

**NORTHAMPTONSHIRE POLICE, FIRE AND CRIME PANEL**  
**REPORT TO THE POLICE, FIRE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER**  
**FOR NORTHAMPTONSHIRE**

**8 FEBRUARY 2024**

<b>Report Title</b>	<b>Review of the Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's proposed Police precept for 2024/25</b>
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**1. Purpose of Report**

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1.1 The report is intended to set out the results of the review by the Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel of the Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's proposed Police precept for 2024/25.

**2. Executive Summary**

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2.1 The Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire is required to notify the Police, Fire and 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**

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3.1 It is recommended that the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire:

- a) Has regard to this report by the Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel arising from its review of the proposed Police precept for 2024/25 in accordance with the Police Reform and 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 and 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 2024/25 produced by the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, in accordance with the Panel's statutory responsibilities.

## **4. Report Background**

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- 4.1 A Police and Crime Commissioner is a major precepting authority under the Local Government Finance Act 1992 as amended by the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011. A Police and 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) and 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 and Crime Panel require:
- a) The Commissioner to notify the Panel of the Commissioner's proposed precept by 1 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 8 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**

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- 5.1 The Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel met in public on 6 February 2024 to review the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire's proposed Police precept for 2024/25. 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 £13 per year for Band D Council Tax to £306.04. The Commissioner

stated that the decision to increase the proposed precept was not one he had taken lightly given current economic pressures on taxpayers. However, he was confident that it had public support and was also underpinned by his track record of delivering improvements to services in the county. The proposed budget for 2024/25 would continue to support key priorities. It would enable Northamptonshire Police to maintain an establishment of 1,500 police officers. The number of officers in neighbourhood policing teams in Northamptonshire had already been doubled and more would be added. The proposed budget would also provide £1.8m investment in the force's resources and systems, including for officer development. Overall the force budget for 2024/25 would increase by over £15m on the previous year and would be £64m higher than the Commissioner's first budget. There was a funded capital programme, an adequate level of reserves and a robust and affordable Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). Northamptonshire was not well served by the national funding formula for policing and continued to be disadvantaged every year that it was not updated. In this situation, the Commissioner ultimately considered that the proposed precept and budget for 2024/25 represented the best deal for Northamptonshire and its residents.

- 5.3 The Panel considered how the proposed precept and budget supported the priorities in the Commissioner's Police, Fire and Crime Plan. Confirmation was sought of how many more officers Northamptonshire Police would have in 2024/25 as a result of the proposed budget. The Panel was advised that the force currently had 1,526 police officers. It was planned to maintain this level in 2024/25, although there would be an increase in the number of officers deployed in neighbourhood policing teams. The Commissioner went on to highlight that the force's total establishment included around 600 officers with less than five years' service and 400 officers who had served for five to ten years. Around 500 officers were in the 25-34 age group and 1,200 were under 44 years old. In this situation it was important to invest in developing officers' capability as well as numbers, which was being done.
- 5.4 A Panel member commented that Northamptonshire Police was subject to increasing demand, neighbourhood policing teams were already under pressure and there seemed to be few Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) in the county. Taxpayers were again being asked to provide additional resources through an increase in the precept. The Commissioner was challenged about whether residents would see a clear benefit from this increase that would demonstrate it represented value for money. The Commissioner responded that cost effectiveness could already be demonstrated by the fact that he was proposing a 4.4 per cent increase in the precept whilst needing to budget for a 7 per cent increase in police officers' pay. A range of improvements were being delivered for Northamptonshire residents. The number of police officers in the community had more than doubled, whereas neighbourhood policing had been hollowed out up to 2015. The force had achieved reductions in burglary, serious violence and anti-social behaviour and an increase in arrests for domestic violence. The force was also now rated first in the country for the effectiveness of case files submitted to the Crown Prosecution Service. The Commissioner went on to highlight that some other forces had removed PCSOs altogether, which was not the case in Northamptonshire. There had been challenges relating to PCSO recruitment but the force should be in a better position to address these now that the number of police officers had reached the intended level. Ultimately, Northamptonshire was in the top quartile for what residents paid in Council Tax for policing and the bottom quartile for resources for policing per head of population.

Consultation on the proposed budget showed that residents were prepared to pay the higher precept and Northamptonshire was one of only two areas in the country where consultation responses had increased this year compared to last. The Commissioner considered that the proposed precept struck the right balance between investment and value for money.

- 5.5 A Panel member noted that the budget for PCSOs included in the MTFP increased by a relatively small amount each year and questioned how this would support additional recruitment. The importance of communicating additional recruitment to communities was also emphasised, particularly given perceptions in rural communities that they were neglected. The Panel was advised that provision for 81 PCSOs had been included in the budget for some years. This was reset each year to account for recruitment and attrition, whilst there were also earmarked reserves that could provide funding for PCSOs. The Commissioner noted that the proposed budget for 2024/25 covered planned recruitment. Rural communities would also see a benefit from increased capacity in rural policing.
- 5.6 The Panel recognised that Northamptonshire had received national uplift funding to recruit police officers up to the current level. The Commissioner was questioned about the ability to maintain 1,500 officers beyond 2025 if there was no change in the national funding formula and whether the cost of doing so would have to be met by local taxpayers. The Commissioner emphasised that he was not responsible for the funding allocated to policing by central government. If there was a reduction in national funding Northamptonshire would actually be at less risk than some other force areas as this represented a smaller component of its overall resources. However, significant attention had been given to ways of maintaining Northamptonshire Police at its current strength into the future. Northamptonshire had benefitted from focussing on recruitment earlier and had attracted additional funding that had not been used fully in other areas, which had been ringfenced to maintain numbers. The Commissioner considered that Northamptonshire was well-placed to maintain the current position into the future, subject to any major changes by the government. It had taken a massive effort to bring the force up to its current strength and it would not be given up lightly.
- 5.7 A Panel member challenged the Commissioner that the proposed budget seemed to be based on traditional funding models and that more innovation was needed to maximise available resources and help to mitigate the impact of unfavourable national funding. The One Public Estate approach and linking together emergency service contact centres were highlighted as areas where more could have been done. The Commissioner did not agree that there was a lack of innovation in Northamptonshire. The development of Enabling Services was an innovative approach that was already having a practical impact. Other examples of innovation included extending the use of social media to contact the force and investigating the use of facial recognition technology in policing. The Commissioner welcomed further ideas. The Panel was advised that a significant amount of work was being done on joint control facilities for the force and Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service, although plans had not yet reached the point where they could be discussed.
- 5.8 A Panel member questioned the scope to lower the proposed increase in the precept by making more use of efficiency savings. The Commissioner responded that the 1 per cent annual efficiency

target included in the budget required the force to operate efficiently before any requests for investment would be considered. The Commissioner would continue to require the force to innovate in order to reduce costs to taxpayers. The proposed budget had been identified in a very difficult economic situation. The Commissioner was responsible for making Northamptonshire a safer place and judged that the proposed precept for 2024/25 represented the best balance to support this aim.

- 5.9 A Panel member noted that there was a slight reduction in the proposed budget for Early Intervention and Youth for 2024/25 and sought reassurance that this did not represent a loss of emphasis in this area of work. The Commissioner advised that all areas of the budget were subject to a zero-base budgeting exercise to ensure that public money was being used as effectively as possible. The change in the budget for Early Intervention and Youth did not represent a loss of emphasis: it related to a post that had not been recruited and so resources had been returned to the budget.
- 5.10 The Panel considered other matters relating to particular aspects of the proposed budget. The Panel was advised that contingencies would be set at the same level as in 2023/24. Panel members highlighted the importance of the Commissioner's estates masterplan to the MTFP and encouraged that it was made available to the Panel as soon as possible. The Commissioner advised that the masterplan should be published in the next month. It was a massive area of work, given the size of the police estate and that the estates strategy could need to cover a 20-year period. The Commissioner considered that the programme being developed was a good one but was still likely to involve some difficult decisions.
- 5.11 Panel members gave views about the case for the proposed precept during the course of discussion. A Panel member commented that the proposed increase was too high, particularly just to maintain services at the current level, and did not give sufficient regard to the impact it would have on taxpayers who were already under pressure. Conversely, a Panel member emphasised that the proposed increase was a necessary response to the gap between local needs and the national funding provided to Northamptonshire. Panel members also recognised the benefit of investment in police officer numbers but commented that this needed to be reflected in visible policing: if residents did not feel safer then additional activity would not have the full impact.

## **6. Outcomes of the Review**

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- 6.1 At the conclusion of discussion the Panel resolved:

**To endorse the Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's proposed Police precept for 2024/25.**

## **7. Background Papers**

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Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011

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

Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel Rules of Procedure