

WEST MERCIA POLICE AND CRIME PANEL

4 February 2021

POLICE & CRIME PLAN ACTIVITY AND PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT (OCTOBER – DECEMBER 2020)

Recommendation

1. Members of the Panel are invited to consider this report.

Background

2. The purpose of this report is to provide members of the Police and Crime Panel with an overview of activity undertaken by the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) in support of his Safer West Mercia Plan and provide an update on police performance.
3. The PCC's office remains open, but in light of the escalation in the pandemic and the tightening of the coronavirus restrictions, staff have been advised they should work from home, unless they need to come into the office for a specific purpose. This has to be for a justified reason approved by the Chief Executive. Contact details on the PCC's website have been amended requesting people to email their enquiry. The public phone is being monitored remotely and anyone ringing the office is contacted by a member of staff.
4. Although the pandemic continues to impact on the delivery of the PCC function, the Commissioner and his staff have sought to minimise this impact as much as possible, ensuring the PCC is able to carry out his key functions and for the PCC and his staff to establish a business as usual approach where possible.

Delivery plan and assurance

5. A delivery plan is used to support monitoring and assurance of progress against individual elements within the plan is updated on a quarterly basis. The delivery plan is subject to monthly scrutiny at the PCC's governance meeting where activity supporting the plan is subject to closer scrutiny. An extract of the delivery plan is included at appendix 1 covering the quarter 3 period, October to December 2020.
6. Examples of recent activity in support of the Safer West Mercia Plan's four key objectives, are set out in the following sections. This includes an update on the Alliance withdrawal in the 'Reform' section and an update on the replacement Community Messaging system in the 'Reassure section. Both these updates have been included in response to the request made by the Panel at the last meeting

Putting victims and survivors first

ISVA and CSE services

7. The PCC has formally commissioned both the CSE & ISVA services, providing a 3 year contract, reinforcing his commitment to supporting victims. A competitive tender process was concluded in December 2020, with the contract for both services was awarded to West Mercia Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre.
8. The new service model will be working towards achieving the objectives of the National Sexual Assault and Abuse Strategy, alongside the commitments in the Police and Crime Plan. The new services will be able to provide increased flexibility and resilience within their provision, as well as streamlining processes to remove any variations in service depending upon the victim's location.

Building a more secure West Mercia

Pilot Offender programme

9. Following positive discussions with regional PCC colleagues, the National Probation Service and West Mercia Police criminal justice lead, the PCC has recently agreed to provide £21,400 of match funding to implement a regional pilot for Anger & Anxiety Management courses. The courses will provide early intervention and prevention support, for low level, often first time offenders, which can be accepted as an Out of Court Disposal. This service is looking at a go live date of Feb/March 2021.

Safer Roads Fund

10. In September as part of the PCC's ongoing commitment to improving road safety, and ultimately reducing road deaths, the PCC launched the Safer Roads Fund (SRF), a new £280,000 fund for initiatives which aim to improve road safety. A range of applications were received and a number of projects were approved for funding including the national charity, Road Peace, which has received £38,244 of support.
11. The Road Peace project is a joint project with the Victim Advice Line (VAL). The funding awarded will provide a Road Peace victim advocate, located within the VAL to provide support and advice to victims of serious injury collisions, piloting in Shropshire initially. A West Mercia support group for families affected will also be set up, along with the provision of some information guides and online resilience programmes.
12. Other projects securing funding include: Great Ness & Little Ness Parish Council (£18,500), Stretton Grandison (£10,235), Almeley Parish Council (£5,000) and a number of other projects including a bike checking service, high visibility kit for cyclists and supporting schools to educate young people through participation in Learn to Ride and Bike-Ability sessions.

Policing demand

13. The force performance report at appendix 2 shows that most crime volumes decreased following the introduction of a lockdown in November 2020. The force is anticipating

that the further tightening of the restrictions and the 'stay at home' requirement will result in further reductions in quarter 4.

14. The force is continuing with high visibility covid patrols. During the current phase of the pandemic officers have been instructed to move swiftly through the first three 'E' of Engage, Explain and Encourage to Enforcement if the individual does not engage responsibly. Exceptions to this are large gatherings and groups and incidents where the officers professional judgement is that there would be overwhelming public support for enforcement. In these circumstance officers will move directly to the enforcement stage.

Criminal Justice (CJ)

15. The Coronavirus pandemic continues to pose significant challenges for the wider criminal justice system. The backlog within the Crown Court continues to grow, with more cases entering the system than being finalised. Lead in times for trials have increased by 44% since the beginning of the pandemic. In order to address the backlog the Courts have extended their sitting times and have introduced additional capacity at Worcester Crown Court. While the mitigation is welcome, the extra capacity hasn't met demand. To compound matters, the closure of Hereford Crown Court for refurbishment hasn't helped. Addressing the back-log continues to be a priority for Government, but with increasing coronavirus cases there is additional pressure being placed on the Courts to temporarily close again. The solutions to these issues are both national and local, and the PCC has been lobbying hard both for the freedom to take local steps and for the national steps to be taken since the start of the pandemic. The urgency and approach advocated by the PCC has recently been reinforced by a Joint Inspectorate report.
16. While cases within the Crown Court backlog continue to grow, that is not the case within the Magistrates' Court. West Mercia has successfully addressed the backlog of cases brought about during the first lock-down and are currently listing active cases. This unfortunately isn't the same position for other PCC areas.
17. The PCC and his office are actively working with National, Regional and Local partners to address the challenges. At a National level the PCC is engaged in a fortnightly meeting chaired by the Secretary of State and at a regional level he is part of a strategic CJ forum. The Deputy PCC now Chairs the West Mercia Criminal Justice Board and the PCC's Criminal Justice Manager attends the Force's Gold CJS recovery group ensuring both oversight and representation at all levels.

Reforming West Mercia

Alliance Update

18. At the conclusion of the Alliance with Warwickshire two new collaboration agreements were entered into to enable Warwickshire to transition out of the Alliance by the end of September 2021 at the latest. One was for a shared IT service. The other was for West Mercia to host Transactional, Forensics and File storage services for Warwickshire. These new collaboration agreements with Warwickshire are proving both robust and effective.

19. In relation to the IT shared service, West Mercia has now transferred all critical applications off the old, shared KCOM and is progressing towards a resilient and adaptable accredited stand-alone IT infrastructure of its own, capable of adapting to nationally provided or procured systems. Whilst West Mercia can now stand its IT apart from Warwickshire, there is still considerable way to go before it is fit for purpose. The investments set out in the budget proposals are part of that journey. Warwickshire are retaining the KCOM circuits for longer, and are bearing all the costs of that themselves, without West Mercia having to bear the majority of the costs as they would have done under the old arrangements. Discussions have commenced regarding the scope of any residual IT services Warwickshire requires from West Mercia beyond the end of the current collaboration on 30th September 2021. If any IT services are required beyond that date these will be on a hosted, not shared basis, as per the recommendation of the independent report at the close of the Alliance.
20. Warwickshire have indicated they are in the final preparations of transferring their forensics services to West Midlands Police. Whilst this is later than the original timeline Warwickshire gave of transferring to West Midlands by the 31st March 2021, it is anticipated that this will be completed before the contingency period set out in the current collaboration ends at the end of September 2021. Negotiations are underway in order to ensure that transition is as effective and efficient as possible for all forces. The West Mercia Forensics Service based at Hindlip continue to contribute to the national forensics capability and it is planned that in due course it will contribute to a national Forensics Capability Network collaboration.
21. Warwickshire are now planning to build their transactional services in-house rather than transfer them to West Midlands. Clarity is being sought as to whether this is anticipated to be completed by the end of the current collaboration on 30th September 2021. If it is not, the terms of any future hosted services will have to be renegotiated, and West Mercia are not expected to suffer any detriment as a result.
22. The file storage collaboration is open ended and there are no plans to alter it.

Fleet modernisation

23. As part of the PCC's commitment to reduce the environmental impact of policing, five new electric vehicles have joined the police vehicle fleet. The new zero emission vehicles will be used for community policing. They are part of a pilot scheme that signifies the start of the plan to move West Mercia Police's entire fleet to ultra-low emission vehicles over the next decade.

Estates Services

24. With the withdrawal of Worcestershire County Council from Place Partnership to take effect 31 March 2021, considerations have been given to the future of Place Partnership Limited (PPL), as an entity and as a vehicle for the delivery of property management services to the remaining partners: West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service (HWRFS) and Warwickshire Police. The collectively preferred option was to proceed with a Members Voluntary Liquidation, plus re-establishment of in-house services at each Authority.

25. The establishment of an in-sourced Property Management Service is well under way. This will be a streamlined function that will manage the delivery of Estate Management, Facilities Management and Project Management services, utilising service providers, contractors as well as providers from relevant outsourced property related frameworks. A full business case providing both better value for money and enhanced property management services has been approved. Staff entitled to transfer to West Mercia have been confirmed and the few remaining vacancies are being advertised within Place Partnership to minimise redundancies, all on time and in accordance with employment law. All service provider contracts and necessary IT systems are on track to be resolved and in place by the deadline of 1st April 2021.

Financial management

26. The Treasurer and her staff are working with the Force CFO and his staff to finalise the 2021/22 budget. They have analysed the provisional Police Grant Settlement. There is close liaison with the billing authorities to collate information regarding the Council Tax Collection Fund Deficits and the 2021/22 Council Tax Base. Regular monitoring of the 2020/21 budget and net expenditure is taking place with progress against savings targets, COVID expenditure and actions taken by the Force to address potential overspends being scrutinised.

27. Work is underway to develop and implement financial arrangements to support the new in-house Estates Service as PPL will cease to provide these services from April 2021.

28. The external audit of the 2019/20 Statement of Accounts has been completed with an unqualified opinion being given.

Reassuring West Mercia's communities

Neighbourhood Alerts

29. The force is in the process of replacing its Community Messaging System (CMS) with a new service. Neighbourhood Alerts (<https://www.neighbourhoodalert.co.uk/>) is a much more intelligent system which will enable people to get updates, how and when they want, tailored to their interests and concerns, rather than a one size fits all system. When registering for the first time the user is asked to provide some background information about themselves including how they want to be contacted, frequency of contact, what they are interested in and any concerns. This will enable the force to provide targeted and tailored advice to each individual. Other improvements will enable police supervisors to have an overview of the messages coming in for their teams so can ensure that if an officer is off sick or on leave it will be seen and dealt with. The system will be launched in the near future once all digital security and information compliance checks are concluded.

PCC's media and communications

30. As lockdown restrictions continue the PCC's communications and engagement function has maintained as much community engagement as possible.
31. Over the Christmas period the PCC launched '*Now that's what I call a safer West Mercia, the official Christmas crime prevention playlist*'. This was a series of crime prevention messages aimed at keeping communities safe, based around popular Christmas songs. Themes included keeping safe on the roads, checking on the isolated and vulnerable, looking out for friends and family who may be at risk of domestic abuse and behaving responsibly within the Covid restrictions. A video highlighting these important subjects was released on the PCC's social media channels each week over the Christmas period. '
32. The PCC has recently used an online media platform to hold four public engagement events across the local policing areas. Joining the PCC on these events were the West Mercia Police We Don't Buy Crime team, the Rural and Business Officer for each area and a representative from the Road Safety team. While the virtual sessions are no substitute for face to face events, they have proved to be a good, safe alternative, allowing communities to get involved and ask the questions that matter to them most. Speeding was by far the most common issue raised at all the events; other issues of note were ASB, drugs and officer visibility. The PCC has demonstrated his commitment to listening to and acting on people's concerns by funding a new Speed Indicator Device in Lyonshall and meeting with local councillors to further discuss speeding in and around Hollywood, Worcestershire.
33. The PCC's Safer West Mercia podcast series has continued to grow and there are now 24 podcasts available to view, including a special edition four part series called White Ribbon which focusses on domestic abuse. The podcasts can be found on Spotify, Buzzsprout, Apple Podcasts and the PCC website.
34. The PCC will continue to review and revise his community engagement in light of changes to coronavirus regulations. In support of this, the PCC is planning to launch a series of community messages encouraging people to help, care and support each other as the pandemic continues.
35. The PCC's website has been redeveloped and went live in the first week in January 2021. This work has been undertaken to ensure the site is fully compliant with changes in accessibility legislation. Work will soon commence to prepare the site for the Pre-Election Period in advance of the next PCC elections.

Public consultation

36. In December the PCC launched a public consultation seeking people's views on his budget proposals for 2021/20. The consultation and its findings are included as an appendix to the budget report forming part of this meeting's agenda.

Independent Custody Visitor (ICV) Scheme

37. In light of the ongoing pandemic, physical visits remain suspended and the ICVs continue their oversight using the interim solution put in place. A designated mobile phone has been placed in each custody suite which the ICVs can use to contact the custody staff and interview the detainees over the phone. This has enabled oversight to continue safely across all the custody suites.

38. The PCC's Scheme Coordinator is in regular contact with all the ICVs and has been able to successfully hold panel meetings and recruit new volunteers using online platforms. The Independent Custody Visitor Association (ICVA) has remained supportive throughout the pandemic and provides a valuable source of information and advice. A number of the ICVs will shortly be taking part in online training around race discrimination which is being hosted by the ICVA.

Performance and accountability

Holding to account

39. The Commissioner holds a regular scrutiny meeting with the Chief Constable as part of his role in holding the force to account. The following areas have been addressed since the last report. Notes from thematic meetings are available to view on the PCC's website

Month	Type	Subject area
November	Thematic	Policing response to Covid 19
January	Public	Precept

40. In advance of the November meeting the PCC had informed the Chief Constable that he intended to discuss his concerns regarding the referral rate for the Victim Advice Line (VAL) and West Mercia's compliance with the Victims' Code of Practice (VCOP) and had provided the Chief Constable with a number of questions in advance. The substantive part of the meeting considered the policing approach taken during the pandemic and how the force had responded to changes in the legislation.

41. Key findings / outcomes from the thematic meetings include:

- To improve officer understanding of VAL there will be some specific training inputs on local policing areas Training will be on the empathy side and will be rolled out in the New Year.
- Upcoming upgrades to Athena will provide an alternative option to Track my Crime and for VCOP compliance metrics.
- Policing Coronavirus has moved on from being an emergency response to being BAU and will still be in the New Year.
- The backlog in court cases is putting a significant strain on the system.
- Joint enforcement has shown the future opportunities the 'one team' approach can give to street visibility and enforcement.

42. Work is well underway in support of the February holding to account meeting which is a thematic on domestic abuse.

HMICFRS inspection reports

43. A revisit on the PEEL 2018/19 investigations cause of concern/recommendations took place in November. In general the feedback received was positive as the force was able to demonstrate improvements in many areas. Further detail can be found on pages 55 to 57 of the quarterly force performance report attached at appendix 2.

44. Wherever possible HMICFRS are continuing their inspection regime. West Mercia has been selected as one of 11 forces for inspection as part of a follow up the 2019 thematic report "Fraud: Time to Choose". As PEEL in 2021-22 evolves towards an intelligence-led continuous assessment model, HMICFRS will make more efficient use of evidence they already have, providing it remains current. This will include evidence gathered from other inspection activity and force management statements. The onsite fieldwork for this inspection will be in September 2021.
45. HMICFRS has released one joint inspectorate thematic report on pre charge bail and released under investigation. This contained 2 recommendations for chief constables. December also saw the first HMICFRS report in response to a super complaint published. This report contains a number of detailed recommendations for both Chief Constables and PCCs. Work is ongoing to review these recommendations.

West Mercia perception survey

46. As part of the Commissioner's commitment to ensure both he and the force are acting on community concerns locally, and that the service provided by the force leads to increased confidence in local policing, the PCC commissioned a confidence survey which has been running for over two years. The latest, quarter 2 results were included in the last performance report to the panel. The Quarter 3 results are due in the next month and will be included in the next report.
47. Confidence data continues to be monitored through quarterly survey results recorded both locally and nationally. The Crime Survey for England and Wales was suspended in March 2020 because of the coronavirus pandemic. It has now recommenced, however the sample size is much smaller and the survey has been made shorter; data at force level is not available. The PCC's commissioned survey has continued throughout the pandemic and continues to provide valuable public feedback.

Force performance reports

48. A number of internal performance products are produced by the force to enable senior officers and the PCC to maintain strategic oversight of force performance. In particular the PCC scrutinises a weekly dashboard of performance along with monthly summary reports. These performance products reflect the new performance framework which was presented to the Panel at the September 2020 meeting.
49. The third quarter performance report for the period October to December 2020, is attached at appendix 2. The report sets out a force wide picture of performance particularly in relation to force priorities and key practises. The report focusses on gold level key performance indicators (KPI), however there are some measures at a silver level included to create a comprehensive picture across the force. The new performance framework uses a reporting hierarchy to monitor performance across the whole organisation at gold (strategic), silver (service) and (bronze) operational levels.
50. The report has been revised to include the number of charges (and as a proportion of action taken outcomes) as requested by the Panel at its last meeting. This information is included on page 27 of the report.

Risk Management Implications

None.

Financial Implications

None.

Legal Implications

None

Equality Implications

None.

Supporting Information

Appendix 1 – Extract taken from the Safer West Mercia Plan Delivery Plan

Appendix 2 – West Mercia Police Performance Report October to December 2020

Contact Points

County Council Contact Points

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Specific Contact Points for this report

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