

West Mercia Police and Crime Panel – 4 February 2015
Agenda item 6 - Appendix 2

Commentary from the WMPCP Task and Finish meeting to consider the PCC proposed precept and budget proposals.

The Task and Finish Group met on 16 January 2015. In attendance were Councillors Sebastian Bowen (Herefordshire), Miles Kenny (Shropshire) and Michael Wood (Shropshire) and Mrs Helen Barker (Independent Lay Co-opted Member).

The meeting heard a presentation from the PCC and his finance and other officers. The following highlights the key issues together with some observations and questions raised by the Task Group.

1. In a rapidly changing environment (including local authority and other service cuts) "Prevention" is the PCCs focus (a theme from the HMIC as well,) as longer term funding reductions requires crime to be prevented before it happens. This isn't just for the Police but the wider community safety partnerships and others and the general public itself. PCC's intention is to invest precept funding for preventative approaches to reducing crime with partners.
2. A specific focus from the PCC on reducing reoffending and breaking the cycle of reoffending and so initiatives in prisons and with key partners. Building upon a solid base of work in the West Mercia eg with Integrated Offender Management and Community Safety Partnerships. It is hoped to make use of prison workshops where prisoners can both learn a trade and potentially set up a not for profit business selling their products to the outside world. There may be some resistance from businesses on the outside, but the PCC believes this can be overcome. There are three prisons in West Mercia that could take part in this scheme. There could be funding for schemes that focus on young offenders in order to prevent re-offending.
3. Major shift to cyber related crime and the need for investment in resources to tackle this.
4. The proposed budget was explained and contained caveats such as the grant assumptions going forward, but severe pressure on the budget generally. Reserves will be utilised, but the PCC is remaining prudent as these can be easily used should there be extraordinary major force crime investigations having to take place. Reserves to be utilised as these are accumulated from the taxpayer and there needs to be tax payer equity. The Police are carrying out zero based budget reviews and focussing on savings. *PCP to be assured that the reserves are being fully utilised to maximum benefit.*
5. Savings will be made through the STRADA review and use of new ICT (reports on both are due and members are keen to hear these and debate the possible impacts for the PCC). The Police need to invest in IT but the new systems must be compatible across the Alliance and ideally should be compatible with all Forces and Government.

6. Noted that Warwickshire have nothing in for prevention compared to the WMPCCs focus on prevention. *How does this then work across the Alliance - different focus in the same Alliance?*
7. Members agreed with the stronger focus on capital funding and its slippage. The police need to demonstrate they are sweating their assets eg. better use of joint accommodation. *Members need to hear what the Estate Strategy is looking like. Are there more proposals for joint use of bases by all the Emergency Services and joint/shared Control Centres?*
8. 250 new Police Officers are to be recruited and trained. This should go some way to filling the gaps left by retirement, leaving the service and other wastage. There should be better replacement planning in place on a continuous basis. The new Officers will not expand the numbers of police on the beat but should bring numbers back up to where they should be, as a minimum.

Additional Member observations and suggested questions for further probing by the Panel:

- a. *How "scientific" was setting process for a 1.99% precept setting process? Is it an evidential /options appraisal process and why 1.99%?*
- b. Some members pleased to see the focus on prevention and prisons/prisoners to reduce re-offending. The PCP should have an update on 'Prevention' on an ongoing basis and a demonstration on how this funding assists with the PCCs planned outcomes.
- c. There should be some benefits from prison manufacture, but need clarity in relation to impact on local business.
- d. *Will the prisons budget from the Home Office contribute towards the work of rehabilitation in the prisons? If not, why not?* Better rehabilitation should lead to less re-offending and therefore reduce the pressure on the prison budget.
- e. There is an imbalance as the Panel cannot scrutinise the Warwickshire side of the Alliance approach to precept.
- f. Complex budgets and not easy to get under the numbers and really understand what is happening. *How strongly are efficiencies being progressed to make savings and by association limit a precept rise?*
- g. Cyber-crime is an increasing challenge. *Clarification to be sought by the Panel as to how this will be tackled locally vs nationally. How will resources shift to meet this very large area of new work –more intelligence-led resources required?*
- h. *Are contributions being made towards the Police Federation? If so, how much and why? Should not the Police Federation be self- funding?*
- i. Need to always consider: 'should we be doing what we are doing?'

It is challenging to assess fully a complex budget in a relatively short session, but the observations above will we hope assist the PCP scrutinise the PCC's precept proposal based upon the budget as set out.

Councillor Sebastian Bowen (Chairman of the Task Group)
January 2015