

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE POLICE, FIRE & CRIME PANEL

REPORT TO THE NORTHAMPTONSHIRE POLICE, FIRE & CRIME COMMISSIONER

7TH FEBRUARY 2020

Subject:	Review of the Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner's Proposed Police Precept for 2020/21
Recommendations:	That the Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner: a) Has regard to this report by the Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Panel arising from its review of the proposed Police precept for 2020/21 in accordance with the Police Reform & Social Responsibility Act 2011 Schedule 5 Paragraph 5(2)(a). b) Gives the Panel a response to this report in accordance with the Police Reform & Social Responsibility Act 2011 Schedule 5 Paragraph 5(2)(b).

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The report is intended to set out the results of the review by the Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Panel of the Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner's proposed Police precept for 2020/21.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Police Reform & Social Responsibility Act 2011 specifies that a Police & Crime Commissioner may not issue a precept under Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 until it has been subject to scrutiny by the relevant Police & Crime Panel (or Police, Fire & Crime Panel) according to the process specified in Schedule 5 of the 2011 Act.
- 2.2 Schedule 5 of the 2011 Act, supporting Regulations, and the Rules of Procedure for the Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Panel require:
- a) The Commissioner to notify the Panel of his proposed precept by 1st February of the relevant financial year.
 - b) The Panel to review the proposed precept.
 - c) The Panel to resolve to:
 - i) Support the proposed precept without additional qualification or comment; or
 - ii) Support the proposed precept and make additional recommendations on it; or
 - iii) Veto the proposed precept provided that the Panel makes that decision by the required majority of at least two thirds of Panel members.

d) The Panel to make a report to the Commissioner on the proposed precept, setting out the results of its review, by 8th February of the relevant financial year.

2.3 If the Panel does not veto the proposed precept the Commissioner must:

- a) Have regard to the report made by the Panel
- b) Give the Panel a response to its report and to any recommendations in the report. The response should also be published in a manner determined by the Panel.

2.4 The scrutiny process concludes at this point. The Commissioner may then issue the proposed precept as the precept for the next year, or issue a different precept but only if it would be in accordance with a recommendation made in the Panel's report.

2.5 If the Panel vetoes the proposed precept the Commissioner is required to produce a revised precept, which is then subject to further scrutiny.

3. Review of the Proposed Police Precept

3.1 The Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Panel met in public on 4th February 2020 to review the Commissioner's proposed Police precept and budget for 2020/21.

3.2 The Commissioner presented the proposed precept and budget, which were based on an increase in the precept of 4.08% representing an additional £10 per year in Council Tax at Band D. The development of the budget had been made more challenging by the late announcement of the Police Grant settlement, although the settlement had eventually proved better for Northamptonshire than expected. The Commissioner emphasised that the commitment to increase visible policing was central to the proposed budget. He considered that a £0.20 per week increase in the charge on taxpayers represented value for money for the outcomes that would be delivered and was supported by the response to public consultation. The proposed budget would build on investment over the past two years. The Force would have 1,310 police officers by May 2020, which was a year ahead of the original schedule and would mean officer numbers were higher than in 2010. The national uplift programme would fund a further 57 officers in 2020/21 and was predicted to enable the Force to achieve an establishment of 1,500 officers by the end of 2022/23. The proposed budget for 2020/21 also provided resources to support activity in areas including community safety, burglary and serious and organised crime. At the same time, Northamptonshire had to deal with demands resulting from significant local growth and the operation of the current police funding formula. This increased the importance of crime prevention and of the Force working with Northamptonshire Fire & Rescue Service to maximise the effectiveness of support services. The Commissioner would continue to make the case to government for a new funding formula that gave more recognition to the situation in the county.

3.3 The Panel questioned the Commissioner about current demand on the Force relative to other force areas. The Panel was advised that the position in Northamptonshire compared unfavourably to that in other areas in various respects. The number of police officers per 100,000 population in Northamptonshire was lower than the national average and that of its closest neighbour. The Force had the third highest rate of reported homicides per head of population in the country in 2018/19. Police officer recruitment could be affected by the proximity of the Metropolitan Police, which paid a higher salary to entry-level officers. Taxpayers' contribution to police funding in

Northamptonshire was at the upper end of the scale for the country as a whole, whereas the opposite applied with regard to the level of government funding.

- 3.4 Panel members emphasised the need for investment in the Force to produce clear outcomes that would be apparent to local residents. Increased officer numbers needed to be coupled with efficient and effective operation to deliver the full benefit. Members of the public also saw getting access to the Force as an issue. The Commissioner advised that he set clear expectations for the Chief Constable about the outcomes that would be delivered in return for additional resources and held him to account on behalf of the residents of Northamptonshire. The Deputy Chief Constable subsequently outlined that the Force operated on an outcome-focussed basis. It had carried out a significant amount of work over the past year to analyse risks and demands in Northamptonshire, which fed into strategic business planning and decisions about the prioritisation of resources. The Force would then take a robust, evidence-based approach to determining its performance. Members questioned whether the Force had sufficient expert capability to deal effectively with new challenges such as the growth in cyber crime. The Panel was advised that the Force had gone back to basics in identifying the current skills in its workforce and its future requirements. Reinforcing investigative skills would support all areas of operation. The Force did also have growing capability in specialist areas such as on-line fraud, linked to regional and national activity.
- 3.5 The Panel was further advised that the Force was currently reviewing the operation of its control room. The time taken to pick up calls was decreasing, although the number of calls received was going up. Further attention needed to be given to the operation of the 101 service and to the links between different organisations' contact centres to enable callers to be directed to the right source of support. The Commissioner highlighted that the Force had a clear performance framework for call handling and he was now more confident in its effectiveness than in the past.
- 3.6 The Panel questioned the Commissioner and Chief Finance Officer about financial challenges over the period of the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). Panel members highlighted that funding scenarios modelled during the development of the MTFP demonstrated that even a mid-case scenario could result in a significant funding shortfall by 2024/25. Concern was raised at the principle that precept increases would come to be used as the means of achieving a balance: the Commissioner needed to have an appropriate contingency plan. The Panel was advised that there should be a clearer picture of the longer term financial position following the Comprehensive Spending Review in summer 2020. The MTFP included sufficient reserves to meet contingencies through 2022/23 and the Commissioner was satisfied with the position up to that point. Work on the later years of the MTFP would continue as the financial envelope became clearer. The Panel was advised that it was intended to build up general reserves to £5 million and then sustain them at this level. The Commissioner would have around £16 million in other reserves by the end of 2020/21. These would be considered for use in supporting investment opportunities or mitigating future risks and demands.
- 3.7 The Panel considered its potential conclusions on the Commissioner's proposed precept and budget for 2020/21. Panel members recognised the challenges resulting from the late availability of the Police Grant settlement and the fact that it only covered the year ahead. Panel members gave the view that the proposed increase represented a relatively small sum per person and would be used to support further positive progress

by the Force. Investment in initiatives such as Operation Lily that addressed crime and anti-social behaviour and supported wider community safety was welcomed. Panel members also encouraged the Commissioner to extend joint working on support services beyond just the Force and Northamptonshire Fire & Rescue Service, for example by looking at opportunities to maximise the use of publicly-owned assets in the county.

3.8 Panel members commented that the responses to consultation on the proposed precept indicated that Northamptonshire residents saw that policing could not be done without adequate resources. At the same time, it was highlighted that only 43% of consultees had supported an increase in the precept of £10 or more. The need for an increase above the rate of earnings growth might also be questioned in light of the additional funding recently announced by the government. The Commissioner emphasised that the proposed precept represented his judgement about the best course of action in the current circumstances. It took account of factors including the resources provided to the Force under the current funding formula; the government’s position on the use of the precept flexibility given for 2020/21; and the fact that there was no certainty about the funding envelope for future years. The Force was in a better position than in the past but needed to continue to improve its performance and for this to be reflected in public perceptions. Northamptonshire residents would ultimately give their view on the Commissioner’s judgement about the precept at the forthcoming election.

Outcome of the Review

3.9 At the conclusion of discussion the Panel ultimately resolved unanimously:

To support the Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner’s proposed Police precept for 2020/21.

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Background Papers:	Police Reform & Social Responsibility Act 2011 The Police & Crime Panels (Precepts and Chief Constable Appointments) Regulations 2012 Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Panel Rules of Procedure