

REPORT OF THE WEST MERCIA POLICE AUTHORITY MEETING HELD ON 15 FEBRUARY 2005

Budget 2005/2006

1. The Police Authority faced a very tough budget-making process this year with the possibility of being capped by the Government if it was judged to have set too high a budget.
2. By way of background it was announced in October 2004 that West Mercia had been 'nominated' by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. As a consequence a 'nominal' budget of £165,321,000 was set for 2004/05, against which increases in West Mercia's budget requirement in subsequent years would be measured. This amount was £517,000 below the original budget set by the Authority in February 2004.
3. The Authority has seen a 3.75% increase in Government funding for 2005/06 although to maintain current policies an increase of 4.4% in the overall budget was actually required. This was due to pay awards, inflation on goods and services, new pension costs and other commitments.
4. Given the Government's stated policy on Council Tax increase the Police Authority decided to take a safety first approach and took all reasonable steps to avoid capping and wasteful re-billing costs in the region of £0.650m. The Police Authority resolved to set a budget requirement of £172.8 million for 2005/2006. The council tax figure, which supports this budget, is £143.17 for a Band D property and represents an increase of 11p per week, or 3.98%.
5. The approved budget produces a funding gap of £1.515m but in order to maintain current levels of service this will be bridged by recognising more fully the ebb and flow of the recruitment process of all Police Officers and Police Staff, overtime savings, capital financing, efficiency gains, interest earnings and contingency funds risk review.
6. The Authority is determined that frontline policing should remain the priority and the budget set envisages that there will be no loss of officers and provides the capability to invest in the vital capital programmes which are essential. The Chief Constable has pledged to maintain staffing levels so far as possible in 2005/06 and there are no direct staff reductions resulting from this year's budget.
7. As part of the budget setting process the Police Authority issued a consultation paper on a range of options between 3.5% and 7.5% and this was sent to MPs, local authorities, Community Policing Boards, Police/Community Consultative Groups, Non Domestic Ratepayer organisations and was available on the Authority's website. The majority view expressed was that a budget that at least maintained the current level of service should be provided, although the threat of capping was widely recognised.
8. A public opinion survey was also commissioned and during December 2004 the polling organisation MORI contacted 1009 council tax payers. The results of the survey, which are statistically significant, showed:

- 56% of people supported a tax increase of 7.5% or 20 pence per week on the understanding that it would result in the equivalent of an extra 35 police officers.
- 10% of people supported an increase of 5% or 13 pence per week on the understanding that this would result in service reductions of the equivalent of 24 officers.
- 11% of people supported an increase of 3.5% or 9 pence per week on the understanding that this would result in service reductions of the equivalent of 60 police officers.
- 8% were in favour of no increase at all, and a further 4% gave other answers indicating that an alternative to increasing the council tax should be sought.
- The remainder either expressed no opinion or gave an answer outside of the parameters of the survey.

9. Despite limited resources over the past two years the Police Authority has increased police officer numbers to record levels; increased the number of Community Support Officers serving communities across the force area and invested in technology that enables the force to use the resources available to it as effectively as possible. This budget represents the best outcome for the Authority, the Force and the people of West Mercia within the context of financial constraints.

10. The Authority was, however, very critical at what was in effect the removal of local discretion in setting the budget given the severe capping regime threatened by the Government and has written to all the MPs in West Mercia. The Authority wishes to continue to explore ways of resolving the underlying funding issues impacting on West Mercia and the MPs, who have previously been very supportive of West Mercia, will continue to have a key role in maintaining pressure on Government for better funding of policing services.

*West Mercia Three Year Strategic Plan and Annual Joint Policing Plan
Incorporating the Best Value Performance Plan
4000+ An Even Better Place*

11. The Authority has agreed the Three-Year Strategy and Policing Plan, which defines the purpose, aims, priorities and key principles for policing in West Mercia for the period 2005 – 2008. The Policing Plan for 2005/06 is incorporated within the plan and gives particular emphasis to the planned outcomes and priorities for the forthcoming year. It also includes the Best Value Performance Plan.

12. A summary of what will be delivered under the 'Four Better Outcomes' during 2005/2006 is shown below.

Reassurance

- Increase the percentage of police officer time spent on front line duties
- Reinforce the commitment to Local (Neighbourhood) Policing through the employment of a further 12 Community Support Officers (bringing the total number of CSOs to 83), designated with appropriate powers, for deployment within policing teams
- Develop improved community consultation arrangements through Community Policing Boards, Police Community Consultative Groups and involvement in

Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, with a particular emphasis being placed upon seeking more effective engagement with those groups that we have yet to reach

- Continuously improve performance in relation to non-emergency call handling and support the introduction of the new national non-emergency number telephone number
- Implement the revised Race Equality Scheme and complete our new Scheme by May 2005
- Improve accessibility to services and premises, with particular emphasis on the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- Optimise the recruitment, retention and progression opportunities for people from under-represented groups

Reduced crime, increased detections and more offences brought to justice

- Further reduce crime levels, with particular emphasis upon domestic burglary, violent crime (including domestic violence) and vehicle crime
- Increase the proportion of sanction detections and the number of offences brought to justice with particular emphasis upon results in relation to our priority crimes
- Increase successes in relation to the prosecution of Class A drug dealers
- Invest additional resources in financial investigation and other related skills in order to increase the amount of assets seized and recovered in accordance with the Proceeds of Crime Act
- Catch and convict Prolific and other Priority Offenders
- In partnership with the Crown Prosecution Service, introduce enhanced Witness Care Units throughout the Force area
- Introduce the national guidance on the investigation of domestic violence incidents and treatment of victims and survivors and ensure policy and procedure is updated to reflect this
- Work with partners to implement the new child protection legislation including the formation of accountable Local Children's Safeguarding Boards and Strategic Partnership Boards
- Increase the number of offences detected and brought to justice through the use of ANPR (Automatic Number Plate Recognition) technology
- Increase the custody capacity at Shrewsbury and Leominster, and improve the efficient use of other cell accommodation, particularly in Shropshire and Herefordshire

Reduced disorder and anti-social behaviour

- Reduce people's concerns about anti-social behaviour and disorder
- Work with Local Authorities, other partner agencies and licensees to actively manage the impact of the Licensing Act 2003 and minimise the risk of anti-social behaviour and disorder resulting from excessive alcohol
- Work with partners, including the Crown Prosecution Service, to target repeat anti-social behaviour offenders, making use of a wide range of potential responses including Anti-social Behaviour Orders (both civil and post conviction), Acceptable Behaviour Contracts, Fixed Penalty Notices and other new powers available through the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003
- Encourage active citizenship in our communities through the introduction of Rural and Urban Safety Schemes in response to local need
- Undertake co-ordinated and well-publicised enforcement campaigns in order to target alcohol related crime and disorder at key times of the year

Reduced road casualties

- Support divisions in the achievement of local priorities, by providing specialist support in road policing and operations
- Implement enforcement and education campaigns, including
 - Drink drive offences
 - Seat belt offences
 - Mobile phone offences
 - Speed offences
 - Hotspot targeting
 - Bikesafe initiative

13. The Plan also includes the Best Value Review Programme and details the results of past reviews and the proposed programme for 2005/06. Further details are shown in the next section of this report.

14. Throughout the year the Authority will monitor the performance of the Constabulary against the targets that have been set and later this year will produce its Annual Report on the performance of the Constabulary against the objectives set in the 2004/2005 Policing Plan.

15. The Three-Year Strategy and Policing Plan will be available on the Internet at www.westmercia.police.uk or from the Director to the Police Authority.

Best Value Review Programme

16. There are currently two Best Value Reviews outstanding from the 2004/05 programme - Diversity and the Central Ticket Office.

17. The Police Authority has agreed that the review of the Central Ticket Office be suspended until September 2005 and the timescales for the Best Value Review of Diversity be reviewed at that time.

18. This is because the Constabulary's Best Value team will be deployed until September 2005 to undertake work on codes which are being developed, under the provisions of the Police Reform Act, by the National Centre for Policing Excellence to identify, develop and spread good practice in operational policing throughout the service.

19. These codes will establish common minimum professional standards of service delivery and investigation in respect of the following business areas; Firearms & less lethal weapons; Police National Computer; Serious Crime Analysis Section; National Intelligence Model; the Bichard Report; Domestic Violence; Child Protection; Missing Persons; Serious Sexual Offences; Child Abuse on the Internet; Safer Prisoner Handling; Using Immigration Powers; Volume Crime; Social Cohesion; and Major Incident Room Administrative Procedures Review.

Capital Programme

20. The Authority has agreed a Capital Programme of £7.194 million for 2005/2006, which includes £1.795m for Information Technology, £1.647m for vehicles and equipment, and £3.752m for buildings.

21. The Authority has also agreed to pursue negotiations for a lease of the former military base at Defford, near Pershore, which will reduce accommodation pressures in a number of areas including storage, driver and dog training, radio and vehicle workshops and Central Motorway Patrol Group.

Efficiency Plan

22. All police forces have been required to demonstrate a continuous drive for efficiency by meeting an annual target for efficiency gains equivalent to 2% of the annual budget. The Home Office has stressed that this is not an exercise in crudely cutting budgets and the gains should be redirected into better front line policing and performance. The Police Authority receives regular reports on the progress made and over the past six years efficiencies to the value of over £20m have been made.

23. Listed below are some examples of efficiency gains included within the 2004/05 Efficiency Plan.

- Land Registry registration scheme £62,000 (cashable)
- Procurement of services £64,000 (cashable)
- Conversion of paper input intelligence reports to intranet format £274,000 (non – cashable)
- Introduction of detainee image database £150,000 (non–cashable)
- Introduction of South Worcestershire Interview Team £301,000 (non–cashable)
- Savings drawn from work performed by Community Support Officers £188,000 (non– cashable)

24. For 2005/06 the requirement is to be increased to 3% efficiencies to a value of approximately £5.200m.

Monitoring of Force Performance

25. The Authority has reviewed the force's performance over the first nine months of the year and noted that the Crime Reduction and Detection figures all showed excellent performance improvements. Performance data in relation to reassurance was discussed in some detail and it was noted that this particular data set would be considered by Community Policing Boards under their revised remit. Two areas for special attention were identified:

- Call Centre Management – the Chief Constable has commissioned a review of call handling
- Sickness Absence – the level of sickness both for Police Officers and Police Staff is the subject of considerable attention particularly given the tight target to be imposed by central government for 2005/6.

Auditors Report on the Best Value Performance Plan

26. The Authority's Best Value Performance Plan is audited by PriceWaterhouseCoopers to ensure it complies with legislation. After auditing the 2004/05 plan they made the following recommendations;

- *'That the Authority puts in place the systems and procedures to enable it to collect and report on all statutory performance indicators in future years.'*
- *'That in the next annual policing plan the Authority reports its actual performance against the original five year targets set in 1998/99 for domestic burglary, violent crimes and vehicle crimes.'*

27. These recommendations have been acted upon. All statutory performance indicators and the original five-year targets are included in this 2005/06 plan.

28. The Auditor also identified a small number of Best Value Performance Indicators, issues from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary work and some financial information that were omitted from the 2004/05 plan. All matters raised have been addressed and, where applicable, also incorporated in this plan.

Binge Drinking

29. Operation Christmas Presence was launched by West Mercia Constabulary over the festive period to tackle binge drinking and late night disorder and to target offences including drink spiking, drink fuelled violence and drink driving. The Authority received a report on the success of this operation and noted that a number of lessons had been learned which would be built upon in preparing the Constabulary's response to the changes in licensing laws due to come into effect in 2005.

Best Value Review of Custody

30. The Police Authority has considered the recommendations arising out of the Best Value Review Report on Custody. The report identified a number of pressing

issues including cell capacity, staffing issues, pending legislative changes and the need to review the current outsourcing arrangements.

31. The Authority has already agreed the provision of new pre-fabricated cells in Shrewsbury, the provision of a total of 16 cells at Hereford and an additional 5 cells at Leominster. Concerns were expressed whether this level of provision, particularly that at Shropshire Division, was sufficient to meet current needs not least in the light of earlier proposals for a new build Shrewsbury HQ with significantly higher levels of cell provision. It was noted that the Chief Constable had not brought forward proposals to progress the Shropshire Headquarters in the light of the restricted budget position.

32. The Authority, in approving the report's recommendations, requested that a review of custody demand be carried out in respect of the Shropshire Division and be reported back to members at their autumn meeting together with a costed implementation plan.

Special Constabulary

33. The Authority has received a report on the Special Constabulary and welcomed the joint recruitment campaign that was being developed for regulars and special constables, based on taking 'positive action' to recruit from ethnic minorities. This will include the marketing of the 'employee release' scheme.

34. A Force Project is also underway to implement many of the changes following on from West Mercia's review of the Special Constabulary. It is anticipated that this will deliver many positive changes for the Specials by integrating them even closer to their police colleagues.

35. Further consideration will be given to the recruitment and deployment position of Special Constables on a divisional basis at the revised Community Policing Boards as part of their oversight of Community Engagement.

Signed on behalf of the
West Mercia Police Authority

R M Forster
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.

List of Background Papers

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

Agenda papers for the meeting of the West Mercia Police Authority held 15 February 2005.