

RECORD OF DECISION

TITLE: Firearms Training Unit – Business case

Ref: PCC/D/2022/23

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

West Mercia requires access to a fit-for-purpose firearms training facility to maintain compliance with national standards around officer training. This is vital to ensuring West Mercia can call upon the full range of high quality policing services when they are needed in local communities.

The Chief Constable has advised that the existing provision within the Force is no longer compliant with national standards, nor can it deliver the required operational capacity.

The Chief Constable is seeking to develop new facilities for the Firearms Training Unit (FTU) on the West Mercia Police Headquarters site at Hindlip Hall, Worcestershire.

The Chief Constable is proposing a fit-for-purpose facility, which meets Health & Safety, licencing and training standards and that is capable of delivering the mandatory national College of Policing syllabus. The proposal put forward is advocated as the best option in respect of balancing operational need with value for public money, both in terms of service delivery now, and across the projected lifespan of the asset.

The Chief Constable is seeking authority from the PCC to proceed to RIBA Stage 3, and allocate total budget of more than £16m for the project.

The proposal represents a significant undertaking and financial commitment for West Mercia and the PCC has undertaken rigorous scrutiny, governance activity and due diligence around the business case.

PROPOSAL

That the PCC:

Approve in principle (subject to planning consent) the development and construction of a Firearms Training Unit at Hindlip Hall, as set out in the associated business case, including:

- A 50m 8 lane indoor range (inc vehicle access)

- A building search facility training area
- A training school, with classrooms and offices

Approve the allocation of a total project budget of £16.74m for the construction of the building across 3 years, with an additional £0.39m allocated to project support costs. The ongoing revenue implications for which are to be met from within existing policing resources. A Medium Term Financial Plan will be updated by the Force which will demonstrate affordability.

Approve expenditure of £1.49m of the total project costs to complete RIBA stage 3, planned to be delivered in 2022/23 financial year.

Approve that primary governance over the delivery of the project be delegated to the Estates Governance Board, with authority to approve continuation of the project through each RIBA stage as long as the project scope and/or costs remain within the approvals provided within this decision notice.

Agree to projected timescales for detailed plans to be provided by West Mercia Police in respect of income generation associated with the new FTU. These would be delivered to the PCC approximately six months prior to project completion.

**APPROVAL OF
West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner**

I hereby approve the above proposal.

Signed



PART 1 – NON-CONFIDENTIAL/EXEMPT FACTS AND FIGURES

SUPPORTING REPORT

West Mercia's Authorised Firearm Officers (AFOs) provide 24/7 armed response cover across the geographic counties of Shropshire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire. The use of firearms is regulated and restricted to specialised units within each Police Force. AFOs require a significant amount of training to obtain and then maintain a licence to authorise them to carry weapons as part of operational front line policing, protecting the public from harm.

AFOs require intensive training on application to join the Firearms Unit and obtain a firearms licence. Once obtained they also have continuous annual training and assessments to be able to maintain that licence. West Mercia has specialist officers who provide training to AFOs. This training has been delivered via a 40m outdoor and 25m indoor firing ranges, situated at West Mercia Police headquarters.

The 25m range is no longer compliant with Health & Safety Executive (HSE) requirements and is not fit for purpose when measured against licencing and training standards. The indoor range is therefore closed. The 40m outdoor range can only provide a limited amount of the training required.

The Force is currently hiring a combination of ranges from both the private sector and other police forces on which to train officers. This has a number of drawbacks including:

- lack of formal contracts to ensure access to other training facilities when required
- Travel time and costs to get to other locations for training
- Barriers of entry to apply for AFOs due to location of training
- Potential reason for higher failure rates, due to inconsistent availability and location of training courses.

The Force has collective agreement that a new firearms range is required to ensure that it enables and maintains a highly qualified AFO unit. A full business case has been developed which sets out the Force proposal to:

- Construct an 8 lane 50m indoor range. This would be located on the site of the current outdoor 40m range at WMP Headquarters
- Convert the current 25m indoor range into a 2 storey tactical search facility and new training school, equipped with classrooms and offices

The construction cost is currently estimated to be between £14.45m - £16.79m. Reassurance has been sought and provided that is in line with costs associated with other similar projects in recent years undertaken by other police forces.

The Force and OPCC Estates service have worked in conjunction with consultants Bailey Garner to scope the project. The annual revenue costs has been estimated to increase by £0.780m (which includes the capital financing cost).

In coming to this proposal the force have considered a wide variety of options, including:

- Continuation of current training through other sites.
- Identification and consideration of locations outside of Force Headquarters as potentially suitable sites.
- Options regarding specification of facility
- Collaboration with a neighbouring force to provide a joint training facility.

After extensive search and consideration the Chief Constable has concluded that the WMP Headquarters site is the most suitable location for the facility. The Force have undertaken a wide review to identify other suitable locations across West Mercia. The conclusion was that the headquarters site was the most appropriate location as there are advantages from not having to purchase additional land, having a suitable area to build on, location within the West Mercia area, near major road networks, and access to accommodation should it be needed for those attending a course. These positions have been supported by the PCC's professional Estates service.

The proposal for a 50m range provides a compliant specification with national standards for the vast majority of training requirements. Whilst some training at 100m is required, these ranges are significantly more expensive in construction, and cannot be accommodated at the proposed site. Force leadership is reassured and has provided assurances to the PCC that the 100m training requirement accounts for only 4% of total training and can be provisioned elsewhere as required. Of the 39 police forces in England, 23 currently have a 50m range, with West Mercia and Staffordshire proposing to build a range of this length. 10 forces have either a 100m or access to both 50 & 100m ranges.

An 8 lane range is also considered to be the optimal size given the number of training days, trainers available and the AFOs requiring training. Projections around capacity are that there would be a shortfall for the number of AFOs. The shortfall of space would mean some courses being delivered using other external ranges.

The Force recognises the point that the new facility cannot provide all the specification and capacity required. However reassurance has been provided to the PCC by the Chief Constable and other Chief Officers that the 8 lane 50m option presents the best balance of meeting the vast majority of operational capacity and requirements, versus value for public money and return on that investment. Building a longer range with more lanes would be significantly more challenging economically. Guidance from the OPCC Estates team suggests it would also not necessarily be feasible on the footprint available. Guidance and standards around FTU requirements has very recently changed at a national level, therefore it is felt that further changes are unlikely in the near future, particularly given the impact this would have on police forces nationwide. The majority have 50m ranges and changes would bring significant associated costs.

A PCC priority is to collaborate with other partners to utilise assets to achieve economies of scale. Collaboration on an FTU is only realistically an option with other police forces. Gloucestershire already have a 100m tri-services range at Blackrock, which does not have capacity to provide the full training needs for West Mercia. West Midlands has both a 50m & 25m range which again does not have capacity to provide all of West Mercia training need. Warwickshire does not have a firearms range.

The Force and OPCC Estates team approached Staffordshire who are also looking to construct a new training facility. A potential development site identified at Staffordshire headquarters was able to accommodate a 16 lane range. Staffordshire already have a full capacity building search facility and are unlikely to see any economic return by contributing to building an additional facility. Proposals for potential collaboration were scrutinised by the Force and Estates team along with colleagues in Staffordshire, and were considered to not provide value for money, collaborative opportunities or additional training advantages. The main reasons for this were:-

- Both Forces require an 8 lane range to meet training requirements, therefore there is no economy of scale to be obtained from building one facility (16 lane facility is equivalent to double the cost of an 8 lane facility)
- There would be a separation of the firearms range and tactical training across two sites, causing issues with trainer availability across sites, requirements to move armoury between sites, requirement to travel between sites for AFOs.
- The travel commitment for AFOs would also be longer, and would come at significant long term expense which must be considered of the context of the proposal
- West Mercia would be building a multi-million pound facility on land that it does not own, which creates inherent issues around control of the asset
- Limited opportunity to benefit from collaborative training as Forces have flexibility in the weaponry and equipment that they use. This would require further work to standardise approach across both forces if this opportunity was to be pursued further.

Review by the OPCC Estates function in West Mercia and the Estates service in Staffordshire ultimately supported the proposed 8 lane 50m range at Hindlip, and separate FTUs for both West Mercia and Staffordshire.

Given the highly specialist nature of the proposal and the scale of the investment under consideration, the PCC sought an independent expert review of the options proposed by the Police, including the recommendation not to collaborate with Staffordshire. This review was undertaken by a former Chief Constable (not West Mercia Police) with significant experience in this area of business. The outcome from the review supported the option proposed by West Mercia Police, as being the most operationally effective and economically justified for West Mercia Police and the public. Specific queries were raised around things such as vehicle access and making best use of the asset, which were addressed by the police force in the final submitted business case.

The final business case was also subject to scrutiny from the PCC, with advice and input sought from the Deputy Chief Executive, Treasurer and Estates service.

As part of that scrutiny it was established that the repayment period for borrowing against the project would be set at 25 years rather than 40, to align with the business case in respect of the projected lifespan of the asset. A Medium Term Financial Strategy will be prepared during 2022/23 which will set out the affordability of the project and how the additional revenue impact will be managed by the Force, within existing budget allocations.

It was also agreed that West Mercia Police would develop and present detailed proposals around income generation associated with the new FTU for the PCC's consideration. These proposals would be presented at an appropriate time, approximately six months prior to project completion. Current estimates suggest income that could be generated from the new FTU would be approximately £200,000 per annum.

The content and terms set out in this decision notice have been shared with and are agreed by West Mercia's Chief Constable.

STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

This decision supports the following element(s) of the Safer West Mercia Plan:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Putting Victims and Survivors First | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building a More Secure West Mercia |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reforming West Mercia | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reassuring West Mercia's Communities |

The decision supports this/ these objective(s) through the following:

- Ensure West Mercia Police has the resources and infrastructure needed to support, value and develop officers, staff and volunteers, enabling them to deliver to the best of their abilities
- Evidences delivery of the estates strategy that meets community needs and supports the police's operational needs
- West Mercia manages its resources to maximise value, effectiveness, efficiency and meet demand. Ensure decisions for investment are transparent, based on robust cases, clear evidence and need.
- Ensures West Mercia has the capability and resources to respond effectively to the most serious policing incidents which require highly trained firearms officers.

- A robust and appropriately scrutinised process demonstrates commitment from the PCC to achieve best use of public money and ensure the best return on that investment.

BENEFITS AND THEIR REALISATION

The overall benefits from the new FTU would be:

- Compliance with national standards and health & safety around AFO training
- Delivering best value for public money across the medium and long term
- Continuity of service to communities, with the continued ability for West Mercia to provide a high quality operational response to some of the most serious policing incidents.
- Income generation of circa £200,000 p/a, to commence upon completion of the new FTU.
- Enable greater access to AFO training to increase diversity within that particular area of policing
- Anticipated lower rates of failure, to be monitored and delivered over time following completion of the new FTU.
- Retained control over access to ranges for training, reducing organisational risk, ensuring continuity of services to the public and consistency of training and support to officers.
- Reassurance to the public and stakeholders in respect of West Mercia's ability to respond effectively to all policing scenarios.
- Replacing a underused asset that is not delivering value for money.

AUTHOR

Name Paul Benfield and Gareth Boulton

Date 12/07/22

FINANCIAL AND TREASURER COMMENTS

The business case states that the cost of bringing the proposed assets into use is estimated to be £17.180m, including project delivery (£0.390m), design, planning and construction (£16.740)

The calculated net revenue cost for the project in year one of operation is estimated at £1.370m. Included in this figure is the annual capital financing costs estimated to be £1.050m based over 25 years. This is consistent with the estimated Useful Economic Life (UEL) of a firearms range. The additional revenue cost per annum would be £0.780m.

Assurance has been obtained that the estimated cost of construction is reasonable and that the proposals provide a Firearms Training Unit that maximises the availability of training against the cost. It is effective in terms of providing the capability to train the required AFOs whilst ensuring that it is value for money.

The capital financing of the asset has been provided over 25 years. The building itself would be expected to last for longer than this period. However given the risk around the requirements for compliance with Health and Safety and against licencing and training standards it is prudent to reduce the UEL.

The affordability of the scheme is dependent on confirmation of final cost and on the business case for the income generation from the assets. Assurance has been obtained that the additional revenue impact can be managed within current Force revenue budget allocations. It will be required that a medium term financial plan, that includes the revenue impact of proposed capital projects, is taken to Estates governance board and agreed. This will be used to provide reassurance that the revenue impact is sustainable before authorisation is given to proceed to construction.

Treasurer



Signature

Date 14th July 2022

LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

By virtue of schedule 11, paragraph 14 of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 the Police and Crime Commissioner may do anything which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to, the exercise of the functions of commissioner. That includes: entering into contracts and other agreements (whether legally binding or not) and acquiring and disposing of property (including land).

PUBLIC ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Information in this form is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOI Act) and other legislation. Part 1 of this form will be made available on the West Mercia Commissioner's website. Any facts and advice that should not be made automatically available on request are not included in Part 1 but instead in a separate Part 2 report.

Part 2 Appendices – Firearms Training Unit Business Case v1.5, Collaboration Report, Independent Review of WMP Firearms Training

OFFICER APPROVAL

Deputy Chief Executive Officer

Signature

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matt Ball", written over a horizontal line.

Date 14th July 2022