

Warwickshire Police and Crime Panel

Monday 6 February 2023

Minutes

Attendance

Panel Members

Councillor Christopher Kettle (Chair) (Stratford-on-Avon District Council)
Councillor Barbara Brown (Vice Chair) (Warwickshire County Council)
Mr Andrew Davies (Independent Member)
Mr Andy Davis (Independent Member)
Councillor Jenny Fradgley (Warwickshire County Council)
Councillor Julian Gutteridge (Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council)
Councillor John Holland (Warwickshire County Council)
Councillor Dave Humphreys (Warwickshire County Council)
Councillor Ray Jarvis (North Warwickshire Borough Council)
Councillor Bhagwant Singh Pandher (Warwickshire County Council)
Councillor Derek Poole (Rugby Borough Council)

Officers

John Cole, Senior Democratic Services Officer
Caroline Gutteridge, Delivery Lead – Commercial and Regulatory
Virginia Rennie, Strategy and Commissioning Manager (Strategic Finance)

Others Present

Sara Ansell, Treasurer, OPCC
Emma Daniell, Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner
Andrew Heath, Warwickshire Joint Audit and Standards Committee
Polly Reed, Chief Executive, OPCC
Philip Seccombe, Warwickshire Police and Crime Commissioner

1. General

(1) Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Ian Davison and Councillor Clare Golby.

Councillor Julian Gutteridge (Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council) was present as a substitute for Councillor Golby.

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

There was none.

(3) Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 November 2022 be confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

There were no matters arising.

(4) Public Speaking

There was none.

2. Budget 2023/2024

The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) presented his proposed Budget for Warwickshire Police including a proposed increase of £14.00 (5.3%) in the local policing precept for an average Band D property (and equivalent percentage increase for other bands) for the 2023/24 financial year.

The Commissioner emphasised that the responsibility to formulate an annual budget for Warwickshire Police was treated with seriousness and considerable research had been undertaken prior to finalising the Budget. He stated that the Budget was a financial blueprint not just for policing, but for many initiatives that made a significant contribution to community safety, crime reduction, and support for victims of crime across Warwickshire.

The Commissioner reported that considerable engagement with the public, including the 'Your Police, Your Views' consultation, had been undertaken prior to setting the Budget. The survey found that there was majority support for an increase in the precept, provided it would lead to tangible benefits to policing. Engagement with the public had shown that continued improvements in the accessibility, visibility, and quality of policing were priorities for residents. He accepted that many households faced financial pressures and that any increase in the precept presented difficulties. However, policing had also been impacted by current economic circumstances, including rising costs for fuel, energy, and goods and services as well as the need to ensure fair wage increases for those working for Warwickshire Police to contend with the cost of living.

The Commissioner stated that, whilst there had been a welcomed increase in central government funding for 2023/24, this alone would not provide the level of funding required to protect services. For this reason, efficiency savings of approximately £1m would be brought forward. These savings could be achieved by optimising recent investment in ICT systems without putting jobs at risk. He advised that unavoidable cost pressures meant that, even to stand still, an increased budget was required. This left little alternative other than to increase the precept. However, he emphasised that in doing so, it would be necessary to demonstrate that every penny provided by residents delivered a tangible improvement to police services.

The Commissioner stated that his Budget sought to deliver against public priorities for policing, providing the Chief Constable with the resources to:

- Further expand policing – supported by the introduction of 10 additional police officers deployed within local policing to improve police visibility.
- Increase capacity within the Control Room by the addition of 15 extra call handlers – this would improve the public’s experience of contacting Warwickshire Police and help to reduce call waiting times.
- Provide an improved service to the public by establishing customer resolution centres at the main police stations of Leamington, Nuneaton, Rugby, and Stratford (with extended opening hours, seven days a week).
- Strengthen Safer Neighbourhood Teams (SNTs) by proactive recruitment to vacancies of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) leading to improved stability within teams.
- Recruit more Special Constables – increasing the level of support provided to officers.
- Implement a new geographically-based policing model with command centres in the north, east, and south of the County, each overseen by a Chief Inspector, providing a direct communication link between the Force and local communities.
- Introduce a new Patrol Investigations Unit with responsibility for undertaking investigations into higher volume crimes, delivering better outcomes for victims. This would also enable existing patrol teams to focus on responding to incidents.

The Commissioner advised that the Budget would also provide for increased grants, with newly-commissioned services for victims of sexual abuse and violence, child exploitation, restorative justice, and victims of modern slavery and human trafficking. These services would provide dedicated support to victims throughout the criminal justice process, helping them to recover from the effects of crime.

The Commissioner emphasised that the proposed increase in the precept of 5.3% was considerably lower than the rate of inflation and was anticipated to be among the lowest increases in the precept across England and Wales. It meant that an average Band D household would pay an additional 27p per week on their council tax as a contribution to local policing services. However, most households in Warwickshire fell within council tax bands A to C and would pay proportionately less. He expressed his view that the proposed Budget represented value for money to taxpayers. It would help to secure a 24/7 policing response and lead to enhanced community safety.

In conclusion, the Commissioner stated that the argument to opt for the maximum possible rise in the precept had been presented to him. However, he did not consider that this would be justifiable to local taxpayers. He emphasised that he had consistently sought to limit increases to the precept to the lowest possible level whilst ensuring that the public received the best possible service. He sought the Panel’s support for the proposals presented.

Councillor Holland highlighted that the findings of His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) following its inspection of Warwickshire Police had shown that improvements were required; these would inevitably require some investment. He highlighted that the population of Warwickshire was growing, meaning that a proportionate increase in the number of police officers was required beyond the targeted headcount of 1100 officers. Demand on the Force had also increased – cybercrime was a growing problem which entailed a significant cost, as did child sexual exploitation. In recognition of these demands, he suggested that there was a strong case for a higher increase in the precept. However, he expressed support for the PCC’s proposals.

The Commissioner advised that nationally, most PCCs had opted to increase the precept to its maximum level. He stated that it was important to take account of cost-of-living pressures faced by householders and highlighted the measures in place to offer support to those experiencing financial difficulties. In respect of officer numbers, he advised that the proposed additional 10 police officers came at a cost of approximately £500,000. He underlined his aspiration for officer numbers to continue to increase.

Andy Davis highlighted that HMICFRS had identified 'responding to the public' as an area requiring improvement. He praised the intention to increase the number of call handlers. However, he highlighted the current pressures affecting the labour market and queried how it was proposed to recruit to these posts as well as to existing staffing vacancies.

The Commissioner acknowledged that recruitment of staff presented challenges. However, there had been a reasonably good response to recent recruitment campaigns. He highlighted that it was common for Control Room staff to decide to train to become police officers or PCSOs, particularly during a period of intensive officer recruitment. This had led to a perpetuation of staff vacancies. The salaries on offer were reasonably competitive. Progress would be monitored on an ongoing basis.

In response to Andrew Davies, the Commissioner advised that 80% of the Budget was dedicated to officer and staffing costs. Savings requirements would be derived from the remaining 20%. He reported that the Force had already identified a means to achieve £1m in efficiency savings resulting from recent investment in ICT. Additional savings were targeted but it was not proposed to reduce the service provided by the Force; savings would come from efficiencies in ways of working.

Andrew Davies acknowledged the importance of efficiency savings within the proposed Budget. However, he sought clarification from the Commissioner of how the Force had become more efficient following organisational changes and recent investment in ICT.

The Commissioner highlighted the increased levels of demand on Warwickshire Police; record numbers of calls were now being received. He stated that the Empower Programme would restructure the organisation in response to current demands. There was scope for continued savings; an annual saving of £1m was targeted in each of the next three years. This would be challenging but he would hold the Force to account for delivery of these savings. Measures were in place to support individuals within the organisation to work more efficiently, including improved training, better leadership, and an emphasis on teamwork.

The Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner (DPCC) highlighted the efficiencies that would be achieved through introduction of the Patrol Investigations Unit. This would free up response officers to attend to 999 incidents without being diverted to attend to routine investigations.

Andrew Davies stated that the focus on improved outcomes was positive. It was important to ensure that the benefits of increased investment were visible to the public. Clarity on the anticipated benefits of the Budget was required alongside measures to monitor the Force's progress in achieving the specific improvements outlined by the PCC. He asked that the Commissioner provide a regular progress update to the Panel.

Councillor Fradgley also recommended that progress in achieving the specific improvements identified within the Budget be closely monitored over the coming year with regular feedback to the Panel by the Commissioner.

The Commissioner stated that he intended to monitor delivery of the Budget closely and would provide regular updates to the Panel throughout the year ahead.

In response to Councillor Poole, the Commissioner advised that the Budget had been devised in response to public priorities for policing. Engagement had been undertaken seeking a view from residents, businesses, town and parish councils, and MPs across Warwickshire. He stated that the introduction of three regional command centres in the north, east, and south of the County would improve the responsiveness of the Force to local issues. It was hoped that borough and district councillors would establish good channels of communication with their regional command to raise specific concerns and recommend areas for improvement.

Councillor Jarvis emphasised the importance of ensuring that residents of North Warwickshire Borough would see a visible improvement to policing services as an outcome of the increased precept. He highlighted the burden that was placed on the Operations Communication Centre by Warwickshire Police's responsibility to periodically accept calls on behalf of neighbouring forces that were struggling to manage demand. He queried whether the benefits of increasing the number of call handlers would be realised whilst this arrangement remained in place.

In response, the Commissioner affirmed his long-term aspiration for a control response unit to be established in Atherstone, such as the one introduced at Coleshill. He emphasised that equal priority was given to calls from North Warwickshire Borough, enabling a prompt response by the Force.

In respect of the effect of overspill of emergency calls from other policing areas, the Commissioner advised that this was an established safeguard in instances where mutual support was required between forces. The Force stood to benefit from this arrangement should a major incident occur in Warwickshire. The impact of demand from other forces was monitored and analysis would be undertaken to determine what percentage of calls had come from other policing areas. He emphasised that the new Control Room at Stuart Ross House was a modern facility which would lead to efficiencies. However, should a major incident occur in a neighbouring policing area, Warwickshire Police had a duty to provide support.

In response to Councillor Gutteridge, the Commissioner advised that he was working alongside other PCCs to seek an amendment to a parliamentary bill which, if successful, would enable emergency services to be statutory beneficiaries of S106 funding. Nationally, Warwickshire Police had been one of the most successful police forces in obtaining S106 contributions, for example, a £600,000 contribution had recently been secured in Stratford-on-Avon District. He emphasised that he would continue to hold the Force to account to ensure that opportunities to benefit from S106 funding would not be overlooked.

The Chair commented that the information provided to the Panel's Budget Working Group on 30 January 2023 suggested that significant spending on officer pay was anticipated during the final three months of the 2022/23 financial year. He sought the PCC's assurance that payroll costs would not exceed budgeted amounts in 2023/24.

The Commissioner advised that, at the close of the financial year, the Force was on course for an underspend of approximately £1.6m due to increased income and staff vacancies. Expenditure for officer pay was on course as predicted.

Sara Ansell (Treasurer, OPCC) advised that accounts were calculated using a forecast outturn for budget monitoring. The pay-related budget in 2022/23 was £93.966m. The forecast outturn across all budget heads (for officer, PCSO, and staff pay as well as overtime costs) was £91.773m; a net underspend of £2.1m. The figures supplied to the Budget Working Group were based on the pro-rata budget and committed and actual expenditure as at a specific point in time. There were some timing anomalies; however, she expressed confidence that the forecast outturn figures provided a reliable indicator of projected expenditure.

The Chair highlighted the increased reliance on income from the Commercial Vetting Service and Road Safety Unit (RSU) to support core activities in 2023/24. He sought the Commissioner's assurance that the projected increases in income from the Vetting Service and RSU were achievable.

The Commissioner advised that the Commercial Vetting Service provided a valuable source of income which relieved pressure on local taxpayers. In recent years, the Force had commercialised and upscaled the Vetting Service, increasing income levels whilst containing costs through greater productivity and efficiency. This had been made possible by a comprehensive review of governance arrangements and staffing structures. He expressed confidence that the Force's Finance Team had taken a prudent, proportionate view of projected vetting income.

The Commissioner advised that the RSU had recently relocated from rented premises to a new base at Rugby Police Station. This had entailed some cost; however, it would lead to improved long-term efficiencies and savings. Income from the RSU provided a valuable surplus, enabling a stronger focus on road safety initiatives. It was likely that expenditure on road safety would be more regularised in 2023/24 following recent investment in this area.

The Chair highlighted the proposed levels of borrowing within the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) as well as projected transfers from reserves over the next five years. He sought the Commissioner's assurance that the extent of borrowing would not place an undue burden on future taxpayers, and that reserves would be adequate to respond to any unforeseen events.

The Commissioner stated that it had been necessary to make a judgement in respect of how capital projects should be financed. There was no longer a capital grant from central government, therefore, it was necessary to balance these costs between current and future taxpayers. He emphasised that it was future taxpayers who would receive the maximum benefit from capital expenditure. He stated his view that £15m was an excessive amount to hold in reserves. In accordance with best practice advocated by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), this amount would be reduced.

Sara Ansell advised that the proposed level of borrowing had been tested through prudential indicators which had found it to be affordable. However, it was recognised that borrowing could be reduced wherever possible using alternative financial means. A balanced view had been taken to hold reserves at an adequate level to manage risk whilst enabling money to be used to support Warwickshire Police to become a more efficient organisation. This approach would lead to increased longer-term savings. She advised that surpluses from the Commercial Vetting Service

would make it possible for capital programmes to be partly financed by revenue contributions. However, should the projected income fail to materialise, it would be possible to dial down the revenue contribution to capital.

In response to Councillor Humphreys, the Commissioner advised that levels of borrowing by the Force were relatively low. He expressed confidence that it would be possible to manage borrowing according to the requirements of the organisation. In common with most local authorities, the Force borrowed exclusively from the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB). He stated that, instinctively, he was disinclined to borrow. However, there were circumstances when it made good sense to do so – for example, to finance capital assets that could be amortised over a period of many years.

In response to Andy Davis, the Commissioner advised that the end of January 2023, Warwickshire Police had reached a total of 1074 officers. A February intake of 38 officers was scheduled, alongside an intake of 24 officers in March. Factoring in the number of officers likely to leave the organisation, the projected figure at the end of March 2023 was 1119. Based on the government incentive of an additional £20,000 for each officer above the threshold of 1100, the Force could potentially receive an extra £380,000.

Polly Reed (Chief Executive, OPCC) advised that the conditions of the Uplift Grant had not yet been outlined by the Home Office. It was likely that an officer headcount of 1100 would need to be maintained for the duration of 2023/24 to qualify for additional grant funding. It was not yet clear how this would be monitored. Recent communications suggested that the Force would be measured in September 2023 and March 2024 to determine whether officer numbers remained at the required level. However, the nature of the financial penalty should numbers fall below 1100 remained unclear. She stated that the primary purpose of the proposed additional 10 officers was to support policing in Warwickshire. However, it would also allow the Force to remain ahead of the uplift target, providing a buffer should numbers fall unexpectedly. Recruitment intakes would be scheduled strategically throughout the year to minimise the likelihood of officer numbers falling below 1100.

Councillor Brown expressed support for the prioritisation within the Budget of visible policing and measures to improve the responsiveness of the Force. She emphasised that members would be asked to justify the increased precept to local taxpayers.

Councillor Poole highlighted current economic pressures faced by residents and stated that he did not support the proposed increase in the precept.

Andrew Davies stated that the proposed increase in the precept presented some concerns. He recognised the need to continue to invest in police services, particularly during a period of rising costs. He underlined the importance of clearly setting out the tangible benefits of the Budget to provide assurance to residents. He stated that, on balance, he was supportive of the proposed precept.

Andy Davis agreed that, on balance, he was supportive of the proposed precept. He highlighted the implications of the National Policing Settlement for 2023/24 which continued the trend of shifting the burden of funding for police services from the national to the local taxpayer.

Councillor Jarvis highlighted the difficulties of presenting an argument to residents to justify the increased precept, stating that he did not support the proposal.

Councillor Fradgley highlighted the difficult choices presented by current economic circumstances. Residents were contending with rising costs-of-living; however, policing was also impacted by financial pressures. She underlined the importance of delivering on what was proposed. This would be critical to assuage public concerns relating to the need to increase the precept.

The Chair highlighted the current economic pressures and the impact these had across the public sector. In recognition of these challenges, there was a need to increase the precept to enable the Force to provide an effective service. However, he expressed concerns relating to the longer-term funding structure, including an increased reliance on income from the Commercial Vetting Service to support core activity. He stated that there were areas of activity where it would have been helpful to have received a more detailed overview; for example, around payroll expenditure. On balance, he supported the proposed precept.

Councillor Poole requested a recorded vote. This was seconded by Councillor Brown and supported by the Panel.

The Chair called a recorded vote to determine support for the proposed precept. The results were:

Votes for:

Councillor Christopher Kettle, Councillor Barbara Brown, Andrew Davies, Andy Davis, Councillor Jenny Fradgley, Councillor Julian Gutteridge, Councillor John Holland, Councillor Dave Humphreys, and Councillor Bhagwant Singh Pandher.

Votes against:

Councillor Ray Jarvis.

Abstentions:

Councillor Derek Poole.

Resolved:

That the Police and Crime Panel accepts the Police and Crime Commissioner's Budget and precept proposal for 2023/24.

The Police and Crime Panel's letter to the Police and Crime Commissioner is appended to these minutes, alongside the response from the Commissioner.

3. Issues Raised by Community Safety Partnerships

No issues were raised by the CSPs.

4. Work Programme

The Panel noted the Work Programme. It was resolved that the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) item would be delegated to the Planning and Performance Working Group for future consideration.

5. Dates of Meetings

The Panel noted the dates of the future meetings.

6. Any Urgent Items

There was none.

7. Reports Containing Confidential or Exempt Information

Resolved:

That members of the public be excluded from the meeting for the items mentioned below on the grounds that their presence would involve the disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

8. Complaints

It was confirmed that no complaints had been received since the last meeting.

The meeting rose at 16:09.

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Chair

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Warwickshire Police and Crime Panel Chair
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Mr Philip Seccombe
Warwickshire Police and Crime Commissioner
3 Northgate Street,
Warwick
CV34 4SP

By email: philip.seccombe@warwickshire.police.uk
cc: Polly Reed (OPCC): polly.reed@warwickshire.police.uk

8 February 2023

Dear Mr Seccombe,

Warwickshire Policing Precept 2023/2024

Thank you for presenting your budget proposals to the meeting of the Police and Crime Panel on 6 February 2023, and for addressing the broad range of questions posed by Panel members.

I write to confirm that a majority of the members of the Panel present at the meeting voted to support your proposal of an increase of £14.00 (5.3%) in the local policing precept for an average Band D property (and equivalent percentage increase for other bands) for the 2023/24 financial year.

In doing so, the Panel recognised the difficult choices presented by current economic circumstances, including the effects of rising inflation, escalating energy prices, and pressure on household finances. The Panel also noted the impact of economic pressures on police finances, including the need to ensure fair wage increases for those working for Warwickshire Police to contend with the cost of living.

The Panel noted the proposed improvements to police services supported by the Budget, including increased numbers of police officers and PCSOs, better visibility of neighbourhood policing, and investment in customer service and call handling processes.

Whilst supporting the proposed precept, the Panel recommended that progress in achieving the specific improvements identified in the Budget is closely monitored over the next year. Members emphasised the importance of ensuring that the practical

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outcomes of spending in 2023/24 are realised, alongside the proposed efficiencies resulting from the Empower Programme and ongoing investment in ICT systems. The Panel will take a keen interest in your challenge of the Chief Constable and is grateful of your offer to provide regular updates throughout the year of the delivery of tangible benefits conferred by the Budget.

The Panel recognised the higher degree of financial risk in the 2023/24 Budget from the need to maintain the police officer numbers to be eligible for the maximum grant from the Government, and the increased reliance on income from the Commercial Vetting Service to support core activity. The Panel looks forward to supporting you in efforts to maximise sustainable levels of income coming into Warwickshire for investment in support of policing across all our communities.

Whilst the Panel recognises that its role is strategic, considering whether to accept or veto your budget proposals requires a level of understanding of the evidence and assumptions used in the preparation of that budget.

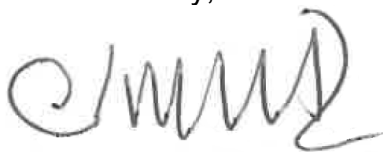
There were areas of activity where the Panel felt it would have been helpful to have a more detailed understanding of the actual expenditures incurred during the year to date and how the forecast was prepared as a basis for the following year's budget.

I look forward to working closely with you and your team to consider how we might better understand the detail behind such issues and enhance the support that the Panel can provide.

Our shared aim is an effective and fiscally sustainable police service for all the residents and communities of Warwickshire, and the Panel looks forward to supporting you in taking this agenda forward over the coming year.

A copy of the minutes of the meeting of 6 February will be forwarded to you shortly.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Kettle', written in a cursive style.

Councillor Christopher Kettle
Warwickshire Police and Crime Panel Chair



16 February 2023

Cllr Christopher Kettle
Chair of the Warwickshire Police and Crime Panel

By email via john.cole@warwickshire.gov.uk

Subject: Warwickshire Policing Precept 2023/2024

Dear Councillor Kettle,

Thank you for your letter of 8 February 2023, which confirmed the decision of the Police and Crime Panel meeting on 6 February 2023 to support the proposed budget for policing for 2023/2024. This letter forms our response under the Police and Crime Panels (Precepts and Chief Constable Appointments) Regulations 2012.

I was grateful to receive majority support of the Panel for the budget and for your recognition of the difficult choices the current economic circumstances presented.

I note the areas of priority that you have outlined to be of interest to you over the coming year and particular the importance on ensuring that the practical outcomes of spending in 2023/24 are realised, alongside the proposed efficiencies resulting from the Empower Programme and ongoing investment in ICT systems. I will keep the panel regularly updated on the progress towards achieving these and can confirm that they will feature in my programme of holding to account with the Chief Constable.

I also welcome the Panel's support of my efforts to maximise sustainable levels of income for policing in Warwickshire and for sharing the aim of securing an effective and fiscally sustainable police service for all the residents and communities of Warwickshire.

Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, 3 Northgate Street, Warwick, CV34 4SP

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I hope that we can work together constructively in coming months,

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Philip Seccombe". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'P' and 'S'.

Philip Seccombe

Police and Crime Commissioner