

Minutes of the West Mercia Police and Crime Panel

Thursday, 25 November 2021, 11.00 am

Present:

Cllr Aled Luckman (Chairman), Cllr Barry Durkin (Vice Chairman),
Cllr Rob Adams, Cllr Jeff Anderson, Cllr Graham Ballinger,
Cllr Sebastian Bowen, Mrs C Clive, Cllr Roger Evans, Cllr Jim Lavery,
Cllr Nigel Lumby, Cllr Stephen Reynolds, Cllr James Stanley and
Cllr Tom Wells

Also attended:

John Champion, West Mercia Police & Crime Commissioner
Chief Constable Pippa Mills, West Mercia Police
Gareth Boulton, Deputy Chief Executive

James Bayliss, Public Health Practitioner
Sheena Jones, Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager
Alyson Grice, Overview and Scrutiny Officer

Available Papers

The members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated);
- B. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 15 September 2021 (previously circulated).

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

405 Welcome and Introductions

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and, in particular, the new Chief Constable of West Mercia Police who was attending her first Panel meeting in her new role.

406 Named Substitutes

Cllr Stephen Reynolds for Cllr Richard Overton (Telford and Wrekin Council).

407 Apologies and Declarations of Interest

Apologies were received from Cllrs Adam Kent (Bromsgrove District Council), Richard Overton (Telford and Wrekin Council) and Vivienne Parry (Shropshire Council).

408 Public Participation

None.

409 Confirmation of the Minutes of the previous meeting

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 15 September 2021 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

410 Draft Police and Crime Plan 2021 - 2025 Consultation Results

The Panel was invited to make any final comments on the draft Police and Crime Plan 2021-2025.

The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) reminded Members that they had considered a previous draft in September. The consultation on this draft had now concluded and this was the Panel's final opportunity to make comments before publication.

The Chairman congratulated the PCC on the broad range of consultation that had taken place. Panel Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and the following main points were made:

- Concern was expressed that, although 690 comments had been recorded in response to the consultation, only 6 changes had been made to the draft plan. In response, the PCC stated that in his view the responses suggested the need for nuanced amendments rather than fundamental changes. He did not see anything in the comments that required significant change.
- In response to a question about whether things were improving in relation to the participation of hard-to-reach communities, the PCC suggested that the voice of some communities was not being heard enough but added that this was an issue for all parts of the public sector. To be truly representative of the community, the approach to engagement needed to be broader. Consideration should also be given to how information was made available as not all people would read such a lengthy document.
- The importance of understanding the concerns of hard-to-reach communities was emphasised. The PCC told the Panel that he valued the opportunity to visit communities, something that had been interrupted by the pandemic, and he was looking forward to meeting people again with the new Chief Constable. They had a joint commitment to reaching communities that had previously been missed and he told the Panel about a recent visit to meet Afghan refugees in Telford. He wanted people to trust the police and engagement was vital

in this. The PCC reminded Members about the changes he had made to the Ambassador scheme including the introduction of the role of Assistant PCC which aimed to increase capacity to engage with communities. The personal connection was important in building relationships.

- In response to a question about whether recent increases in the number of police officers represented a true growth in numbers or simply returned the force to the situation before previous cuts, the PCC reminded the Panel that he could only comment on the period that he had been in office, as that was what he was accountable for. Since he had been in office, numbers had increased and would increase again in the next financial year. He went on to suggest that a focus on police numbers was 'a red herring', as numbers were irrelevant if communities did not feel they saw enough police officers.
- It was suggested that there had been an increase in petty crime in Shrewsbury town centre since the closure of the police station there. In response, the PCC suggested that the closure of the station did not mean there were fewer officers in the town and it was important to have officers out in the community rather than in police bases. Officer visibility and accessibility were important.
- A Member stated that she was not convinced that the plan showed any improvement on previous versions as it was not clear what actions would be taken or what success would look like. She suggested it would be helpful to see the performance management structure that sat behind the plan in order to ensure actions were taken. The PCC reminded the Panel that this focus would come in the delivery plan. He did not want the Police and Crime Plan to be a rigid, prescriptive document. The Panel Member suggested that the Panel would find it useful to have some form of assurance so that Members could see progress on achieving the aims described. The PCC said that he would look again at this but had previously taken a clear decision to keep performance information out of the plan, allowing the performance framework to be adjusted or refocussed as required.
- The PCC confirmed that the use of bicycles was still a key part of the force's assets and he had recently signed off a £50k investment to upgrade and invest in pedal and electric bikes.
- A Member welcomed the proposal to invest in community speed reduction schemes and expressed frustration about the effectiveness of Community Speed Watch groups suggesting that, although they could be a short-term fix, they were not a sustainable solution to problems of speeding. The PCC agreed that Community Speed Watch groups were only part of the solution and reminded the Panel that 19 additional specialist road policing officers were being recruited. He also noted the role of effective road design and would work with the highways authorities on this. His aim was to be a more effective leader in the system.
- With reference to the recent meeting of Worcestershire County Council's Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board which had discussed road safety, the PCC said that he would wish to be supportive but needed to be clear what the tangible outcomes of the meeting were. He confirmed that more resources would be available in

this area but wanted road policing to be every police officer's responsibility, not simply seen as a specialist area. This was not necessarily currently the case.

- The proposed metrics were welcomed as being very comprehensive and it was confirmed that these would form the basis of reporting back to the Panel at future meetings.
- Concern was expressed that, by placing warning signs in Community Speed Watch areas, drivers were able to slow down meaning that not all potential speeding motorists were caught. The PCC reminded Members that the aim was for everyone to be complying with the speed limit and speed enforcement was predominantly visible and overt. The force did have the ability to undertake unmarked speed enforcement but this was a much smaller resource.
- He also noted the role of citizenry through, for example, dash cams or helmet cams, reminding the Panel that footage could be uploaded via West Mercia's website. A Member reported favourably on the installation of a Speed Indicator Device in his local area and the PCC reminded Members that West Mercia ran a scheme which provided up to 50% of the cost of these signs. With reference to solar powered signs, the PCC informed the Panel that, although he had no views on the power source used, if a sign was environmentally friendly that would be welcomed.
- With reference to the consultation exercise, a Panel member queried whether repeat responses could be prevented. The Deputy Chief Executive of the Office of the PCC confirmed that the online response system had used techniques to prevent multiple submissions from one person. Although it appeared that some responses had been copied and pasted, this would have been picked up by the policy team as part of their analysis. The Chairman of the Panel noted that, although it was important that responses were kept anonymous, it was also important that responses were not duplicated.
- In response to a question about why there had been low levels of response in Herefordshire, the PCC acknowledged that it was important to hear a diversity of responses from across the whole of the West Mercia region and expressed concern about the level of engagement in some areas. It would be important to aspire for better.

411 West Mercia Police OCC Performance

Members received an update on holding to account (HTA) activity undertaken by the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) in respect of Operations & Communications Centre (OCC) performance.

By way of introduction, the PCC reminded the Panel that the OCC was the front door to West Mercia Police. Although contact methods were changing, the telephone was still central to the police's quality of response. He was continually impressed by the level of effort that went in to making the system work but acknowledged that the system did not always succeed.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and the following main points were raised:

- It was not currently possible to establish all of the nuanced data that may be requested, such as the average caller waiting time and how many repeat callers there were. Work was underway to rectify this and the Chief Constable had made a personal commitment to improve matters.
- Concern was expressed that, if a caller did not get a rapid response on 101, they would call 999 with a consequent impact on emergency provision.
- The PCC agreed to facilitate a visit for the Panel to the headquarters of West Mercia Police at Hindlip to see the operation of the OCC.
- It was confirmed that, however a member of the public chose to report a crime or access the police, the assessment process was the same.
- Concern was expressed about the relatively poor level of performance in relation to the 101 number as there was a danger that this could diminish the public's view of the police and it was disappointing that issues had not been fixed. In response, the PCC reminded the Panel that this was a complex operation, involving a public contact system across three geographically diverse counties. He was confident that the system could get to the position it needed to be. Work would then be done to ensure that all channels were properly embedded so that communities could have confidence in the system.
- In response to a question about whether the reasons for recent outages had been identified, Members were reassured that this was not a system problem. All appropriate measures had been put in place and contingencies had been reviewed to make it less likely that this would happen again. The Panel was reminded that, if a force's ability to answer emergency calls went down, there was a well-established system for calls to be answered by other police forces.
- The PCC confirmed that there were no plans to close the front desk at Malinsgate Police Station in Telford.
- In response to a question from the Chairman about whether appropriate checks were in place, the PCC confirmed that control room performance was discussed in weekly meetings with the Chief Constable. He also recognised that many concerns were raised with local councillors.
- In conclusion, the Chairman hoped that targets for consistent 101 and 999 performance would be achieved or exceeded by June 2022 as set out in the presentation.

412 West Mercia Police Workforce Diversity and Inclusion

The Panel was provided with an overview of diversity and inclusion relating to the West Mercia Police workforce. The Police and Crime Commissioner reminded Members that this was a complex area of recruitment. He hoped that the Panel would see that progress had been made but acknowledged that there was further work to be done.

The Panel was invited to ask questions and the following main points were raised:

- West Mercia Police's efforts to increased diversity and better reflect the population it served were welcomed. It was confirmed that this had not been at the expense of standards, but had involved supporting people through the recruitment process who ordinarily would not have been able to navigate the system.
- The aim was to ensure the organisation was welcoming to all and the importance of retention was acknowledged.
- In response to a question about the methodology used, the Chief Constable described the importance of levelling the playing field. She informed the Panel that one of the biggest draws in police recruitment was the influence of friends and family already in the service. People from ethnic minority backgrounds were less likely to have these links. The aim was to demystify the organisation by supporting candidates on an individual basis.
- It was confirmed that there had been a focus on supporting female candidates as there had not been the same concerns about male applicants.
- It was confirmed that the data referred to warranted Police Officers (rather than Police Community Support Officers).
- In response to a question about vetting procedures in the light of recent high profile vetting failures, the PCC confirmed he was confident in local processes. West Mercia Police was also engaged in national work and was keen to learn lessons from elsewhere in the country.
- The progress made in relation to recruitment of female officers and those from ethnic minorities was welcomed. However, there appeared to be less progress in relation to people with disabilities and those from the LGBTQ+ community. The PCC pointed out that these groups were included in the data in the report and confirmed that the journey to equality was about removing barriers for all.

The Panel welcomed the progress made but requested that future reports should include a broader approach to diversity and inclusion including people with disabilities and those from the LGBTQ+ community.

413 Budget Monitoring Report (April - Sept 2021)

The Panel was updated on the half year position in relation to the West Mercia Police 2021/22 budget.

In the course of the discussion, the following main points were raised:

- In response to a question about the current level of backlog and the plan of action with respect to estates management, the Police and Crime Commissioner reminded the Panel that all public bodies had a form of backlog in estates management. West Mercia Police had been dealing with the recent move away from Place Partnership and the current backlog was manageable and was being addressed.
- A Member noted the concern expressed in the report about the number of employees in the organisation who had elected not to join the pension scheme and informed the Panel that he shared this concern.

- With reference to the slippage in the delivery of the Change programme, the Police and Crime Commissioner suggested that this was due to the impact of the pandemic and the lack of progress of the former alliance partner. Although the force wanted to aspire to better, there was a need to be realistic about what was achievable. The ultimate aim was to deliver a fit for purpose system for police officers.

414 **Police & Crime Plan Activity and Performance Monitoring Report**

The Panel was provided with an overview of activity undertaken by the Police and Crime Commissioner in support of the Safer West Mercia Plan and an update on police performance.

By way of introduction, the PCC made the following points:

- The PCC had been pleased to see the force-wide impact of the new Chief Constable and her appointment had been positively received across the workforce.
- There had been significant success in securing Government funding, including the Safer Streets bid which had a particular focus on reducing violence against women and girls and was the highest per population in the country. The PCC was grateful for the work done by his office and partners.
- The latest position in relation to the Alliance split and ongoing provision of IT services was noted.
- The PCC had not been impressed by the level of response to the latest Annual Town and Parish Council Survey and recognised the need to improve the level of engagement. He acknowledged that it was not possible to get any closer to local communities than the Parish Council and would welcome any ideas from Panel Members on how engagement could be improved.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and the following main points were raised:

- The Chairman congratulated the PCC on the external funding that had been obtained and recognised that it was a significant sum.
- However, he was disappointed that the split from the Alliance with Warwickshire was still ongoing and expressed concern that money provided by the taxpayers of West Mercia was still being used in this way, especially when the West Mercia Force had its own IT problems. In response, the PCC reminded Members that West Mercia was now providing a service to Warwickshire rather than being in partnership. West Mercia had supported Warwickshire as needed and this was felt to be the right thing to do and was appreciated by the PCC of Warwickshire. The Chairman acknowledged the reassurance.
- In response to a question about investment in IT, the PCC reminded the Panel that there was a broad ICT transformation programme. Running a large ICT system was a complex operation and, now that the force

had sovereignty, it could quickly move to deliver the benefits of the programme.

- When asked about the benefits to residents of West Mercia of providing services to Warwickshire, the PCC reminded the Panel about overhead sharing and joint investment opportunities. The current arrangement was on the basis of full cost recovery and supported a consensual and planned separation of business.
- The Chairman noted that it had been an active decision to have an agreement on West Mercia's terms to continue IT support for Warwickshire and asked whether support would conclude by March 2023 as planned. In response, the PCC reminded the Panel that the discussion covered a commercially sensitive live contract. He felt he had made the best decision to support the public and was as confident as he could be that the arrangement would end in March 2023.
- A Member suggested that it would be useful for the Panel to receive a report on progress on the ICT improvement programme at a future meeting.
- A Panel Member welcomed the ongoing commitment to victims of modern slavery and the extension of the funding scheme. He went on to ask about how work on the prevention of modern slavery could be embedded into relationships with partner organisations and members of the public. The PCC agreed that, although the work mentioned in the agenda report referred to support for victims, work to ensure vulnerable people did not become victims was also essential. The Police and Crime Plan saw a shift towards a greater proportion of the police budget being focused on crime prevention. He was keen to get the prevention agenda moving forward and any assistance from local councils would be welcomed.
- A question was asked about West Mercia's stance on refusing Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) when the police felt the rules could not be enforced. The Chief Constable agreed to provide a response outside of the meeting.
- It was agreed that an update on progress with the Estates programme would be provided at a future meeting.
- With reference to the autumn roadshows, the PCC acknowledged that some had been more successful than others. For example, the Shrewsbury Food Festival had been successful as a large number of the visitors lived in the West Mercia area. The Malvern Show had been less successful as many of those attending had travelled from outside West Mercia. The ability to hold a conversation with members of the public was important but attendance at local shows needed to be part of a suite of activity.
- In response to a question about the role of the Assistant Police and Crime Commissioner, the PCC reminded the Panel that there were legal restrictions on what he could delegate. However, the APCC could assist in maximising engagement. In terms of the financial impact, the PCC confirmed that this was consistent with the previous ambassadors scheme.
- With reference to the disappointing response to the Town and Parish Council survey, the Chairman suggested that this may reflect a lack of engagement by the police, noting that parish council meetings in his

local area had not been attended by a police officer for some time. The PCC recognised that this may be the case if parish councils felt they had not seen a police officer for some time and noted that different parish councils had different relationships with the police. He acknowledged that, although a police presence was not needed at every meeting, there was a lack of consistency in the overall approach.

- It was noted that only 10% of respondents to the 2021 Town and Parish Council survey felt that the visibility of the police was Excellent or Good. The PCC acknowledged that this was not good but reminded Members that this was not the only measure and others gave a more positive picture. The PCC stated that his commitment was clear. He wanted the community to have confidence in the police and would use these responses to measure this. To this end, increasing the level of response was important and he would appreciate any help from local authorities to achieve this.
- With reference to the Community Policing Charter, the PCC suggested that it was important to be flexible to local circumstances across what was a very diverse community.
- The Chief Constable informed the Panel that she had met many committed staff since she had taken up the post, including in the Safer Neighbourhood Teams. She felt that the visibility of staff was important, not simply when they were carrying out a specific task.
- A Panel Member suggested that the diminishing involvement of the police with parish councils and local schools may have an impact on the positive view of the police.
- The PCC confirmed that he aspired to solve the issue of fly tipping through a partnership approach and had received good applications from the Community Safety Partnerships in Worcestershire but not Herefordshire or Shropshire. The Chairman hoped that Panel Members would feed this back to their Councils.

415 National Association of Police Fire and Crime Panels

The Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager reminded the Panel that the National Association of Police, Fire and Crime Panels had been set up to share ideas and experiences nationally. The Association was free to join and was not allowed to spend any money on lobbying.

The Panel was invited to appoint a voting representative to join the Association.

It was agreed that Councillor Luckman would be appointed as the Panel's representative on the National Association of Police, Fire and Crime Panels.

416 Work Programme

The Panel's Work Programme was discussed. Members noted that the process to appoint an Independent Member of the Panel was underway and the outcome would be discussed on 4 February. Members also agreed to add road safety to the work programme for February.

The Panel agreed that the following items would be added to its work programme for future meetings:

- Update on progress with the Estates programme
- Update on progress with the ICT improvement programme
- Update on the PEEL report (due in February 2022)

The Panel also agreed to add a visit to the Operations and Communications Centre (OCC) to its work programme and potentially hold a meeting at West Mercia Police Headquarters at Hindlip.

The meeting ended at 1.18 pm

Chairman