

7 February 2018

Dear Mr Seccombe,

Warwickshire Policing Precept 2018/19

Thank you for presenting your budget proposals to the meeting of the Police and Crime Panel on 1st February 2018, and for answering the broad ranging questions put to you by the Panel. The draft minutes of that meeting are enclosed.

I write to confirm that the Panel supports your proposal of a 6.25% increase in the local policing precept for the 2018/19 financial year. The Panel has also agreed to make a number of recommendations concerning:

- Fairer funding from Central Government
- Definitions of police officer numbers
- The approach to public consultation

Fairer Funding from Central Government

The Panel welcomed the lifting of the national pay cap which enabled a well-deserved pay rise for the Force. However, the flat cash settlement from Central Government, alongside price and pay inflation, has created significant budgetary pressures. The Panel are mindful that your precept decision is being taken within a context of increasing levels of reported crime both locally and nationally, and members recognise that the public have overwhelmingly called for the protection of frontline policing.

Whilst the Panel welcomes the recent Home Office announcement that allows greater flexibility in the level of precept set by the Commissioner, members note that in order to retain current levels of policing, the burden of funding is falling directly onto the council tax payers of Warwickshire. Therefore, the Panel recommends that:

- 1. The Commissioner puts a strong case to Government to press for fairer funding for Warwickshire Police. The Panel would welcome an update on this in due course.**

In previous years the Panel has expressed concern about the high level of reserves. We are pleased to note that you are taking a prudent approach to funding the budget gap by increasing the use of reserves over the medium term. Accordingly, the Panel recommends that:

- 2. The Commissioner continues to keep the use of reserves under close review, alongside the delivery of the Force's savings targets, to ensure there is capacity to cope with future risks and funding instability.**

Definition of Police Officer Numbers

Panel members felt strongly that the public consultation carried out between 22 December 2017 and 19 January 2018 was not crystal clear in explaining the impact of each budget option on police officer numbers. The Panel believe that a lack of clarity could have had an impact on the public's understanding of these numbers. Therefore, the Panel recommends that:

- 3. The Commissioner, in responding to this letter, provides written detail on the number of officers that the Force has, and will have, following the precept increase. This should be accompanied by a narrative to explain how Police Officer numbers are defined.**
- 4. The Commissioner publishes and promotes his response to this letter on his webpage by the 1st March 2018.**
- 5. In future years, where Police Officer numbers feature in precept consultations, a clear explanation of the model used to define officer numbers is included.**

Public Consultation

The Panel acknowledges that the Budget Consultation received a statistically significant 1500 responses, and we note that this is the highest response rate for a consultation to date. With over 70% of respondents selecting the £12 increase option, there was a clear indication that the majority were in favour of the maximum rise. We also note that the consultation timeframe was shorter than may have been wished, due to the late release of the Provisional Finance Settlement from Central Government.

At the meeting on 1 February 2018, the Panel raised a series of questions concerning your approach to public consultation. These questions sought to explore how you understood the demographic of your respondents, and highlighted that some groups may be under or overrepresented in your survey. The survey responses showed an overrepresentation from your own district area compared to the north of the county, but we recognise that steps were taken to obtain responses from across Warwickshire.

The Panel's research revealed that some other Commissioners had undertaken a more detailed consultation to acquire information on respondent's age, gender and ethnic origin, for example. By gathering this information, we believe that you would gain a clearer understanding of those groups who are underrepresented, and can take action to remedy this. In light of this, the Panel recommends that:

- 6. In future years, a proactive and targeted approach is taken to engaging with residents in the north of the county, and from demographic groups that may currently be underrepresented.**
- 7. Consideration is given to ways of recording more details about respondents, whilst balancing the value in keeping the survey quick to complete.**

The Panel agrees it would enhance transparency for the consultation responses to be published on your website, once any personal identifying features have been removed. We can link to this information from our website: www.warwickshire.gov.uk/policeandcrimepanel. At our next meeting on 19th March 2018, the Panel will be reviewing your Consultation and Engagement Strategy which offers a constructive opportunity to explore this topic further.

Conclusion

The Panel would like to record its thanks for the quality of information they have received, and commend the open and transparent approach that your office and Warwickshire Police have taken in setting the budget.

The Panel also wishes to record its interest in the Force's use of restorative justice and the police estate. These issues will feature in the Panel's work programme over the coming year.

On behalf of the Panel, I trust that you will reflect on the recommendations set out in this letter, and look forward to your written response.

Yours Sincerely
Councillor Nicola Davies
Warwickshire Police and Crime Panel Chair