

REPORT OF THE MEETING OF WEST MERCIA POLICE AUTHORITY HELD ON 26 SEPTEMBER 2006

Police Reform

1. On the 12 July, Tony McNulty, the new Police Minister, announced that there would be no forced police merges in England and Wales. This marked the end of an intense and very difficult period, which had thrown police forces and police authorities into turmoil as they sought to address the Home Office's desire to see the creation of a series of larger, regional forces.

2. Naturally, the Police Authority was delighted with this decision and placed on record its grateful thanks for the support received for the West Mercia Strategic Police Service option. The support from local communities, stakeholders, all local councils and councillors, MPs and Members of the House of Lords, who made their views known was essential for the campaign to succeed.

3. The Authority is looking to the future so that the ambition to build the West Mercia Strategic Police Service that was argued for is achieved. Together with the Constabulary, the Police Authority has already started to deliver this vision through the re-alignment of the budgets, which enabled a £2.9 million investment in 95 new Protective Services posts and an additional 300 Community Support Officers will be appointed to support local policing teams.

Local Policing Teams

4. This autumn will see the public launch of the Local Policing strategy, with 145 new Local Policing Teams becoming the bedrock of the police service in West Mercia. This new approach will improve communication, strengthen local relationships and, importantly, make the Constabulary more accountable to local people by giving them a direct say in how policing priorities are set.

5. The launch of the strategy followed a successful pilot scheme in the North Worcestershire Police Division where, as part of the initiative, 126 (PACT) Partners and Communities Together) meetings have been held, involving 3,700 members of the public with 400 objectives identified.

6. A framework is being developed for PACTs, PCCGs (Police/Community Consultative Groups) and the Police Authority, which will highlight their respective roles and address issues arising from the Police and Justice Bill in relation to community safety partnerships.

Corporate Governance

7. The Authority's external auditors, PricewaterhouseCoopers, have completed its Independent Review of the Corporate Governance Arrangements and scored the Authority Excellent in two categories and Good in the other four (the grades available were Excellent, Good, Fair and Poor).

8. The report praises the Authority for its clarity of purpose and intended outcomes for the public and service users and the degree to which the Authority engages with the public and the content of its website are hailed as best practice. The report also praised the calibre of the Authority's officials and the effective and democratic way in which the Authority was run.

9. The review assessed performance in six areas, as defined by the "The Good Governance standard for Public Services" published by the Office for Public Management (OPM) and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and are shown below:

Good Governance Principle	Assessment
Focusing on the organisation's purpose and on outcomes for the public	Excellent
Performing effectively in clearly defined functions and roles	Excellent
Promoting values for the whole organisation and demonstrating the values of good governance through behaviour	Good
Taking informed, transparent decisions and managing risk	Good
Developing the capacity and capability of the Authority to be effective	Good
Engaging stakeholders and making accountability real	Good

Independent members

10. Five vacancies will arise on the 1 April 2007 for independent members of the Police Authority. The appointments will be for a four-year period and were advertised at the beginning of October 2006, with a closing date of 8 November 2006.

11. Residents or people living in the area and over the age of 21 are eligible to apply although there are a number of disqualification provided in the Police Act 1996, including being a member of a district or county council and lay justices.

Disability Equality Scheme

12. A new duty will be placed on public authorities, including West Mercia Police Authority and the Constabulary, which will require the publication by 4 December 2006 of a Disability Equality Scheme.

13. As part of the consultation process to produce the Police Authority's Scheme a questionnaire has been distributed to disabled groups seeking their views and comments on what should be included.

14. A copy of the questionnaire can be downloaded from the Police Authority's website or is available from the Director's office (contact details shown below).

Disability Access

15. The Authority has received a report on building projects that were being undertaken to ensure that all its buildings are compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act. Due to the changing property portfolio and legislative changes at present just under half of the Authority's 71 buildings are compliant. As with last year

the Capital Programme includes £500,000 for DDA projects and once the current year's projects are completed, the compliance rate will be 64%.

16. Projects included in the current year are the police stations at Cleobury Mortimer, Dines Green, Hereford, Leominster, Market Drayton, Much Wenlock, Newport, Shifnal, Upton and Wythall.

Police Station Refurbishments

17. Tenbury Wells Police Station has been officially re-opened by the Lord Lieutenant of Worcestershire, Michael Brinton, following a refurbishment. The existing offices have been improved and the IT facilities upgraded and a new extension provides an improved front counter and toilet facilities for people with disabilities.

18. The Shadow Lord Chancellor, Lord Kingsland, officially opened the new custody suite at Shrewsbury Police Station on 29 August 2006. The £1.68m refurbishment has already led to improvements in performance and processing of detainees and in particular police officers have been able to address drunkenness and anti-social behaviour more quickly. There have also been cost savings in terms of time and money in respect of transporting people to custody, freeing up operational police officers' time and enabling them to return to their duties more quickly. The unit has also provided a safer and more secure environment for both staff and detainees.

Independent Custody Visiting Scheme

19. The Independent Custody Visiting Scheme provides a check on the conditions under which people are detained in police custody and provides an independent check on the way police officers and custody assistants carry out their duties.

20. There are over 70 independent custody visitors in West Mercia and they are drawn from all parts of the area. During 2005/06 fifteen new visitors were appointed and three training sessions arranged. Visitors also met regularly to discuss their visits and received reports from the national Independent Custody Visiting Association.

21. A total of 304 visits were made to the custody units at Hereford, Kidderminster, Malinsgate (Telford), Shrewsbury, Wellington (which was used as a temporary site during the refurbishment of Shrewsbury) and Worcester in 2005/06.

22. 1121 people were in custody at the time of the visits of which 730 were offered a visit; 575 accepting (79%). Reasons for detainees not being offered a visit included being interviewed, in consultation with their solicitor, asleep or visitors being advised not to see the detainee for health and safety reasons.

23. While there were no major areas of concern, where issues were raised these were dealt with satisfactorily and reported to the Police Authority as appropriate. Issues raised the previous year included the effectiveness of the heating and cooling systems in custody units and these have been remedied. Of particular note has been

the added value that custody assistants have added to the detention arrangements in police stations.

24. Further information about the Scheme and how to join are available from the Authority's website or the Director's office.

Stop Search and Encounter Records

25. Figures for the first quarter of the year indicated that there were total of 3364 recorded Stop Searches, an increase of 40% compared to the same period last year. Looking at the reasons for Stop Searches it was apparent that drugs were again the most common reason, followed by stolen property. The arrest rate was 13.1%.

26. The overall figures indicate that a person from a Minority Ethnic Group (MEG) was 5.22 more times likely to be stopped than a white person, although it was recognised that the actual numbers were very low and for the period analysed of the 45 MEG people stopped only 21 lived in the West Mercia area.

Signed on behalf of the
West Mercia Police Authority

P Deneen
Chair

Further Information

Any person wishing to seek further information on the subject matter of this report should contact David Brierley or Ian Payne on Shrewsbury (01743) 344314.

Further information on the West Mercia Police Authority can also be found on the Internet at www.westmerciapoliceauthority.gov.uk.

Questions on the functions of the Police Authority

The Authority has nominated the following members to answer questions on the discharge of the functions of the Police Authority at meetings of the relevant councils:

Herefordshire Council	Mr B Hunt
Shropshire County Council	Mr M Kenny
Telford and Wrekin Council	Mr J Hicks
Worcestershire County Council	Mr E Sheldon

List of Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Director of the Police Authority) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

Agenda papers for the Annual Meeting of the West Mercia Police Authority held on 13 June 2006.