

Minutes of the West Mercia Police and Crime Panel

Wychavon District Council, Civic Centre, Pershore,

Worcestershire

Wednesday, 7 February 2024, 11.00 am

Present:

Cllr Barry Durkin (Chairman), Cllr Rob Adams (Vice Chairman),
Cllr Caroline Bagnall, Cllr Joanne Beecham, Cllr John Gallagher,
Cllr David Hitchiner, Cllr Nigel Lumby, Cllr Tracey Onslow,
Cllr Richard Overton, Cllr Vivienne Parry, Cllr Tom Piotrowski,
Cllr James Stanley, Cllr Colin Taylor, Mrs Carole Clive and Ms Beth McDowall.

Also attended:

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

Phil Rook, Chief Financial Officer
Paul Kinsella, Senior Public Health Practitioner
Samantha Morris, Interim Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager
Alison Spall, Overview and Scrutiny Officer

Available Papers

The members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated);
- B. Presentation on Budget Briefing 2024/25 (attached to these minutes)

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

507 Welcome and Introductions

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

508 Named Substitutes

West Mercia Police and Crime Panel Wednesday, 7 February 2024
Date of Issue: 22 February 2024

Councillor Caroline Bagnall for Councillor Tony Parsons (Shropshire Council)
Councillor Colin Taylor for Councillor Roger Evans (Shropshire Council)
Councillor David Hitchiner for Councillor Liz Harvey (Herefordshire Council)

509 Apologies and Declarations of Interest

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Roger Evans, Helen Jones, Liz Harvey, Kelly Middleton and Tony Parsons.

Councillor Tracey Onslow declared an interest as she had previously been the Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia.

Councillor Nigel Lumby declared an interest as he was in receipt of a Police Service pension (not from West Mercia area).

510 Public Participation

None.

511 West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner's Proposed Precept and Budget 2024-25

The Panel was asked to consider the:

- (i) West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner's (PCC's) Proposed Budget 2024/25 and Medium Term Financial Plan 2024/25 - 2028/29
- (ii) Report of the Panel's Budget Scrutiny Sub Group; and to
- (iii) Provide a report to the PCC on the proposed precept, including any recommendations, outlining whether it vetoed the precept or not.

The PCC gave a presentation to the Panel (attached to the Minutes), on his proposed budget. The following main issues were highlighted:

- The PCC's vision for West Mercia continued to be delivered through the 4 pillars of the Safer West Mercia Plan (SWMP) (Putting Victims and survivors first, Building a more secure West Mercia, Reforming West Mercia and Reassuring West Mercia's Communities). The Acting Chief Constable set out in detail some of the improvements planned in respect of the PCC's commitments to improved visible and accessible policing, improving public contact and to more effective investigations and better outcomes. These improvements included seeking to ensure that the roles of Neighbourhood Police Officers and Police Community Support Officers (PCSO) were fully staffed and able to be more visible particularly in town centre locations; enhancing the service for victims of sexual offences and improving the capacity of the online sexual abuse team and the digital forensics unit.
- The way in which the budget had been built, and the proposals to fund the £6.9m funding gap required for a balanced budget. The Panel was informed that it was critical that the resources were focussed in the right

operational areas to ensure the most benefit for the public. The aim of this budget was to protect and deliver plans that were already in place. It had therefore been necessary to reduce services in some areas and re-prioritise spend into other areas.

- An updated suite of key performance indicators (KPI's) had been developed to enable the success of the delivery of services through the 4 pillars to be measured by the Panel. It was highlighted that that there was consistency with the KPI's from the previous year to enable members to track changes.
- The PCC's recommendation to the Panel was to increase the precept by 4.91% for 2024/25, adding £13 to the annual Council Tax bill for an average band D home. During the PCC's term of office, he had been the lowest preceptor across all of the PCC's in England. The proposed increase for this year was necessary and justified in order to protect the funding basis relied upon to provide services.

The Lead Member of the Sub Group introduced the Group's report and thanked the members and supporting officers involved for their contribution to the process. The PCC was also thanked for the provision of data and his transparency which had enabled the Group to gain a thorough understanding of the budget at a granular level.

The Sub Group had met on 4 occasions and their work had focussed on seeking evidence that the precept proposals would provide best value and enable the inclusion of community themes which had emerged from the public engagement exercises, whilst also fulfilling the objectives of the SWMP. To achieve this, the Lead Member reported that the Group had taken account of a number of issues including the national economic picture and the effect on the West Mercia Police and the wider community of the proposed precept, the detrimental effect that the lower level of precept projected in the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) would have on West Mercia Police services and the potential benefits and efficiencies that the proposed precept increase could bring to key performance areas in the SWMP. The Group had also reviewed the KPI's from last year's precept setting process and considered how they could be enhanced, with a draft version for 2024/25 then having been considered.

Members of the Sub-Group had recommended that the West Mercia Police and Crime Panel support the PCC's proposal for an increase of Council Tax by £13.00 for an average Band D home (equivalent to 4.91%) providing that the Panel continued to receive a quarterly budget monitoring report which included KPI's (to monitor the outcomes against the Budget so that the PCP can identify trends, service improvements and satisfaction against the commitments in the SWMP) and continue to have a baseline for precept reviews in future years.

The Chairman thanked the Sub Group for their work and commitment to their task.

During the discussion, the following issues were raised by Members:

- A Member referred to the CCTV provision in Hereford and asked whether the PCC could provide financial support for the maintenance costs as he had been able to do previously. The PCC advised that he was not in a position to provide direct funding but would help Councils to attract support from other sources of funding. Direct funding had been withdrawn as universal support across the region had not been possible. The PCC also highlighted that the statutory duty for CCTV provision, under crime and disorder legislation, remained with local authorities, who owned the equipment. He did, however, recognise a partnership approach, and he had at times provided capital funding for infrastructure and equipment.
- With the rapid growth of cyber-crime, currently accounting for 50% of all crime, a Member questioned what was being done to increase resources in this area to protect the community. The Acting Chief Constable (ACC) explained that the Force was responding to this growing issue in various ways including increasing investment in child sexual exploitation issues, a whole system approach to fraud, including individual support for victims, and close working with the National Crime Agency where offences were originating from abroad. The PCC added that this issue was central to his strategic decision-making process on funding and that the Force's digital forensics team had been developed significantly to seek to combat the threat. The challenge now was to divert more resources to this area and to be able to effectively report on this threat.
- A Member sought assurance that the KPI's presented to the Panel would be clear, concise and robust in nature and that comparative trends would be able to be scrutinised. The PCC advised that he was committed to this and that he felt there had been progress made towards ensuring comparisons could be made against earlier KPI's, ensuring that the Panel were able to effectively hold him to account and build public confidence. He acknowledged that there was also scope for further progress in this area and gave his commitment to this being developed going forward.
- Concern at the lack of budget certainty in the coming years was expressed by a Member. The PCC confirmed that with Government's funding being based on a 1-year settlement, there was only certainty about the funding for the current year.
- A Member sought reassurance that concerns about improved face to face public contact with Police, opening times of local police stations and improving the performance of the 101 service were key priorities for the PCC. The PCC set out the expectations regarding police station opening hours and that the 101 service currently being provided was not good enough. He gave his commitment to improvements being made in these areas and confirmed that the Chief Constable had made resources available.
- The unfairness of the Council Tax system was raised in that the poorest in society paid a higher percentage towards Council Tax, than the more wealthy. A Member asked whether the PCC would consider working with the Panel to seek a reform of the Council Tax system. The PCC agreed the system was unfair and outdated, but highlighted there were a number of Council Tax support schemes for those most in need.

Whilst it was not an issue that was currently prominent in the country, he confirmed that it was an issue high on his agenda.

- In response to a Member's comment about the size of the proposed increase in precept, the PCC acknowledged that £13 a year was a significant increase, but he felt that it was justified on this occasion given the level of service being provided. He also highlighted that local authorities were having to make similar difficult decisions.
- A Member highlighted that residents were worried about knife crime and that sometimes victims felt let down. Whilst the current support being provided to put victims and survivors first was welcomed, it was questioned what additional support would be provided for victims as a result of the increase in precept. The PCC acknowledged that at times residents were let down and he gave his commitment to drive forward an improved universal offer for the delivery of services and was confident that the planned investment would facilitate this. On a positive note, the Panel was advised that the successful community investment work on crime prevention in Telford over the last 4 years had now been able to be provided across the West Mercia area.
- The 10 additional police officers (to be employed to front line policing) that the increase in precept would facilitate were welcomed, as was the fact that the Safer neighbourhood teams would be protected for the year ahead. The Panel was assured that policing resources were deployed to ensure a universal level of service was provided across West Mercia.

The Chairman highlighted the importance of working in partnership and that the robust KPI's were essential to allow effective comparisons to be made and provide confidence in the process. He thanked the PCC and his team for their contributions and the Lead Member and Sub Group members for the time and effort that had given to this process.

Having considered the reports, the following recommendation as proposed by the Budget Scrutiny Sub Group was considered:

That the West Mercia Police and Crime Panel support the PCC's proposal for an increase of Council Tax by £13.00 for an average Band D home (equivalent to 4.91%) providing that the Panel continues to receive a quarterly budget monitoring report which includes key performance indicators (to monitor the outcomes against the Budget so that the PCP can identify trends, service improvements and satisfaction against the commitments in the SWMP) and continue to have a baseline for precept reviews in future years.

This recommendation was agreed by Members of the Panel by a majority vote of 12 in favour, no votes against the recommendation and 2 abstentions.

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

512 Police & Crime Plan Activity and Performance Monitoring Report

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

The PCC highlighted the following points from his report:

- The PCC had been successful in a £650,000 bid to deliver the Complex Care Pathfinder to support victims of sexual violence, which he highlighted would make a huge difference.
- As part of the Government's Safer Streets Five initiative (SS5), the PCC had bid successfully for nearly £1m to fund a range of projects designed to tackle violence against women and girls, anti-social behaviour and neighbourhood crime in 2023/24 and 2024/25. The Panel was informed that as a result of budgetary pressures within Government, the funding for 2024/25 had now been reduced by £180k, but the PCC remained confident that partnership working would still enable the SS5 initiatives to be delivered with minimal impact.
- The Road Safety Grant initiative had been relaunched for a second round, with applications now closed. The PCC agreed to report back to the Panel on how these monies had been deployed.
- In respect of the criminal justice system, the Panel was informed that witness attendance rates remained high at 86%, which was above the regional and national average. The PCC also highlighted that West Mercia was the 6th highest in the country for guilty pleas at first hearing in the Crown Court.
- The Community Charter had been established 3 years ago, and the PCC advised that a review would be carried out this year to establish what was being delivered in terms of the key pledges the charter contained.

During the discussion, the following main points were made:

- A Member expressed frustration that the performance data linked in the report was for Quarter 2, rather than Quarter 3, thereby not enabling recent progress to be checked, for instance on the 101 response times. The PCC explained that unfortunately the timing of the meeting had meant the Quarter 3 data was unable to be incorporated, but that this data would be published shortly on the website and details would be forwarded to the Panel. In terms of response times for 101 calls, it was confirmed that there had been some improvement, but still some further progress needed. The ACC reported that as at 4 February, 74% of 101 calls were answered within 4 minutes and 50% in less than 30 seconds, and that 86% of 999 calls had been answered within 10 seconds. He reported that since the introduction of the switchboard, the abandonment of calls had reduced considerably. In relation to abandoned calls, a Member suggested that the message received when calling 101 should be checked and streamlined if possible, as there was a long-winded message to listen to before the phone rang the service itself. The PCC also highlighted that performance data on the

website was now being updated each month. In response to a query, he advised that this was not currently showing any previous data to enable trends to be viewed. He had been considering various ways of presenting this and would seek the Panel's input at the next meeting.

- The challenges presented by retail crime were raised by a Member and it was queried whether sufficient communication was taking place with individual retailers. The PCC assured the Panel that the Police were committed to enhanced visibility of Officers in the retail environment with dedicated town centre teams. It was recognised that retail theft was usually linked to other offending behaviour, and it was important to get to the root cause of this. The Panel was also informed of the important work funded by the Police, which was ongoing in conjunction with companies to ensure that their retail environments were set up appropriately. In response to a comment about the importance of focussing on the neighbourhood level of retail crime, the PCC assured the Panel that all levels of crime were unacceptable, and it was important to ensure that the right response was taken in response to all retail crime, importantly working closely with all the retailers in doing so.
- With regard to the information supplied on combatting drugs partnerships, a Member queried whether there was performance data for this area. The PCC advised that a performance dashboard was in the process of being developed. In the meantime, the ACC advised that there was some detailed information relating to the effectiveness of County Lines activity, which could be circulated to the Panel for information.
- A Member suggested that for the next Panel meeting, it would be helpful to review where the KPI's that the Panel currently received were located in reports, to ensure that going forward they were positioned together in the most effective way for the Panel to be able to easily access and monitor. The PCC was happy to present the information however it suited the Panel best and suggested this could be looked at by the Officers in advance of the next Panel. In response to a suggestion by another Member, it was agreed that developments in preventing cybercrime and artificial intelligence would be incorporated into the performance report.
- The increase in crime levels in rural areas was raised, particularly with respect to theft from farms and the protection available to farmers to protect their properties and equipment. The PCC advised that preventative measures were important, and that the smart water used to mark equipment had proved to be an effective system to help the Police to identify some of these criminals. In response to a general question as to whether rural crime was being sufficiently addressed, the PCC explained that the majority of crime that took place in rural areas was not specifically rural crime, as residents in those areas were subjected to the same crimes as all other areas, such as domestic abuse and online exploitation. Therefore, police activity focussing on these crimes benefitted residents in all areas. The Panel felt that an update report specifically on rural crime would be helpful and timely and it was agreed that this would be added to the Panel's Work Programme.

513 West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner's End of Term Report

The Panel received the PCC's End of Term report for information.

Given the proximity to the PCC elections, a Member questioned the content of this report and the context of the information provided. Whilst the report highlighted positive developments, the lack of data showing trends was an omission. The Member also sought the PCC's justification for a 12.4% proposed increase in funding for the PCC's office, given that budget savings were being sought across other budget areas. The PCC explained his reason for providing a draft version of his end of term report, as he wished to provide the Panel with an opportunity to look back over his period of office on what had been achieved in comparison to his police plan, to ensure accountability and transparency. The PCC advised that the 12.4% increase related to additional activity concerning his commissioning function.

514 Work Programme

The Panel reviewed its work programme, and it was agreed that the Annual Report on Complaints would be moved to the September Panel meeting.

Following a discussion earlier in the meeting, it was noted that an 'Update on Rural Crime' had been agreed to be added to the Work Programme.

The meeting ended at 1.07 pm

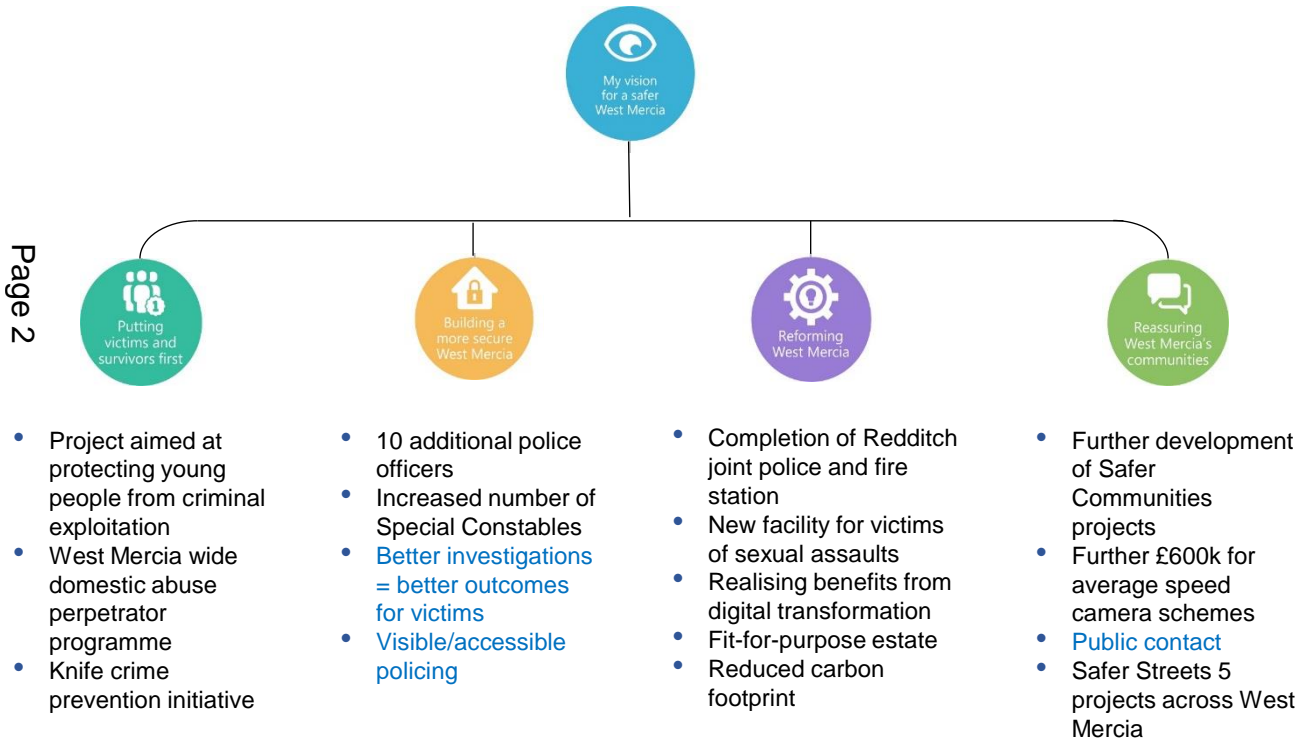
Chairman

West Mercia Police and Crime Panel

Budget briefing – 2024/25

Delivering the 2024/25 budget

Proposed PCC commitments – 2024/25



Boosting police officer numbers

2,506



Building the 2024/25 budget

Proposed expenditure on policing	£290.4m
Funding available	(£283.5m)
(based on a Council Tax precept increase of 1.99%)	

Funding gap: £6.9m

Proposals to bridge the gap

Underspend & reserves	£1.3m
Reduction in Services	£1.7m
Increase in Council tax	£3.6m
To be finalised	£0.3m (pension contributions)

Balanced budget

1. Improved visible & accessible policing

What we will do....

- Record number of police officers (S/Rs/Rf)
 - Achieve & maintain 2506 throughout 2024/25
 - Task effectively to crime & ASB hotspots & measure impact
- Protected SNT numbers & fewer abstractions
 - The force is committed to ensuring 100% of SNT PC posts are occupied throughout 2024/25
 - Patrol resources redistributed to better match demand and to minimise the need for SNT abstraction
- Full recruitment into protected PCSO numbers
 - The force is committed to use effective workforce planning to maximise occupancy of PCSO posts throughout the year
- Increased numbers of specials
 - Proactive recruitment of special constables to over 150.
- Town centre policing teams
 - A dedicated SNT policing resource located in town centres (based on a rounded assessment of local demography)
- 'All-out' visible policing patrols (S/Rs)
 - A day of action every month in a Local Policing Area
- Additional officers in professional standards (S/Rs/Rf)
 - Officers and staff are vetted in a timely way and are available to serve the public more quickly
 - 100% compliance with new vetting standards to ensure only the right people are employed

By

Q1
Q2

Q1
Q1

Q1

Q2

Q1

Q2
Q1

SWMP & Budget Outcome

- The public have trust and confidence in West Mercia Police to keep them safe/feeling safe
- % seen police in area in last week >25%
 - Reduction in TRC
 - Time spent in hotspots
- People have better access to services they require
- Reduction in TRC
 - Improved median response time
- Community Charter delivers its commitment
- % seen police in area in last week >25%
 - % who have confidence in local police >80%
- Community participation in community safety
- % seen police in area in last week >25%
- Communities safe from crime, disorder & danger
- % seen police in area in last week >25%
 - Reduction in shoplifting & increase in solved
 - % who have confidence in local police >80%
- Less harm and more positive outcomes
- Reduction in TRC & increase in solved
 - Increase in % victims satisfied by crime type
- Public have trust & confidence in West Mercia
- Reduction in median vetting times for standard cases
 - % who have confidence in local police >80%

2. Better investigations & better outcomes

What we will do....

- **Ensuring victims of serious sexual offences get a more consistently high standard of service**
 - A clear service offer from West Mercia Police that is based on but exceeds national best practice
- **Additional officers focused on tackling child abuse**
- **File quality improvements leading to better and faster access to justice**
- **Increased focus and resource on homicide prevention**
 - Coordinated work with partners to identify and intervene with those most at risk of involvement in serious violence
- **Reform of digital forensics**
 - A new case management system will be implemented in 2024/25 to speed up examinations and effectively track progress
- **Utilising publicly accessible information as part of investigations**
 - Intelligence officers with greater technology & training
- **Improved outcomes via performance framework**
 - Crime investigation shared more effectively with investigative responsibilities defined according to role
 - Provide priority responses to any retail crime where violence is threatened or a suspect detained
 - Greater use of diversionary and out of court remedies

By

Q1
Q2
Q2
Q2
Q4
Q3
Q1
Q1
Q1

SWMP & Budget Outcomes

- Victims are kept informed and supported, and recover from the harm suffered**
- Victim satisfaction % (rape)
 - Increase in crime solved (rape)
 - % cases with specialist officer deployed
- Victims are safeguarded from being re-victimised**
- Quicker action to safeguard children
- More positive criminal justice outcomes**
- % compliant pre-charge files (75%)
- Communities safe from crime, disorder & danger**
- Reduction in harm caused by Op Freya cohort
 - Reduction in serious violence
- Focused on improvement, innovation & value**
- Quicker action to safeguard children
 - Reduced digital forensic turnaround times
- Focused on improvement, innovation & value**
- TRC % solved
- More positive criminal justice outcomes**
- TRC % solved
 - Shoplifting % solved, % victims satisfied
 - Median priority response time

3. Improved Public Contact

What we will do....

- Maintenance of increased staff and officer numbers in the Public Contact Team
- Prompt and effective firearms licensing
 - An increase of 11 constables in the FLU
 - Every licence granted and renewed will prioritise public safety and be issued in line with national best practice
 - Reduce waiting times for those seeking a licence
- Increased direct access to police officers at first contact
 - Extended use of video conferencing to contact the public quickly in the right cases
- Continual improvement in response times
 - Patrol resources rebalanced to enable quicker service
- Software to support digital/CCTV sharing
 - New technology to allow officers to capture digital, photographic and video evidence at the scene
- Enhancing digital desk for reporting via website and social media
 - Staff assigned to managing and responding to digital reporting
- Crime recording at the scene so that victims have quicker access to information and support

By

Q1

Q2

Q1

Q1

Q1

Q1

Q2

Q2

SWMP & Budget Outcomes

Access to services, when people require them

- % 999 calls answered in 10 seconds
- % 101 calls answered in 2 minutes

Community concerns are acted upon

- Reduction in expired certificates
- 50% reduction in grant waiting times

Focused on improvement, innovation & value

- % victims satisfied by crime type
- % domestic abuse solved

Access to services, when people require them

- Reduction median emergency response time
- Reduction median priority response time

Less harm & more criminal justice outcomes

- % TRC solved
- % shoplifting solved
- Reduction in response times

Crime reported that may have been unreported

- % victims satisfied by crime type

Victims are kept informed and supported

- % crime recorded in line with VCOP
- % victims satisfied by crime type

How success will be measured

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Safer West Mercia Plan	Improvement Area	Key Performance Indicator
Putting victims & survivors first	Victim satisfaction	% of victims satisfied by crime type
		% of crime recorded in line with VCOP
	File quality	% compliant pre-charge files (75%)
Building a more secure West Mercia	Total crime	Volume of total recorded crime
		Total recorded crime % solved (13%)
	Violence	Violence with injury volume
		Violence with injury % solved (15%)
	Robbery	Robbery volume
		Robbery % solved (12%)
	Shoplifting	Shoplifting volume
		Shoplifting % solved (25%)
	Home burglary	Home burglary volume
		Home burglary % solved (7%)
	Vehicle crime	Vehicle crime volume
		Vehicle crime % solved (4%)
	Domestic abuse	Volume of repeat domestic abuse
		Domestic abuse % solved (12%)
Rape	% cases with specialist officer first deployed	
	Rape % solved (10%)	
	Child protection	Quicker action to tackle online abuse

Safer West Mercia Plan	Improvement Area	Key Performance Indicator
Reassuring West Mercia's communities	Call Handling	% of 999 calls answered within 10 secs (90%)
		% of 101 calls answered within 2 minutes (70%)
	Emergency response times	Median emergency response time
		Median priority response time
	Firearms licensing	Reduction in expired certificates
		Shotgun & firearm grant issue times (50% quicker)
Visible policing presence	Time spent in identified crime & ASB hotspots	
	% people that report seeing police weekly (25%)	
Public confidence	% of respondents that agree they have confidence in local policing (80%)	
	Reduction in median vetting waiting times and compliance with best practice	
Reforming West Mercia	Finance	Savings plan is delivered (as part of achieving financial outturn)
		Unqualified annual VFM conclusion is received from external auditors
	Environment	Reduced policing carbon footprint
	Technology	Reduced digital forensic turnaround time

What it means for the public

Highest establishment of police officers on record in West Mercia, with 10 additional officers to be based in frontline policing

Increased numbers of Special Constables to support visible policing in the heart of communities

More offenders brought to justice through better quality of investigations

Improved response times for 101 and 999

Protected SNT numbers and fewer abstractions

Reduced domestic abuse and all violence against women and girls

Improved confidence and satisfaction from victims and survivors

Software to support digital/CCTV sharing

Fit-for-purpose policing estates – maintaining presence in local communities

Better use of technology to deliver effective community policing

Further development of partnership projects focused on delivering effective prevention and tackling community concerns

Initiatives to prevent child criminal exploitation



Proposed precept 2024/25

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4.91%
increase

£277.50

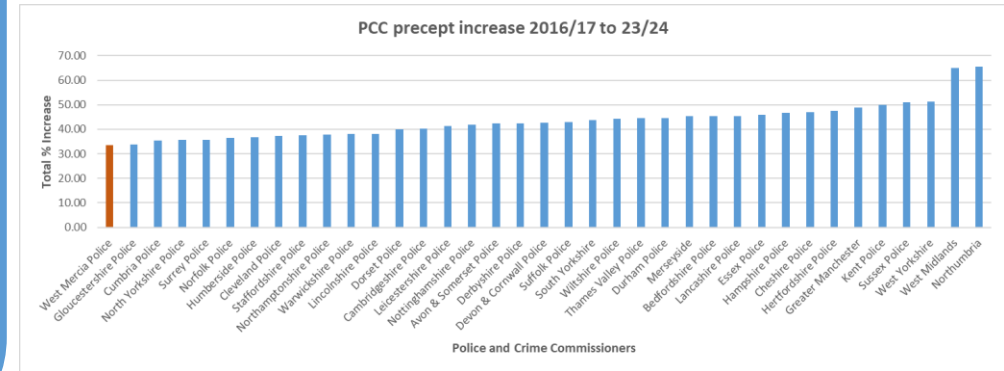
Average band D proposal

£13.00

Average extra per year

25p

Average extra per week



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