

Staffordshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel

Report of the Chairman of the Police, Fire and Crime Panel

To Staffordshire County Council

This report summarises issues considered at the Staffordshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel meeting on 10 February 2020, particularly the Commissioners proposed Budgets and Precepts for the Policing and Fire and Rescue Services for 2020/21.

(NB For each Precept the Commissioner is required to submit his proposals to the Panel. The Panel has the power to veto that Precept if they consider it to be too high or too low. The veto has to be approved by two-thirds of the Panel membership (ie 8 of the 12 members). If the veto is exercised a process set out by Regulation has to be followed for the submission/consideration of alternative proposals).

Proposed Police Service Precept 2019/20

The Home Office Grant Settlement for Staffordshire has been set at £131.479million, an increase of £10.5million on the previous year. The total policing requirement was £212.402 million with the Commissioner proposing to part fund the balance from an increase in Precept of 3.94% (£8.53 pa per Band D property). The Commissioner acknowledged that this figure was marginally below the Referendum limit of £10 but felt that it struck a balance between what could reasonably be asked of Council tax payers and the investment required in local policing.

The Home Office Settlement was noted to include £2.532million ring fenced for the recruitment of 90 additional officers by 31 March 2021. This is Staffordshire's target number for the first phase of the 20,000 additional officers promised in the Governments manifesto. Receipt of the ringfenced funding is dependent on the 90 officers being recruited however the sum available would not fully fund that number of posts. More details on the funding and conditions attached were awaited therefore the Commissioner was unable to answer queries raised by panel members as to whether it might be awarded on a pro rata basis should it not prove possible to recruit 90 officers in one year. The Commissioner was confident that the target could be met with a recruitment programme being developed.

For the remainder of the increased funding the Commissioner's proposals included: investment in the Special Constabulary to enhance their role in the community, investment in ANPR (Automatic Number Plate Recognition) to support the further growth of the Team and its capability in terms of tracking offenders throughout the County and beyond, further expenditure on technology and digital capability in order to maximise their benefits (eg. purchasing the most up to date mobile devices), and investment in IT software to assist with demand management and prioritising the deployment of resources.

The Panel noted that the Settlement was for one year only in view of Government's Capital Spending Review and acknowledged the increased level of risk built into the 2020/21 Budgets due to uncertainty around future funding.

The Commissioner submitted an updated MTFS for the period 2020/21 – 2023/24 which showed a reduced budget deficit of £3.328m by 2024.

The Policing Precept proposals were supported by Treasury Management and Capital and Reserves Strategies, the key points of which were the intention to reduce the level of borrowing by funding a number of developments from cash reserves and the gradual increase in the level of Reserves with the General Reserve to be maintained at £5.9m and the Earmarked Reserve fluctuating during the next 5 year period and forecast to be around £2.9m by 2024.

The Panel unanimously agreed to support the proposal to increase the Policing Precept by 3.94% for 2020/21.

Fire and Rescue Authority Precept 2020/21

The Service was reported to need a total net revenue budget of £42.404m for 2020/2021, of which £14.618m was Settlement funding made up of Revenue Support Grant, 1% allocation of local business rates and a top up of Business rates by Government. Of note was the first, albeit relatively minor, increase in central Government funding since 2012/13. The balance (£27.785M) was to be met from the Precept hence the Commissioner intended to apply the full 1.99% permitted increase (ie £1.51pa for a Band D property). The Commissioner explained his wish to build an element of flexibility into the Fire and Rescue Budget to help accommodate a number of uncertainties such as the final pay award to firefighters compared to the 2.5% assumption built into the budget, and the outcome of ongoing legal challenges around Firefighters' pensions.

The £0.3m budget gap for 2020/21 was acknowledged with assurances given that measure would be implemented to achieve the necessary savings. The MTFS predicted a widening budget gap to £1.5m by 2024/25 reflecting the anticipated outcome of the next Comprehensive Spending Review and the effect which the Fair Funding Review might have on the Staffordshire's funding position.

Of note was the anticipated savings which would result from the Police and Fire and Rescue shared use of Fire Stations at Hanley and Tamworth, which had not been factored into budgets for 2020/21, and the re-investment of savings realised from Shared Service arrangements into three new fire safety audit roles within the Prevent Team. We will monitor the effect on future years' budgets of the new Governance arrangements for the Fire and Rescue Service.

The proposed Precept was supported by the Treasury Management, Reserves and Capital Strategies for the Service. Main points to note included the gradual reduction in the overall debt position over recent years and the fact that no additional borrowing would be required during 2020/21. The Treasury Management and Capital Strategies were unchanged from the current year.

The Panel unanimously agreed to support the 1.99% increase in the Fire and Rescue Authority Precept for 2020/21.

Other issues discussed:

The Commissioner's Annual Report – As this was the Commissioner's last meeting with the Panel/last Annual Report, the Report summarised the progress made throughout his period in office on initiatives under each of the 5 themes of his Strategy. He highlighted a number of projects which he considered to have made a major impact on policing, the public's confidence in policing, and support to the community. These included the implementation of mobile technology across the Force, raising awareness of Domestic abuse and improved support for its victims, changes to the way in which individuals with mental health issues were dealt with/assisted by the Police, the Cadets Scheme, including the Junior Cadets initiative, and the revival of the SPACE scheme and its proven effect on reducing Anti-Social Behaviour during the periods when it is in operation.

The Panel is required to formally report (and publish) its views on the Commissioner's Annual Report. As the Commissioner reported to Panel considerably earlier that would be the 'norm' I will be consulted on the Final version prior to its publication.

Termination of IT Transformation contract with Boeing – The Panel sought more information on a published decision of the Commissioner to terminate the IT Transformation Project entered into with Boeing in 2016 originally for a ten year period. Boeing had been appointed to modernise, develop and deliver IT services to Staffordshire Police. The Commissioner reported that over time the Force requirements and aspirations had changed. This had coincided with Boeing reviewing their Business model therefore both parties had mutually agreed to terminate the contract. Boeing have an involvement in the implementation of the Niche Project which is due to go live in April 2020 (bringing together 11 different IT database systems) and would honour their commitment to that project. We have requested details of the spend and achievements of the Project during the period that the contract ran.

HMICFRS Review of Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) 2018/19 – Following a new Inspection Regime, Her Majesty's Inspectorate carried out its first inspection of the SFRS with the brief- to assess how effectively and efficiently the Service prevents, protects the public against and responds to fires and other emergencies, and assesses how well it looks after the people who work for the Service.

The Inspection had judged the SFRS to be 'Good' in all 3 core questions (Effectiveness, Efficiency and People), 'Good' in 10 of the 11 elements of those 3

core questions, and 'Outstanding' at the 11th element – promoting the right values and culture.

Whilst welcoming the favourable outcomes of the inspection the Commissioner stressed that he and the Chief Fire Officer would work to maintain those standards, seek improvements where needed and explore options for developing the service, maximising any benefits which collaborative working with the Police and other agencies might provide.

For more information on this meeting or on the Police and Crime Panel in general please contact Julie Plant (01785 276135 e mail Julie.plant@staffordshire.gov.uk) or Helen Phillips (01785 276143 or helen.phillips@staffordshire.gov.uk)

Details of Panel meetings are issued to contact officers in each of the District/Borough Councils in the County and Stoke-on-Trent City Council for posting on their own web sites.

Stephen Sweeney

Staffordshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel Chairman

Staffordshire County Council

