

REPORT OF THE MEETING OF WEST MERCIA POLICE AUTHORITY HELD ON 21 SEPTEMBER 2004

Mr Tony Mullett CBE QPM

1. The members of the Authority recorded their deepest sympathies to the family of Mr Tony Mullett who served as Chief Constable of West Mercia from 1985 to 1991. On leaving West Mercia he became the first head of the National Criminal Intelligence Service

Budget 2004/2005

2. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister announced in April 2004 that the budget set by the Police Authority for 2004/2005 was considered to be excessive and proposed to set a notional budget, which might restrict the increase in budget for 2005/6. A delegation from the Authority, together with the Chief Constable, met with the Minister for Local and Regional Government, Nick Raynsford, on 29 June 2004 where emphasis was placed on the excellent performance and management of West Mercia combined with its relatively low funding position. The Minister was urged to set a notional budget as close as possible to the actual budget set by the Police Authority in February this year so as to minimise any potential budget impact in 2005/6.

3. However, the Minister announced in Parliament on 8 July 2004, that despite the representations made by West Mercia he intended to set a 'notional budget' of £165.321 million which was £517,000 less than the approved budget (had the 2004/2005 budget been set at that notional level the Council Tax precept for a Band D household would have reduced by £1.26 for the year).

4. The Authority agreed to write again to the Minister inviting him to reconsider his decision, impressing upon him the fact that it is the low level of Home Office grant received by West Mercia (the fourth lowest in England and Wales) that results in the higher than average burden being borne by the Council Tax payer. *The ODPM have now rejected this further request and the notional budget proposed in April 2004 has been confirmed.*

5. Meetings with local MP's have also taken place to brief them on the financial position facing West Mercia and the potential impact on the budget 2005/6 should the support from Central Government increase by less than 5.5%, this being the estimated percentage level of police inflation.

6. Through the instigation of Michael Foster MP (Worcester) and other local MP's an adjournment debate on policing in West Mercia will be held in Parliament on 12 October 2004.

Financial Results 2003/2004

7. The financial results for 2003/2004 revealed that the gross cost of operational policing activity had increased by 10.2% over the previous year to £163.2m. The balance on the reserve accounts was £19.055m and included a total of £5.956m that had been added during the year for capital purposes. £5.153m of this would enable the currently approved Capital Programme to be completed and a further £0.803m had been added from reserves with a view to supporting the future development of the force's custody facilities.

Community Support Officers

8. The Authority has agreed to support a bid to the Home Office's Neighbourhood Policing Fund for 35 additional Community Support Officers (CSOs) to further improve Police visibility and to bid for a sum equivalent to 5 extra CSOs. The Authority also welcomed the announcement that Government funding for the 67 CSOs currently in post will continue for a further three years.

Custody Projects

9. The provision of proper custody facilities is a fundamental requirement of policing and has an impact on performance in key areas of policing. The Authority has, therefore, agreed to upgrade to the units at Leominster, Hereford and Shrewsbury to provide increased capacity and facilities.

10. The Leominster unit will be extended from four to nine cells and once completed will be used as the main custody station for Herefordshire whilst the Hereford unit is closed and rebuilt to provide a sixteen cell unit (currently eight). The Shrewsbury upgrade will increase the capacity by three cells to eleven.

Council Tax on Second Homes

11. District and Unitary authorities have been given discretion to reduce the discount on the council tax for second homes and the Shropshire county and district councils had requested that the additional revenue raised be spent in the respective local areas.

12. In considering this request the Authority noted that the budget decision in February 2004 took into account the additional council tax resources and had been committed to existing plans. It also noted that policy decisions about resource allocation had to be taken in the context of existing structures and that many policing activities were reactive and crossed local authority boundaries in terms of staff deployment. Therefore, whilst positive initiatives will continue to be supported by the existing divisional structure, the Authority could not agree to a hypothecation of council tax funding from the police precept to any particular district council area.

CCTV Link

13. Approval has been given for the provision of a CCTV link from Herefordshire to the Call Management Centre based at Hindlip Hall, Worcester.

Sponsorship

14. During 2003/2004 West Mercia Constabulary received sponsorship to the value of £38,048. Sponsorship of vehicles amounted to £24,100 and £13,948 related to other donations.

Special Priority Payments

15. The Police Reform programme contains provision for a local scheme for special priority payments to be targeted at front line/operational officers in particular. West Mercia introduced its first scheme in 2003 and the Authority has agreed a revised

scheme for 2004. The scheme provides for additional payments of between £500 and £3000 and includes posts such as:

- Operational Sergeants
- Tutor Detective Constables
- Armed Response Officers
- Officers trained and deployed to Chemical, Biological, Radiological and nuclear incidents.
- Central Motorway Patrol Group Officers

West Mercia Neighbourhood Watch Association

16. The Authority has agreed a one-off grant of £2,000 to assist the newly formed West Mercia Neighbourhood Watch Association.

Summary Policing Plan

17. The Summary Policing Plan, which sets out the Force's key priorities for 2004/5, is available on the Authority's website at www.westmercia.police.uk and copies are also being distributed to local authorities and police/community consultative groups. Copies are also available from the Director to the Police Authority's office.

Front Line Policing Targets

18. The Home Office's Strategic Plan for 2004-2008 'Confident Communities in a Secure Britain' includes a target to free up over 12,000 police officers nationally from the back office to the frontline. In order to monitor this target the Force Front Line Policing Measure (FLP) has been developed and this indicates that for West Mercia the current percentage of police officer time spent on frontline duties is just above the national average of 63.17%, at 64.5%. The Authority is required to approve targets aimed at improving this level and has agreed the following targets:

<i>Baseline</i>	64.5%
<i>End 2005/06</i>	66.7% (+2.2%)
<i>End 2006/07</i>	69.5% (+2.8%)
<i>End 2007/08</i>	73.0% (+3.5%)

Intelligence Recording

19. A report on the steps being taken with respect to intelligence recording against the background of the Bichard Report into the Soham murders has been prepared. Members noted that practices in West Mercia were reassuring but that, without a wider range of national changes, the risk of poor information gathering and exchange would remain. Work to ensure best practice in this area was continuing and was subject to Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary's scrutiny.

Community Problem Solving

20. Members of the Authority have received a presentation on a community problem solving initiative, which was designed to tackle Anti-Social Behaviour. Following the introduction of this initiative at a location in Kidderminster, crime and disorder levels were driven down by 82% and levels of reassurance had risen. The model, which

was developed by the Crime and Disorder Team at Police Headquarters, is now available to all Divisional Commanders.

Independent Custody Visiting Scheme

21. The Independent Custody Visitors Scheme provides the opportunity for members of the local community to observe, comment and report upon the conditions under which people are detained in police stations, and the operation in practice of the statutory and other rules governing their welfare, with a view to securing greater public understanding of these matters. The visitors are all volunteers and subject to certain restrictions any person over the age of 18 can apply through the Director to the Police Authority to become a custody visitor in West Mercia. The Authority monitors the reports submitted by the visitors and where necessary takes matters up with the Constabulary if there are areas of concern.

22. A total of 306 visits were undertaken during 2003-2004, exactly the same as for the previous year. There were 1113 people in custody at the time of the Independent Custody visits, 990 of these people were held by the police under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act.

23. No major problems emerged from the visits and where issues were raised these were either rectified as soon as possible, dealt with in correspondence with the Divisional Police Liaison Officer or discussed at the Panel meetings. Specific issues raised included the unavailability of duty solicitors, which is being addressed nationally and concerns with the custody area at Shrewsbury and Redditch.

24. The Police Authority welcomes applications from all people over eighteen but would particularly like to encourage people in the 20 - 40 year age bracket and those from ethnic minority backgrounds as they are currently under-represented. Application forms and further details are available from the Director of the Police Authority's office.

Signed on behalf of the
West Mercia Police Authority

R M Forster
Chairman

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

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 21 September 2004.