

Monthly Assurance Meeting June 2019 – Meeting Notes

Date: Tuesday 24th June 2019 @ 19:00
 Chair: John Campion
 Minutes: Jackie Irvin, Policy Officer, OPCC
 Venue West Mercia Police HQ

	Name:	Capacity:
Attendance:	John Campion	Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC)
	Tracey Onslow	Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner (DPCC)
	Anthony Bangham	Chief Constable (CC)
	Martin Evans	Assistant Chief Constable (ACC)

Apologies:

1.	Introduction	ACTION
2.	Questions	
2.1	<p>The PCC said there had been some good announcements about increasing police numbers and how specials are used. One of the questions submitted asks how this investment in police officers would be used to improve the service to rural communities.</p> <p>The CC began by explaining that the ACC was attending the meeting as</p>	

	<p>he leads on all matters related to local policing and in particular rural and business crime and that they would both be answering the questions. In response to the question he commented:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a good news story. After many years in a tough policing environment when there have been less police officers and special than he would have liked, along with the challenge faced by the vast geography of West Mercia, funding now means there will be extra officers. • Nearly all of the extra officers in operational roles will be going out to the most rural areas, specifically targeting those areas where the gaps had been most felt, including Bridgnorth, Evesham and Ludlow. • They are focused on ensuring the rural communities who often feel vulnerable from less visible policing will get that return first, many are already in place and by the end of the year the force will be back up to a strength of 2145 police officers which is about 250 more that there were only 1 or 2 years ago. • The ACC added that they had looked very closely at areas where the response to incidents is not as good and areas where visibility is lacking. Extra officers will be introduced right across the local policing areas. • The Special Constabulary provide a fantastic service for West Mercia. Some targeted problem solving work has been done with them so the work they do on the ground is more impactive. Last year special constables performed 53,000 hours of high visibility patrols in communities. • A recruitment campaign for Specials is about to begin to try and double the number of special constables. <p>The PCC asked the ACC to explain how he will measure that the investment has made a difference and results in improved trust and confidence. The ACC responded:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He has a clear expectation that additional officers will lead to an improved performance in each of the areas, including: • Additional visibility of staff. Feedback from surveys will measure this, • Engagement with communities and key partners such as town and parish councils will improve, • Improvements in response to incidents. There are challenges in some very rural areas but he expects response times to improve and this will be measured. <p>The DPCC added that the PCC's funding would be doubling the number</p>	
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	<p>of rural and business officers (RABOs), from 5 to 10.</p> <p>The PCC said he feels there is a more cohesive offer to rural communities. He had that week approved a request for funding from the two local policing Chief Superintendents for two additional mobile vans for local police officers to use in their communities.</p> <p>The PCC said that he felt parish councils are often the centre of local communities and asked the ACC to explain what his expectations are for engagement between those parish councils and local police officers. The ACC replied that there are many parish councils. He has a clear expectation that councils and officers, know who each other are and how to exchange information and that officer details are on the website, including their mobile numbers. When there is a clear need for an officer to attend a parish council meeting then the ACC has an expectation that they will go, but they will not attend every meeting. He'd prefer they were out addressing the issues than attend meetings.</p>	
	<p>The PCC made reference to the Welsh borders and the low crime rate. The Welsh border communities are particularly sparse and he asked the CC to explain how criminality in dealt with in these areas and how communities are kept safe. The CC explained that West Mercia borders three welsh force areas and the difference between the Welsh border and that with the West Midlands could not be more extreme. West Mercia has to be policed in a way that allows for these differences to be met. There is routine cross border policing going on every day and many farms for example straddle both England and Wales. The network of small roads is also challenging and can be exploited. The police use overt and covert tactics to prioritise and address the vulnerability along these borders and work together between forces to address crime.</p>	
	<p>The PCC said some of the cross border criminality targets wildlife crime. One of the questions received is around the law around badger set interference asks for reassurance for what the force approach is to wild life crime and that it is dealt with in a proportionate way. The CC and ACC responded:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally there is any crime that occurs in a rural areas which can be criminal damage, burglary etcetera and, more specifically, there is wildlife crime which is often driven by organised criminality and is hard to tackle. • There are 20 wildlife crime officers across the force and a Superintendent in Herefordshire who is experienced and interested in wildlife crime, sits on national groups and leads the work for the force. • The 20 wildlife crime officers carry out this role in addition to their day job and all have a passion and interest. They are upskilled in the specialist law, work closely with key stakeholders such as the NFU and Angling Trust. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Badger digging is an issue but so also is the destruction of wildlife habitats, for which the force has had some successful prosecutions, illegal trapping and poaching. Hare coursing is not such a problem in West Mercia, its game and deer poaching is more significant. • The DPCC asked what the public could do to help the police fight these issues. The ACC said engagement was important and the RABOs did a lot of this. Sharing knowledge was also important and the force is working with colleges such as Harper Adams University. 	
	<p>The PCC said that one issue raised had been fly tipping and Liz from Frankley had asked if the police can do more to address constant fly tipping, which can be on an industrial scale and can the public do more to help, for example by setting up CCTV? The PCC added that the cost and inconvenience is a big strain for many rural communities. The CC replied that it is a disgusting crime, often organised, and often exploiting someone who thinks they are paying for a good service only for their rubbish to be dumped on someone else’s land. There are more issues on the borders, but it is a problem on a smaller scale across the force. He added that people should come forward and report it and check carefully the credentials of any company employed to remove waste.</p> <p>The ACC added that the police work closely with local authorities who have a role to play. If criminality can be identified as having taken place then appropriate action can be taken and there is a role for local authorities and the police to work together, with support from communities.</p>	
	<p>The PCC commented that although a low crime area, more serious criminality had been alluded to. Some of the issues raised by the public included drug dealing and other criminality in rural areas and county towns linked back to serious and organised crime. Many people will have read about things like county lines and on TV. What are the force dealing to address to address organised county lines drug dealing in rural areas? Hereford had been raised as a particular example.</p> <p>The CC responded that county lines was an issue across all three counties areas not just Hereford. County lines is about taking drugs from the more urban areas and setting up markets in rural areas. The force are addressing this every day, some of this is covert around the movement and can’t be discussed. It is quite complicated and as soon as one line is taken down it is often immediately replaced by another and drug crime continues to come into vulnerable rural areas. There has been a noticeable change and it is now quite a feature in police activity and the force will do everything they can to stop it.</p> <p>The DPCC commented that West Mercia was one of the only areas to adopt the three offers of help from the Home Office which were training for partners, locality reviews and a strategic framework review. Work with partners will continue and the force works closely with neighbouring</p>	

	<p>forces, National Crime Agency etc.</p> <p>The ACC added that in response to the specific concern about Hereford there has been a significant operation arresting many people, with in excess of 300 years prison sentences so far against people coming from far afield to commit these offences in rural Hereford. This passes on a strong message to dealers and a lot of work with partners and initiatives is still ongoing.</p> <p>The CC said that parents and teachers and people who work with young people can help as there is an increasing move towards the exploitation of young vulnerable people, often on the periphery of trouble at school or not attending school. If a change in the pattern of behaviour is spotted then people should come forward as organised gangs are looking forward for a particular type of person to exploit.</p>	
	<p>The PCC said a question raised at the Hereford Food Festival, linked with the previous but more widely was what is the role of the police in engaging and diverting young people away from ASB, bullying and crime, particularly in rural areas?</p> <p>The ACC said that in the last two years there had been a significant focus of working with partners at a local level to look at diversionary activity. Across the force in all the counties diversionary activities are in place targeted at young people at risk of becoming involved in criminal activity, from low level ASB upwards. Some in place, are as a result of PCC funding. Examples of schemes include, launched that week, the Get Safe initiative in Worcestershire targeting individuals at risk of criminal or sexual exploitation which puts a support plan in place to give the individuals all the help they need. One of the challenges is the evidence to show the schemes are working and whether it worth looking to moving to other areas.</p> <p>The DPCC added that there has been a shift in emphasis to identify and work with individuals at a much earlier stage in their behaviour. A new West Mercia Diversionary Network lead has just started to look into the adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) agenda to set up a diversionary network.</p> <p>The PCC said his commissioning activity has been on a journey with diversionary activity and working with partners. Part of the PCCs concern and one that is raised with him by the public is that activity is taking place with engaged individuals, rather than using the limited resources to target those on the edge of criminality or poor behaviour. He asked the ACC to explain the role of local policing in identifying those young people that most need support. The ACC replied that there are dedicated neighbourhood teams, whose role in problem solving out in the community and with partners. As an example with ASB they look to problem solve to stop the incidents happening again by identifying the individuals involved and looking to see what can be done to move them</p>	

	<p>away from the activity, identify other family members at risk of the same behaviour and work with schools.</p> <p>There is a police cadet scheme and a young police cadet scheme. The PCC asked what the force was expecting to get from this. The ACC responded that the young cadet scheme was targeted at year 6 pupils and seeks to build their confidence and their confidence in the police. There is a cadet scheme in each area, doing a lot of work in communities, many of whom aspire to be police officers of the future. The DPCC said its also important to work with young people with special needs.</p> <p>The CC that the uplift in officer numbers will provide an opportunity to do more in this area.</p>	
	<p>John from North Worcestershire has asked how can the police do more to publicise the good news stories and show their good work? The CC said one of the challenges is the range of media channels available, and it is important that the force accesses them all to promote good news stories. Volunteers can help to promote good news stories.</p>	
	<p>The PCC referred to Les at the Shropshire County Show who was concerned about the theft of working dogs domestic dogs and livestock. There were national statistics earlier in the year which showed that there were few prosecutions around sheep theft. The PCC asked what the force is doing to address this crime and was told:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it is still a relatively rare type of crime as it needs to be organised and well set up. • It does have a big impact on a farmer’s livelihood, and if it involves the theft of a working dog there is often an emotional attachment. • This type of theft maybe under reported. Both the incidents and any precursor events. <p>The PCC raised that people in the rural community often say they don’t report crime because they feel nothing will happen, and asked the CC what his message would be to rural communities who may feel disengaged. The CC responded that people should come forward, while acknowledging if people have had a bad experience it may put them off, but if the police don’t know about it then they can’t deal with it. West Mercia is a complex policing environment and the police won’t always respond instantly, but it will be recorded and at some point a local officer will look at it.</p> <p>The PCC added that he had the confidence that incidents were being recorded and that reports provided vital intelligence. The CC did asked for people not to call at a busy time. Pick a quiet time, go on line or contact a local officer. The mobile numbers of officers, along with their emails and supervisor details are all available on the West Mercia website.</p>	
	<p>The PCC referred to Harper Adams University, a rural centre of excellence. Kresida from the university had said it would be great to see the police more engaged with rural communities and asked if this would</p>	

	<p>happen. The CC responded that the force was keen to work with all of West Mercia’s universities and colleges, not only because of their academic research but because they are part of the community. The force has worked with Worcester University and Harper Adams and would follow up on future opportunities to get more engaged. The DPCC added that they could provide a useful research resource and the We Don’t Buy Crime initiative was an example of where an academic evaluation had taken place.</p>	
	<p>The PCC commented that rural crime can also happen in urban areas, including burglaries. In a rural area properties can be isolated and left alone. The impact of a burglary can reduce the feeling of safety in a rural isolated property. One person had asked what is being done to address burglaries and for rural communities what reassurance can be given to rural communities that the issue is been identified, dealt with and that prevention is a priority. The CC responded:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a focus on burglaries in people’s homes and keeping people safe. Burglaries can also in be in business premises which can have devastating effects and from other types of properties such as allotments. Damage is also an issue. • The ‘we don’t buy crime’ initiative is designed to cut off the ability of stolen property to be sold. The force work with a local company called Smartwater to mark property. The force also works with second hand traders and is the first force in the country to have a database record to ensure legitimate property is being bought and sold. • The initiative uses signage to show the area is covered and this helps to act as a deterrent and encourages thieves to go elsewhere. <p>The PCC he was impressed by Smartwater and the police’s use of it to the extent that he had offered 25% funding to local councillors and had seen big roll outs as a result in places such Wythall and Cleobury Mortimer. It does need the community to be involved as well.</p>	
	<p>The PCC said that probably the biggest issue raised to him by rural communities is road safety. The issues raised include the impact motor cars have on quality of life as well as the number of people who die on West Mercia’s roads. The PCC said the most serious aspect was people being killed and he asked the CC to explain what his commitment was to improving road safety, and targeting the numbers killed and seriously injured. The CC responded:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A week doesn’t pass by in West Mercia without someone dying on its roads and many more people are seriously injured or receive life changing injuries, however for many people it isn’t an issue for them until they are directly affected. • Road safety has to be a top priority and the force has re prioritised for this. Challenges include the fact that there are many unclassified roads and a range of road users, including horse riders, pedestrians, cyclists, agricultural vehicles and HGVs as well as cars. Factors such as speed, driving while distracted or drunk add to the challenges. • The police have enforcement powers and must use them effectively. It is a key priority and they need to get the message across to the public. 	

	<p>The PCC referred to evidence that shows that there is usually a pattern of poor driving behaviour which leads an incident, and asked if there was anything citizens could do to assist. The PCC responded, drive slower, take it seriously and concentrate.</p> <p>The PCC said that people often witnessed poor behaviour of other drivers and asked what role motorists could play in using technology. The CC responded there a range of dash cams and head cams. Many force including West Mercia run Operation Snap which enables the public to upload their footage. It is about changing driver behaviour but the force will also prosecute if appropriate.</p> <p>The PCC raised the quality of life issue around speeding traffic in villages and asked the CC to explain what the force did to address such community concerns. The ACC responded.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From a local policing perspective neighbourhood officers are expected to know the priorities and concerns of their local communities. • Where speeding traffic is an issue, the officers are expected to work with their communities. The Community Speed Watch scheme, run with volunteers, operates in a number of communities and there are opportunities for other communities to come forward for this scheme. • The Community Concern Programme, with the Safer Roads Partnership, works with local councils to address road issues. • The force does have enforcement powers and these should be used when needed. <p>There are 29 community speed watch schemes in West Mercia, with the PCC providing funding to purchase the equipment. The PCC asked how communities should raise their concerns with and was told to initially contact their Safer Neighbourhood team.</p>	
	<p>The PCC ended by saying any questions not answered on the night would be afterwards. He then briefly explained his wider holding to account programme worked and that notes were published on the website.</p>	
3	<p>CONFIRMATION OF NEXT MEETING TYPE / DATE / TIME / VENUE: Thematic on Workforce Tuesday 27th August 2019, Room 1.38, Hindlip Hall</p>	