

WEST MERCIA POLICE AND CRIME PANEL

19 SEPTEMBER 2023

ESTATES STRATEGY PROGRESS REPORT

Recommendation

1. Members of the Panel are invited to consider the report.

Background

2. The Police and Crime Commissioner's Estates Strategy was developed in 2022 in consultation with West Mercia Police, the public and other partners. The document sets out aspirations for the police estate across the medium term and principles as to how these will be achieved.
3. The Estates Strategy is designed to support delivery of the Commissioner's Safer West Mercia Plan in every context. This includes:
 - Community reassurance and confidence in respect of police visibility and accessibility
 - Ensuring police buildings are fit for purpose in respect of their required functions. For example, they are safe and welcoming for victims and witnesses, whilst (where appropriate) being safe and secure in respect of people detained in police custody.
 - Support and enable reform within policing and drive greater effectiveness and efficiency for the public
 - Support health and wellbeing for police officers, staff and volunteers
4. West Mercia's police estate consists of approximately 100 buildings and sites. The estate has suffered from a lack of strategic management and sufficient investment for many years. As a result, there has been (and continues to be) a significant amount of work to do in making the estate operate effectively and efficiently in support of the police service while delivering best value for the public purse. Significant additional investment has been made in recent years to look to address these issues, as well as much more active management of the estate. This has led to notable recent improvements in estates performance, whilst acknowledging more work is required.

Governance

5. West Mercia's Estates service is now fully embedded as part of the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC). It serves West Mercia Police as well as Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service (HWFRS).
6. The service is under the day-to-day control of the OPCC Chief Executive and is formally governed by a new Estates Governance Board to ensure appropriate

rigour, transparency and co-ordination. This meeting is chaired by the Deputy PCC, and typically attended by West Mercia Police Chief Officers, OPCC statutory officers and HWFRS senior leaders.

7. Within West Mercia Police the Estates Forum meeting is the primary vehicle for escalation and discussion of Force specific estates matters, feeding into the OPCC and the main Estates Governance Board as appropriate. This ensures the operational requirements of the police force can be established and agreed and that work on the estate is fit for purpose.

Major Capital Projects

8. Major capital projects remain ongoing within West Mercia's estate in 2023/24, representing significant investment in the estate and key public services. These are work towards a new firearms training facility and the new police and fire station in Redditch.
9. The PCC has supported a £16.74m investment in a new, fit-for-purpose firearms training unit (FTU) for West Mercia Police to ensure local communities can continue to receive the right response to incidents when highly specialised police firearms units are required. Current facilities are no longer compliant with national standards and all options were considered prior to PCC sign-off.
10. The project is continuing at pace in 2023/24. More than £1m has been invested in progressing the project thus far, with contractors appointed for the latest stage in the process. It is currently planned that the FTU can be submitted for planning approval before the end of the calendar year.
11. Work on the new police and fire station at Redditch continues at pace.
12. Having overcome a number of challenges with the new site the build is now well underway and on track to be completed on time and on budget.
13. The completed project will represent a total investment of circa £20m and will ensure a fit-for-purpose operational base for emergency services at the heart of the local community for many decades, whilst also offering improved sustainability through environmental and economic efficiency.
14. West Mercia Police remains on track to vacate the existing Redditch police station on time. It will be necessary to temporarily relocate local officers and staff until such time that the new police station is ready to occupy. A temporary location in the town centre has been identified that is fit for purpose. It is currently being redeveloped to accommodate the Force in the coming weeks.

Planned Projects 2023/24

15. Almost 100 projects are budgeted and scheduled within the planned programme across the police estate in 2023/24. This is a significant uplift on activity in previous years, reflecting the additional investment being made to ensure the estate is fit for purpose and supports key services.

16. These projects range from minor window replacements to major internal refurbishments and have a relatively even and proportionate spread across the whole force area. All projects support elements of the Estates Strategy, including:
- Ensuring compliance with laws and regulations
 - Ensuring security
 - Maintaining an estate that is fit for purpose
 - Delivering best value for money
 - Improving sustainability
 - Ensuring the estate is more flexible and connected
 - Maximising the potential of the police estate
17. There is a significant element of work within the planned programme at the Hindlip police headquarters. Much of this work is necessary modernisation to support the Force in having more flexible workspaces, embracing new ways of working and enabling functions to work in close proximity where it is beneficial.
18. The content of the draft South Worcestershire Development Plan represents a significant risk in respect of the Hindlip Masterplan, delivery of the Estates Strategy, and long-term viability of Hindlip as a police headquarters. The draft plan contains a proposal to remove Hindlip Park's status as a "major developed site", within the greenbelt. If approved, this measure would call into question not just the viability of the site, but also the nationally significant emergency services which operate from it. The PCC remains actively engaged in the process and attempts to retain this status are ongoing.
19. In the financial year 2022/23 the estates team commissioned a full building fabric condition survey of the estate to determine the current condition and compliance of the sites and buildings. This data means that a more informed approach can be taken to planning and decision making. It has helped determine the specific work categories and priorities for the 2023/24 planned infrastructure and improvement programmes. This will be further developed to prepare a 5-year, long term planned programme. Further similar surveys will be commissioned shortly in respect of heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems.

Finance

20. The PCC has continued to prioritise significant resource towards the estate and the estates service, particularly since the Estates service returned to the OPCC, recognising the need for investment and improvement in this area. This investment is set out in the table below:

	22/23 (£)	23/24 (£)
Total Estates Budget	9,800,880	12,958,859
Planned Programme Budget - Revenue	829,585	1,062,921
Capital Budget		
- Masterplan	7,496,000	8,940,000

- Planned Programme Capital	800,000	1,596,000
- Local Policing Estates Transformation	418,000	1,491,000

21. Wider economic factors continue to have a significant impact on the Estates function, including inflation in the construction sector, utility costs and interest rates. These environmental factors create a challenging position whereby the need for effective and efficient use of public resource in line with the Estates Strategy is even greater. This scenario continues to drive both the OPCC and West Mercia Police to come up with alternative solutions, maximise efficiency and deliver even better outcomes.

Efficiency and Commercial Advantage

22. Commercial advantage is a central premise of the Estates Strategy, focused on delivering the best possible value for money and enabling as much investment as possible into key services and infrastructure. Work in this regard over the last year has focused on maximising additional income and minimising costs wherever possible.

23. Numerous “invest to save”, initiatives have been supported in the last year, with the aim of realising significant longer term revenue savings via short term investments. These include the rollout of low energy LED lights at divisional headquarters. It is anticipated the cost of the investment will be repaid in full within two years (particularly given high energy costs) and will then support ongoing savings on an annual basis and support a reduction in West Mercia’s energy footprint.

24. In conjunction with the electrification of West Mercia’s vehicle fleet, investments have also been made in charging infrastructure. Again, with the intention of recouping costs through reduced reliance on conventional petrol / diesel vehicles and reducing carbon emissions. A pilot is now underway in Worcester with a further review of the full charging infrastructure taking place.

25. A review and closer management of contracts is supporting significant efficiencies within the service. For example, more than £100,000 has been removed from West Mercia’s waste management contract through an improved contract and procurement process this year. In total, efficiencies totalling more than £330,000 are projected for delivery through improved management of estate contracts per year.

26. West Mercia’s Estates team is engaged at high levels of central government and the House of Lords on behalf of emergency service partners seeking changes to legislation around section 106 contributions from housing developers. The Estates service is working with partners to seek to improve access to income streams for policing and other blue light partners, with government receptive to the approach thus far.

27. A programme of rationalisation has also been developed and is being implemented to drive efficiency through revenue generation and reduced annual costs. This rationalisation is focused primarily on non-operational buildings and pieces of land which sit within West Mercia's estate portfolio, but which either carry inherent significant costs and risk, or have little to no strategic value. It is believed these disused or unnecessary parts of the police estate can achieve significant capital receipts in the coming years.
28. This rationalisation programme is supported by (and operates in conjunction with) work to modernise the police estate, recognising the shift to new ways of working and creating more flexible workspaces with the police estate.

Co-Location

29. Co-location with local partners is intended to meet key elements of the Estates Strategy. These include ensuring that the police service remains visible and accessible to communities and enabling the best possible service, whilst also seeking to be efficient and deliver best value to the public.
30. The PCC has been clear that any proposal to sell operational police stations must have fit-for-purpose alternatives within the same communities and that principle remains. For example, the recent sale of Tenbury Wells has seen West Mercia Police co-locate with Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service (HWFRS) nearby.
31. Collaboration with HWFRS is extensive, with shared facilities also in Bromsgrove, Redditch, Leominster, Peterchurch, Wyre Forest Hub and a shared headquarters at Hindlip Park, all in the interests of improved public services and efficiency.
32. Collaboration around co-location with Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) is less developed. Discussions between the OPCC and SFRS have commenced in recent months with teams now engaged positively to look at possibilities and opportunities.
33. The PCC is also engaged with other partners around co-location. For example, at Pontesbury, where the local Safer Neighbourhood Team now operates out of the Pavilion community hub. Other similar arrangements with community partners exist in a number of places such as Bridgnorth, Wem, and Whitchurch. The PCC is also at an early stage of exploring the viability of co-location in Newport.

Compliance and Regulations

34. A full review of West Mercia's health and safety policies related to the police estate has recently been undertaken and finalised.
35. New pro-active inspection and testing regimes have been designed and implemented to ensure health and safety standards as well as compliance with statutory requirements.
36. Compliance is reported at every Estates Governance Board, alongside other performance metrics. Currently the Estates Service achieves a "first time fix", in

85% of reactive work.

37. This again represents real progress for an estate where compliance and testing regimes had been inconsistent in years gone by.

Fit for Purpose

38. A central tenet of the Estates Strategy is that West Mercia's estate will be fit for purpose.
39. As previously documented, it is apparent that the estate suffered from a lack of investment and strategic management for a significant number of years. The extent of this issue continues to develop and be understood as the estate continues to be managed in a much more pro-active manner.
40. Significant additional investment has been made in the estates function and infrastructure in recent years. For example, a large amount of work and investment has been channelled into making West Mercia's infrastructure more resilient following power outages in recent years. This has involved investment in more cooling infrastructure, better alert mechanisms, better testing, and more developed co-operation between relevant functions. It does not however wholly mitigate against the fact that West Mercia has elements of its estates infrastructure which have not been fit for purpose for some time now, which will continue to present challenges and levels of risk, albeit much reduced.
41. Some significant progress has been made and that should be noted. It remains the case however that there is currently more work to do with the estate than there is resource allocated. It is clear that the modernisation of West Mercia's estate and making it fully fit for purpose will be a long-term endeavour, as was known at the time the Estates Strategy was developed.
42. For example, it is apparent that a multi-million-pound investment would be required in the divisional headquarters at Shrewsbury to make the building fit for purpose. Major investment would also be required at Telford's Malinsgate divisional headquarters in the medium term. Options around the northern estate are currently being appraised between the OPCC and West Mercia Police, taking into consideration operational requirements, balanced with affordability and best value for the public.
43. These and other similar considerations will need to be reviewed in the continued delivery of the Estates Strategy, to ensure the strategy and its objectives can be delivered in a timely, effective and efficient manner whilst balancing the delivery of other priorities within the Safer West Mercia Plan.

Risk Management Implications

None.

Financial Implications

None.

Legal Implications

None.

Equality Implications

None.

Supporting Information

None

Contact Points for the Report

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Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance (Monitoring Officer) there are no background papers relating to the subject matter of this report.

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