

Minutes of the West Mercia Police and Crime Panel

County Hall, Worcester

Thursday, 27 July 2023, 11.00 am

Present:

Cllr Barry Durkin (Chairman), Cllr Rob Adams (Vice Chairman),
Cllr Martin Allen, Cllr Caroline Bagnall, Cllr Roger Evans, Cllr Paul Harrison,
Cllr Liz Harvey, Cllr Nigel Lumby, Cllr Kelly Middleton, Cllr Richard Overton,
Cllr Vivienne Parry, Cllr Tom Piotrowski, Cllr James Stanley, Mrs C Clive and
Ms B McDowall

Also attended:

John Champion, West Mercia Police & Crime Commissioner
Gareth Boulton, Chief Executive, Office of the West Mercia Police & Crime
Commissioner
Andrew Boote, Head of Service for Safer Communities (Public Health)
Samantha Morris, Interim Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager
Alison Spall, 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 3 February 2023 (previously circulated).

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

472 Election of Chairman

The Interim Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager welcomed everyone to the meeting and advised that there was a change to the order of business with agenda items 5 and 6 (Elections of Chairman and Vice-Chairman) being moved to the start of the meeting.

It was noted that Councillor Aled Luckman had stood down as Chairman of the Panel.

Nominations for Chairman were received for Councillors Barry Durkin and Liz Harvey. On being put to the vote, Councillor Barry Durkin was duly elected as

Chairman, for the remainder of the three-year term until July 2024, and took the Chair.

473 Election of Vice-Chairman

As Councillor Barry Durkin had been elected as Chairman of the Panel, there was now a vacancy for Vice-Chairman.

Nominations for Vice-Chairman were received for Councillors Roger Evans and Rob Adams. On being put to the vote, Councillor Rob Adams was duly elected as Vice Chairman for the remainder of the term until July 2024.

474 Welcome and Introductions

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and placed on record his thanks to the retiring panel members, Councillors Aled Luckman, Graham Ballinger, Sebastian Bowen, Nyear Nazir, Tom Wells and David Wright for their contribution to the Panel. He particularly wished to highlight the long service of Councillor Sebastian Bowen who had been a member of the Panel since 2012 and had brought a wealth of experience and knowledge to the Panel. It was agreed that a letter of thanks would be sent to all retiring members on behalf of the Panel.

The new substantive members were: Councillors Barry Durkin (Herefordshire), Martin Allen (Malvern), Joanne Beecham (Redditch), Kelly Middleton (Telford and Wrekin), Tracey Onslow (Wyre Forest), Tom Piotrowski (Worcester City) and James Stanley (Worcestershire County).

The PCC advised the new members that if they had any particular areas of interest they wished to explore, this could be arranged via his office.

475 Apologies and Declarations of Interest

Apologies were received from Councillors Joanne Beecham, Helen Jones, Tracey Onslow and Tony Parsons.

There were no declarations of interest.

476 Named Substitutes

Councillor Caroline Bagnall for Tony Parsons (Shropshire Council) and Councillor Paul Harrison for Tracey Onslow (Wyre Forest District Council).

477 Public Participation

None.

478 Appointment of Co-opted Members

The following elected members were unanimously co-opted on to the Panel: Roger Evans, Vivienne Parry, Tony Parsons (Shropshire), Liz Harvey (Herefordshire) and Richard Overton (Telford and Wrekin).

479 Confirmation of the Minutes of the previous meeting

The Minutes of the meeting held on the 3 February 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

480 Annual Report of the PCC

The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) introduced his Draft Annual Report. Members of the Panel were required to review the Report and make recommendations to the PCC for consideration, following which, the PCC must then respond to any report or recommendations that the Panel has made prior to publishing the final version of the report.

In presenting his Annual Report, the PCC highlighted that in the last year there had been an increase in funding of £15m for policing and a significant rise in numbers of police officers for West Mercia. Whilst there had been an increased level of confidence in the West Mercia Police (the Force) in the last year, the PCC remained frustrated at the pace of the delivery of improvements. There were changing demands from communities and the PCC expected to see a greater pace of change in the year ahead.

The PCC drew attention to a few specific areas including:

- The lack of progress in respect of improving the visibility and access to police officers, an area that the Chief Constable was committed to seeing change.
- The reporting of poor behaviour of police officers nationally had impacted the reputation of the Police Force in general and public confidence. This behaviour was unacceptable, and the PCC was supportive of the work being done to drive improvement.
- The importance of continuing to fund services to support victims and securing additional funds for this purpose. This year more than £2m had been secured to tackle sexual and domestic violence and create safer spaces within communities. The PCC's mission was to continue to support those who needed it at a level that was expected and deserved by communities.

In the discussion that ensued, the following points were raised:

- With reference to the 500 new police officers highlighted in the report, a Member asked for details as to how many of them were front line officers. The PCC was not able to give an exact percentage but confirmed that it was not 100% as not all police officers were visible in the community and had other roles for example pursuing criminals on the dark web and therefore were out of sight of the public. The Panel would be provided with details following the meeting.

- Members were keen to see police officers being more visible within their communities, which would also benefit residents who had a fear of crime. The PCC explained that the number of police officers in an area varied according to activity levels, and that the Police response was relative and proportionate. The PCC acknowledged however, that public perception needed to improve and advised that some public perception work had recently been carried out in Pershore, and that he was keen to work with Councillors to improve public perception.
- A Member suggested that there was a lack of police officer presence at some Parish Council meetings, although it was highlighted that this was not the case at all Parish Council meetings. The Chief Executive explained that the Local Policing Charter including an agreement to provide timely updates to Parish Councils. If this was not happening, Councillors were asked to advise the PCC.
- A Member highlighted that the PCC's visit to a farm in Shropshire and interest in rural crime issues had been well received within the local farming community.
- Although there were some issues with policing in Telford, particularly with a lack of police attendance, a Member wished to highlight that the partnership working with the Police on the Safer and Stronger Communities programme was a very welcome initiative. The PCC agreed that the programme was proving successful, and that it was central to the aims of the Community Safety Partnership legislation.
- A Member advised that many of the issues highlighted in the report had been seen first-hand and referred to some positive diversionary and street work that was taking place and the mutual benefit of ward walks with the Police.
- In response to a Member question about the outcomes of the investment in technology, the PCC advised that by October the benefits would be realised, and a report would be brought to the February Panel detailing the outcomes of the investment.
- Referring to the year in numbers set out in the report, a Member requested that future reports included comparative figures from previous years with some context as to whether progress was 'on track' for these indicators. The PCC explained that he had adapted the reporting over time to suit the Panel's needs and was happy to try and meet new requests.
- The Chairman reminded the Panel that its role was one of critical friend and of holding the PCC to account. The PCC added that he saw the Panel's role as being one of support and challenge of his commissionership.
- A Member set out their observations on the figures used in the report, for instance the reliance on the use of estimates, despite the numbers of crimes reported having increased. It was suggested that public satisfaction with visibility was an outdated way of judging performance with the increasing importance of cybercrime. The low proportion of offences where action had been taken was also highlighted, and it was questioned what blockages were in the system and what was being done to influence this situation. The PCC agreed that the outcomes in the UK for lower-level crime were poor, although the Police did well with outcomes relating to serious crimes. Following some significant

investment in investigative work, the updated performance figures which would be presented to the September Panel were showing some improvement in the quality of outcomes. The PCC concurred that cybercrime and online fraud were important areas and that a weekly fraud update was provided via 'neighbourhood matters.'

- A Member highlighted that PCC's reflective summary of the previous year was appreciated, as was the use of case studies and the breakdown for each area. It was however disappointing to note the PCC's frustrations and the PCC was asked what actions were being taken to overcome these. The PCC set out his frustration that the organisation did not adapt quickly to emerging threats and he would prefer it to be 'live' to challenges that came along. The biggest frustration was with the lack of consistency and priority given to the commitments of the Chief Constable as set out in the Local Policing Charter, which meant that residents were not always getting what they should expect.
- Referring to the support for women who had suffered sexual and domestic violence, a Member asked for further details of the practicalities of victims accessing the support.
- In response to a question about the availability of 'Crucial Crew' in Shropshire, the PCC advised that he thought it was available in all areas of Shropshire and advised the Member to approach the local policing team, or his Office if her local team were not able to help.
- With reference to ensuring the accuracy of recording of outcome data, this was an area the PCC reported was being worked on. If ethical recording were an area of interest to the Panel, the PCC could provide a report at a later date.
- A Member expressed concern about the lower crime detection rate in Shropshire. The PCC advised that work was being carried out on this and the disparity was reducing.
- A Member requested detailed information on the average waiting time for 101 calls to be answered, as the figures quoted in the report did not reflect the local residents' experience. The PCC advised that further details could be found in the public call handling section of the performance monitoring report hyperlink in the report.

The Chairman confirmed that a formal letter would be sent to the PCC setting out the Panel's comments on his draft annual report.

481 2023/24 Annual Budget Metrics Report

The Panel received a report which provided an overview of the key performance indicators agreed by the PCC and the Chief Constable as part of the budget setting process for 2023/24. The PCC highlighted that these indicators had not been available when the Panel considered the precept.

A Member commented that for new Members, a longer-term view would be helpful so that trend analysis over time could be seen. Another point was raised that a comparison with indicators from other areas of the UK would be useful.

In response to a request from a Member, the PCC agreed to supply further details of the most similar group comparisons for robbery and burglary.

482 Combatting Drugs Partnership

The Panel received an update on the work of the two Combatting Drugs Partnerships in West Mercia, for which the PCC was the Senior Responsible Officer (SRO).

A Member questioned the PCC about the priority balance between tackling hard drugs which were fuelling serious crime versus the high usage of soft drugs amongst young people and the impact of those on their mental health and wellbeing. The PCC advised that the Government's 10-year plan 'From Harm to Hope' set out the approach to combatting illegal drug use at all levels. As the SRO, the PCC had a co-ordination role to ensure that there was a balanced approach but was not yet assured of the consistency of neighbourhood enforcement on drugs use. The PCC also referred to the recent launch of the Neighbourhood Crime fighting team which would boost resources to combat local drug issues. The Panel was informed that the PCC was unsure how the drugs partnerships were feeding back to Councils.

In response to a Member's question, the PCC stressed that the pathways had to be supported by partnerships, rather than a single organisation, and there was currently inconsistency as to how this was happening. The PCC referred to good consistency of delivery from the rehab work in prisons which was then being continued when the prisoners were released.

483 Most Appropriate Agency (MAA)

The Panel considered a report which set out details of a new policy and procedure referred to as, 'Most Appropriate Agency' which the Force had introduced on 3 April 2023. The Panel was informed that the policy was based on Humberside's Right Care Right Person (RCRP) policy and was intended to ensure that everyone, including the most vulnerable members of the community received the correct service, by the most appropriate agency, first time and every time. The PCC advised that there was a national launch event the previous day and whilst supportive of the principles behind the policy, he did have concerns regarding its implementation and how the system would work. The PCC had taken time to understand the way in which Humberside had implemented their policy and was clear that a partnership approach with all the local authorities in their area, was key to a successful approach. The PCC was keen to know if the Panel had any suggestions about the implementation of a partnership approach and 'bringing the partnership to life', perhaps involving local authority scrutiny bodies in the process.

Members raised a few issues and questions, to which the PCC responded as follows:

- The speed with which the policy was being implemented was raised as a cause for concern. A Member also highlighted the views of the Local

Government Association, which whilst welcoming the plans, had expressed concerns as to who would be left to foot the bill.

- Members were very concerned about the impact of this policy on vulnerable people in the community, especially those with mental health issues. It was felt that the conditions set out for a duty of care to arise for the Police to intervene, did not come across as a partnership approach.
- A Member asked whether the Equalities Impact Assessment referred to under the Equality Implications had been completed yet. The PCC advised that this had been completed by the Force and he would check whether it had been published.
- Whilst acknowledging that mental health was not a Police role, a Member suggested that the Police had powers to hold a person which were useful in certain situations, and examples were provided of a recent incident where Police intervention had been required. It was suggested that Telford & Wrekin Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) programme could have a role in a partnership and that drop off points with the IAPT team might be part of a solution. Also, greater involvement of place-based community groups as a source of engagement and for feedback purposes could be useful.
- A concern was raised about how the process for determining the best provider of a service would be managed and also the need to be able to respond to emergency situations, especially given that all partners could not necessarily act as an emergency service.
- A Member questioned, given the limited response to the consultation carried out by the Force, how partners had been engaged and challenged to roll out this policy. The PCC commented that the low engagement rate with the survey suggested to him that it did not reach the right people for completion.
- A Member suggested that the conditions required to be met before the Police had a duty to act was a major concern (paragraph 40 of report) and was unreasonable. The PCC advised that whilst he felt the Chief Constable was right to implement the policy, he had consistently expressed concerns in his holding to account work. He also agreed that there were some contradictions in the Force's policy, and he would ensure the concerns were taken on board.
- The PCC confirmed that the RCRP Toolkit (College of Policing) had been launched the previous day and that all the major partners had signed the agreement. It was intended that this policy would be cascaded through organisations, but the alignment of funding and services was not yet being seen.
- Another Member shared concerns that the process of implementing the policy was being rushed and whilst partnership working was the key, some sectors had little awareness of what was expected. It was suggested that local authority scrutiny committees could play a key role in helping this to move forward. The PCC welcomed this suggestion and advised that his Office could provide information or support to help partners to engage. It was agreed that the Chairman would write on behalf of the Panel to all Councils to encourage their engagement in this process.

- Further concerns were expressed about vulnerabilities in the community, for instance for the ambulance crews having to deal with difficult situations.
- A Member referred to a press release which the Force had issued about reducing police involvement in mental health care and commented that the Chief Constable was not present at this meeting to hear the Panel's concerns. The PCC advised that he would liaise with the Chief Constable to ensure that the Panels concerns were shared.
- A Member referred to the 'Mend the Gap' programme with different authorities and suggested that it may be of interest in this context too.

484 Police & Crime Plan Activity and Performance Monitoring Report

The Panel received an update on the activity undertaken by the PCC in support of his Safer West Mercia Plan and an update on Police performance.

In response to a Member's question about the approach to having 'holding to account' public meetings, the PCC advised that he had concluded that hybrid meetings were the way forward to ensure that the public could have the opportunity to participate. Consideration was also being given to holding a Force wide face to face 'holding to account' meeting.

Members raised a number of questions as follows, which were responded to by the PCC:

- In respect to a Member's question about the impact of the culture and values of the organisation, the PCC reported that the Chief Constable was currently in the process of carrying out a cultural audit throughout the Force, the results of which would be reported to the Panel.
- A Member raised the worrying statistics regarding children and young people affected by domestic abuse. The PCC highlighted that there was significant underreporting in this area making it hard to judge whether the increase was due to a true increase in crime numbers or a better understanding of the reality.
- In terms of the holding to account meetings, a Member highlighted that it would be helpful to receive some reassurance or communication regarding the contributions made by the public at these meetings.
- The diversity of the Police Force was questioned. The PCC advised that the Force was not yet representative of the communities that it served, but recent figures were showing some improvements. He commented that any insight from Members into engaging underrepresented communities would be welcomed. The PCC highlighted that figures on diversity were included in the performance report. A Member requested that a progress update be provided on police force diversity over the past 5 years and that the Equality implications section at the end of the report marked as 'none' could be usefully expanded.
- In response to a Member's question, the PCC agreed to ensure the financial management section of the report was expanded and the Chief

Executive confirmed that the most up to date quarterly financial information was always included.

- The importance of combatting rural crime was highlighted and a Member spoke positively about the use of smart water to prevent farm thefts. The PCC agreed that smart water was really helpful, and his mission was to ensure that it could be used much more extensively both within the farming community and innovatively for a wide range of community and parish uses, for which he was providing some funding.
- A Member was pleased to read about the work of the West Mercia Rape Sexual Abuse Support Centre (WMRSASC) in supporting victims of sexual violence and asked whether enough was being done considering the growing number of referrals. The PCC reported that there was currently far more demand than capacity, however, in the last few days, the Ministry of Justice had announced additional funding which would help. The Panel was informed that there was work ongoing with perpetrators to break the cycle of crime in this area and the PCC explained that his role included co-ordinating activities to help prevent these crimes.
- In response to a comment about low prosecution rates inhibiting people from coming forward to report crimes, the PCC advised that sexual violence crimes were very hard to prosecute, and that getting the right support for victims was important, especially as the delays in the criminal justice process could be very lengthy. The social stigma attached to reporting sexual violence was raised, and it was also recognised that there were many unreported male victims too.
- A Member highlighted that there were different perceptions of what domestic abuse looked like and suggested that it would be helpful for consideration to be given as to how the 'lived experience' of domestic abuse could be conveyed to the public, to increase their understanding of the issue. The PCC agreed to take this away for consideration and report back to the Panel.

485 Work Programme

The Panel received details of its current work programme and the following main points were made:

- In response to a question about whether the Panel could carry out Task Groups, the Interim Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager advised that the Panel was able to commission deep dives into particular issues. Initial suggestions made were:
 - smart water/rural crime
 - partnership working around sexual violence
 - Estates
 - Key Performance Indicators or PFI's
- A report on Police Force diversity was added to the work programme for the September meeting.
- A Member queried whether there were any shared services between West Mercia and Warwickshire following the separation of the Alliance.
- The Panel discussed the process for scrutinising the proposed precept and a Member suggested that it would be helpful if the final notification

of the proposed precept was advised at an earlier stage in the budget setting process. The Interim Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager explained that the PCC had agreed earlier in the meeting to liaise with Officers about the process for scrutiny of the draft precept and details would be provided in due course.

- The Interim Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager suggested that Members may wish to consider 'Champion' roles for Panel Members in order to develop their depth of knowledge in certain key areas.

The meeting ended at 1.50 pm

Chairman