

REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE WEST MERCIA POLICE AUTHORITY HELD ON 20 SEPTEMBER 2005

Deputy Chief Constable

1. The members of the Authority have paid tribute to the Deputy Chief Constable, Mr Alan Bridge, who retires in October 2005 after thirty-five years of public service, the last three and a half years of which have been with West Mercia Constabulary. Mr Ian Arundale, who is currently Assistant Chief Constable, will succeed him.

Honours and Awards

2. The Authority has recorded its congratulations to Miss Louise Hickey (Senior Contracts Manager), PC Julian Turner and Mr Mike Watkins (Traffic Warden) on their award of MBEs in the Queen's Birthday Honours. The Authority also congratulated Sergeant Roberts Matthews on winning the Police Federation/Sun's Regional Bravery Award and Mr Nigel Waterworth who won the national Ferrers Trophy for the Special Constabulary.

Police Restructuring

3. Arising from the publication of a Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary report 'Closing the Gap', the Home Secretary has outlined his proposals for significant changes to the manner in which police forces in England and Wales are structured to deliver effective policing services to the public and in particular to deliver what are termed 'Protective Services'.

4. The Home Secretary has identified four key levels of policing:

- Strong, local neighbourhood policing presence, so that every citizen knows their local police.
- Strong basic command presence.
- A Strategic level above that for the wider issues.
- A national level to address national issues and challenges.

5. Options for change include greater collaboration, lead specialist forces, lead regional forces, federation of forces, the creation of new and strategic forces, with the Home Secretary making the latter his clear preference.

6. The Police Authority is convinced that people living in the West Mercia Constabulary area already receive very good policing service given current levels of funding. The force has outstanding performance figures, which compare very favourably nationally and has made significant advances in tackling criminality at local and regional level and in refocusing its activities in order to ensure it is best placed to deliver even more 'local policing' in line with the Government's Police Reform agenda.

7. Over the next couple of months the Police Authority will be considering the options and will be consulting with stakeholders to ensure that all views and suggestions are taken into consideration in determining the best way forward.

Annual Report 2004/2005

8. The Authority has agreed the Annual Report for 2004/2005 on the policing of the area and this will be available on the internet at www.westmercia.police.uk .

9. The excellent performance delivered by the Constabulary over the last year is a credit to the officers and staff who have worked relentlessly on behalf of their local communities, both on the front line and behind the scenes.

10. The Authority and the Constabulary place great importance on listening to the needs and concerns of local people and ensuring that they have a voice in how their neighbourhood is policed. This helps form strong relationships which result in citizens being willing and able to play an active role in the fight against crime.

11. Regular surveys are carried out to ensure that the delivery of services is appropriate and sensitive to individual people's needs. For example, there are 140,000 people in West Mercia who have some form of hearing or speech impairment and a text messaging system has recently been introduced to make it easier for those who find it difficult to dial 999 in an emergency.

12. The year has seen continued recruitment campaigns including a successful Positive Action drive to encourage more applications from minority ethnic groups and women. 2005 also saw the publishing of revised Race Equality Schemes for both the Authority and Constabulary and these set out how equality of opportunity will be promoted for all employees and equality of service for all communities.

13. Successes in tackling drugs crime led to national recognition for the Constabulary. Over £370,000 in assets and cash was seized and retained from a Shropshire drug dealer and an operation in Worcestershire has led to a significant impact being made on the supply of Class A drugs in the area. This has helped rebuild community confidence through a sustained campaign targeting street dealers.

14. The 'Knock knock' campaign, aimed at cracking distraction burglaries – people who trick their way into people's homes to steal, often targeting elderly people – was also successful and combined with on-going work with Trading Standards, has led to a 13% reduction in this type of crime.

15. Operation Turn Up, launched in February 2005, put 401 bail dodgers back before the courts. The initiative led by the Constabulary, on behalf of the Local Criminal Justice Board, targeted individuals who had 'Failed to Appear' warrants issued against them.

16. Providing reassurance to communities by increasing the visible presence of police officers and community support officers on patrol is an important priority. Much work was done in this particular aspect of policing especially at Christmas with Operation Crackdown (to address alcohol related crime) and throughout the year by

putting more officers on the street and working with licensees to discourage binge drinking.

17. Being located between the West Midlands conurbation and Wales, West Mercia's roads are very popular with motorcyclists. Although motorcyclists account for only 1% of traffic, they account for one sixth of all road deaths. The 'Knights of the Road' initiative has focused on enforcing speed limits on the most dangerous routes while continuing to provide riders with a chance to improve their skills through the Bikesafe scheme. Other traffic campaigns have included the use of seatbelts and enforcement activities targeted at collision hotspots.

Summary Policing Plan

18. The Summary Policing Plan, which sets out the Force's key priorities for 2005/06, will also be available on the Authority's website at www.westmercia.police.uk and copies will be distributed to local authorities and police/community consultative groups. Copies are also available from the Director's office.

Financial Results 2004/2005

19. The financial results for 2004/2005 revealed that the gross cost of operational policing activity had increased by 7.8% over the previous year to £166.6m.

20. The 2004/05 budget improved a number of operational activities including providing additional resources for tackling regional crime and supervising front line officers. In addition, procedures for call handling, court case preparation, performance management and embracing diversity were strengthened.

21. Whilst at the same time improving the level of service in 2004/05 and for future years, the Authority was successful in continuing its strategy to strengthen the Authority's financial reserves.

Formula Grant Distribution

22. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) has issued a discussion paper about proposed changes to the distribution of grants to local authorities and police authorities.

23. The proposals would see West Mercia receiving only the minimum levels of grant increases and is, therefore bad news. The underlying trend of Government grant allocation has always appeared to disadvantage this area, a point that has been consistently made to the thirteen local MPs.

24. The range of reduction in government support is exemplified to be between £5.4m and £10.5m, which would represent a very significant reduction in available resources.

25. The Police Authority has made a submission to the ODPM setting the case for West Mercia and will be arranging appropriate briefings with local MPs and partner agencies.

Leominster Police Station

26. Plans to increase the police presence in Leominster by building a larger station and doubling the number of custody cells have been approved. The £4.3m scheme will, subject to planning approval, involve the building of a new station off Southern Avenue in Leominster and will provide accommodation for other partner organisations, including the Crown Prosecution Service.

27. The existing station at Ryelands Road will eventually be sold to offset the cost of the new development. It is intended to maintain a police base in the town centre and possible locations are being explored with partner agencies.

Sponsorship

28. During 2004/2005 West Mercia Constabulary received sponsorship to the value of £34,926. Sponsorship of vehicles amounted to £22,740 and £12,186 related to other donations.

Direction and Control Complaints

29. The Police Authority and Chief Constable have agreed a protocol for handling complaints from members of the public relating to the direction and control of the force. These types of complaints relate to operational policing policies, organisational decisions, general policing standards in the force and operational management decisions, rather than complaints against the conduct of police officers and staff for which a statutory procedure is already in place.

30. Issues concerning the direction and control of a force, by their nature, have the potential to have an impact on a force's efficiency and effectiveness. The Police Authority has a statutory responsibility for the efficiency and effectiveness of its police force and it is also accountable to local communities for the delivery of policing. Reports will be presented to the Human Resources Management Panel of the Police Authority, including any identifiable trends.

Stop and Search

31. During 2004/2005 there were 10,100 Stop Searches recorded under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act in West Mercia, representing a 43.28% increase on the previous year.

32. Drugs accounted for 41% of searches and were the most frequent object of search followed by Stolen Property. The Force recorded a positive search rate of 19.75%, which was reasonably consistent across all Divisions.

33. The arrest rate across the Force is 17%, which is well above the national average, and as in the previous year the greatest numbers of arrests arose from searches for stolen property.

34. The greatest number of searches was on people aged between 10 and 19 years, followed by the 20 to 29 years age group. In total these two age groups accounted for 81% of all searches.

35. When people are stopped they are asked to state their ethnicity based on the 16+1-ethnicity classification system. West Mercia's figures indicate that the rate of Stops for people from Minority Ethnic Groups is 8.86 per 1000 of the resident population and for white people 7.88 per 1000 of the resident population.

36. Further details about the use of Stop and Search and people's rights can be found on the Authority's website at www.westmercia.police.uk. Leaflets are also available at police stations and from the Director of the Police Authority's office.

Livescan Fingerprint Service

37. Livescan is a digital on-line facility in custody suites, which links a person's fingerprints to the national fingerprint database and provides an identification of the subject instantly. It replaces the old style ink-and-paper fingerprint record, which entails a delay of several days before computerised links can be made.

38. The custody suite at Worcester has had the benefit of a Livescan unit for several years and the Authority has agreed to extend this facility to the other custody sites over the next two years, in line with the Home Office's national plan to make greater use of the National Fingerprint Board's service.

Independent Custody Visiting Scheme

39. 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.

40. The Independent Custody Visitors are volunteers and during 2004/2005 they made a total of 306 visits. This meant that the Police Authority's target for each of the six designated stations (Hereford, Kidderminster, Redditch, Shrewsbury, Telford and Worcester) to be visited on a weekly visit was achieved in respect of two stations and that the overall performance was 94%. This was an excellent achievement and testimony to the dedication shown by the Area Panel Co-ordinators and Independent Custody Visitors (ICVs).

41. There were 1153 people in police custody at the time of the visits and of these 614 (53%) consented to a visit.

42. Whilst there were no major areas of concern where issues were raised these were dealt with satisfactorily and reported to the Police Authority as appropriate. Issues raised included the effectiveness of the heating and cooling systems in custody units and this is an area that will be subject to specific monitoring during the coming year.

43. Both the Herefordshire and Shropshire Panels have commented for some time on the overall adequacies of the custody facilities at Hereford and Shrewsbury and, therefore, welcomed the decision of the Police Authority to improve the custody facilities in these two counties.

44. There are at present 70 ICVs across West Mercia and the Police Authority is always keen to recruit. Applications are welcome from all people over the age of eighteen and the Police Authority is particularly keen 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

Paul 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

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 20 September 2005.