. When asked if the additional funding would show a significant improvement in KPI's, the PCC reassured the Panel that improvements would be seen as a result of the investment made including improvements in public confidence and victim satisfaction.
- A Member suggested that the Council Tax flexibility offered to PCC's was as a result of poor government decisions and inadequate funding for Police Forces which left PCCs with no option but to use the flexibility offered to them and thus pass the increase on to taxpayers.
- Although the PCC was not aware of every PCC's precept proposal in the Country, most PCCs in the West Midlands were proposing to take advantage of the precept flexibility.
- The increase in the precept would enable the PCC to fund 40 additional police officers and thus provide more visible policing across the Force area, which included the roll out of the Stronger Communities Programme.

Having considered the reports, the following recommendation as proposed by the Panel's Budget Task Group was considered:

That the West Mercia Police and Crime Panel support the PCC's proposal for an increase of Council Tax to £14.84 (equivalent to 5.94%) providing that the Panel receives a quarterly budget monitoring report which includes key performance indicators (as attached) to monitor the outcomes against the Budget so that it is possible for the PCP to identify trends, service improvements and satisfaction against the commitments in the West Mercia PCC's Safer West Mercia Plan. This recommendation also sets out to ensure that in future years base budgets have been maintained to maximise investment and flexibility.

This recommendation was agreed by Members of the West Mercia Police and Crime Panel by a majority vote of 8 in favour, 3 against the recommendation.

Following the meeting, a report from the Panel would be sent to the PCC.

470 Police & Crime Plan Activity and Performance Monitoring Report

The Panel received an update on the activity undertaken by PCC in support of his Safer West Mercia Plan and an update on police performance.

The PCC highlighted the following points from the Report:

- A new Deputy Chief Executive had been appointed and had started work in December 2022.
- The PCC had been successful in a partnership bid of £650,000 across 2 years, with Shropshire & Telford ICS, and Herefordshire & Worcestershire ICS to NHSE/I in December. The bid was for a complex

care multi-agency service, to support victims of Sexual Violence with complex needs. The service would enable tailored provision, triaging, case meetings, stabilisation or faster access, overall achieving better outcomes and puts the victims at the centre of their own recovery.

- Good progress was being made against His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) - A report into the effectiveness of vetting and counter-corruption arrangements in West Mercia Police (published 17 November) – The Panel would be provided with an update at its next meeting on 12 June 2023.

During the discussion, the following main points were made:

- A Member highlighted the A49 (Shropshire) which was a high risk route and asked if more support could be provided by the Police. In response, the PCC suggested that if a joint meeting was arranged between Shropshire Council and Highways England he would make arrangements to attend the meeting.
- Concerns were expressed about the delays in the criminal justice system and the PCC was asked whether there was anything that the PCP could do to help. The PCC emphasised the importance of keeping the situation on the radar and as previously mentioned Hereford Court was still not sitting and any help with re-opening it would be welcomed. The Chairman reminded members that the Panel had written to the Leader of Herefordshire Council to urge that the Court was re-opened following its November 2022 meeting. The impact of the delays on victims was worrying and puts strain on them and the Victim Care Unit but also was resulting in less guilty pleas. It was agreed that delivery of justice should be at the centre of any discussions.
- It was noted that at the end of the third quarter of the financial year, the financial position of West Mercia was an estimated revenue underspend of £4.388m (1.6%) against the total budget of £261m. The underspend had mostly resulted from the profile of recruitment of Police Officers occurring towards the end of the financial year, and also from managing Staff recruitment to ensure that police officer recruitment could be prioritised and in order to manage the effect of the larger than expected pay award for 2022/23. The PCC confirmed that the Chief Constable had reassured him that the force remained on track to onboard the current agreed allocation of officers (including the 20 additional officers) by March 2023, despite a challenging employment market.
- The PCC acknowledged that there were challenges around the existing fire-arms range and that a new facility could be a good income generation opportunity.
- The PCC was actively engaged in the public consultation around the South Worcestershire Development Plan (SWDP) Review, specifically around the status of police headquarters at Hindlip. The review proposed to remove Major Developed Site status for Hindlip Park. If confirmed, this would threaten the long-term viability of the site as an operational headquarters for both the police force and Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service. The PCC added that lawyers had been engaged to provide support with this.

- Delivery of the annual planned programme of minor works and refurbishments continued to provide significant improvements to the estate. Examples included the provision of a new Learning & Training Hub at Bridgnorth police station, major refurbishment of the Hereford MASH facility and improvements to the Dog Section Training facility at Hindlip.
- The PCC, Deputy PCC and Assistant PCC continued to carry out engagements with communities, such as attending parish council meetings, visiting local community groups, and those that receive funding from the PCC. A total of 74 engagements took place between October and December. This was a significant increase on the previous quarter. A Member commended the PCC for this approach as it was making a significant difference to the farming communities – an invitation was extended to the PCC to visit some local farms.

With regard to the KPI’s for monitoring the outcomes of the precept funding against the Safer West Mercia Plan, it was agreed that the quarterly performance regime would be discussed outside of the meeting.

471 Work Programme

It was agreed that an update on the progress made against His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) - A report into the effectiveness of vetting and counter-corruption arrangements in West Mercia Police (published 17 November) would be added to the Work Programme for the 12 June 2023 meeting.

The meeting ended at 1.05 pm

Chairman