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Mr Philip Seccombe
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cc: Polly Reed (OPCC) polly.reed@warwickshire.police.uk

3 February 2022

Dear Mr Seccombe

Warwickshire Policing Precept 2022/23

Thank you for presenting your budget proposals to the meeting of the Police and Crime Panel on 27 January 2022, and for addressing the broad ranging questions posed by Panel members.

I write to confirm that a majority of over two-thirds of the membership of the Panel voted to veto your proposal of an increase of £9.99 per annum (3.95%) in the local policing precept for Band D properties (and equivalent percentage increase for other bands) in the 2022/23 financial year.

The Panel resolved that the proposed increase was too high.

At the meeting, the Panel was mindful that its decision was taken in the context of increasing financial pressures experienced by many householders due to rising inflation, energy prices, costs of living, and the introduction of increased National Insurance contributions from April 2022.

The Panel recognises the challenges associated with preparing a balanced budget and the need to deliver resilient police services. However, it was resolved that continued increase of the policing precept, year-on-year, placed an undue burden on residents. There is now an opportunity to review the precept amount to secure a fairer balance between the needs of policing and affordability for taxpayers.

Needs Based Precept

At the meeting on 27 January, the Panel expressed concern that the information provided did not specifically outline how additional precept funding would be utilised. Conversely, there was limited explanation of the services which would need to be downgraded or deferred if the precept was not agreed. Information presented at the meeting provided an outline of whole budget proposals but failed to adequately demonstrate the areas where additional funding would have a positive impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of our policing service, or how this would be monitored. By way of explanation, Section 7 of the Budget Report¹ outlines 'anticipated benefits delivered from this budget'; however, these are broad strategic intentions drawn from the Police and Crime Plan 2021-25, rather than specific costed interventions.

Effectiveness and Efficiency

The Panel recognises the importance of effective and efficient policing. At the meeting, members drew attention to the delivery of the Evolve Programme, including substantial investment in ICT infrastructure. It is the Panel's view that taxpayers' interests can be best served by utilising existing resources to optimal efficiency alongside investment. The Panel felt that there was a lack of information about how this will improve efficiency and costs savings that will feed through into the budget.

At the meeting, the Panel was interested to hear that the Chief Constable proposed to undertake an Operational Review of Warwickshire Police in 2022. The Panel would be pleased to support this initiative.

Consultation Processes

At the meeting, attention was given to the limited response to the 'Your Police, Your Views' consultation from residents; of the approximate 567,000 residents of Warwickshire, only 839 had responded. This, coupled with the severely limited response from residents in the north of the County, led members to question the representativeness of the public consultation findings.

The Panel's view is that the proposed precept does not adequately reflect the findings of the Consultation. The presentation to the Panel² showed that 13% of respondents indicated that they "could afford a larger increase"; this was considerably outweighed by the 39% of responses expressing the view that "I do not feel that any increase would be affordable to me". This was the majority view held in North Warwickshire, Nuneaton & Bedworth, Stratford-on-Avon, and Warwick.

¹ OPCC (24 January 2022), *Warwickshire Budget 2022-23 and Medium Term Financial Plan 2022/23 – 2026/27, Report of the Treasurer, Director of Finance, Chief Executive and Chief Constable*, p. 15

² OPCC (January 2022), *Budget Consultation Results – Your Police, Your Views 2022-23*, p. 7

Furthermore, the Panel was concerned that the effect of a moderate rise had not been adequately communicated to those participating in the survey. It is considered that an explanation of the implications for service delivery of a rise of £5 per year for a Band D property (specifically, which services would be downgraded or deferred) would have enabled a more informed response.

In recognition of the low response rate from Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough, and the high proportion of those consulted who indicated support for a precept freeze; I would urge you to consider implementation of a precept that takes account of the fiscal challenges faced by householders.

The Panel recognises the challenging timescale to coordinate a public consultation. It is a subject which attracted the Panel's attention at meetings previously held to consider the precept: in February 2020, the Panel observed that the response rate had been low. At that meeting, I urged the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner to consider making use of alternative strategies to improve response rates and encourage wider participation.

In February 2018, the Panel recommended that you consider approaches to future consultations to enable collection of "more detailed information on the demographic of those who respond and take active steps to engage with those groups who are underrepresented".

The Panel thanks you for your commitment to consider initiating future consultations earlier in the year by means of a phased approach to seek a view from residents in advance of details of the government settlement being made available. The Panel continues to express an interest in supporting your Office to improve response rates that are representative of the geographic and demographic composition of Warwickshire.

Conclusions:

An increased council tax burden will inevitably contribute to existing pressures on households, and members were required to balance this against the Constabulary's understandable desire to consolidate the considerable progress made to establish a resilient, standalone Police Force for Warwickshire, but we feel a business case has not been set out to demonstrate the need for a precept increase of 3.95%.

The Panel invites you to look again at your proposed Precept figure and recommends a reduced amount.

Next Steps:

Following receipt of this report, the Regulations state that:

- Where the Panel vetoes the precept, the PCC is to have regard to and respond to the Panel's report, and publish a response, including the revised precept, by 15 February;
- The Panel, on receipt of a response from the PCC giving notice of the revised precept, is to review the revised precept at a public Panel meeting and make a second report to the PCC by 22 February;
- The PCC is to have regard to and respond to the Panel's second report and publish a response by 1 March.

A meeting of the Panel has been scheduled at 2pm on 10 February 2022 at Shire Hall, Warwick. It would be helpful to know if we will have your revised Precept Report by this date. The Panel requests your presence at this meeting for the purpose of responding to questions in relation to the revised precept and would be very grateful if you could confirm your attendance.

A copy of the minutes of the meeting of 27 January 2022 will be forwarded to you shortly.

Yours sincerely,



Councillor David Reilly
Warwickshire Police and Crime Panel Chair