

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 meetings on Monday 1 and Monday 15 February 2021, particularly the Commissioners proposed Budgets and Precepts for the Policing and Fire and Rescue Services for 2021/22.

The main items considered on the 1 February were:

Decisions published by the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC)

Details were submitted of one decision published by the Commissioner since the last Panel meeting:

Joint Emergency Transport (JETS) (Decision no. 202021/003)

<https://staffordshire-pfcc.gov.uk/cms/wp-content/uploads/SCPF-D-202021-003.pdf>

Proposed Police and Crime Budget and Precept 2021/22

(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 (i.e. 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).

The Panel considered the Commissioners proposed budget and precept proposals for the **Police and Crime** element of his portfolio for 2021/22. The Home Office Police Grant for Staffordshire had been set at £122.417million, an increase of £7.259million on the previous year. The total policing requirement was £222.051 million. Other sources of funding were from the Police Pension Grant £1.825million; Uplift Ring-fenced grant £1.483million; Revenue Support Grant of £8.423million and Council Tax freeze grant £3.541million; Local Council Tax Support grant £1.365million and a deficit of £200,000 from the Council Tax Collection Fund.

The Commissioner was proposing to part fund the balance from Council Tax funding of £83.197 million proposed increase of 5.99% per annum (£13.48 pa per Band D property). This figure was below the permitted limit of £15.

The Commissioner explained that this was a difficult financial position, with significant uncertainty into the medium term which made planning very challenging. The current Covid-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the tax base and deficits on collection funds from 2020/21.

The Panel noted that the Settlement was for one year only in view of Government's Comprehensive Spending Review and acknowledged the increased level of risk built into the 2021/22 budgets due to uncertainty around future funding.

Members considered the level of debt and level of reserves as detailed in the Treasury Management Strategy and Capital Programme. There was concern that this may increase in the medium term due in part to the proposed investment in an Operation Hub / Firearms Range. It was explained that this had only been granted outline business case approval at present and a more detailed business case was needed prior to decision, but if granted this may affect borrowing. The Business case to develop an Operation Hub / Firearms Range, was included into the Panels work programme for further scrutiny.

The Governments uplift programme, recruitment of the additional officers, and its financial implications was discussed. The Panel felt that it was important that the public should see an increased visual presence in communities. The number of PCSO's was also challenged as it was felt that their number had reduced recently. It was explained that the type of staffing posts had changed but the number of employees had remained the same. It was also noted that there was an additional 35 members of support staff recruited during 2020/21. The Panel asked to be provided with the numbers of PCSO's, Police Officers and Support Officers employed over the last three years.

The proposed Precept was supported by the Treasury Management, Reserves and Capital Strategies for the Service.

The Panel unanimously agreed to support the 5.99% increase in the Police and Crime Precept for 2022/23. They also asked that the next Commissioner consider ways of demonstrating increased number of officers to the public who feel there is a reduction in their communities.

Other issues discussed at the meeting:

National Conference for Police, Fire and Crime Panels/ National Association of Police Fire and Crime Panel AGM Feedback Report

The Panel received a report from its member and officer representatives at the AGM of the National Association of Police, Fire and Crime Panels and the National Conference for Panels, both held virtually on 23-25 November 2020. The keynote speakers included Lord Toby Harris (Co-Chair of the all-party parliamentary group on policing and security); Paddy Tipping (Chair of the Police and Crime Commissions); Yvette Cooper (Chair of Select Committee on Home Affairs); Olivia Pinkney (Chief Constable, Hampshire Police) and Becci Bryant (Chief Fire Officer, Staffordshire).

At its meeting held on the 15 February 2021, the Panels main item of business was the consideration of the **Proposed Fire and Rescue Budget and Precept 2021/22**.

The Panel considered the report which set out the proposed budget and precept proposals for the Fire and Rescue Authority for 2021/22. It was reported that the Settlement Funding for 2021/22 was £14.571million made up of; Revenue Support Grant (RSG) which had been set at £4.777million; Local Business Rates revenue of £3.735million and Business Top up of £6.059million. It was noted that the RSG had reduced by £9million since 2012.

The total budget requirement for the service was £42.404million. The Commissioner was proposing to part fund the balance from Council Tax funding of £27.406 million and proposed an increase of 1.99% per annum (£1.54 pa per Band D property). The Commissioner informed the Panel that this figure was below the permitted limit of 2%.

The Panel also considered the Treasury Management Strategy, the Reserves Strategy update and the Fire Authorities Capital Strategy and Capital Programme 2021/22 to 2023/24 which included the Minimum Revenue Provision Policy.

The Council Tax surplus/deficit, which would normally show a surplus, was showing a deficit of £602,258 due to the impact of collection fund and the pandemic. The Chief Finance Officer felt that the Local Tax Support Grant would support the reduction at the moment but there was concern over future years. The Panel were also concerned over the Sargeant and McCloud case and the impact on the pension fund long term implications and challenges for the service.

The Panel noted that the Settlement was for one year only in view of Government's Spending Review and felt that this was a challenging financial position which made future planning difficult. The current Covid-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the tax base and deficits on collection funds from 2020/21.

The Panel unanimously approved the proposed precept increase of 1.99% (£1.54 per annum, per household (Band D)).

At the meeting the Panel also discussed the **Fire and Rescue Service Safety Plan 2020-2024 update report**

The report provided the Panel with an update on the delivery of the Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service Safety Plan (SP) and the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP). The Safety Plan was designed to underpin the Staffordshire Commissioners Fire and Rescue Plan and four priorities for the Service were determined following consultation across Staffordshire in 2020. Detail on the priorities and the progress to date was contained in the report.

Specific questions were asked on the Princes Trust work which had stopped during the pandemic and also the Cadets scheme. It was planned that both schemes would start again when it was safe to do so. The Safe and Well visits had been reduced during 2020 and the service was being provided through a revised approach using either telephone advice only; telephone advice and smoke alarms dropped off; and

for residents with an immediate threat to life telephone advice and a full safe and week physical visit.

Along with the Safety Plan, the Commissioner presented a **COVID-19 inspection letter from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS)**. The Inspection was carried out between the 19 and 30 October 2020. It was noted that staff absence had increased by 63% from April to June 2020. Members asked for more information on staff absences during 2020 for both Fire and Police services and if the absence had been due to Covid-19.

The Panel also requested information on the number of high-rise blocks of flats in Staffordshire and the situation was regarding cladding. This information would be provided however, it was confirmed at the meeting that there were no ACM cladding in Staffordshire.

The Panel and the Commissioner expressed their sincere thanks to the Fire and Rescue Service for all their work during the pandemic, particularly the work with the vaccination programme.

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

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Staffordshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel Chairman