

# **ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT**

## **2024-25**

<b>Draft version</b>	1.0
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## 1. Introduction

The PCC and the Chief Constable are two separate legal entities with separate statutory responsibilities. However, they work together to ensure West Mercia Police is working effectively and is held accountable for the standard of service delivered to the public.

This Annual Governance Statement for 2024-25 explains how the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and Chief Constable for West Mercia Police have complied with their published corporate governance framework for the year ending 31 March 2025.

## 2. Scope of responsibility

The PCC and the Chief Constable are responsible for ensuring that their business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively.

The Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act<sup>1</sup> (the Act) sets out the functions of the Police and Crime Commissioner and Chief Constable and the Policing Protocol<sup>2</sup> sets out how these functions will be undertaken.

The Act requires the Police and Crime Commissioner to have a Chief Executive and Chief Finance Officer (the Treasurer). The Chief Executive is the head of paid service and undertakes the responsibilities of monitoring officer<sup>3</sup>. The Act also requires the Chief Constable to appoint a Chief Finance Officer<sup>4</sup> (the Director of Commercial Services). The Financial Management Code of Practice<sup>5</sup> sets out the responsibilities of the PCC's Chief Finance Officer and Chief Executive and of the Chief Constable's Chief Finance Officer.

The Policing Protocol sets out the high-level financial responsibilities of the PCC and the Chief Constable, making clear that the former is ultimately accountable to the public for the management of the Police Fund while the latter has day to day responsibility for managing their allocated budgets after these have been approved by the PCC.

In discharging this overall responsibility, the PCC and Chief Constable are also responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of their affairs and facilitating the exercise of their functions. This includes ensuring a sound system of governance (incorporating the system of internal control) is maintained through the year and that arrangements are in place for the management of risk.

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<sup>1</sup> PRSRA11, S5-8

<sup>2</sup> Policing Protocol Order 2023

<sup>3</sup> Local Government and Housing Act 1989 S5

<sup>4</sup> PRSRA11, Sch 2 p4

<sup>5</sup> Revised Financial Management Code of Practice for the Police Forces of England and Wales and Fire and Rescue Authorities created under section 4A of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004.(July 2018)

The Chief Constable is responsible for operational policing matters, the direction and control of police officers and police staff, and for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of the force. The PCC is required to hold the Chief Constable to account for the exercise of those functions and those of the persons under the Chief Constable's direction and control. The PCC must satisfy himself that the force has appropriate mechanisms in place for the maintenance of good governance, and that these operate in practice.

A Joint Corporate Governance Framework sets out how governance operates for both the PCC and Chief Constable. The framework consists of:

- Part A – Corporate Governance Framework
- Part B – Joint Financial Regulations
- Part C – Scheme of Consent
- Part D – PCC Scheme of Delegation
- Part E – Chief Constable Scheme of Delegation

The Joint Corporate Governance Framework can be found on the PCC's website [www.westmercia-pcc.gov.uk](http://www.westmercia-pcc.gov.uk) or can be obtained from the Office of the PCC at Hindlip Hall, Hindlip, Worcester, Worcestershire, WR3 8SP.

The Code is consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework: 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government'<sup>6</sup>.

This Annual Governance Statement explains how the PCC and Chief Constable have complied with the Code and the requirements of Regulation 6 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 to conduct a review of the effectiveness of the system of internal control.

### **3. The purpose of the Governance Framework**

The governance framework comprises the systems and processes and culture and values by which the PCC and Chief Constable direct and control, and the activities through which they account to and engage with the community. It enables the PCC and Chief Constable to monitor the achievement of their strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the timely delivery of appropriate, cost-effective services, including achieving value for money.

The system of internal control is a significant part of that framework and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives; it can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness.

The system of internal control is based on an on-going process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the PCC and Chief Constable's policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.cipfa.org/policy-and-guidance/publications/d/delivering-good-governance-in-local-government-framework-2016-edition>

impact should they be realised, and to manage them effectively, efficiently and economically.

## **4. The Governance Framework**

The key elements of the systems and processes that comprise the PCC's and Chief Constable's governance arrangements and how these adhere to the seven principles in the Code are set out below:-

### **4.1 Principle A: Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law**

The Policing Protocol Order 2011 (as amended in 2023) requires both the PCC and Chief Constable to abide by the seven principles of personal conduct set out on 'Standards in Public Life: First Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life', commonly known as the *Nolan Principles*. Additionally, the Police Code of Ethics, combines these values with others enshrined in policing, and sets and provides a framework for upholding high standards of conduct and behaviour.

The PCC and his Deputy (DPCC) have both signed a code of conduct based on the principles referred to above. These documents have been published on the PCC's website, along with the declarations of interest of both the PCC and DPCC.

Officers, police staff and staff of the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner operate within:

- Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner and Police Force policy and procedures including those relating to Anti-Fraud and Corruption and Whistleblowing, referred to as the Professional Standards Reporting policy in the Force.
- Corporate Governance Framework,
- Conduct Regulations and Codes of Conduct.

Policies, procedures, regulations and the governance framework are reviewed as appropriate. Notifications of disclosable interests and a register of gifts and hospitality are published on the PCC's and the Force website.

The Force has a Professional Standards Department (PSD) whose role is to protect the public from harm by monitoring and investigating the professional and ethical standards of West Mercia Police. The three main functions of PSD are: the Anti-Corruption Unit, the Misconduct and Complaints Team and the Vetting Unit.

PSD are responsible for the administration of complaints by members of the public against police officers and staff below the rank of Chief Constable. Complaints against the Chief Constable are dealt with by the PCC. The West Mercia Police and Crime Panel administers formal complaints made against the PCC and Deputy PCC.

In February 2020, regulations<sup>7</sup> came into effect giving PCCs extra responsibilities for reviewing how complaints are dealt with, where the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome determined through the PSD complaint process. To effectively discharge this duty the PCC has appointed an external qualified body to provide support, expertise, and resilience to the PCC to undertake a review of the actions taken by the force. However, the final outcome decision is made by an appropriate officer in the PCC's office.

Quarterly PSD 'Assurance & Accountability' meetings are held between the Deputy Chief Constable, the Head of PSD and the PCC to coincide with the publication of IOPC performance data to provide oversight and challenge on PSD performance.

The PCC's office holds regular meetings with representatives from the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) to discuss matters relating to complaint handling and its strategic oversight.

In complying with regulations issued in 2021<sup>8</sup>, the PCC publishes the most recent IOPC quarterly complaints data for the force and the IOPC annual statistics report, alongside a narrative setting out how the PCC is holding the Chief Constable to account, and the PCC's assessment of his own performance in carrying out his other complaints handling functions.

The West Mercia Joint Audit and Standards Committee (JASC) established by the PCC and the Chief Constable considers issues of standards, ethics and integrity as part of its core function. The JASC is a public meeting, and copies of all papers are published on the PCC's website.

## **4.2 Principle B: Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement**

The Policing Protocol highlights that the Police and Crime Commissioner is accountable to local people and draws on this mandate to set and shape the strategic objectives for the force area in consultation with the Chief Constable.

The Police and Crime Plan sets out the strategic direction and objectives of the force. Following PCC elections in May 2024 the PCC's West Mercia Safer Communities Plan 2025 – 2028 was published in November 2024 following a 12-week public and stakeholder consultation.

To support the West Mercia Safer Communities Plan, the PCC has published a Communications and Engagement Strategy 2025 - 2028 for his term of office. This sets out the PCC's seven priorities on how local people will be involved with the PCC and the Chief Constable to ensure they are part of decision making, accountability and future direction.

In February 2022 West Mercia Police agreed a new Corporate Communications and Engagement Strategy. It places an emphasis on two-way communication and engagement with both internal and external audiences. In addition, West Mercia

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<sup>7</sup> Police (Complaints and Misconduct) Regulations 2020

<sup>8</sup> The Elected Local Policing Bodies (Specified Information) (Amendment) Order 2021

Police has adopted the principles of the National Contact Management Strategy (NCMS) into a local West Mercia Contact Management Strategy. Both strategies are designed to complement and support each other.

In conjunction with West Mercia Police, the PCC has commissioned a public perceptions survey. Members of the public are interviewed on a quarterly basis and asked for their thoughts on police visibility, accessibility and integrity. The information the survey provides is used to inform decisions made by the PCC and West Mercia Police. The results of the survey are published on the PCC's website.

Ahead of setting the budget in 2024/25, the PCC conducted a formal consultation with communities in the form of an online survey and face to face engagements, used to inform governance and scrutiny of activity within West Mercia Police and deliver improvements for communities.

Social media is widely used by the PCC and the force, as well as more traditional methods of engagement. The PCC actively uses X (formerly Twitter), LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram to engage with communities. Neighbourhood Matters is utilised by both the force and PCC, which allows messages and updates to be shared with those that sign up to the platform. The system was launched in West Mercia in July 2021.

In order to inform Commissioning activity, the PCC regularly commissions a variety of needs assessments, to understand local landscape in relation to victim services and crime prevention. In 2024/25, the PCC commissioned several needs assessments which all included public/victim and stakeholder consultation.

The force has appropriate mechanisms in place for engaging with a variety of stakeholders, partners and the public. The Safer Neighbourhood approach is central to policing in West Mercia and there are Safer Neighbourhood Teams (SNTs) throughout the force area. Police Officers, Police Community Support Officers, Specials and Volunteers work with local communities to address local policing priorities.

West Mercia Police undertakes a survey with victims of certain incidents and crime about the services they have received from the police. The surveys seek to measure the satisfaction levels of individuals in a consistent way, allowing comparison to be drawn between different victim groups, service stages, local policing areas and demographic groups.

The force has a recently refreshed Local Policing Community Charter, a document that outlines the force's local policing service offer and spearheading its approach to addressing community concerns. The Charter sets out six key themes: visibility and accessibility of neighbourhood policing teams; responding to our communities; prevention; vulnerability; relationships; and partnerships.

The force has a number of active Independent Advisory Groups (IAGs). Three are protected characteristic groups which offer specialist advice and guidance to police on diversity issues and the effects on their communities. In addition, there are five IAGs covering each of the geographical Local Policing areas, inputting into their

neighbourhood police services. A Violence Against Women and Girls Advisory Group has also been established. Members of IAGs act as 'critical friends' to the police, influencing, advising and shaping how the police support and protect communities.

The PCC has an annual holding to account programme, known as 'Assurance and Accountability'. The 2024-25 planned programme included;

- Performance (including HMICFRS focus)
- Serious and Organised Crime
- Child Sexual Exploitation
- Diversity, Equality and Inclusion
- VAWG

In addition to the planned programme, other areas of ad hoc scrutiny were centred around;

- VAWG
- Road Safety

The force also convenes scrutiny panels where members of the public and / or partners are able to scrutinise practice in areas such as stop and search, use of out of court resolutions, and the investigation of serious sexual offences.

The PCC and the Force each has a Publication and FOI scheme in place. All FOIs received by the PCC are dealt with by the PCC's office or passed onto the force by agreement as appropriate. The PCC and the Force publish the outcome of FOIs they are responsible for on their respective websites.

The PCC's publication scheme establishes the means by which information relating to decisions will be made available to local people, with those of greater public interest receiving the highest level of prominence, except where operational and legal constraints exist. Since 2021/22 benefits realisation has been incorporated into the PCC's decision notices. Key decisions made by the PCC are published on the PCCs website.

The Annual Report sets out how the PCC has exercised his functions in each financial year and the progress which has been made in the financial year in meeting the objectives set out in the police and crime plan. An Annual Report was published in March 2025.

#### **4.3 Principle C: Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits**

The PCC has issued a Police and Crime Plan. It outlines the police and crime objectives and the strategic direction of the Force.

The annual Force Strategic Assessment provides an overview of the external environment that the force operates in; this includes the threat from crime and the changing situation in relation to macro issues such as the political and financial state

and how they might impact on communities and how they are policed. A Force Control Strategy for the coming year is developed from the Strategic Assessment findings. This is underpinned by the force's Vision and Values.

In February 2024 the PCC approved West Mercia signing up to the Emergency Services Environmental and sustainability Group (EESG) Sustainability Charter. The charter has been developed by members from multiple Fire & Rescue Services and Police Forces to:

- Drive the collective action needed to address the challenges of climate change
- Assist all Emergency Services with their sustainability journey, whatever their starting point
- Include the latest developments of the global sustainability agenda
- Adopt the three principles of sustainability for inclusion in everyday operations.

The delivery of this charter will be managed through the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Board. The Board provides oversight of activity by West Mercia to deliver a sustainable approach to policing. With the recent appointment of an Environmental (Carbon) Manager there has been a renewed focus on developing the response to the West Mercia Net Zero Strategy and identifying opportunities to decarbonise fleet and assets across West Mercia. The board is also encouraging cultural and business process change to ensure that the organisation as a whole is sustainable in both economic and social activities, such as reviewing procurement practices and requirements on partners and contractors to consider their approach to sustainability.

Collaboration agreements set out those areas of business to be undertaken jointly with other Forces and Local Policing Bodies, whether to reduce cost, increase efficiency or increase capability to protect local people. Statutory partnerships are subject to either contractual agreements or are governed by legislation.

The Force collaborates with policing partners in the West Midlands region (Staffordshire, Warwickshire and West Midlands) in order to combat the national threats identified in the Strategic Policing Requirement. Regional oversight and governance mechanism are established at a senior level, with strategic governance maintained via the Regional Collaboration & Partnership Board (RCPB). The RCPB is attended by the PCC and Chief Constable of each of the four forces and governs the Regional Organised Crime Unit and the West Midlands Counter Terrorism Unit, and also provides regional scrutiny of the National Police Air Service (NPAS).

The Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) ensures that planned activities to support the objectives of the PCC and Chief Constable are financially sustainable. The MTFP, prepared by the Treasurer and Director of Commercial Services, is monitored closely throughout the year, and reviewed and updated formally as part of the budget setting process each year.

The PCC's grant scheme is based on identified need with clear outcomes. The approach is set out in the Commissioning and Grants Strategy, including a requirement for service providers to demonstrate where their services can add social

value, and this forms part of the assessment process in line with the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012.

#### **4.4 Principle D: Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes**

The PCC's West Mercia Safer Communities Plan outlines the police and crime objectives (outcomes) and the strategic direction for the policing of the Force area. The PCC has developed a delivery plan which sets out monitoring and progress against the commitments within the Plan. This programme is subject to internal scrutiny at the monthly PCC Office Governance Board and external scrutiny by West Mercia Police and Crime Panel.

West Mercia Strategic Assessment and Force Management Statement inform the business planning cycle, which in turn provides the basis for the Treasurer and the Director of Commercial Services to produce and maintain the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). The MTFP is monitored throughout the year and reviewed and updated formally as part of the budget setting process each year.

The Force has a Business Planning Process that considers all the force's services, and the resources required to deliver those services. The process sets out the baseline service delivered, expected increases in demand in services and where efficiencies can be made. It also provides a methodology for prioritising service delivery to ensure the budget is balanced. The Force presents a budget proposal to the PCC to inform the development of the final budget requirement.

The PCC and Chief Constable's joint system of internal financial control is based on a framework of regular management information, financial regulations, administrative procedures (including segregation of duties), management supervision, and a system of delegation and accountability.

The Force has a Change and Transformation Board to govern its Change and Transformation Programme. This Board scrutinises project management and proposed investment decisions and monitors both costs and benefits, ensuring these are aligned to the strategic objectives and are delivered efficient and effectively. The Board meets regularly through the financial year. It is chaired by the Deputy Chief Constable and includes senior officers and managers from the Force and a senior representative of the PCC.

#### **4.5 Principle E: Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it**

The PCC and Chief Constable ensure that their statutory officers have the skills, resources and support necessary to perform effectively in their roles and that these roles are properly understood throughout the organisation. Specialist advice is sourced externally as required.

The Corporate Governance Framework provides a clear statement of respective roles and responsibilities and how they are delegated.

The PCC has implemented a staffing structure within the OPCC to ensure it has the necessary capability and capacity to support him in delivering his statutory functions.

Chief Officers have clearly defined leadership roles and are responsible for implementing strategy and managing the delivery of services within their respective portfolios. **The Workforce Planning Strategic Framework was reviewed and updated in March 2024** to support the organisation to ensure that the governance structure, mechanisms, processes and relations by which workforce planning is conducted across West Mercia Police are aligned. Alongside this the force reviewed its approach to talent management to ensure that it was fit for purpose, fair and transparent to support the force in delivering on its commitment to develop its staff. The OPCC and force training strategies set the climate for continued professional development of individuals. The respective Performance Development Review processes will ensure that these strategies are turned into reality for officers and members of staff. This principle is also included within the Police and Crime Plan.

In January 2025 West Mercia Police published their refreshed Diversity, Equality and Inclusion (DE&I) Strategy. The Strategy consists of three pillars; Our People, Our Communities and Our Partners. Governance of the DE&I Strategy is via a quarterly Organisational Inclusion Board, chaired by the Director of Business Services.

The PCC is a member of the national Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC). The Chief Officers of West Mercia Police are members of the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC).

#### **4.6 Principle F: Managing Risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management**

The PCC and Chief Constable each have a Strategic Risk Strategy in place to ensure that the risks facing the force and PCC's office are effectively and appropriately identified, evaluated and reported.

The force has a system of risk identification and escalation, centrally overseen with clear ownership in the relevant business areas and at the appropriate level to manage risks. This is updated bi-monthly and reported to directorate meetings and the Executive Board. A complementary system of risk management is in place for the change programme recognising the different nature of risk in developmental activity.

The PCC's risk management framework sets out a clear reporting structure. Strategic risks are reported to the PCC on a quarterly basis at the OPCC Governance Board, following review of operational and strategic risks by the OPCC senior leadership team. The framework is designed to capture risk and make sure that the focus is placed on those risks which are most likely to impact on the PCC's ability to deliver services.

Additional risk registers are maintained by the estates service for all significant capital projects and are reported to the Estates Governance Board.

The strategic risks registers of the PCC and Force are reviewed on a regular basis and are subject to scrutiny by the Joint Audit and Standards Committee as a standing agenda item.

The force has a performance framework which uses a reporting hierarchy to monitor performance across the whole organisation at gold (strategic), silver (service) and (bronze) operational levels. The Force produces a number of performance products in support of the framework Force performance is reviewed as part of the quarterly Force Delivery Group (FDG) meeting.

In conjunction with the Force, the PCC has identified a suite of performance metrics to monitor progress against the commitments in the West Mercia Safer Communities Plan, including the National Priorities for Policing. Existing performance products, including the West Mercia Police Quarterly Performance Report will be used to report against the agreed metrics.

In complying with regulations issued in 2021<sup>9</sup>, the Police and Crime Commissioner is required to provide a statement on the contribution of West Mercia Police to achieving improvements against the national policing priorities. This statement is published on the PCC's website and subject to review in line with requirements set out in the regulations.

The Corporate Governance Framework sets out the parameters for decision making, including the delegations, consents, financial limits for specific matters and for contracts.

The West Mercia Governance Board, chaired by the PCC, meets on a monthly basis to ensure that:

- There is the right vision, mission, objectives, culture and strategy to achieve the organisations' purposes
- There are good, robust processes for formulating, reviewing and adapting them
- The agreed strategies are being implemented and monitored and if there is divergence then appropriate and timely action is taken
- The organisations have the right resources in the right places to deliver the strategies
- There are the right systems of good governance to ensure the organisations and their resources are well directed and controlled.

The PCC chairs a separate PCC Office Governance Board to govern the activity of the OPCC in delivering the West Mercia Safer Communities Plan.

The main operational decision making meeting for the force is the Executive Board, which meets monthly and is chaired by the Chief Constable. The Board receives regular reports on operational performance and the financial position.

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<sup>9</sup> The Elected Local Policing Bodies (Specified Information) (Amendment) Order 2021

An Estates Governance Board has been established to govern the management of the West Mercia estate. The Board meets on a regular basis throughout the year to ensure provision of an efficient and effective estate that supports the delivery of the West Mercia Safer Communities Plan and policing priorities.

A Joint Audit and Standards Committee (JASC) operates in accordance with Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) guidance and the Home Office Financial Management Code of Practice. The JASC's main role is to provide assurance to the PCC and Chief Constable that the corporate internal control and governance framework, including risk management, is operating adequately and effectively. As part of its annual work programme the Committee receives regular updates on internal and external audit, HMICFRS inspections and treasury management. The papers and minutes are published on the PCC's website.

Warwickshire County Council are commissioned by the PCC and Chief Constable to provide internal audit functions, conducting independent and impartial audits of PCC and Police processes.

The PCC and Force manage information in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations, the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Code of Practice on the Management of Police Information. This is overseen by the Audit, Assurance and Compliance Board chaired by the Deputy Chief Constable (who also holds the position of Senior Information Risk Owner for the force). The Force's Information Compliance Unit provides professional advice on information compliance for both the PCC and the Force and ensures that appropriate policies and procedures are in place. The Force's Data Protection Officer (DPO) provides this function for the PCC.

Mandatory GDPR and data management training is in place for all officers, staff and volunteers who have access to information and completion rates are monitored by the Audit, Assurance and Compliance Board.

The PCC and Chief Constable's joint system of internal financial control is based on a framework of regular management information, financial regulations, administrative procedures, management supervision, and a system of delegation and accountability.

The financial management arrangements conform with the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer of the PCC and the Chief Financial Officer of the Chief Constable (March 2014).

#### **4.7 Principle G: Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability.**

The PCC has produced and published an annual report which details performance against objectives for the previous year.

The PCC's decisions and actions are scrutinised by the West Mercia Police and Crime Panel. In 2024-25 this has included:

- approving the precept for 2025-26,
- approving the appointment of a new Chief Constable,
- making recommendations on the annual report
- receiving a quarterly performance report detailing activity in support of the Plan and on force performance.

Information published on the PCC's website is in accordance with the Elected Local Policing Bodies (Specification Information) Order 2011 as amended. The PCC's website is kept up to date with the publication of key decisions, performance reports and details of HMICFRS inspections including the PCC's response to the Home Secretary on the reports. Decisions of significant public interest made by the PCC are published in a standard easily accessible format.

The PCC and Chief Constable have appointed internal and external auditors. Audit recommendations are reported to the Joint Audit and Standards Committee.

Both the PCC and Force are subject to external independent scrutiny and review, through the external audit of their financial statements, systems and management arrangements, and through the inspection of policing performance by HMICFRS. Audit and inspection reports are published by the PCC.

The Force are required to prepare Force Management Statement (FMS) each year by HMICFRS. The FMS is a self-assessment used to inform the business planning cycle of the organisation. The FMS provides an assessment of current and future demand and how the force will adapt to meet the demand including an assessment of risk of service failure and the financial resources required.

## **5. Review of effectiveness**

The PCC and Chief Constable have responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of the governance framework, including;

- The system of internal audit
- The system of internal control

The governance framework is reviewed regularly and influenced by the internal and external audit reviews for its effectiveness by the PCC, Chief Executive and Treasurer. The roles and processes applied in maintaining and reviewing the effectiveness of the governance framework are outlined below.

### **5.1 PCC**

The PCC has overall responsibility for the discharge of all the powers and duties placed on him and has a statutory duty to maintain an efficient and effective police force. The effectiveness, review and maintenance of the governance framework is undertaken by the Joint Audit and Standards Committee who discuss governance issues, referring reports to the PCC when necessary.

## **5.2 West Mercia Police**

The Chief Constable has responsibility for conducting a review of the effectiveness of the governance framework within the Force at least annually. This review is informed by the work of senior officers and managers, the Head of Internal Audit and the Risk and Assurance managers within the Force who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment.

## **5.3 Joint Audit and Standards Committee**

The Joint Audit and Standards Committee receives regular reports on governance issues. This will include the review of the Annual Governance Statement for inclusion in the Annual Statement of Accounts and update reports on progress made in addressing significant governance issues included in it.

The Joint Audit and Standards Committee receives regular reports on policy and procedure, decision making, leadership, culture, people, performance and conduct. This also includes update reports on progress made in addressing any significant issues identified.

## **5.4 Head of Internal Audit**

In maintaining and reviewing the governance framework, the OPCC Treasurer and the force's Director of Commercial Services place reliance on the work undertaken by Internal Audit and in particular, the Head of Internal Audit's independent opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the system of internal control. The internal audit service is compliant with all CIPFA and industry requirements and standards. The Joint Audit and Standards Committee reviews internal audit performance.

The annual audit plan is agreed in advance with regard given to known risks and previous audit findings. The plan is flexed during the year to reflect emerging issues.

## **5.5 External Audit and other external review bodies**

External Audit are an essential element in ensuring public accountability and stewardship of public resources and the corporate governance of the PCC and Chief Constable's services, with their annual governance report particularly providing comment on financial aspects of corporate governance, performance management, value for money and other reports.

**The External Auditors issued an unqualified opinion on both the 2022/23 Statement of Accounts and their overall Value for Money conclusion for both the PCC and the Force in March 2024.**

## **HMICFRS**

During 2024-25, HMICFRS inspectors conducted a PEEL (Police Efficiency, Effectiveness & Legitimacy) inspection in West Mercia. The final report is due to be published in May 2025.

All recommendations and areas for improvement identified in inspection reports are considered by the Force via the Service Improvement Board which is attended by

the PCC's office. All reports are publicly available on the HMICFRS website. In addition, the PCC has a duty to respond to the Home Secretary for each report, outlining local actions being undertaken and providing assurance around governance. These responses can also be found on the PCC website.

## **Police and Crime Panel**

The Police and Crime Panel provides checks and balances in relation to the performance of the PCC and scrutinises the PCC's exercise of his statutory functions. The Panel is independent of the PCC.

## **6. Significant governance issues**

### **6.1 Significant governance issues 2024-25**

In the last AGS no significant governance issues as defined by CIPFA for business as usual activity were identified, however a number of areas were identified to be addressed during 2024-25. These were:

<b>Issues identified</b>	<b>Mitigating activity</b>
Appointment of a new Chief Constable	A competitive process has taken place, and the PCC commended his preferred candidate to the Police and Crime Panel for confirmation in March 2025. The new Chief Constable took up his post on 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2025.
Respond to the outcomes of the HMICFRS SOC inspection report published in May 2024	Managed by Service Improvement Board/Force Delivery Group, oversight provided by Assurance & Accountability process, any issues requiring escalation to West Mercia Governance Board.

### **6.2 Potential significant governance issues 2025-26**

We do not consider there to be significant governance issues in accordance with the CIPFA definition.

We will however closely monitor the following during 2025-26 to ensure that good governance is maintained:

- Respond to the outcomes of the HMICFRS PEEL inspection report due to be published in May 2025.
- Implementation of the Force transformation programme and monitoring of the business realisation and delivery of savings
- Continue to plan and identify opportunities to mitigate the impact of price and demand pressures on the budget for 2025-26 budget which was set in March 2025.

- Continuing to ensure medium to long term financial sustainability, whilst meeting significant investment demands in respect of issues such as estates, neighbourhood policing and digital infrastructure.
- Review of the joint Corporate Governance Framework to ensure its continued fitness for purpose. This is due to be completed in June 2025.

## **7. Conclusion and commitment statement**

We are satisfied that this report is an accurate commentary on the governance arrangements in place in the PCC's Office and the Force and of their effectiveness during this period.

We shall continue to ensure all the necessary steps are taken to scrutinise and implement effective governance during 2025-26 and that the areas identified in 6.2 are suitably monitored.

Signed

John Campion  
Police and Crime Commissioner  
West Mercia

Richard Cooper  
Chief Constable  
West Mercia Police

Paul Benfield  
Treasurer  
West Mercia OPCC

Richard Muirhead  
Director of Commercial Services  
West Mercia Police

Gareth Boulton  
Chief Executive  
West Mercia OPCC