



Dorset Police and Crime Panel

Minutes of a meeting held at County Hall, Dorchester
on 5 February 2015

Present: **Members**

Borough Poole

Elaine Atkinson

Co-opted members:

Ann Stribley

Phil Goodall

Bournemouth Borough Council

John Adams (Chairman)

Co-opted members:

Malcolm Davies

Dennis Gritt

David Smith

Christchurch Borough Council

Bernie Davis

Dorset County Council

Fred Drane

Ian Gardner

East Dorset District Council

Malcolm Birr

North Dorset District Council

Gary Jefferson

Purbeck District Council

West Dorset District Council

John Russell (Vice-Chairman)

Weymouth & Portland Borough Council

Michael Goodman

Independent Co-Opted members

Mike Short

Officer advisers to the Police and Crime Panel:

Patrick Ellis, Assistant Chief Executive, Dorset County Council

Andy Frost, Strategic Manager DAT & Community Safety, Dorset County Council

Adam Richens, Finance Lead Officer to the Dorset Police and Crime Panel, Borough of Poole

Fiona King, Senior Democratic Services Officer, Dorset County Council

Also in attendance:

Martyn Underhill, Dorset Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC)

Officer advisers to the Police and Crime Commissioner

Dan Steadman, Chief Executive to the Police and Crime Commissioner

Richard Bates, Treasurer to the Police and Crime Commissioner

Debbie Simpson, Chief Constable, Dorset Police

(Note: These minutes have been prepared by officers as a record of the meeting and of any decisions reached. They are to be considered and confirmed at the next meeting of the Dorset Police and Crime Panel on **9 June 2015**.)

Apologies for Absence

1. Apologies for absence were received from Iain McVie.

Code of Conduct

2. There were no declarations by members of any disclosable pecuniary interests under the Code of Conduct.

Minutes

3. The minutes of the meeting held on 10 November 2014 were confirmed and signed.

Matters ArisingMinute 55.6 – Quarter 2 Report

4. Following a question from the Chairman about 'body cams' the PCC advised the Panel that this project had taken longer to resolve than anticipated. The complex issue was the management of data but he was hopeful that it would be resolved by Christmas.

Minute 55.7 – Quarter 2 Report

5. With regard to the recording of sexual offences the PCC advised that there had been an increase of 28% in 2013.

Public ParticipationPublic Speaking

6.1 There were no public questions received at the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 21(1).

6.2 There were no public statements received at the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 21(2).

Petitions

7. There were no petitions received in accordance with the County Council's petition scheme at this meeting.

Chairman's Announcements

8. The Chairman advised members that since the last meeting he had attended a conference in London which had been run by the Local Government Association (LGA) and had been very successful. He noted that along with other members of the Panel they had attended a training session in December and had received an update on the Treasury position in January. He drew members' attention to the HMIC report – the State of Policing – which was now available to view online.

Precept Approval

9.1 The Panel considered a report by the Treasurer to the Police and Crime Commissioner which set out the proposed 2015-16 precept for the Police and Crime Commissioner for Dorset.

9.2 The Treasurer advised members the final settlement had now been received and noted that there was no change to the revenue grant formula but there would be a loss of about £20k from the capital grant.

9.3 The Commissioner set the financial context by highlighting the changes in formula funding and the cost pressures facing the Police in 2016/17. He also shared with member's feedback from the public consultation on the precept proposals and advised members of the Panel that future increases would be necessary, particularly in 2016-17.

9.4 The Commissioner addressed members prior to taking any questions and his speech is attached as an Annexure to these minutes.

9.5 Members of the Panel asked the following questions to the Police and Crime Commissioner, who responded accordingly:

1. Can the commissioner outline any steps that have been taken to lobby Government for a fairer settlement for Dorset Police - for example to actually apply the needs based funding formula which has never been properly implemented and which costs Dorset Police about £1.9m per annum.

A meeting was arranged with local MPs and the Local Government minister in late 2013 to explain the current inequity and deficiencies within the current funding formula and the need for reform.

The Policing Minister agreed the PCC could be involved in re-negotiations on the policing formula.

Since this date, every opportunity has been taken in consultation responses and in meetings to re-iterate these points.

The latest example was the response to the funding settlement sent to the Home Office by the PCC in January 2015, which again highlighted concerns at the lack of progress on reviewing the funding formula, highlighting the negative effect of top slicing, and seeking assurances on permanency of freeze grants. It also highlights the unhelpfulness of the referendum limits.

The PCC's appointment to the Governments Police Funding Formula panel means he will be fighting hard to secure fair funding for Dorset to move us off the bottom of the national funding league tables.

2. Can the Panel be advised the extent to which the budget as presented is impacted by the £679k forecast in-year overspend as present in item 7 on this agenda. For example it would be helpful to understand if it has an impact of the general balances of Dorset Police which we are told are forecast to be £3.4m as at 31 March 2015.

Action is being taken in the current year to mitigate the forecast overspend, including reducing the use of overtime, limiting non staff expenditure, and where possible, holding vacancies. However, a year end overspend is still anticipated. This overspend would be funded from general balances, with a view to reinstating them to the level of 3% over the next couple of years.

3. Has the commissioner made any bids to the 2015/16 national Police Innovation Fund referenced in section 3.2, if so in respect of what services.

A bid for £4.4m has been made in both 2015-16 and 2016-17. The bids are in respect of Strategic Alliance programme delivery, ICT convergence and a number of collaborative projects with Devon and Cornwall.

We await the result.

4. Can the Commissioner explain how the risk based review of the force budgets, which has recently been undertaken, will remove the risk of underspending.

The review of Force budgets has taken significant sums from the budget. This includes £3.2m reductions achieved during the budget setting process, and as a result of the Cost Challenge review process. Further reductions in workforce, capital funding, and the introduction of a 'risk line' equivalent to a 1% increase in Council Tax have squeezed the budget even further.

A number of the savings have come from revenue budgets which are demand led which naturally means there is often variance to forecast. For these, the provision of an adequate reserve, such as for Major Operation Reserve and Insurance Reserve mean that any overspend can be picked up from the reserve and the on-going base budget provision revised.

The other major risk-based change is around the staffing budgets. The significant time-lag to recruit police officers has led to underspends in pay budgets in recent years. During 2014-15 we have significantly over-recruited our planned officer numbers which will offset the vacancy savings and mean more front line officers available and no underspend on the budget. There is of course a risk that if turnover is insufficient that the pay budget could overspend but this will be closely monitored during the year.

5. Can the commissioner outline how the £870,000 used to fund his Office is actually applied.

The £870,000 core OPCC funding is an artificial figure that relates to the budget that was previously spent by the Police Authority, who were largely invisible to the public and had greatly different statutory functions and general expectations on them.

My main focus on expenditure is value for money rather than cost, and the £870,000 does not accurately reflect the full costs of achieving my ambitions for Dorset, but I always seek secure funding for posts that enable the OPCC to coordinate, facilitate, and commission projects, grants and innovation.

The £870,000 can be broken down as follows:

68% is on the cost of staff/ training and travel subsistence, 28% on statutory functions such as public engagement, treasury services and audit and 4% on legal, consultancy and IT / printing services.

My office continues to secure funding through winning grant awards and securing support from government for many of the innovative pilots that are so important to me, such as mental health coordination, restorative justice development, and investments in counselling services for victims of sexual abuse and domestic abuse.

6. Can the commissioner provide an overview of the Victims Bureau and the Victims Competed Fund that the £300,000 of his Local Innovation Fund will be funding in 2015/16.

The PCC has agreed to fund £228,397 Phase 2 of the Victims' Bureau between 2014 and 2016 from the PCC's Local Innovation Fund.

Future funding for the Phase 2 growth of the Victims' Bureau post 2016/17 (£176,940pa) is yet to be identified. In the long term, the PCC has expressed a desire to establish a charity and to support (amongst other things) the development of the Victims' Bureau through charity funding, sponsorship and/or grant funding streams.

It has been agreed at the Joint Executive Board that the PCC and Chief Constable will underwrite the financial risk post 2016, match funding 50% equal share from the OPCC and Dorset Police, accepting the financial liability of £88,470 each, in the event the charity, sponsorship or grant funding is not

realised by April 2016. Should only partial funding be realised, the OPCC and Dorset Police share the liable financial risk equally.

The PCC was successful in obtaining £299,000 from the Victims Competed Fund in 2014-15, the maximum sum possible. Whilst some of the projects undertaken were one-off, several of them require a longer period of time to test their effectiveness and determine if they should be continued in the longer term. The balance of the Local Innovation Fund will be used to fund these in 2015-16.

7. Can the commissioner explain why a £0.5m PFI reserve is being created and why he is proposing a £0.4m increase to the Major Operations Fund between 31/3/14 and 31/3/15. Can he also clarify how these are being funded.

The PFI reserve will total £1m at the end of 15/16, following planned transfers to this reserve in the current year and next. The reserve is held to mitigate the contractual price increases throughout the remainder of the PFI contracts. This is normal practice in managing PFI cashflows and particularly important in dealing with index linked contracts in a period when our funding is being reduced. The PFI transfer is in the base budget for 2014-15 and 2015-16, then removed.

The Major operations contingency stood at £1.2m at the end of 13/14, but the revenue funding for major operations underspent by £400k in that year. The PCC agreed to put this one off underspend to the Major Operations Contingency, to allow a greater risk to be taken with revenue funding for major operations in the future, as reported to the Panel in June 2014. As a result, the Major Operations Contingency revenue budget has been reduced on an on-going basis by £200k with effect from 2015/16. We underspent on major ops in revenue by £426k last year. This was carried forward as part of general balances and then transferred to the major ops reserve in the current year.

9.6 The Independent member asked the PCC what other options had been considered for this funding and the PCC advised that all budgets had been reviewed to explore options but noted that the major crime budget had to remain and made reference to a recent case in Purbeck. The Treasurer commented that part of the budget setting process was to review all reserves and balances and money was set aside to deal with potential risks.

8. Can the panel be advised why 1.5% notional rate of inflation has been applied to all budgets subject to inflationary pressure when the current rate of inflation as measured by CPI is 0.5%.

Most contracts continue to be tied into RPI, which is running higher than CPI – although still at a very low point of 1.6% in December. Although it is not possible to predict future price increases, a 1.5% annual increase is a significant reduction from previous projections and roughly reflects the current position. It is however only applied to budget headings where cost increases are unavoidable.

9. Can the panel be advised of the process to deliver the £0.5m un-identified savings referred to as a negative budget or "risk line".

The risk line has been introduced to ensure that continued challenge is applied to budget holders during the year. Although it is not known at this stage where these savings will be found from, monthly meetings with budget holders will maintain the pressure on them to realise further reduction. In addition, contracts will be re-negotiated during the year, with an expectation that these will realise

savings. It will be a challenge to meet this risk line, but that challenge will be passed on to those managing the budget with clear expectations that the saving will be found.

10. Can the Panel be advised as to why £1.2m has been spent on “Costs of Ferndown Disposal” as reference in the proposed capital programme (Appendix C)?

The £1.2m relates primarily to relocation costs, including dog section, Transport, Territorial Policing and so on, much of which needs significant adaptation work at its new location. It also provides for an element of redundancy costs arising from the relocation. All costs will be kept to a minimum as far as possible. The costs are funded from the anticipated sale proceeds from Ferndown (£5m+), and will result in significantly lower on-going costs in the region of £0.3m per annum.

11. Can the Panel be informed how the tablet computers that it is intended to spend just under £0.5m of capital on in 2015/16, will be used.

The purchase of tablet computers will support the Smarter Systems work that is currently on-going in the Force. It will provide a key means for remote access to information for officers and staff, allowing for the more efficient use of time, which given the anticipated reductions in workforce, will be essential.

12. Can the Treasurer please explain the £1.4M smoothing fund removal entry in Table 1 in App 2 of his report. Also, in the budget for 14/15, this was set at £600k, why was it increased and where did this funding come from?

The 2013 Medium Term Financial Strategy indicated that there was likely to be a temporary shortfall in 2015/16 and 2016/17, when compared with 2014/15, due to timings of savings achieved over those years. This was on top of the underlying shortfall resulting from the cuts in grant funding. The projection was based on numerous assumptions, including timing of leavers and recruits. It was originally anticipated that £0.8m set aside would be sufficient for this purpose, although that was increased by £0.6m to £1.4m as part of the 2015/15 budget round.

Following feedback from the Police and Crime Panel, the need for the smoothing fund was revisited as part of the updated Medium Term Financial Strategy process for 2015/16. At that point many assumptions had changed, including the timing of costs and savings, and a significant amount of further savings were projected, including through LGPS deficit changes, Cost Challenge and the introduction of the risk line from 2015/16. It was decided that the effect of the year on year variances could be dealt with through normal budgeting processes and the need for a smoothing fund was removed.

9.7 The member from Christchurch Borough Council asked if money was being used for the ‘Niche’ programme. The PCC advised that there were two different programmes running and the smarter systems project could link into the ‘Niche’ project. This was a major change in software for Dorset Police and retraining would be needed.

9.8 Following a question from the member from Weymouth and Portland Borough Council about the background to the commitment to freeze the precept following public acceptance that the precept should rise, the PCC advised that he had made a promise to the public for this period and was honouring this, he was finding savings elsewhere rather than raising the precept for a third time. He added that this was the calm before the storm

and that next year would be very different and was currently taking legal advice around the possibility of giving the public a say via a referendum.

9.9 In response to a question from a member from Dorset County Council concerning the huge demands on the Police with regards to terrorism and how this would be funded, the PCC advised that should a similar incident to the one in Paris arise, there were funding streams available from central government. The Chief Constable added that the approach to terrorism was a national initiative with protected funding.

9.10 The member from North Dorset District Council made reference to the cut in crime over a 9 year period and the opportunity for efficiency savings as less crime was being reported. The PCC advised that projections had been a 24% cut on top of the 18% cut that had already been achieved. Nationally crime reported had reduced by 40% but a slow down was now being seen. It was now more about risk and harm and reducing and stopping crime.

9.11 The Chief Constable advised that although crime had reduced the demand on Police had not and that the average cost of crime had increased by 20%. They were now moving towards an evidence based demand service but it was the hidden and emerging crime that was not known. She noted that cyber crime was now becoming more well-known and understood.

9.12 Following a question from the Leader from the Borough of Poole about the consideration of joint lobbying, the PCC advised that there had been some with regards to the Fire Authority and there had been a considerable amount of lobbying done through Oliver Letwin MP. To date he had not been asked to take part in any lobbying with the County Council or the Borough of Poole.

9.13 One member from Bournemouth Borough Council whilst welcoming the opportunity to freeze the precept asked if alternative options to increase funding had been considered. The PCC confirmed he was constantly looking at new ways of funding and also challenged the Chief Constable to find new ways. With regards to the proceeds of crime Act, 18% of what was seized comes back to Dorset via the Treasury which he had challenged and lobbied on. He was prevented from raising more than 1% of his budget in sponsorship but added that many PCCs were now exploring the opportunities of sponsorship. He also advised that there was now a post in his office whose role was to income generate in as many different ways as possible.

9.14 It was agreed to hold a recorded vote on the recommendations in the Treasurer's report. Members voted unanimously to support the freeze in precept for 2015-16 and accepted the Freeze Grant which was equivalent to a 1% council tax increase.

Resolved

10. That the Freeze in precept for 2015-16 be supported.

Reason for Decision

11. The Police and Crime Panels (Precepts and Chief Constable Appointments) regulations 2012 required the Police and Crime Commissioner to notify the panel of their proposed precept for 2015-16 by 1 February 2015. This then needed to be considered by the Police and Crime Panel who could either approve the proposed precept or veto it. A two thirds majority of the Police and Crime Panel was required to veto any precept proposal.

Progress against the Police and Crime Plan (Quarter 3 – April to November)

12.1 The Panel considered a report by the Commissioner which informed members of the progress against the Police and Crime Plan and Priorities 2013 – 17 for Quarter (April-November 2014).

12.2 The PCC provided commentary for members on a few key areas of activity and highlighted the priorities in the Plan. The Panel was also updated separately on the other sections of the plan and how performance in those areas was being managed. Members asked the following questions on the relevant priorities.

Priority 1

12.3 Following a comment from the Chairman relating to the issue of fewer incidents being recorded but the scale of public engagement with the force remaining the same, the PCC advised that although crime goes down demands do increase. The Chief Constable shared some data with members in that 400,000 contact calls a year were received, (221 999 calls a day and 746 101 calls a day). 522 incidents were reported daily and 275 were attended by the Police.

12.4 Following a question from a member from Dorset County Council about the use of the voluntary sector and volunteers and also police attendance at community events, the Chief Constable advised that there was work in progress to expand the capacity of the work in relation to the voluntary sector. Part of the PCC's statutory role was community engagement which was supported by volunteers. Special constables were primarily volunteers and 150 had been recruited this year. Whilst the Police wanted to focus on what happened within communities they did have to prioritise risks and were limited by the resources they had and did not allow them to be as involved as they were previously.

12.5 The member from North Dorset District Council welcomed the PCC raising the issue of tazars in relation to mental health but asked if the policy had now changed. The PCC advised that there would be significant changes nationally and they would be announced shortly.

12.6 In relation to the Victims Bureau, based in Boscombe, and the question of rural access, the PCC advised that he was currently exploring a satellite bureau to address this area. The Chief Executive added that the services of the bureau also went to the victim, and highlighted the benefits of having a victim's hub.

12.7 Following a question from the Leader of the Borough of Poole concerning unreported crime and the change in the age of those person's exhibiting anti-social behaviour, the PCC shared the Leader's concerns across Dorset in relation to anti-social behaviour and was seeing more examples of older resident disputes, but advised that the community trigger had not been activated. The Chief Constable commented that in relation to unreported crime, some people chose not to report a crime and that there were media campaigns to encourage more reporting. Smarter systems aimed to make the process easier for the public to report crime.

12.8 Several members commented on issues with the 101 service and the Chief Constable noted that 70% of calls were now answered within 30 seconds and then passed to a force command centre if necessary within 30 seconds. The PCC commented that this was not an urgent number, it was a national system that they were unable to change and did not plan to take police officers off the beat in order to answer a phone. The member from North Dorset District Council felt a message needed to be sent out that this was not a

directory enquiry number. Following a visit to the call centre he felt the service was not being used appropriately.

12.9 Following a question from a member from the Borough of Poole regarding public events being held at venues without disabled access, the PCC advised that if his office arranged an event there was always disabled access but he was not able to dictate the choice of venues that he had not arranged or paid for, but undertook to add this request to event forms he was sent.

Priority 2

12.10 The Chief Constable gave members some context to the latest performance figures in relation to the number of people seriously harmed in Dorset. She highlighted the change in domestic abuse counting levels and made reference to national and local campaigns to encourage the reporting of domestic abuse. The numbers of sexual offences was following the national trend of increase and noted that around a third of the work was historic. Increases in public place violence, as in other areas, was in some respect due to a change in legislation, a third of injuries in this area related to dog bites. There was a need to look at the longer term trends to ensure there was the evidence base to tackle issues. She highlighted that deaths on roads were now the lowest since 1926, although the number of seriously injured had increased.

12.11 The Chairman felt that sight of the national figures alongside the local ones in future reports would be helpful. The Chief Constable advised that they would be able to provide the nearest national figures available but noted that they may not necessarily be within the same period of reporting that was being considered.

12.12 In relation to alcohol related crime the PCC noted that he was lobbying to bring the drink drive limit down and was looking at the fixed price for alcohol.

12.13 The member from North Dorset District Council noted that the figures for serious sex offences showed that trust was growing following a history of poor prosecutions and felt it would be helpful to know the numbers of perpetrators that were prosecuted. The Chief Constable agreed that people should have a good journey through prosecution, if this was what they wanted, but the job of the Police was also to protect others from an individual. A positive outcome at court was not what everyone required.

Priority 6

12.14 The PCC advised that the Strategic Alliance work with Devon and Cornwall continued to drive out the savings that were required.

12.15 Following a question from the member from Christchurch Borough Council regarding PCSO's in his particular area, the PCC advised that these posts had been ring-fenced until May 2016. The Chief Constable commented that more PCSO's had been recruited recently and more would be recruited and highlighted that nowhere would be left without cover but some had to be moved operationally to cope with increased demand.

12.16 One member from Bournemouth Borough Council highlighted the work of CSAS (private security firm in Boscombe to help tackle anti-social behaviour) and also queried the powers of PCSO's in the light of a review. The Chief Constable responded that they were keen to ensure the CSAS supplemented the work of the PCSO's. PCSO's did not have all the powers of Police Officers and should be used differently. Evidence had

suggested that PCSO's should not be given more powers within a safer neighbourhood environment. The implementation process following the review had now started.

Section 3: Financial update against planned spending

12.17 Following a question from the member from North Dorset District Council about the amount spent on specific items in relation to the use of the 2014/15 precept increase, the PCC advised the following expenditure had been made: Integrated Offender Management - £100k; Body Worn Cameras - £100k so far; Cyber Crime - £100k (will increase); Rural Vehicles – 7 new vehicles £200k; Officer recruitment - £1.6m (130 new officers joined the force this year).

12.18 The Chief Constable made reference to an important piece of work being undertaken by the College of Policing, which was led nationally, but one which Dorset Police supported. One member expressed concern about using national statistics as reporting in metropolitan areas was very different. The Chief Constable noted that there would be the ability to extrapolate relevant figures to show how the local picture looked and undertook to circulate further explanation of this to all members.

Noted

Refresh of the Police and Crime Plan

13.1 The Panel considered a report by the Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer to the Police and Crime Commissioner which updated members on the refresh of the Police and Crime Plan 2013/17 for the 2015/16 financial year.

13.2 The Chief Executive advised members that the plan was in draft and that the figures related to when the plan was last published and would be updated when published at the end of April. He welcomed feedback from members via Andy Frost. He also advised that the Annual Report would be presented to members at their next meeting in June.

Noted

Dates of Future Meetings and Programme of Future Business

14.1 The Panel considered and agreed its Work Programme for 2015.

14.2 Members were reminded of the dates for future meetings during 2015, as follows:

- Tuesday 9 June 2015. 10.00am
- Thursday 10 September 2015, 10.00am
- Tuesday 10 November 2015, 10.00am
- Thursday 10 December 2015, 10.00am, Training and Development Session for all members

Resolved

14. That the Work Programme be agreed with the addition of a report on expenditure in the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for the next meeting in June.

Questions

15. No questions were asked by members of the Panel.

Meeting Duration: 10.00am – 12.45pm

Annexure

PCC Budget speech

The budget I have presented today will provide Dorset Police and the Chief Constable with the resources needed to deliver the requirements that I have set out in the policing plan. At last year's panel I undertook to explore freezing the police element of the council tax for this year and I have delivered against this promise. This has not been without its challenges.

This is now the 5th budget since the start of the austerity measures and my 3rd as the elected Police and Crime Commissioner for Dorset.

We have already seen a cash reduction in our funding levels of 18% since 2011 and this year's police funding settlement reduces that still further, placing ever increasing pressures on operational budgets.

In recent years, the police authority accepted government freeze grants in 2011-12 and 2012-13 and I took the difficult decisions to increase the police precept by just under 2% in the following 2 years.

- When I decided on the precept level last year, I undertook that I would review the policing budgets with a view to limiting the increase of police precept in 2015-16, perhaps even to a 0% increase if that was possible.
- As we have reported to the panel during the year, this review has led to the establishment of a more risk based approach to our budgeting along with significant savings driven out through
 - Scrutinising further previously underspent budgets
 - Repaying our pension fund deficit to reduce liability
 - The sale of surplus assets to help fund our capital programme
- I did however state that the freeze would only be possible if there was no significant divergence from our funding assumptions – the news there is good and bad.
- You'll see in section 5 of the treasurer's budget paper that the taxbase upon which council tax is collected has increased significantly for 2015-16.
- A number of our billing authorities have seen substantial rises, particularly Bournemouth, and this has pushed the increase for 2015-16 up to 1.5%. This compares favourably with our assumption of 0.6% and adds around £463,000 to the base budget.
- So, collection fund surpluses of £383,000 have been generated, which equates to £83,000 more than our planning assumption.
- **That's the good news.**
- The bad news is that the police funding settlement from the home office is even worse than anticipated.
- The Home Office had protected the police service from additional cuts in 2014-15 but this is not the case for

2015-16. Additionally, extra money has been top-sliced from the budget for a number of government policies that are tabled as additional initiatives; such as the police

innovation fund (which we are then required to bid against) and the substantial growth of the **independent police complaints commission and her majesty's inspectorate.**

- This has resulted in a total loss of central government grant funding to me to allocate for policing in Dorset, for 2015-16 of around £3.2m.
- This is £680,000 worse than even our most prudent projections. This is devastating news for the people of Dorset.
- So what does this mean overall? We are around £135k worse off than our original medium term financial plan assumptions, so a difficult position has become even worse.
- Despite these challenges, the chief constable and I have really pushed officer recruitment with 130 new officers being taken on. This will also avoid the underspending of pay budgets which we have seen in previous years through staff turnover and delayed recruitment processes. This principle of ensuring Dorset Police continues to recruit has been protected for 2015-16, under the planned budget before you today.
- However I sit before you as a Police and Crime Commissioner fearful of what the near future may hold.
- It is clear that there will be further austerity ahead, but the severity of it and how it will affect policing is largely dependant upon the results of the general election in May 2015 and the makeup of any future government.
- Projections have shown that the biggest challenges are yet to come. Early indications are that the next comprehensive spending review will be even more demanding than the last one.

Whilst there are many commentators trying to second guess what this will look like, they are all consistent in forecasting further cuts. The Institute of Fiscal Studies, after reviewing all the major parties' proposals, and the chancellor's autumn statement has concluded that year-on-year real cuts of 6% should be seen as a realistic prospect.

If this happens, this is a removal of 41% from police budgets centrally in 9 years.

For Dorset Police this could be a further £20m reduction in the budget. To put this in context £20m is the equivalent of 500 uniformed officers, or the withdrawal of all policing activity in Bournemouth.

More realistically I have been working with the force to see what the practical implications of such further cuts could be.

The starting point was not where further cuts could be made but the increasing demands and public expectation on the service.

Child sexual exploitation,
Human trafficking,
Cyber-crime,
Counter terrorism,
Protecting and supporting victims and vulnerable individuals

Are all growing areas of demand. As the whole of the public sector comes under increasing pressure, the police are increasingly becoming the service of last resort.

Against these pressures, with a policing resource level not seen since the 1970's, there would have to be a dramatic shift in the services and response provided.

The absolute imperative of taking calls and responding to emergencies would have to be maintained as the very core of our service. Some capacity to respond to serious crime would also be retained.

So, to my proposal

All of this fearful uncertainty is part of the context of my proposals before you today.

Section 13 of the report confirms my proposal to freeze council tax for 2015-16.

My thorough review of finances has put us in a position to be able to do so, even though i have wrestled with that proposal, i have decided not to increase the burden on our council tax payers this year.

Importantly, and a significant element of my considerations, is that this proposal will make Dorset eligible for a government freeze grant designed to persuade PCCs to freeze precepts; this equates to the equivalent of a 1% rise of £574,000 which will then be added into our funding baseline, meaning it will be available year after year.

This is a very difficult decision that weighs heavily with me. I am inherently aware of the baselined benefit of raising a further £500,000 if I was to raise the precept under current capping limits of 2 % but as I sit here today the future is uncertain.

An additional driver for the argument of taking the government 1% grant is the fact that I have obtained a seat at the table with the government gold group sitting soon to restructure the police funding formula ... Surely a larger government grant is preferable to taxing the public?

And then there are the consultation results

Now, statutorily, I must consult on the level of contribution from local people towards the police. I am pleased that so many got involved in local democracy through my precept consultation which attracted the highest return in the region when compared to other PCC offices.

It's important I thank the 2,635 people who responded to our seven weeks public consultation on the 2015-2016 precept proposals, which closed on Friday 30 January.

Together with the community safety survey, seen here, we received over 3,000 responses, the highest response rate in the south.

Going to the online survey, of the 602 respondents, 30% have indicated that they support a freeze. 15% would support a 1% increase although this can be achieved by accepting the freeze grant at no cost to the council tax payer. 25% have indicated that an increase of around 2% is about right and a further 27% would be happy to support a higher increase.

The public overwhelmingly said yes to a rise in police funding. But would that rise have been enough?

The Government cleverly offer a 1% central grant as compensation not to raise. The government also then restrict my leeway in raising the precept by “capping” me. This cap prevents me from raising the precept above 1.99%. What both of these things mean, is that to raise the precept for the public would only secure 1% of extra funding, roughly £500,000. I say only, as in reality, to offset the cuts, I need four or five times that amount.

Small wonder that some PCCs in Wales (who are not capped) are announcing precept rises of 3, 4 or 5%!

Within the restrictions placed on me politically, I have sought to balance the needs of our Police service with the demands on families across Dorset. The government have offered me £574,000 if I decide to freeze for this financial year. My preference, naturally, is that wherever possible, the government funds local policing rather than the residents of Dorset having to bridge the funding gap in these difficult financial times.

It is important to note that this consultation will inform future plans as well as current plans. I do hear what the public say.

So, in closing, I am caught between a rock and a hard place ... a government 1% grant that meets some of the need or a capped raise of 2% that partly redresses the huge cuts we have experienced ... This difficult decision of mine that you are considering today is over roughly £500,000, when the actual debate is about 6 or 7 million pounds.

There is no doubt that the upcoming general election brings with it more uncertainty over the future of funding. I have already mentioned that, next year, one of the main political parties is predicting a 6% cut to the budget Year-on-year to 2019.

If that happens, not only could we be looking at a precept rise, I will also actively explore going to referendum, asking the people of Dorset to support a much higher rise.

I say a referendum because the law says that to go above 2%, I have to call one.

So to the panel, and to the public, I say this

Please treat this year as the “calm before the storm”.

Next year, all bets on police funding are off.

Next year, a raise and/or a referendum are likely.

So, in summary

I commend my proposals to you and would value your considered feedback which I will take fully into account in my difficult decision.