

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE POLICE, FIRE & CRIME PANEL

REPORT TO THE POLICE, FIRE & CRIME COMMISSIONER FOR NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

8 FEBRUARY 2023

Report Title	Review of the Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner's proposed Police precept for 2023/24
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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The report is intended to set out the results of the review by the Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Panel of the Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner's proposed Police precept for 2023/24.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire is required to notify the Police, Fire & Crime Panel of the Police precept that he proposes to issue for the next financial year. The Panel must review the proposed precept and make a report on it. The Commissioner must have regard to this report and respond to any specific conclusions or recommendations from the Panel before issuing the final Police precept.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire:
- a) Has regard to this report by the Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Panel arising from its review of the proposed Police precept for 2023/24 in accordance with the Police Reform & Social Responsibility Act 2011 Schedule 5 Paragraph 5(2)(a).
 - b) Gives the Panel a response to this report in accordance with the Police Reform & Social Responsibility Act 2011 Schedule 5 Paragraph 5(2)(b).
- 3.2 Reasons for Recommendation(s) – The recommendations are required to complete the Panel's review of the proposed Police precept for 2023/24 produced by the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner, in accordance with the Panel's statutory responsibilities.

4. Report Background

- 4.1 A Police & Crime Commissioner is a major precepting authority under the Local Government Finance Act 1992 as amended by the Police Reform & Social Responsibility Act 2011. A Police & Crime Commissioner may not issue a precept under Section 40 of the 1992 Act until it has been subject to scrutiny by the relevant Police (Fire) & Crime Panel according to the process specified in Schedule 5 of the 2011 Act.
- 4.2 Schedule 5 of the 2011 Act, supporting Regulations, and the Rules of Procedure for the Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Panel require:
- a) The Commissioner to notify the Panel of the Commissioner's proposed precept by 1st February of the relevant financial year
 - b) The Panel to review the proposed precept
 - c) The Panel to resolve to:
 - i) Support the proposed precept without additional qualification or comment; or
 - ii) Support the proposed precept and make additional recommendations on it; or
 - iii) Veto the proposed precept provided that the Panel makes that decision by the required majority, which is that at least two thirds of the persons who are members of the Panel at the time when the decision is made vote for it.
 - d) The Panel to make a report to the Commissioner on the proposed precept, setting out the results of its review, by 8th February of the relevant financial year. If the Panel votes to veto the proposed precept the report must state that the Panel has done so and set out its reasons for doing so.
- 4.3 If the Panel does not veto the proposed precept the Commissioner must:
- a) Have regard to the report made by the Panel
 - b) Give the Panel a response to its report and to any recommendations in the report
 - c) Publish the response in a manner determined by the Panel.
- 4.4 The scrutiny process concludes at this point. The Commissioner may then issue the proposed precept as the precept for the next financial year or issue a different precept but only if it would be in accordance with a recommendation made in the Panel's report.
- 4.5 If the Panel vetoes the proposed precept the Commissioner is required to produce a revised precept, which must be subject to further scrutiny by the Panel.

5. Review of the proposed Police Precept

- 5.1 The Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Panel met in public on 2nd February 2023 to review the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire's proposed Police precept for 2023/24. The meeting was webcast live and the recording is available to view at the following link: [West Northamptonshire Council - YouTube](#).
- 5.2 The Commissioner presented the proposed precept and budget, which were based on an increase in the precept of £15 per year for Band D Council Tax. The Commissioner stated that his

proposal reflected the challenge of providing an efficient and effective police force in the context of current financial pressures and the effect of an unfair national funding formula for policing. He was acutely aware that increasing the precept would add to demands on local taxpayers and it was therefore essential that his final decision was well-informed. The Office of the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner (OPFCC) had carried out a far-reaching public consultation on the precept, which had received a better response than in the previous year. Over 51 per cent of residents who responded said that they were prepared to pay £15 or more for policing, which was also higher than in the previous year. The proposed precept would enable continuing progress without having an undue financial impact on residents. The budget for 2023/24 would support a baseline establishment of 1,500 police officers, which was the highest number ever in Northamptonshire and included a significant number of officers allocated to neighbourhood policing. It provided for further investment in key areas of operational and commissioned activity. It also maintained the commitment that OPFCC staffing costs would be kept below 1 per cent of the policing budget. The proposed precept and budget formed part of a robust Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) that provided for further investment and contingencies over the next three years. The national funding formula had not been updated for 10 years and central government funding for Northamptonshire did not take account of population growth. The Commissioner would continue to make the case for change and encouraged all local elected representatives to work together on this matter. In the meantime, the Commissioner considered that the proposed precept for 2023/24 represented the best deal for Northamptonshire, which would maintain investment in police officers, maintain an adequate level of reserves and safeguard policing services in the county.

- 5.3 The Panel considered how the proposed precept and budget supported the Commissioner's priority to provide an efficient and effective police response in Northamptonshire. A Panel member challenged the Commissioner about whether there was scope to increase investment in police officers or equipment above the level proposed in the draft budget. The Commissioner emphasised that he had already made the commitment to have 1,500 officers in Northamptonshire by March 2023 and would sustain this number. There was currently significant economy uncertainty, with a further increase in interest rates earlier that day. It was not practical in this context for him to make a further commitment to have a specific number of police officers at a future date. Northamptonshire Police had made good progress delivering its share of the national uplift in police officers, to the point where it had received additional government funding. However, the force was also likely to have a relatively young workforce until the end of the 2020s. The Commissioner considered that he had been clear to Northamptonshire residents about his priorities concerning officer numbers and the development of neighbourhood policing, as well as related matters such as improving workforce support for serving officers.
- 5.4 The Commissioner was further questioned about his level of confidence that the planned establishment of police officers could be maintained given current pressures on retention in policing and the need for effective vetting to ensure that suitable people were recruited. The Commissioner advised that retention was less of an issue for Northamptonshire Police now than at previous times when it had been affected by the benefits that the Metropolitan Police offered to new recruits. Recruitment was monitored effectively. Previous investment in vetting also meant that Northamptonshire was in a better position than some other force areas and was

already using approaches that were now being recommended nationally. The Commissioner was generally confident in the position in Northamptonshire without being complacent.

- 5.5 A Panel member urged the Commissioner to commit to a recruitment drive for Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) in addition to recruiting police officers. The Commissioner responded that he could make this commitment. Previous concern about progress with recruitment of PCSOs had led him to establish an earmarked reserve to retain any in-year underspends on the PCSO budget for neighbourhood policing and related activities. This had encouraged more recruitment.
- 5.6 The Panel sought reassurance about the robustness of the key assumptions informing the MTFP on future police pay and pension costs. The Panel was advised that assumptions concerning police pay had been informed by benchmarking and by extensive discussion amongst all Police & Crime commissioners and chief finance officers. The MTFP included prudent estimates for pay increases at an average of 2 per cent, which was the Home Office assumption. However, as this was felt to be low the 2023/24 budget also provided for a specific pay inflation contingency of a further 1 per cent. The position on pension costs during the period covered by the MTFP would be affected by the outcomes of the next actuarial review of the police pension scheme, which could result in an increased employer contribution rate. The financial implications of this could be significant. The MTFP was modelled on sensible assumptions based on precedents, including that the government would fund 75 per cent of increased costs.
- 5.7 A Panel member noted that the Commissioner had been making the case that the national funding formula treated Northamptonshire unfairly for some years and questioned whether any change was likely to be forthcoming. It was also highlighted that the government might consider that an increasing number of taxpayers in the county was already generating additional resources. The Commissioner advised that the government had committed to reviewing the national funding formula before the end of the current parliament. The key question was what measures a new funding formula would use to allocate resources in addition to local population. A new funding formula should not penalise force areas that were performing well or produce unintended consequences in relation to functions such as crime recording. The Commissioner was confident in the basis for his case that the existing funding formula disproportionately disadvantaged Northamptonshire compared to other force areas.
- 5.8 A Panel member challenged the Commissioner about whether more could be done to deal with crime and antisocial behaviour by young people, including improving engagement with them by Northamptonshire Police. The Commissioner emphasised that there was already a significant amount of activity focussed on young people in the county, including work by the OPFCC Youth Team and Adverse Childhood Experiences Team and the My Pink Trainers film on road safety. Neighbourhood policing would assist in addressing issues more generally. At the same time, it should be recognised that local authorities were responsible for dealing with anti-social behaviour. All partners needed to work together more effectively on this matter. Northamptonshire Police was looking at the 'Right Care Right Person' model used by Humberside Police that was designed to provide the best response to people contacting the police who actually needed support for health or care needs.

- 5.9 The Commissioner was questioned about how the proposed budget supported voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations contributing to community safety activity in the county. The Commissioner commended the efforts of all VCS partners working in the field. The Panel was advised that the OPFCC offered financial support to VCS groups through grant funding schemes, which provided funding for specific projects rather than core operating costs. The Commissioner went on to emphasise that other statutory organisations also needed to make an appropriate contribution to community safety activity and highlighted in this regard that he needed to seek a discussion with relevant partners about the extent to which the OPFCC was currently funding local Sunflower services.
- 5.10 The Panel sought clarification about whether planned investment in the OPFCC commissioning and delivery budget would support the future operation of the Flare app for members of the public to use to report areas or behaviours that caused them to feel unsafe. The Commissioner advised that he was committed to maintaining the operation of the app, which was providing useful intelligence. A Panel member commented that the app had been well-received in the community.
- 5.11 The Commissioner was questioned about the level of investment proposed in Information Technology and whether this was based on maximising the use of civilian personnel for roles that did not require police officers. The Commissioner highlighted that the Capital Programme included a relatively high level of investment in ICT. Work in this area included considering opportunities to make use of innovative technology such as artificial intelligence and drones. However, there was also scope for Northamptonshire Police to improve its cost-effectiveness by decommissioning old systems that had been retained because they held data that might still be needed in the future.
- 5.12 The Panel considered other matters relating to the development of the proposed precept and budget. A Panel member raised the need for a demographic breakdown of the responses to consultation on the proposed precept in order to give confidence that hard-to-reach groups or areas had been engaged. The Panel was advised that responses had been analysed whilst consultation was underway to identify any gaps so that the OPFCC could take action to address these: for example, it had worked with North Northamptonshire councillors to boost the number of responses obtained from Corby. The OPFCC would publish a detailed breakdown of consultation responses online before the end of February 2023. It was clarified to the Panel that the Commissioner's share of the Council Tax Collection Fund surplus was a one-off sum and was being used to replenish reserves after an equivalent sum had been taken out to support the 2023/24 budget. This was the first surplus on the Collection Fund for some years due to the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic. The OPFCC was working with local authorities to identify if further surpluses were likely in future and so could be built into the base budget.

6. Outcomes of the Review

6.1 At the conclusion of discussion the Panel resolved unanimously:

To support the Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner's proposed Police precept for 2023/24.

7. Background Papers

Police Reform & Social Responsibility Act 2011

The Police & Crime Panels (Precepts and Chief Constable Appointments) Regulations 2012

Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Panel Rules of Procedure