

Opening Address from the Police and Crime Commissioner

Today's agenda item concerns a proposal to raise the precept and, as you can clearly see from the proposal paper and Appendix 2, the police budget is never clear cut. I will now lead you through the ebbs and flows that are contained within next year's budget.

At paragraphs 3.2 and 3.3, you will see the view from the Chancellor and the Home Secretary that a freeze in police cuts is dependent upon the PCC raising the police precept. It is important that we don't lose sight of the fact that unless the precept is raised by 2% year on year for the term of this Parliament, police funding will have been cut by 7%. It is equally important to understand that in the ebb and flow of this budget we are not talking about an additional £1m, we are actually talking about offsetting £1m from a £6m cut and using that £1m to deal with emerging threats. Continuing on the ebb and flow you will see at paragraph 6.2 that no freeze grant is actually available to us this year and at paragraph 7.3 an unexpected collection fund surplus has arrived. However, the collection fund surplus is then effectively removed by the increase in the single state pension.

Paragraph 10.1 reminds us that we need to find £6.3m savings this year and paragraph 13.2 highlights that we still do not know the outcome of the review of the funding formula - something that you know I was instrumental in starting with Government.

Notwithstanding that, I was very open minded about freezing the council tax policing element this year except for the three reasons that are clearly outlined in the paper.

And to sum those reasons up: firstly, the Government expects me to raise the precept; secondly, the Chief Constable, for the first time, has formally requested a precept rise; and, thirdly, under my statutory responsibilities I have consulted the public. Those consultation results show 82% in favour of a 1.9% increase. Significantly, we know from our summer consultation with thousands of Dorset residents the three priorities the public are most worried about are matched by the Chief Constable.

In summary therefore, before handing over to you for comments and questions, I come before you to seek your view on raising the precept by 1.97%. If you agree with my position, this raise will enable the Force to achieve savings of £5m next year, not £6m, allowing it to divert £1m towards the three reasons the Chief Constable and the public consider to be their priorities.

Never forget that I complete this term of office with a force that is debt free with adequate reserves, a force that has undergone the biggest IT change in its history and a force that stands and punches above its weight.

By managing the financial position of the Force, I have repaid the pension fund deficit resulting in one of the strongest balance sheets in the Service.

By improving the efficiency of the Force and releasing under-used assets, I have enabled investment in marine capability, rural vehicles, specialist operational technology (such as forensics, use of drones, hi tech crime). The legacy in-house systems of the Force have been or are being replaced with 'fit for purpose' applications that meet our collaborative agenda.

Dorset Police is one of the top performing police forces in this country. It is crucial that we invest in it to maintain that position for whoever is elected as Police and Crime Commissioner in May.