

REPORT OF THE WEST MERCIA POLICE AUTHORITY MEETING HELD ON 17 FEBRUARY 2004

Budget 2004/2005

1. The Police Authority has set a budget requirement of £165.8 million for 2004/2005. The council tax figure, which supports this budget, is £137.69 for a Band D property. This will require an increase of 34p per week and will allow for the recruitment of more police and community support officers, enhance the force's capabilities to combat crime and provide increased support for victims and witnesses. It will also enable the Constabulary to further improve its telephone call handling arrangements and introduce more technological advances in support of front line policing.

2. In setting the budget the Authority faced some extremely difficult decisions given that the real terms increase in Government grant was only 2.8% against the minimum 6.6% that was required to cover current obligations and maintain existing levels of policing.

3. The Authority consulted on options of 19.4%, 15.4% and less than 15.4%. While there was a strong desire from the members of the Authority to support the Chief Constable in his ambition to further improve performance they felt unable to support the 19.4% option, particularly given the results of the consultation exercise which had expressed concerns about excessive council tax rises. The consultation had however indicated significant support for a 'maintenance' budget of around 15%.

4. Due to a stronger than expected Council Tax base in 2004/2005 the Authority was able to approve a 'midway budget' of 14.9%, which would not only maintain existing police officer strength and policies, but should allow some small movement towards developing the new Chief Constable's revised Three Year Strategy referred to later in this report.

5. In summary the budget will allow for

- maintenance of current policing levels
- increased anti-terrorist and regional crime response
- more efficient major incident and serious crime investigations
- greater supervisory resilience
- speedier and more effective referrals to courts
- improved telephone call handling
- 8 additional Community Support Officers
- improved victim of crime and witness support
- enhanced technology to combat crime and disorder
- central advisory team on diversity matters
- responding to the new Independent Police Complaints Commission requirements for the investigation of public complaints and internal disciplinary matters
- more specialist police staff freeing up police officers' time
- 16 extra police officers towards a new total of 2424 bringing West Mercia closer to average levels.

6. A 4.9% option was also considered representing a low single figures increase but the consequences of this level of funding was seen as undermining the improvements already achieved and contrary to the perceived wish of the community not to weaken policing services.

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

7. 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 2004 – 2007. The Policing Plan for 2004/05 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 2000 – 2005.

8. A summary of what will be delivered under the 'Four Better Outcomes' during 2004/2005 is shown below.

Reassurance

- Increasing the use of Community Support Officers (CSO's). West Mercia is on track to having 55 new CSOs in place early in 2004. The Constabulary will work to maximise the contribution of CSO's based in the community, who will carry out routine foot patrols to increase visibility and reassurance. They will work with their local communities to help tackle crime, low level disorder and anti-social behaviour.
- Further increasing the contribution from CSOs and Neighbourhood Wardens through piloting an accreditation scheme for 'Accredited Neighbourhood / Street Wardens' in the Wyre Forest District. The results of this pilot will form the basis upon which any future accreditation scheme is developed.
- Seeking to identify the factors that undermine community reassurance and propose new ways of addressing them.
- Improving call handling of emergency and non-emergency calls and improving the quality of service delivered at the first point of contact. In April 2004 call handling for Herefordshire Division will integrate with those already serving the South and North Worcestershire Divisions.
- Improving local call handling and call follow up through establishing Public Service Desks in all divisions. These locally based call handling facilities will link more effectively with local officers and Police Staff to deliver enhanced non-emergency services.
- Incorporation of the requirements of the new national Independent Police Complaints Commission into our practices and procedures for investigating public complaints against police officers and police staff

Reduced crime, increased detections and more offences brought to justice

- Develop and enhance the Hate Crime investigation policy
- Develop and enhance the child protection policy and procedures
- Contribute effectively to our Local Criminal Justice Board target of increasing the number of offences brought to justice

Reduced disorder

- Monitor the impact of new licensing laws on instances of disorder and ensure effective deployment
- Continue to work effectively with partners making use of the entire range of effective solutions e.g. ASBOs, Acceptable Behaviour Contracts, Fixed Penalty Notices
- Increase the number of both Rural and Urban Safety Initiatives throughout the force

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
 - Partnership activity with the Institute of Advanced Motorists to improve driver skills
 - The National Bikesafe initiative to improve motorcycle riding
 - Enforcement and education on the use of seat belts
 - Conspicuity education, particularly with pedestrians
 - Impairment (Drink/Drugs driving)
 - Ongoing enforcement of speed limits

9. The Plan also includes the **Best Value Review Programme** and details the results of reviews completed since March 2003, including:

- ◆ Information and Systems Technology Department
- ◆ Procurement
- ◆ Police Authority
- ◆ Forensic Services

10. The following reviews are planned in 2004/2005:

- ◆ Custody
- ◆ Health and Safety
- ◆ Central Ticket Office (Fixed Penalty Notices, Fines etc.)
- ◆ Diversity

11. Any person living in the West Mercia area can contribute to the reviews by making representations to the Clerk to the Authority at P O Box 487, Shrewsbury, SY2 6WB (police.authority@westmercia.police.uk).

12. 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 2003/2004 Policing Plan.

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

Monitoring of Force Performance

14. The Authority has reviewed the force's performance over the first nine months of the year.
15. The results indicated that in most areas of performance the force was moving in the right direction. Increases in violent crime reflected national trends but work continues to address this issue.
16. The Authority's Force Performance Monitoring Panel will be keeping all performance under review and violent crime in particular.

Capital Programme 2004/2005

17. The Authority has agreed a Capital Programme of £9.371 million for 2004/2005, which includes £6.095m for Information Technology, £1.723m for vehicles and equipment, and £1.553 for buildings.
18. The Home Office has indicated that it expects priority to be given to Information Technology to support front-line policing. West Mercia's programme recognises the strategic importance of Information Technology and includes projects to improve call handling, intelligence led policing, reduction in paperwork and criminal justice processing.

Be Somebody Campaign

19. As at 1 January 2004 the overall strength of the Constabulary was 2417 officers. The full-time equivalent strength (reflecting part time working etc) was 2398. The target now is to achieve and maintain 100% staffing at the new total of 2424 full time equivalent officers.

Police: Building Safer Communities

20. The Home Office has consulted the Authority on its Green Paper 'Building Safer Communities' and before agreeing a response the Authority sent details to some 300 organisations or individuals for their views.
21. The key points raised in the response were;
 - a) Neither Regional Police Authorities nor direct elections to Authorities were supported but it was recognised that a few existing Authorities were too small and some amalgamations may produce more effective organisational units.
 - b) Regional co-operation should be encouraged including member training
 - c) While Partnership working was supported the existing structures were too fragmented and confused. A single structure established around the Basic Command Unit should be explored.
 - d) Greater recognition of the needs and role of business in any new structures or targets should be considered

- e) A review of council tax would be welcomed but a local revenue source should be retained.
- f) Longer term financial planning would be welcomed, as would much earlier grant announcements.
- g) Reform proposals are supported especially those directed at improving the Criminal Justice process. Current listing arrangements waste police officer time and impact adversely on witnesses.
- h) Modernisation is always embraced but PITO's (Police Information Technology Organisation) performance should be reviewed.

Complaints and Other Statistics

22. 207 complaints were received against the police between April and November 2003 compared to 236 in the same period during 2002. A breakdown of the categories of complaints is shown below:

Oppressive behaviour	96
Racial Incidents	4
Malpractice	7
Failures in Duty	48
Incivility	38
Traffic	2
Other	12

23. During the period 1 September to 30 November 2003 nine police officers and one Special Constable were seriously injured. In addition 166 police officers, six Specials and two Police Staff suffered minor injuries.

FLARE Partnership

24. FLARE (Funding Local and Regional Expectations) was originally established by the Police Authority as a way of facilitating the work of the Community Safety Partnership by developing funding for projects. Its steering group comprised a variety of members drawn from the Police Authority, Local Strategic Partnerships, the voluntary sector, Chamber of Commerce and Probation Service.

25. FLARE has supported the work of West Mercia by:

- Generating an additional £1,277,000 in external funding, either through FLARE or through the Constabulary.
- Ensuring that funding is sought for priorities identified in the Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategies
- Providing a source of information and expertise on funding issues
- Developing projects which are delivered by voluntary sector organisations – an approach which reduces costs to West Mercia and which is compatible with Central Government strategy
- Providing practical support to police officers and police staff and to partner agencies by managing the bidding process and writing applications

- Establishing good networking and working relationships with a range of partners across West Mercia.

26. Since FLARE was established there has been a reduction in the range of large joint funding opportunities with the focus on smaller bids at the county, unitary or Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership level. In addition it is anticipated that police forces will be recommended to develop an income generation strategy which will be broader than the role currently undertaken by FLARE.

27. The Authority has therefore agreed to the dissolution of the FLARE Partnership with effect from 31 March 2004 and will await the development of an Income Generation Strategy before deciding on any replacement structure.

Central Motorway Police Group

28. The Central Motorway Police Group is a partnership between the Staffordshire, Warwickshire, West Mercia and West Midlands Police and is seen as a beacon for regional collaboration.

29. The motorways are a major artery for crime and a motorway patrol officer makes about ten times as many arrests than an average police officer. In 2003/2004 alone property to the value of £4.5 million was recovered.

30. From April 2004 the Highways Agency will take over some of the functions presently undertaken by the Police, for example minor incidents. This should result in a 25% reduction in police time spent on these activities and will enable more resources to be directed at core crime, serious incidents and increased ANPR (Automatic Number Plate Recognition) activity (at present ANPR makes 9 hits an hour but only 1.5 can be dealt with).

31. The CMPG has 222 staff and covers 630 miles, which is 12% of the national motorway network. Its budget for 2004/2005 is £9.360 million

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 meetings of the West Mercia Police Authority held on 17 February 2004.