

Staffordshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel

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

To Staffordshire County Council

In accordance with agreed practice, I am reporting on matters dealt with by the Police, Fire and Crime Panel at its meeting on 5 February 2024.

The main items of business were:

Decisions published by the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC). There were no decisions had been published on the Commissioners website since the last meeting.

Questions to the PFCC from Members of the Public

The Panel considered the questions ask by a member of the public and the Commissioners written response. It was noted that the questions were submitted prior to the last meeting but had missed the deadline for publication on that agenda so had been included today for information.

Mr Bradbury attended the meeting but had no supplementary questions.

Proposed Police Budget and Precept 2024/25

The Commissioner introduced his report which set out the proposed budget and precept proposals for the Police and Crime element of his portfolio for 2024/25. He reported that the proposed budget/precept showed a total net revenue budget requirement of £264.824m for 2024/25.

The Commissioner proposed to part fund the balance from Council Tax funding of £100.091m with an increase of 4.99% per annum (an increase of £13 per annum) increasing the Council tax to £273.57 p.a. per Band D property.

The Commissioner stated that he believed that the budget was in a positive position and it allowed the Force to respond to incidents. More emphasis would now be on surveillance and organised crime and more proactive policing. Considerable investment in the service was needed however, particularly in Technology and Estates.

The Panel was informed that the Force would continue to strive for savings and efficiencies and had saved £7m during 2023/34 with more savings planned in future years. The Commissioner felt that there was still considerable uncertainty in terms of the economy; pay increases; and pension contributions.

The Panel received a presentation from the Commissioner's s151 Officer, which was considered along with the report which included the following:

1. Budget Report 2024/25 including Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)
2. Treasury Management Strategy 2024/25
3. Reserves Strategy update
4. Capital Strategy and Capital Programme 2024/25 to 2027/28

The **Treasury Management Strategy** for 2024/25 set out proposals for the management of the Commissioner's cash flows, borrowing and investments and their associated risks.

The **Reserves Strategy update** paper considered the overall level of reserves held at 31 March 2023 and the forecast position at 31 March 2024.

The **Capital Strategy and Capital Programme** (Including Minimum Revenue Provision Policy) set out the long-term capital investment and investment decisions.

A summary of the results of the public and stakeholder engagement survey which had been carried out by the Commissioner was included in the papers.

In addition to the information in the report, the following was gained during the discussion and questioning:

- The Panel was reminded that the budget for 2023/24 was forecast to achieve a small underspend and had saved all of the savings identified and included recruitment of an additional 60 officers.
- Investment in new technologies and infrastructure (e.g. Police stations, vehicles and custody facilities) was needed.
- Significant inflation pressures still remained. Uncertainty over future pay awards all meant that accurate financial predictions were difficult.
- The MTFS showed a budget gap of £19m by the end of March 2028. The process to address this had been started.
- Prior to any decisions being taken regarding projects or investments, a full governance programme was followed to ensure that the investment was still needed and the proposals were still the most effective and best value for money.
- Efficiency savings were mentioned in the report. It was explained that these included managing costs in contracts and better use of specialist services such as data analysis. The Commissioner explained that more productivity could be

achieved by using technology to collect data or intelligence more quickly. Investment in solar panels and heating systems would also lead to savings.

- There was an emphasis on investments leading to future savings.
- The Commissioner felt that the budget was realistic and reasonable.
- The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) was viewed as an opportunity to achieve greater efficiencies. An example was given of AI surveillance equipment being used to spot behaviour trends or spot dangerous weapons which would pre-empt incidents.
- When asked what the public would see in return for the 4.99% precept increase, the Commissioner stated that investment to enable greater productivity and efficiency would lead to Officers having more time on the beat or with victims or solving crime.
- More investment was due in road policing.
- The Budget Support Reserves after 2025/26 were listed in the report at zero. It was explained that this was for specific projects/expenditure so the reserve may last longer if more efficiencies were found. The panel was informed that this type of reserve was unusual for a force to have and was a recent addition to the budget.
- Updates on progress on Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) and Transformation projects would be included in future budget update reports to the Panel. It was asked that this should include what benefit the transformation project would add. The Panel was reminded that the performance meetings with the Chief Constable contained this information, and this would develop as the projects developed.
- The Commissioner agreed that it would be useful to link investment or transformation to demonstratable results.
- Following a question on why Estates/Building investment was taking place, but the Capital Earmarked Reserves was not being used, the Section 151 Officer explained that reserves were used wherever possible, but some of the reserves may be ringfenced for other projects. The detail of the projects was not available at the meeting. More information would be sent to the panel after the meeting.
- The Reserves budget showed a predicted £27.5m would remain by the end of the MTF period.
- It was explained that some investment was compulsory to meet required standards, as new tasers, firearms training and officer personal safety training.
- In the report, it stated that the MRP statement of 4% was a 'prudent provision'. The Panel asked for this to be explained at

the next meeting when the Panel considered the Fire and Rescue service precept.

The Panel adjourned to consider their response to the Commissioners budget and precept proposals. Upon reconvening, the Chair reported that the Panel would support the 4.99 % increase but that the transformation plans were key to the budget proposals being achieved. The transformation plans/projects therefore needed to be delivered and results needed to be seen in terms of reducing crime and improving service.

The Panel Resolved:

1. In relation to the Budget and Precept setting:

- b) That the proposed budget and Precept increase of 4.99%, increasing the council tax to £272.57 for a band D property (£13.00 per annum, per household increase) be supported and the Commissioner be notified accordingly.
- c) That the precept increase of below the 2024/25 increase in state pension (8.5% increase) working age benefits (6.7% increase) and below the recent ONS data for wage growth (7.2% increase) be noted.
- d) That the Council Tax base increase to 365,868 band D equivalent properties, equivalent to an increase of 1.55% be noted along with the council tax collection fund surplus of £1.239m.
- e) That the use of £1.621m of revenue reserves to balance the 2024/25 budget (in addition to use of other earmarked reserves to support identified purposes) be noted.
- f) That the MTFS summary financials and MTFS assumptions as contained in the report be noted.
- g) That the delegation to the Director of Finance for the Staffordshire Commissioners Office and the Chief Finance Officer of Staffordshire Police to make any necessary adjustments to the budget as a result of late changes to central government funding (including changes due to the final funding settlement being announced) via an appropriation to or from the general fund reserve be noted.
- h) That the proposed four-year Capital Investment Programme totalling £83.508m and the Capital Strategy and Capital Programme Paper be noted.
- i) That the outcome of the Staffordshire Commissioner's budget consultation within the Commissioners foreword which included a survey regarding the proposed level of precept for 2024/25 be noted.

2. Future Panel information items:

Updates on progress on Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) and Transformation projects be included in future budget update reports to the Panel. The Panel asked that this should include what benefit the transformation project has add.

3. Information requested following the Panel meeting

Estates/Building investment - Capital Earmarked Reserves were not being used. Was the reserve ringfenced for other projects?

National Conference for Police Fire and Crime Panels - 9 November 2023

The Panel received a report from its member representatives at the AGM of the National Conference for Police, Fire and Crime Panels, held on 9 November 2023. Workshops attended as part of the National Conference had included discussions on 'Public confidence in policing'; 'Measuring success' and Preparing for change'.

Questions to the PFCC by Panel Members

Question 1 – Could the Commissioner provide an update on the project to replace the Firearms range?

Response: The Commissioner reported that the project was going through the planning process but the proposals were subject to review as discussed earlier to ensure that demand and need hadn't changed and that the scheme was still the best option for the force. It was hoped that a decision would be made soon.

Webcast can be found at [Browse meetings - Staffordshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel - Staffordshire County Council](#)

For more information on these meetings or on the Police, Fire and Crime Panel in general please contact Mandy Pattinson
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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.

Councillor Bernard Peters (Chair)
Staffordshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel