

West Mercia Police and Crime Panel

Report of the Task Group to examine the mid-year budget position of West Mercia Police for 2019/20

Purpose

1. In previous years in support of its role to consider the proposed precept, the West Mercia Police and Crime Panel has established a Budget Scrutiny Task Group which has met with the West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) to examine the budget and strategic issues impacting on the precept prior to consideration by the Panel. The Panel agreed with the PCC in February 2019 that the Task Group would meet during the year to review progress with the issues highlighted in the precept discussion.

Membership

2. The Task Group is chaired by Councillor Sebastian Bowen and the other members are Carol Clive, Independent Member and Councillors Julian Grubb, Jim Lavery and Peter Whatley.

Discussion of the Budget

3. Members of the Task Group met on 5 December 2019 to review the impact and effectiveness of the PCC's spending proposals set out in the precept plans for 2019-20, and as previously agreed this included:

- the £200k investment in the Victim Advice Line;
- recruitment to the additional posts both of Police Officers generally and the additional posts for Rural and Business crime officers; and
- an update on the Athena project.

4. Background information referred to by the Task Group for this meeting was:

- the PCC's report on the proposed precept for 2019-20, which was considered by the Police and Crime Panel at its meeting on 7 February 2019;
- the Task Group's report to the PCP following its consideration of the PCC's precept proposals for 2019-20;
- the report to the PCC by the PCP about the proposed precept.

5. The PCC, John Campion, and Deputy PCC, Tracey Onslow, were supported by Andy Champness, Chief Executive, Liz Hall, Treasurer and Richard Muirhead, Chief Financial Officer for the Force.

Victim Advice Line

6. The Task Group learned that at the half year point there was an underspend on the Victim Advice Line compared to the budget. The new service was launched in April 2019 and initially referrals to this had not been at the level anticipated. Officers had been reminded about this and the PCC is addressing it in his holding to account meetings with the Chief Constable.

7. The Deputy PCC reported that feedback from victims who had used the service was positive and as data was no longer transferred between databases accuracy had improved.

Recruitment

8. In the Proposed Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2019/20-2021/22 the PCC had committed to recruiting an additional 115 Police Officers to increase the establishment in West Mercia to 2,145. This was in addition to an increase of 100 officers previously announced by the PCC.

9. The PCC reported that recruitment to the total of additional 215 posts had been achieved. Posts were either recruited to, officers were in training or operational. He reminded the Task Group that the training took 17 weeks, followed by 10 weeks with a tutor Constable.

10. In addition, the Force had been allocated 93 officers between now and April 2021 and it was in the process of recruiting to these posts. In the meantime, turnover was a challenge – in line with normal turnover, 180 posts had become vacant this financial year though retirements, promotions and resignations.

11. Two problem solving hubs have been set up to deal with rural and business crime using resource from the recruitment of additional officers. The Deputy PCC pointed out that the Victim Advice Line was a useful tool for supporting residents in rural areas.

12. Members asked about the impact of the employee turnover on the budget. The PCC explained that a career of 30 years was necessary to achieve a fully funded pension. The police officers retiring currently generally had 30 years' service. There was potentially a 'bulge' in retirees in the next few years which reflected the demographic of officers recruited through campaigns 30 years ago.

Information Technology (including Athena)

13. The Athena system is now live across the 9 forces who joined a consortium to buy it.

14. Management information was currently provided ad hoc and work is being carried out to be able to share information across forces. The force could still use the Police National Database.

15. The PCC reported that the replacement for the Airwave system was likely to go live in 1920-21.

Sebastian Bowen
Chairman, Budget Task Group