

Minutes of the West Mercia Police and Crime Panel

County Hall, Worcester

Monday, 30 October 2023, 10.00 am

Present:

Cllr Barry Durkin (Chairman), Cllr Rob Adams (Vice Chairman),
Cllr Joanne Beecham, Cllr Roger Evans, Cllr Liz Harvey, Cllr Helen Jones,
Cllr Nigel Lumby, Cllr Tracey Onslow, Cllr Vivienne Parry, Cllr Tony Parsons,
Cllr Tom Piotrowski, Cllr James Stanley and Mrs C Clive.

Also attended:

John Champion, West Mercia Police & Crime Commissioner
Anthony Morriss, Deputy Chief Executive, Office of the PCC
Chris O'Hara, Head of Estates, Office of the PCC
Samantha Morris, Interim Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager
Alison Spall, Overview and Scrutiny Officer

Available Papers

The members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated);
- B. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 27 July 2023 (previously circulated).

(A copy of document A will be attached to the signed Minutes).

486 Welcome and Introductions

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) updated the Panel on the recruitment process regarding the appointment of a new Chief Constable. The PCC advised that an assessment process had taken place the previous week, but that an appointment had not been made. Next steps were being considered, which would likely involve a re-advertisement of the post before Christmas. In the meantime, the interim arrangements would continue.

487 Named Substitutes

There were no substitutes.

488 Apologies and Declarations of Interest

Apologies were received from Councillors Martin Allen, Kelly Middleton and Richard Overton.

There were no declarations of interest.

489 Public Participation

None.

490 Confirmation of the Minutes of the previous meeting

The Minutes of the meeting held on 27 July 2023 were agreed and signed as a correct record.

491 Estates Strategy Progress report

The Panel received a report which provided an update on the PCC's Estates Strategy, developed in 2022, which had been designed to support the delivery of the PCC's Safer West Mercia Plan. The strategy had been developed in consultation with West Mercia Police, the public and other partners and it set out the PCC's aspirations for the police estate across the medium term as well as principles as to how they would be achieved.

The PCC explained that the Estates service was now fully embedded within the Office of the PCC (OPCC), and it served West Mercia Police (the Force) as well as the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Fire and Rescue Service (HWFRS). The Panel was informed that there was good collaboration between the Force and the HWFRS, with currently one shared building and a further one currently being constructed. It was anticipated that there would be scope for further progress in this area.

The PCC advised that the South Worcestershire Development Plan (SWDP) represented a significant risk to the planned programme at the Hindlip Police Headquarters. The Panel was informed that the draft plan included a proposal to remove Hindlip Park's status as a 'major developed site' within the greenbelt, which would fetter the discretion to adjust and develop this established site to meet the Force's ongoing needs and could impact the potential viability of the site. The PCC advised that objections had been lodged and there would be continued engagement with the process to seek to maintain the current development status.

Members raised a number of issues, which were responded to as follows:

- A Member commented that it would have been helpful if relevant background documents had been included with the report to provide more context, particularly in relation to the delivery of the Strategic Plan. The PCC advised that the information requested was not ordinarily published but that the request would be considered.

- The Head of Estates advised that the risk from Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) in the Estate was extremely low, with a condition survey having been undertaken 2 years previously not identifying any evidence of RAAC. Further investigations were taking place at one property, but no evidence of RAAC had yet been found.
- A Member questioned the potential use of the police station at Ludlow and suggested that it was currently under-used. The PCC explained that Ludlow station was an important operational police base for the area and had a good level of occupancy by emergency and safer neighbourhood teams. Whilst the level of use varied from time to time, there were no plans to actively seek a partner to share the building, although the PCC would consider any enquiries from partners that were forthcoming. In terms of the customer experience, the PCC advised that this was an issue that would be explored further, perhaps on the lines of the digital kiosk recently introduced at Kidderminster.
- In response to a Member request for clarity about the future plans for the divisional headquarters at Shrewsbury, the PCC expressed his frustration at the lack of progress with the Monkmoor site, but he confirmed that there was a commitment for redevelopment in Shrewsbury. A feasibility study and assessment as to the future provision of services in the northern estate were currently ongoing and the PCC confirmed a decision was expected in 2024 on the way forward. The PCC also referred to Telford's Malinsgate divisional headquarters which he highlighted as needing major investment in the medium term.
- A replacement firearms training centre at Hindlip was welcomed and a Member queried where it would be located. The PCC advised that a full planning application was being developed and it was hoped that permission could be secured before any possible changes to the SWDP, which might put the project at risk.
- A Member asked what the current situation was regarding co-location projects in the Telford area. The PCC advised that Shifnal now had a police base again, which was made possible with the support of the local council. With Newport's police station having previously been sold, it was hoped that the town could similarly regain a police base on similar lines to Shifnal. It was highlighted that local Town Councils were at the heart of these developments and they were proving to be a valuable partner to progress matters, as were voluntary and health partners in other locations.
- Given the role of the One Public Estate Forum (OPEF), a Member sought clarity as to what role the PCC wanted Panel members to have regarding co-location. The PCC explained that whilst actively engaging with the OPEF, local Member knowledge was valuable too.
- With regard to the programme of rationalisation, the PCC didn't have a specific example of a current asset with a significant risk but explained that the rationalisation process generally involved legacy sites such as former police houses.
- In response to a question about when police assets were due to be sold and whether they were offered for sale to other public bodies before being placed on the open market, the PCC explained that the principle

of the OPEF was that partners had first opportunity to purchase any assets being sold.

- A Member highlighted that there was no reference to Hereford Police Station in the report and requested an update on the site. The PCC agreed to provide further detail following the meeting.
- A Member suggested that a timeline of events would be helpful to view estates activity in one place and further questioned whether the 5-year long term programme could be shared with the Panel and whether it would address timelines, priorities, maintenance backlog etc. The PCC agreed to consider how best to update the Panel in this regard.
- The PCC advised there had been a shift to planned maintenance away from reactive maintenance and would consider how to represent the key issues of interest to members in future reporting. It was also suggested that it might be helpful to have a Working Group reviewing estates issues on an annual basis.
- A Member asked about the impact of the budget on staffing issues relating to the Estates Strategy. The PCC advised that increased staffing levels had led to space being used more intensively, for instance with open flexible working spaces. Most of the estate was owned by the Force, so savings were more difficult to achieve, but where buildings were rented, costs were minimised wherever possible. Details on efficiency savings gained would be included in future updates.
- A Member questioned whether there was a strategy demonstrating how the Force would achieve net zero compliance and be fit for purpose by 2050. The PCC advised that it was being developed in relation to buildings and energy savings, but a wider strategy was not in place. The Member suggested that it was timely to consider drafting a Strategy as to how the organisation would reach net zero by 2050 and also suggested that the Force's Environmental Strategy could be usefully made more robust.
- Noting that the Force had successfully worked in partnership with the Fire Service, a Member asked whether consideration had been given to a total 'blue light approach'. The PCC advised that they had not been successful with this as yet.
- In response to a question as to whether there was any evidence that the lack of investment in the estate portfolio had any detrimental impact on staff morale or working conditions, the PCC advised that staff morale was measured, but the condition of the estates had not specifically featured. The PCC's priority was to focus on preventative maintenance measures in high use areas as well as investment in welfare areas for staff use such as gyms.
- A Member offered praise for development of the blue light hub at Redditch but questioned why there was no provision of cells in the new building. The PCC explained that custody facilities were not always required in a location and that the provision was available across the whole area, which meant that there was always an appropriate number of Officers in a locality to deal with any emergency that occurred.

492 Diversity, Equality and Inclusion

The Panel received a report on diversity, equality and inclusion (DEI) which the PCC played a key role in advancing across West Mercia alongside statutory obligations. Promoting DEI was a central focus of the PCC's Safer West Mercia Plan.

The PCC explained his understanding of DEI which was a key tenet of his work. Anything tokenistic wasn't helpful, the PCC saw himself as an inclusionist, aiming to ensure that everyone could be heard and understood. The outgoing Chief Constable had brought Inclusion into the Force's values at an early stage, and he stressed that it was important that this commitment continued.

During the discussion, the following main points were discussed:

- A Member highlighted that the terminology in the report should be reviewed to ensure that it was up to date and reference to other protected characteristics and neurodiversity should also be included to ensure it fitted with recent government guidance. The PCC agreed to ensure the language was re-assessed.
- For future reports, a more granular breakdown of the demographics of West Mercia was requested.
- The importance placed on awareness within the Force was highlighted to the Panel, with an example of how staff with neurodiversity issues had been involved in the current Chief Constable recruitment process.
- The PCC advised that there was consistent engagement with under-represented groups, for instance, the travelling community, as well as those who didn't organise themselves into groups. The Panel was informed that video clips were used at the start of staff inclusion sessions, to highlight the lived experience of individual people to enable their voices to be heard.
- The 'Step' programme initiative to improve attraction and recruitment across all strands of diversity was praised and the PCC highlighted the importance of this work.
- At the request of a Member, the PCC agreed to look at opportunities for engagement within Ludlow.
- In response to a Member's question, the PCC commented that it was disappointing that the figures hadn't shown more of an uplift on representation of all communities, and this was an issue that the Force was regularly challenged on. It was highlighted that the Chief Constable's emphasis on inclusion and the cultural audit that was ongoing were important elements to focus on, but that work was not yet completed. The PCC advised that he was not yet fully assured on this, but he recognised that matters were moving forward.

493 Work Programme

The Panel reviewed its work programme and it was agreed that:

- the 'Confirmation Hearing for the Chief Constable' would no longer be required for the 17 November Panel meeting
- Harassment of women and girls (including how Government funding was supporting victims of sexual harassment locally) would be added to the work programme
- It would be checked with the Chief Executive of the OPCC if it was possible to include the 'Update on Information Technology on the agenda of 17 November meeting.

The Interim Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager advised that arrangements were being made for a Budget Briefing for all Members of the Panel in December.

The meeting ended at 11.40 am

Chairman