

WEST MERCIA POLICE AND CRIME PANEL

REPORT TO WEST MERCIA POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER FEBRUARY 2018

SCRUTINY OF THE SALE OF REGISTRATION PLATE AB1

Recommendation

1. It is recommended that the West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner has regard and responds to this report and its recommendations following the Panel's Scrutiny of his sale of the rights to registration plate AB1.
2. The Panel thanks the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for providing a report and attending its meeting on 6 February 2018. Following its Scrutiny of the PCC's sale of the rights to registration plate AB1, the Panel submits this report.

CONTEXT

councils in the West Mercia police area, with councillor representatives and also independent members.

5. Police and Crime Commissioners have wide-ranging powers and functions, and an important role for these Panels is to scrutinise or review decisions or other action taken by them. This is part of the public accountability of Commissioners ± candidates are of course accountable to the electorate at the time of elections but Panels have a clear part to play on behalf of the public in relation to the exercise of Commissioners' functions during their term of office.
6. This report relates to a decision by the West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner, Mr John Campion, to sell the rights to numberplate AB1 in Summer 2017. This sale caused a considerable degree of public criticism and comment given its historical connection to the police service and potential value, whether or not such criticism is justified. The Panel had a valid role in the public interest to carry out a Scrutiny of the PCC's sale to help clarify the facts, increase transparency and indeed accountability.
7. The Panel also received a number of complaints concerning the conduct of the Commissioner in selling AB1 i.e. in relation to his decision to sell and the process used. As some of those complaints alleged criminal offences, then as required by law they were referred to the national IPCC (now IOPC) which eventually decided

circumstances surrounding the sale, and the PCC had full opportunity to set out his position and respond to or address any matters of concern at the Panel.

15. The main dates in the sale process as set out in the PCC's report were given as:

15 June 2017 ±Brightwells instructed to market the registration mark
15 June - 17 July ±registration mark marketed
17 July ±offer of £160k made direct to the PCC
18 July ±registration withdrawn from sale with Brightwells
8 August ±contracts signed and sale completed.

There were 3 general areas which the Panel scrutinised:

A - DID THE PCC HAVE THE RIGHT TO SELL AB1?

16. The Panel recognised the strong feeling, particularly amongst those connected with the police service, that the PCC should not be selling off the 'family silver' given the historical connections between AB1 and the office of Chief Constable. There was a suggestion that the PCC either had no right to sell AB1 or his rights to do so were constrained somehow
17. However, the Panel was satisfied that the PCC had the right to sell AB1 as the elected police body for West Mercia. The PCC had exhibited the appropriate DVLA registration form, the AB1 numberplate had clearly been in the possession and use of the relevant police body or service for many years, and there was no convincing evidence before the Panel to show that the PCC had no right to sell the property or that his rights to sell unused police assets were constrained. Whether it was appropriate to sell off the 'family silver' was a matter of judgement for the PCC to make. The panel had no role in preventing or attempting to reverse the sale of AB1.

B- DID THE PCC IMPROPERLY SELL AB1 TO A FRIEND OR CLOSELY CONNECTED PARTY?

18. Concerns were raised that because the purchaser was an ex-Chief Constable of West Mercia the PCC may have been influenced in his business dealings by friendship, and should not have been personally involved in such a sale. The Panel heard from the PCC that he had had a purely professional connection with the purchaser when Chief Constable through the PCC previously being a member of the West Mercia Police Authority.
19. A number of Panel members reported that they had had a similar connection with Chief Constables including the purchaser whilst they served on the predecessor police authority, and the relationship between authority members and chief constables was a professional working one rather than based on friendship, although the chief constable would be well-known to such members. The PCC was clear that the purchaser was not a friend of his. The purchaser had retired from office before the PCC was elected, and their relationship came only from their previous professional connection when the PCC was a member of the police authority and the purchaser was Chief Constable at that time.

accepted that the £160k was significantly higher than the other bids disclosed in the exempt report to the Panel, if they were on the same basis of being VAT inclusive.

Could a higher value have been received?

26. The Panel did have concerns over the mechanism and timescale of the sale process. The PCC stated that £160k had been the highest bid received, and no higher offers were received. However, the Panel had heard direct from a member of the public who stated he had been looking to buy this plate for some time, and had made the selling agents aware of his interest when he saw the advert in the Daily Telegraph on 15 July, which he believed was the first time the plate had been advertised nationally. The agents had informed him that bids were being sought in the region of £250k, but the sale had been withdrawn from them as another purchaser had been found, but he stated his initial offer was £305k and had been told by the agents that the bid had been passed on.
27. The PCC admitted that the agents had indeed sent an email on 19 July saying that a Worcestershire resident intended to start bids from £300k, but he did not consider this was a firm bid. The PCC also indicated that by 19 July he had already agreed the £160k offer which had been received on 17 July.
28. The Panel was very concerned that although it was said there had been regional marketing at some unspecified point after 15 June 2017, the first and only national marketing ived

Conclusion

31. The Panel concluded that it was not satisfied that best value had been obtained for the registration rights to AB1 through the processes followed by the PCC ; there was no criticism of the PCC's integrity but the sale had not been done in the most effective way and