

## **Minutes of the West Mercia Police and Crime Panel**

**Wyre Forest District Council, Wyre Forest House, Finepoint**

**Way, Kidderminster DY11 7WF.**

**Wednesday, 23 November 2022, 11.00 am**

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### **Present:**

Cllr Aled Luckman (Chairman), Cllr Sebastian Bowen, Cllr Helen Jones, Cllr Nigel Lumby, Cllr Jeff Anderson, Cllr Roger Evans, Cllr Vivienne Parry, Cllr Rob Adams, Cllr James Stanley, Cllr Graham Ballinger, Mrs C Clive and Ms B McDowall

### **Also attended:**

John Champion, West Mercia Police & Crime Commissioner  
Gareth Boulton, Chief Executive

Tim Rice, Head of Service for Safer Communities, Public Health  
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. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 7 September 2022 (previously circulated).

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

### **456 Welcome and Introductions**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

### **457 Named Substitutes**

None.

### **458 Apologies and Declarations of Interest**

Apologies were received from Councillors Barry Durkin, Tom Wells, Nyear Nazir, Jim Lavery and Paul Watling.

There were no declarations of interests.

#### **459 Public Participation**

None.

#### **460 Confirmation of the Minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 September 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

#### **461 Police & Crime Plan Activity and Performance Monitoring Report**

The Panel received an update on the activity undertaken by the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) in support of his Safer West Mercia Plan and also an update on police performance.

The PCC introduced the report and in doing so highlighted that:

- The two Combating Drugs Partnership (CDP) had now been set up in West Mercia and were based on the Integrated Care Board footprint. There was one CDP for Herefordshire and Worcestershire and one for Shropshire and Telford. The PCC was the Senior Responsible Officer for both CDP's.
- Included in the 2022/23 budget was a further uplift of 125 Police Officers for West Mercia. The Chief Constable had reassured the PCC that this target was on track and by the end of the financial year there would be an over recruitment of 20 Police Officers.

During the discussion, the following main points were made:

- Paragraph 66 of the Agenda Report described that between September and October 2022, the PCC's office had received 232 pieces of correspondence. A Member questioned how many pieces of correspondence had been replied to and whether there were any trends that could be identified from the correspondence. The PCC explained that there was a system of reviewing and identifying trends and that he reviewed most of the correspondence himself. The recent restructure of the PCC's Governance Team would also make it easier to respond to concerns.
- In response to a question about Operation Lincoln (the investigation into maternity services at the Shrewsbury and Telford NHS Trust) the PCC advised that he had engaged with local, regional and national partners to understand the demand for support services for victims. As a result of these discussions, the PCC had submitted a bid to the Home Office for

further funding of £100,000 to provide support to these victims. The PCC confirmed that the outcome of this bid was still awaited.

- For 2022/23, the PCC had provided £339,782 to West Mercia Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre, to support therapeutic counselling for survivors of sexual violence. This funding had allowed the service to recruit permanent counsellors, who were previously on zero hours contracts to provide sustainable support for survivors, and to reduce waiting lists.
- The PCC had submitted a funding bid to the Ministry of Justice, for £276,500 up to 31 March 2025, to provide an out of court diversionary service, for females at risk of entering the criminal justice system. This was linked to the Commissioner's commitment to deliver effective, early intervention for vulnerable people, with the outcome of reducing the likelihood of reoffending.
- A Member questioned whether the cashless society was driving, controlling behaviour in situations of domestic violence, the PCC was unsure whether this was the case.
- It was noted that for the period April – September 2022, out of the 17,630 referrals for support from victims of crime, only 16,145 victims had been provided with support, a Member questioned why this was the case. The PCC explained that the right people were getting help but there was a drive to increase the number and quality of assessments.
- The PCC clarified the difference between victim services and support for victims. Victim Services was the direct support commissioned by the PCC accessed by direct referrals and the support for victims was provided the West Mercia Police Victim Care Unit mainly for victims going through the criminal justice system and requiring long term support, although there were some areas of overlap.
- It was agreed that in order for the Panel to understand the progress being made by the 2 CDP's, an update on the performance metrics would be provided twice per year.
- In response to a concern expressed about the capacity of the Police to investigate drugs related crime, the PCC explained that there was a commitment in his Police and Crime Plan to tackle drugs related crime and also the intention to continuously improve performance in this area. The PCC reminded Members of the Panel that in the first instance it was important to contact the Safer Neighbourhood Teams (SNT) with local concerns and if there were any concerns about how the SNT's were working, to provide the PCC with feedback.
- The PCC advised that the first cohort of West Mercia's Professional Policing Degree (PPD) Programme had gone through the System.
- A Member highlighted that speeding in communities was a very big concern and welcomed the PCC's 2022/23 budget commitment. The value of this investment for 2022/23 was £515,800, with a further £400,000 ringfenced pending a business case. The PCC highlighted the need for a mixed approach to tackling speeding which included education, environment and enforcement. The PCC was also developing a specification for a refresh of the road safety needs assessment, which would be used to inform future commissioning in this priority area – it was agreed that the Panel would be updated on the specification when available.

- A Member highlighted some successful work in Derbyshire tackling car cruising.
- Members expressed concern about the 60,000 cases in the criminal justice backlog across England and Wales. In West Mercia, the number of cases in the backlog had risen by more than 70% since before the pandemic. In Shrewsbury, there had been a rise of more than 120% in backlog cases and more than 40% in Worcester since before the pandemic. Members expressed concern about the impact of this on the victim and the accused whose lives were on hold.
- The PCC expressed concern about the criminal justice system and in particular the impact on effectiveness of the Police as a result of the ongoing closure of Hereford Crown Court. Members of the Panel were very concerned to hear this and it was agreed that a letter would be sent to the Leader of Herefordshire Council to express the Panel's concerns
- It was noted that the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act included a new Serious Violence Duty that required specified authorities (i.e. police, local authorities, fire and rescue, health bodies, probation services and youth offending teams) to collaborate regarding serious violence making the responsibility for working together a joint responsibility.
- The PCC continued to monitor and support the Force's delivery of the local and national uplift of police officers through holding to account mechanisms and the fortnightly uplift meetings with the force and National Uplift leads. Efforts had been made via the uplift programme to improve diversity and representation within West Mercia and progress had been made in respect of increasing the recruitment of female officers and those from ethnic minorities. It was, however recognised that further progress was still required.
- Significant work was underway across the West Mercia Estate as part of measures to drive energy efficiency. This work was intended to both reduce West Mercia's carbon footprint, and also offset increased pressures that the Force faces around energy costs. Projections for 2023/24 showed that West Mercia Police's energy costs would increase by 90% compared to 2022/23.
- The PCC was actively engaged in the current 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.
- In response to a Member question, the PCC suggested that 2023/24 Budget would be different; inflation pressures and increased energy costs would mean that the gap was likely to be bigger.
- A Member questioned how much the 'Tommy' Statues in Shropshire had cost – the PCC agreed to check and report back.
- The report from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) for England and Wales - An inspection of vetting, misconduct, and misogyny in the police service was referred to and the PCC was asked whether he was content that the vetting

process in West Mercia Police was effective. In response, the PCC explained that although it could never be certain, he was reassured by the Force's response when a situation occurred in West Mercia.

- With regard to the Perception Survey, 21% said they see an officer or PCSO at least once per week – a reduction from 24% in the previous quarter – A Member questioned why this was. The PCC advised that the Chief Constable was confused by this result, although it wasn't a bad result it needed to be maintained. The PCC suggested it wasn't always about seeing a Police Officer directly but the ease of getting hold of them when needed.
- The increasing number of rough sleepers in the communities was referred to and the associated crime problems. The PCC explained that supporting rough sleepers was a partnership issue with local Councils being responsible for supporting rough sleepers and the Police being responsible for the crime related elements.
- The PCC explained that policing for large events eg football matches was co-ordinated by the Operations Planning Department.
- It was noted that both 999 and 101 call handling had seen improvements when compared to the previous month, however 101 was still significantly below target.

## **462 Satisfaction and Outcomes**

The PCC introduced the Report and explained that satisfaction was not at the aspirational level set and was disappointed with the current levels. Ensuring that crime was effectively investigated was a key part of victim satisfaction, including the follow-up. The PCC confirmed that he was holding the Chief Constable to account for this work and the Chief Constable had committed that the uplift programme of police officers would be achieved by Christmas, following which improvements should start to be seen. The PCC explained further that there was increased demand and complexity on the police system and delivering the aspirational satisfaction levels were a challenge.

During the ensuing discussion, the following main points were made:

- A Panel Member suggested that satisfaction and outcomes were disappointing, it was not possible to triangulate the information in the report with other performance and activity reports and the Holding to Account Minutes were not clear in terms of the drivers for the poor performance in this area. In addition, none of the aspirational targets relating to the satisfaction data at Force level between April 2021 and September 2022 had been achieved, which was statistically significant. That said, public confidence levels were good when compared with other forces.
- The PCC acknowledged the comments and agreed that public confidence levels were good in terms of expectation but levels were lower when actually engaging with the Police. The PCC believed that the biggest difference would come from improved follow-up which would help to manage situations better.

- The PCC further highlighted that West Mercia was an outlier in Outcome 16 (where the victim doesn't support prosecution) which if improved would also have a significant impact on victim satisfaction.
- The PCC was asked to provide reassurance and clarify what measures would be put in place to achieve better outcomes and satisfaction. The PCC explained that the uplift programme of Police Officers was still working through the system, which would provide more capacity. The timeliness of investigations needed to improve as well as the training of staff in the specialisms associated with the more complex crimes. The Chief Constable had committed to increasing the number of police officer posts by Christmas and then training would follow. Additionally, there would be a focus on victims needs assessment to ensure better quality and the ability to commission the right services. The PCC explained that this would not be a quick fix but he was reassured that West Mercia Police were on the right journey.
- A Member suggested to the PCC that the investment in the increased number of Police Officers would not necessarily result in a robust response to bringing offenders to justice (paragraph 20). In response the PCC confirmed that this had to be the drive and that West Mercia Police needed to provide a high quality service.

## 463 Work Programme

The Work Programme was considered and it was agreed that:

- There would be an informal budget briefing on 5 December (10am).
- The Budget Task Group Membership would be: Beth McDowall (Lead Member), Carole Clive, Sebastian Bowen and James Stanley.
- The Estates Strategy would be discussed at September 2023 meeting.
- Training would be arranged for new Panel members (as required) in June 2023.

The meeting ended at 1.15 pm

Chairman .....