

REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE WEST MERCIA POLICE AUTHORITY HELD ON 23 SEPTEMBER 2003

Appointment of Members and Questions on Police Matters

1. Following the council elections in May 2003 Mr J T Hicks and Mrs K Tomlinson have been appointed to the Authority from the Borough of Telford and Wrekin Council. Mr B Hunt has also been appointed from the Herefordshire Council.
2. The Authority agreed to nominate Mr Hicks and Mr Hunt to answer questions on the discharge of the functions of the Police Authority at meetings of their respective councils during 2003-2004.

Annual Report 2002-2003

3. The Authority has published its Annual Report, which looks back on the year ending April 2003. This was the year that saw the recruitment of 300 extra police officers and their training and development is well advanced and the impact will become increasingly apparent during the current year.
4. The Police Authority remains committed to an increasing police presence on the streets of West Mercia and prompt response to calls for assistance.
5. Last year the Authority asked the force to put even more effort into detections and it is pleasing to report that overall detection levels are some of the highest in the country. The force has also exceeded its target for the detection of violent crimes and burglary. The Authority believes that improved detection is an important ingredient in providing good policing and reassurance to the public.
6. Vehicle crime has fallen significantly, as have road deaths and serious injuries. Response times too have improved both in rural and urban areas and the Authority will continue to set high targets that reflect the importance attached to this service.
7. Resourcing, however, remains a major concern particularly given the relatively low level of Government support received in West Mercia compared to many other forces.
8. Copies of the Annual Report are available from the Clerk to the Authority or from the website www.westmercia.police.uk.

Final Accounts 2002-2003

9. The Authority has approved the Statutory Financial Statements of Accounts for 2002/2003 and the external auditors PricewaterhouseCoopers anticipate issuing an unqualified audit opinion.

Be Somebody Campaign

10. As at 1st September 2003 the Constabulary's overall strength had increased to 2410 police officers – an increase in strength of 390 officers since the start of the “Be Somebody” Campaign. The figure of 2410 was based on actual numbers although it includes some part time officers. The full time equivalent number was 2391 police officers.

Capital Programme 2003-2004

11. The Authority has agreed a revised Capital Programme of £13,913,600 for 2003-2004.

12. The revised programme provides for the purchase of land at Battlefield Business Park, Shrewsbury as a site for a new Shropshire Divisional Headquarters and the leasing of the British Telecom building in Barton Road, Hereford. This will enable the relocation of some staff and allow the refurbishment of the existing custody facilities at the current Herefordshire Divisional Headquarters site.

13. Included in the programme is the purchase of equipment for video recorded identity parades throughout all divisions in West Mercia. This follows the successful pilot in Shropshire of the scheme. The cost of the equipment was £20,000 and the Shropshire Division, which saw 265 parades during a six-month period, soon recovered this outlay. If volunteers had been used this would have cost £200 in expenses per parade.

14. The Authority has also agreed to the installation of a CCTV monitoring system in the Hereford Custody Suite. All six primary custody suites in West Mercia are now fitted with this system, which is essential in the event that a person in custody alleges that West Mercia failed in its duty of care.

Medium Term Plan 2004-2007

15. The Authority has received an update on the Medium Term Plan produced last year for 2003-2006. The strategic principles remained largely unchanged but the financial position has been updated.

16. In formulating the Plan the basic principles adopted were:

- *Maintain strength of operational officers.*
- *Balanced budget – planned spending to be no greater than funding in any year. However, some reserves are available to smooth any large fluctuations, e.g. pensions or major incidents.*
- *Reserves to be maintained at a well-judged level, having a considered view of the nature of the liability for which they exist.*
- *Capital investment is important and is likely to require support from the revenue account.*

- *Financial plans should be set in the context of a three year view, whilst recognising the high degree of uncertainty inherent in this time frame.*
- *Opportunities for improving the service or for enhancing the support to operational officers can arise at short notice and may need to be implemented rapidly. Plans will be sufficiently flexible so as to allow this to happen.*

17. The report included details of the range of any possible impact on the Council Tax precept for 2004-2005 given that this was heavily dependent on the amount of increase in government grant each year.

Flint House

18. The former Chairman of the Authority, Mr D B Watkins DL has been very involved in raising money for the Police Convalescence Home at Goring on Thames in Oxfordshire. The appeal has so far raised £78,729 from local donations and the Police Authority has agreed to donate a further £5,000 from the Occupational Health Grant it receives from the Home Office towards helping fund a new room at the centre. This will enable more police officers who are in need of rehabilitation to attend. The Authority placed on record its appreciation of Mr Watkins' success with the appeal.

West Midlands Regional Watch Association

19. The Authority has joined with the other three police authorities in the West Midlands in contributing £500 each to help establish the West Midlands Regional Neighbourhood Watch Association, which has been formed in response to the emerging regionalisation agenda.

Complaints and other Statistics

20. There were fourteen assaults on police personnel during April and May 2003 coincidentally the same as in this period in 2002. Six were in the Telford Division, three in the Shropshire and South Worcestershire Divisions and one in each of the other two divisions. During the same period 38 complaints were received against the police.

Best Value Reviews

21. The following Best Value Reviews have been completed and the Authority has agreed the respective options reports, which are available from the Clerk to the Police Authority. Costed Implementation Plans will be prepared for further consideration.

- Criminal Justice Support Unit
- Crime Recording – including Central Data Unit
- Procurement
- Information Systems and Technology Department
- Police Authority

Race Equality Scheme

22. The Authority has agreed a revision to its Race Equality Scheme, which was adopted in May 2002, to reflect the fact that the Constabulary has now established Independent Advisory Groups.

Police/Community Consultative Groups (PCCG)

23. The Authority receives regular reports from the PCCG meetings held throughout the West Mercia area. Recent matters brought to the attention of the Authority included:

- Some concern about responses, particularly to cases of vandalism and lack of action with known offenders (Malvern Hills).
- Problems with youths on local housing estates and call handling (Redditch).
- Information on allocation of additional police officers (several groups).
- Continued desire for high visibility policing (several groups).

Independent Custody Visiting Scheme

24. 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 Clerk 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.

25. A total of 306 visits were undertaken during 2002-2003. This compared with 312 in 2001-2002 and 331 in 2000-2001. There were 1011 people in custody at the time of the visits of which 839 were held by the police under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE). 530 (60%) of PACE detainees were visited by visitors. This compared with 513 out of 822 (62%) in 2001-2002 and 457 out of 739 in 2000-2001 (62%).

26. 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 was being addressed nationally and concerns with the custody area at Shrewsbury and the Sergeant's office at Redditch.

27. Six fewer visits were undertaken compared to last year but a higher number of detainees were seen (530 compared to 513 in 2001-2002). There was also an increase in the number of positive comments on the way in which the visitors were received and

dealt with by custody officers and assistants. There were no visits recorded during the year to temporarily designated stations.

28. The overall performance against the visiting rotas was 94% with 100% records being achieved at Kidderminster and Redditch stations.

29. The Authority is always keen to recruit new visitors, particularly in the Herefordshire area, and applications are invited from people over the age of eighteen. For further information please contact the Clerk to the Police Authority.

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 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 on 23 September 2003.