

REPORT OF THE MEETING OF WEST MERCIA POLICE AUTHORITY HELD ON 19 DECEMBER 2006

Draft Strategic Priorities 2007/10 and Operational Priorities 2007/08

1. The Police Authority is consulting key stakeholders on the proposed policing priorities for 2007 and beyond. These build upon recent successes and take into account national targets, local partnership commitments and local communities' views. The proposed priorities for improvement are:

Local Policing – fully implementing 145 locally focused policing teams throughout the West Mercia area. Establishing effective engagement with communities and partners at a local level. Working together to resolve the crime and disorder issues that are of greatest concern to local communities.

Protective Services – investing to significantly enhance the Constabulary's capability and capacity to protect communities from the threat of terrorism and to promote safety by dealing effectively with major crime and serious and organised crime.

Protection of Vulnerable people – ensuring a more co-ordinated and risk based approach to the protection of vulnerable children and adults, with particular emphasis on domestic violence, hate crime, sex offender management and missing persons.

Tools to do the Job – supporting developments in up to date buildings, equipment and improved information technology. Tackling local, regional and national crime through enhanced information quality and effective information sharing between forces.

2. The proposed Priorities are designed to support and be consistent with the national Strategic Assessment 2006, the West Mercia Baseline Assessment, referred to later in this report, and the National Community Safety Plan 2006-2009. This Plan was updated in November 2006 and includes the Government's Community Safety Themes:

- *Making Communities stronger and more effective.*
- *Further reduce crime and anti-social behaviour and building a culture of Respect.*
- *Preventing extremism and countering terrorism*
- *Creating safer environments.*
- *Protecting the public and building confidence.*
- *Improving people's lives so they are less likely to commit offences or re-offend.*

3. Details of the proposed priorities are also included on the Authority's website at www.westmerciapoliceauthority.gov.uk and comments are invited by 29 January 2007.

Sustainable Policing

4. The Association of Police Authorities (APA) and the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) have made a formal submission to the Government on the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) in their report 'Sustainable Policing'.
5. The CSR will shape the funding for the police service between 2008 and 2011 and the APA/ACPO report includes five key statements:
 - *The APA and ACPO call on the Government to acknowledge the realistic approach to the Comprehensive Spending Review 2007 and give due account to the APA/ACPO approach.*
 - *The police service has made significant progress in reducing crime and improving public reassurance. The APA and ACPO want to ensure that sufficient funding is available to maintain and build on this progress - for the benefit of communities.*
 - *The Government is called upon to acknowledge the funding gap and the implications this has for policing and to work with police authorities and chief officers to ensure that communities continue to receive the policing services they need and deserve.*
 - *The Government is asked to consider the priorities for the Comprehensive Spending Review Period and take them into account when making decisions that will shape policing in coming years.*
 - *The Government is called upon to give police authorities and chief officers the flexibility and freedom they need to better manage their resources and achieve real outcomes for communities. The Government should also create a lighter, more focused and co-ordinated regime of monitoring and inspection.*
6. All MPs in West Mercia have been sent a copy of the report together with a briefing note on its contents and impact from a West Mercia perspective.

Capital Programme

7. The Police Authority has agreed additional investment of £0.804m in Protective Services equipment, vehicles, computer and communications equipment. Other additions to the Capital Programme include a new Police Post in Kidderminster and an upgrade of the Central Ticket Office's Network. The items have all been funded from within the existing budget.
8. Provision has also been made for the provision of additional premises in the Shrewsbury area to ease the pressures on the Shropshire Divisional Headquarters and the Police Authority accommodation.

Budget 2007/2008

9. The budget for 2007/08 is being developed against a background of seeking to continue to improve services whilst operating within Government guidelines and minimising the impact on Council Taxpayers.
10. It is expected that the permitted increase in Council Tax will be below 5% and consequently it is likely that if existing commitments and planned developments are to be maintained, the budget will need to be supported from the Authority's earmarked funds retained for specific purposes and risk management.
11. As part of the consultation process on the draft Policing Priorities comments are invited and the Police Authority will meet on 13 February 2007 to agree the budget for the forthcoming year.

Protective Services

12. The budget for 2006/07 included an extra £2.9million for the recruitment of an extra 95 police officers and staff to strengthen the Constabulary's ability to tackle issues including serious and organised crime; roads policing; cross border crime and counter terrorism. This recruitment is ahead of schedule with over a third of the posts already filled and the force is set to beat its target to have all the positions filled by April 2008.
13. The new posts, mainly in the central Criminal Investigation (CID) and Force Operations departments, will boost the specialist policing resources available across Herefordshire, Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin and Worcestershire. They will play a vital role in keeping local people safe and help to ensure that those officers and staff involved in local policing teams, who provide a visible and patrolling police presence in communities, remain on the front line, building partnerships and resolving local residents' issues."
14. The Police Authority took this prompt and positive action in February 2006 to address the Government's understandable concerns about a gap in the resources available nationally for what has become known as the protective services. It was recognised that for West Mercia Constabulary to further strengthen its reputation as a strategic police service, additional investment in this area was vital. As a result of financial prudence, it was possible to make this significant additional investment into these critically important areas of policing and ensure that the force has the resources and skills it needs to tackle crime in the 21st century.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary

15. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) has published the Baseline and Combined Assessment 2006 for West Mercia. This has confirmed that the Constabulary continues to be one of the best performing police forces in the country.

16. The Assessment includes Areas for Improvement and the Chief Constable and the Police Authority are considering these. In particular the protection of vulnerable people is included as one of the key priorities for 2007/08.

17. During November 2006 the Chief Inspector of HMIC, Sir Ronnie Flannagan, visited West Mercia and commented on how committed to policing the people he met were.

18. During his visit Sir Ronnie heard about the force's plans to strengthen the resources available to protect vulnerable people and the ongoing programme to recruit additional officers and staff for protective services.

19. Sir Ronnie also visited South Worcestershire Division where he met officers and staff from the Anti Social Behaviour Unit, Public Protection Unit and Hate Crime team.

20. The Police Authority agreed that to receive such praise from Sir Ronnie was a positive tribute to all those who work for West Mercia.

Disability Equality Scheme

21. Both the Police Authority and Constabulary have published Disability Equality Schemes and copies are available on the Internet at www.westmerciapoliceauthority.gov.uk and www.westmercia.police.uk respectively.

22. The Schemes were developed in consultation with disabled people and representative groups and set out how the promotion of disability equality will be central to the way the organisations operate

User Satisfaction Survey

23. The User Satisfaction Survey for April 2005 – March 2006 indicated that satisfaction had increased at all stages in Burglary, Violent crime, and Vehicle crime, with an overall decrease in satisfaction in Road Traffic collisions and Racist Incidents.

24. For the first two quarters of the current year victims of burglary dwelling and road traffic collisions have showed the strongest levels of satisfaction. Lowest satisfaction was with victims of violent crime and racist incidents.

25. In comparison with Most Similar Forces, satisfaction with treatment and of violent and vehicle crime victims are areas for improvement while the force is performing comparatively very well with respect to police actions, follow up and Road Traffic Collision victims. There is currently a six-month pilot survey of victims of anti-social behaviour.

26. Divisional Commanders are raising awareness of surveys amongst staff and regular reports are made to Performance Group meetings. The Victims Code came into effect on 1 April 2006 and initiatives include: regular focus groups; a DVD of violent crime victims; police officer prompt cards; and regular updates to victims.

Customer service has also been enhanced through the production of the 'Be the Difference' booklet and the 'Speaks Quality' project which was being rolled out to all West Mercia staff.

27. User satisfaction surveys will be conducted by telephone from April 2007 and this should result in a higher response, particularly from victims of racist incidents.

Community Engagement Strategy

28. The Panel received an update on the preparation of a joint Community Engagement Strategy for the Police Authority and Constabulary.

29. Joint objectives have been agreed and specific roles for the Police Authority and Force identified. The Authority and Force's current activities against the objectives are being reviewed to identify gaps in provision, areas for improvement and suggested actions to improve.

30. As part of the process for developing the strategy Police Authority members have attended workshops and a questionnaire has been sent to Police/Community Consultative Groups with a follow-up workshop planned. Work has also been undertaken within the Constabulary.

Local Policing Programme

31. The Police Authority has received an update on the implementation of the Local Policing Programme.

32. The Local Policing Database has been launched and this provides public information on PACT (Partners and Communities Together) meetings, details of the local policing teams, local contact details and a summary of the key priorities agreed for the respective local areas. The database is available on the Internet at www.westmercia.police.uk website and enables people to search for their local details by postcode.

Stop and Search

33. Stop, Search and Encounter Records for the period 1st July to 30th September 2006 showed that there were a total of 3365 Stop Searches, a 12.58% increase on the previous year. The number of Minority Ethnic Group stops (307 over the period) was small in numeric terms and equated to less than one MEG per person per day per police division.

Audit

34. The Authority's external auditors, PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PWC), have presented the West Mercia 2005/06 Audit Letter. This was a very positive audit and PWC had issued an unqualified audit opinion on the Authority's 2005/06 financial statements..

35. PWC's review of the Police Authority's Corporate Governance Arrangements rated the six principles of corporate governance as two 'Excellents' and four 'Goods'. An action plan has been agreed in order to strengthen the governance arrangements still further.

36. The Police Use of Resources Evaluation (PURE) undertaken by PWC also provided a positive conclusion on the use of resources. The Authority had developed its risk management arrangements over the last eighteen months and as this becomes embedded, risk processes and assessments would be improved. The Auditors stated that the Force and Authority were implementing a highly effective Performance Management framework. Arrangements are particularly effective at the corporate levels of the organisation and there is work ongoing to ensure that the framework is further developed and tailored for use throughout the organisation at all levels.

Medical Care

37. The Authority in monitoring the sickness absence profile for Police Officers and Staff, noted that the four main categories for absence were musculo-skeletal, psychological disorders, miscellaneous conditions and respiratory. The increase in psychological disorders was a worrying trend. Action being taken to address these concerns included Stress Audits in the South Worcestershire and Hereford Divisions.

People

38. Assistant Chief Constable Margaret Wood, who heads West Mercia's Protective Services and Serious Organised Crime activities, has secured a prestigious post as ACPO Terrorism Director and will take up the position in January 2007.

39. This newly created post will see Mrs Wood co-ordinating work across the police service to build capacity and capability to counter terrorism and play a major role in the creation of the Counter Terrorism Units and Regional Intelligence Cells at key locations across England and Wales.

40. The Police Authority has placed on record its appreciation of the contribution Mrs Wood has made to policing in West Mercia and also that of Chief Superintendent Julie Harries and Mrs Lynn Anslow who have retired as Head of the Professional Standards and Estates Departments, respectively.

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:

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

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 19 December 2006.