

**POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER FOR WEST YORKSHIRE**

**RESPONSE TO THE POLICE AND CRIME PANEL**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 On 30th January I notified the Police and Crime Panel for West Yorkshire of my proposed precept for 2014/15. The Panel formally considered the proposal on 7th February, and, as it is required to do by law, has issued me with a report on that proposal.

1.2 The delay in the government announcing the referendum principles has made budget planning even more difficult this year. In the absence of firm criteria and based upon the position in 2013/14 and earlier indications by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the Home Office, three options had been considered:

1) Accepting the Government’s offer of a precept freeze grant equivalent to a 1% increase in council tax.

2) Increasing the council tax by the general referendum limit of 1.99%.

3) Increasing the council tax by the specific referendum limit for West Yorkshire of £5 at Band D, which would have been equivalent to 3.69%. It is now clear that this is not an option under the criteria announced by the DCLG on 5 February 2014.

1.3 Sustaining the recruitment of police officers to protect the frontline is a key priority for me, and one which requires a sustainable source of revenue funding. At the time of setting the budget in 2013/14, the financial and organisational position dictated that the only means of allowing for any police officer recruitment was to increase the police council tax by the £5 at Band D allowed for by the government for those PCCs falling into the lowest 25%. This was a difficult decision given the economic climate and on balance I would have been unable to agree a similar increase, if allowed, in 2014/15.

1.4 I am conscious of the current level of the police council tax which is the third lowest in England and Wales, the current difficult economic climate facing the public and the longer term requirement to make significant additional savings in the budget. To accept the offer of council tax freeze grant, which is time limited, is a short term solution but one which in my view endangers the future financial health and viability of the police service in West Yorkshire. This is not a sustainable option and, having committed to keep communities safer and feeling safer in my Police and Crime Plan, not one which I am able to accept because of its longer term implications.

1.5 I therefore proposed a precept of £82,390,285 representing a 1.99% increase in the police council tax, which makes up around 10% of the overall council tax bill. My proposal reflects feedback from my Listening to You First survey which has informed decision making regarding priorities and overall support for the approach.

1.6 My proposal will result in a budget of £418.7m, a reduction of 1.5% on 2013/14. The budget allows for the recruitment of 126 police officers, as against forecast leavers of 224, a net reduction of 98. Police staff numbers would reduce by 56, after allowing for recruitment of 70 to essential posts including increasing the Force capacity to deal with Child Sexual Exploitation, cyber crime, fraud, domestic abuse and Proceeds of Crime Act seizures from organised criminals. The overall position on PCSOs will depend upon the decisions taken by the five District Councils to my proposal to provide additional funding for a two year period to preserve frontline numbers. Again, this is a priority for me and one in which I am prepared to invest, to support the Districts which are also facing significant budget reductions. Funding is also provided for the increased recruitment of special constables and volunteers.

2. **THE PANEL’S CONCLUSIONS**

2.1 The Panel issued its report on 7th February and this is attached at Annex A. I have a duty to take into account the recommendations made to me by the Panel and to issue a public response to it.

**3. THE COMMISSIONER’S RESPONSE**

3.1 I welcome the Panel’s support for a 1.99% per annum council tax increase at Band D, which supports my overall strategy of maintaining sustainable funding to continue recruitment, investing in community safety with partners to meet our shared outcomes and equipping the Force to meet the challenges of dealing with high levels of demand in the face of falling numbers.

3.2 My response to the specific recommendations set out in the Panel’s report is as follows:

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| **No** | **Recommendation and PCC Response** |
| 1. | Involve the public, partners and Panel in a long-term planning process on the shape and size of frontline policing in West Yorkshire, covering the staffing mix of the Force and physical presence in communities;  **This is vital to the shared outcomes in the Police and Crime Plan of keeping communities safer and feeling safer.** **A comprehensive review is already planned and I will ensure that the Panel is involved and kept informed of its progress and outcomes.**  **The Force Transformation Fund will allow for investment in mobile technologies including hand held devices and vehicle borne computers, to assist in increasing the visible policing presence in our communities. It will also assist in the further integration of police and partner agency service delivery to communities to enable safer communities.** |
| 2. | Bring forward a detailed report on the use of the £20m Force Transformation Fund, including the expected outcomes for residents and longer-term efficiency savings;  **The utilisation of the Transformation Fund is subject to my approval of individual business cases. I will be looking to ensure that best possible use is made of this opportunity to invest in the Force as it reduces in size, so that it continues to transform how it delivers the policing service to our communities, improving performance and quality of service.**  **I will ensure that the Panel receives a regular report on its use at appropriate times.** |
| 3. | Monitor the impact of the Force’s new assets so that savings in running costs are realised and reinvested in recruitment of Police Officers;  **The report referred to in 2 will cover the savings and benefits realised through utilisation of the Force Transformation Fund.**  **Sustainable recruitment of police officers is a key priority for me and one which underpins my overall financial strategy. Presented to the Panel.** |

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| 4. | Introduce, alongside the Chief Constable, a strategic approach to the use of Special Constables, including in specialist areas like cyber and financial crime;  **I have been in discussions with the Chief Constable about the recruitment and deployment of special constables, including their use in specialist areas. In light of the importance of a joint approach to the recruitment of special constables from under-represented communities and areas, the Chief Constable and I will attend future recruitment events.**  **A Chief Superintendent is currently carrying out a review to assess whether the campaign has targeted under-represented groups and specialisms sufficiently, and to make any recommendations for improvement if appropriate.** |
| 5. | Ensure that the recruitment of 126 Police Officers reflects the diversity of West Yorkshire;  **Police officer recruitment is targeted towards those who work as special constables and PCSOs and this means that we will benefit from the fact that 12.9% of specials are from a BME community which should feed through into more representative police officer recruitment. Adverts always say that applications from BME candidates are particularly welcome and a separate support seminar is held for BME applicants.** |
| 6. | Ensure that the costs of the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner continue to reflect the spending pressures on the Force as a whole;  **The OPCC budget is just 0.4% of total spending and the MTFF shows that it continues to reduce in line with the reductions to the force budget. Savings of £73k have been built into the budget proposal.**  **I have committed to ensure that the spend on my office remains value for money. HMIC Value for Money profiles for 2013 identify that the costs of the PCC per head of population in West Yorkshire are the lowest in the most similar group and the second lowest overall.** |
| 7. | Continue to seek external funding, including from the national Police Innovation Fund.  **The PCC’s 3i project, (innovation, income generation and investment) will continue to explore opportunities for innovation and income generation at a local, national, European and international level to further invest in all our communities.**  **It is also the intention to develop bids in advance so that they are available as and when needed, particularly where deadlines for submission are tight.**  **The Home Office gave a high weighting to collaborative bids in the first round of the Innovation Fund and we will be looking to work in partnership to maximise the potential for success.** |