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DORSET POLICE AND CRIME PANEL

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 4 FEBRUARY 2021

[LINK TO RECORDING OF PCP MEETING](#)

Present: Mr Mike Short (Chairman), Cllrs Bobbie Dove (Vice-Chairman), Pete Barrow, George Farquhar, Les Fry, May Haines, Sherry Jespersen, Mr Iain McVie, Cllrs Lisa Northover, David Taylor and Tony Trent

Apologies: Cllr Barry Goringe

Officers present (for all or part of the meeting):

Jim McManus (Corporate Director - Finance and Commercial), Simon Bullock (Chief Executive, OPCC), Marc Eyre (Service Manager for Assurance), Jonathan Mair (Corporate Director - Legal & Democratic Service Monitoring Officer), Martyn Underhill (Police and Crime Commissioner), James Vaughan (Chief Constable), Elaine Tibble (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Adam Harrold (OPCC Director of Operations), Julie Strange (OPCC Chief Finance Officer) and Dave Clegg (Strategic Planning Manager for Corporate Development Dorset Police)

25. Minutes (20:25 on recording)

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 December were confirmed and agreed as a correct record.

The Service Manager for Assurance gave the panel an update on the Action Points from the last meeting.

Action 16 Pending until the next meeting.

Action 18 To be dealt with in Agenda Item 5

Action 19 had been actioned.

26. Declarations of Interest

Cllr May Haines declared an interest as a recently appointed trustee for the Safer Dorset Foundation, which funds the Bobby Van.

27. Public Participation (22:28 on recording)

Public questions were received. A copy of these questions and responses received is appended to these minutes.

28. Budget Precept (24:50 on recording)

The Chairman introduced the Budget Precept with an explanation of the voting rules with the assistance of a visual presentation.

The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) was invited to make his presentation of the report. **(27:45 on recording)**.

The PCC reflected on the current position of Dorset Police and the impacts of recent events such as Brexit and the Covid 19 pandemic.

The PCC invited the Chief Constable to outline what the precept had achieved over the last 12 months.

The Chief Constable thanked the PCC for his unstinting support over the last year. He continued with an update on the Force's achievements over the last year and proposed plans for 2021-22. **(37:25 on recording)**.

The PCC then outlined his reasons for the proposed increase in precept. **(52:13 on recording)**.

His speech and the Chief Constable's letter outlining the case for an increase of £15 in Council Tax for a band D property are attached as appendices to these minutes.

The Director of Operations (OPCC) gave a summary of the Precept consultation responses and results. **(01:10:12 on recording)**.

The Chief Finance Officer (OPCC) then focussed on the funding for the budget comprising of the provisional settlement and the Council Tax element of the funding. The Chief Finance Officer was able to give positive assurance on the robustness of both the reserves and budget. **(01:15:12 on recording)**.

The PCC then summarised **(01:20:07 on recording)**.

The Chairman invited the panel members to ask the following questions. These questions and officer replies can be found on the recording with the timings stated below;

Questions:

1. Noting that 33% of respondents to the PCC's online survey did not endorse a financial uplift of £15 a year for a Band D property, what would be the impact to the people of Dorset if the Precept were frozen? **(01:40:10 on recording)**.
2. How will the increased precept (£15) improve the current position of visibility and the positive resolution of crimes, which both have implications for public confidence and satisfaction levels? **(01:52:47 on recording)**.

3. Council tax contribution to the police budget under your tenure has gone from £50m to £74M; this year the budget proposals include a £15 increase for a band D council taxpayer. How would the strategic approach to delivering the Police & Crime Plan have been impacted if the increase had been limited to the same 2% referendum limit as local authorities (around £4.80 for band D)? **(02:02:25 on recording)**.
4. Setting a budget with finite resources is about choices; for example, you have chosen to invest in vulnerability as part of this Precept uplift. What choices did you discard or postpone in the setting of this budget? **(02:08:40 on recording)**.
5. Dorset Police has stated to the OPCC that the additional precept funding will deliver investment to priority areas – could you please outline to the public what these investments are and how do these areas meet your Police and Crime Plan, given the budget paper mentions the reduction in the tax base alone has effectively cost £1.6m? **(02:11:10 on recording)**.
6. Are there any expectations of a return to tax base growth in the MTFP? If the £1.6m reduction is reversed and we return to levels of growth, is this future windfall in additional CT income factored into financial plans? **(02:12:20 on recording)**.
7. There are a number of big issues in the Capital programme, the ageing Police HQ being one. What action is the OPCC taking to move to a sustainable capital programme and what are the medium to long-term financing assumptions? Is there a longer-term assumption of eliminating and/or repaying borrowing, to reduce the impact on the revenue budget and therefore the local tax payer? **(02:14:04 on recording)**.
8. The MTFP balances in every year with the assumptions that have been made. What challenges for efficiency or productivity improvement sit within those assumptions? The 0.3% savings target set for 2021/22 looks small compared with the increases in national and local funding. **(02:25:23 on recording)**.
9. How do the reserves plans set out in appendix 3 support or mitigate the risks set out in appendix 4? The strategy forecasts that all useable reserves except the general fund will be materially consumed by the end of 24/25, so how are those reserves supporting the organisation's budget over the MTFP period and what are the risks to the revenue budget in the longer term once reserves are used? **(02:27:52 on recording)**.

10. What is the PCC's view on the biggest strategic financial risk being the continued reduction in real terms of central allocation, based on a flawed funding formula? This is compounded against a backdrop of the national PCC review, the outcome of which may be greater national policing objectives and direction, but with accountability left at the door of the PCC and Chief Constable. **(02:32:43 on recording).**

The Chairman took a formal vote on the recommendation to support the PCC's recommended precept increase for 2021/22 to £73,476,745, equivalent to a Band D charge of £255.58, an increase of £15 per annum or £1.25 per month (6.2%). **(02:43:07 on recording).**

Proposed by Vice-Chairman (Cllr Bobbie Dove), seconded by Cllr David Taylor.

Decision: That the Police and Crime Panel unanimously approve the PCC's proposal to increase the precept for 2021/22 to £73,476,745, equivalent to a Band D charge of £255.58, an increase of £15 per annum or £1.25 per month (6.2%).

29. COMFORT BREAK

The Panel adjourned from 12:50 until 13:20hrs.

30. Nomination of Chair/Vice chair for 2021/22 **(03:17:30 on recording)**

The Service Manager for Assurance invited nominations for the position of Chair and Vice-Chair for the year 2021-2022.

It was proposed by Cllr Les Fry and seconded by Cllr David Taylor.

Decision: that Mr Mike Short be appointed Chair and Cllr Bobbie Dove be appointed Vice-Chair for the year 2021-2022 starting June 2021.

Cllr Tony Trent asked for his abstention to be noted.

31. Police and Crime Plan Monitoring Report **(03:22:28 on recording)**

The PCC introduced the PCP Quarterly Monitoring Report and the headlines from the report in relation to progress against the Police and Crime Plan.

Pillar 1 - Protecting People at Risk and Harm **(03:25:30 on recording).**

The panel members received an update from the PCC and members were invited to ask further questions (set out below):

Recorded Hate Crime (YTD) - can the OPCC please provide a succinct verbal brief on the 34% increase?

The Chief Executive (OPCC) responded with an update on recorded hate crime. **(03:27:35 on recording).**

He advised that due to the court delays he might not be able to answer whether there was a corresponding increase in hate crime convictions by the next panel meeting but was happy to add this to the forward plan.

Action: an update on hate crime to be added to the forward plan and presented when available.

Pillar 2- Working with our Communities (03:47:44 on recording).

The panel members received an update from the PCC and members were invited to ask further questions (set out below):

Can the OPCC please outline what the issues are of “working with partners to address ASB” (Yellow)?

The PCC and The Chief Executive (OPCC) responded **(03:40:14 on recording).**

Pillar 3 - Supporting Victims, Witnesses and reducing Reoffending (03:49:07 on recording).

The PCC focused on the delays in the justice system due to Covid 19 restrictions and suggested this was an area the panel may wish to focus on at a future meeting.

Pillar Leads were invited to ask questions.

Pillar 4 - Transforming for the Future (03:57:56 on recording).

The panel members received an update from the PCC and were invited to ask questions.

In response to a request for an update on artificial intelligence and automation, the Chief Executive gave the panel an update on what was being worked on in the area.

The Chairman then invited all panel members to put forward their questions on the four Pillars. **(04:11:00 on recording).**

Questions asked related to:

How the Force was planning to deal with an influx of visitors to Dorset during summer.

Environmental Anti-Social Behaviour.

Hate Crime with an Action point to look at how to reduce and remove barriers to people reporting hate crime and increase confidence in reporting these crimes.

Covid related fraud.
Housing for homeless in Weymouth.

FY 20/21 Q3 finance questions: **(04:42:40 on recording)**.

The Chairman asked the Chief Finance Officer (OPCC) to respond to questions 1 & 2 questions via the minutes:-

1. OPCC Commissioning Spend for FY19/20 was £2.2m. In this FY to date it is reported as £339k. Why the shortfall in commissioning?
 - A. The OPCC line does appear to be behind schedule however this line includes both the income and expenditure for the OPCC and reflects the full year grants for Victims Funds. Commissioning activity has been busier than ever this year with specific Covid Funds available as well as our core spend. Commissioning spend up to the end of December was over £1m with further invoices expected imminently. The budget is forecast to be fully spent by year end.
2. Could the OPCC please remind the panel where the uplift of £653k in the Capital Budget direct revenue contributions was sourced from?
 - A. Around a third of the additional revenue contributions have come from contributions from other Forces for forensics work that we host on behalf of the region. The remainder is in relation to uplift spend primarily for new vehicles, which has been funded from the ring fenced revenue grant received for that purpose.
3. The Q2 report predicted an overspend of £1.4m, 3 months later this overspend is now quoted as £300k. The Fin team are to be congratulated for this achievement. Can the OPCC please outline how this swift turnaround of £1.1m was achieved?

The Chief Finance Officer (OPCC) responded and outlined how the turnaround was achieved **(04:43:15 on recording)**.

32. **Covid - Verbal Update (04:45:00 on recording)**

The Chief Executive (OPCC) gave the panel members a verbal update for the latest position on Covid activity.

The panel members were then invited to put any questions to the Chief Executive.

33. **Complaints - Verbal Update (04:56:00 on recording)**

The Chairman of the PCP Complaints Sub-Committee confirmed that there were no outstanding complaints.

34. Forward Workplan (04:56:23 on recording)

The Service Manager for Assurance presented the workplan. There were a couple of issues raised at the meeting to add to the plan.

35. Thanks to the PCC

Cllr Bobbie Dove extended her thanks to the Police and Crime Commissioner for his hard work over the last 9 years. This was echoed by the Chairman who also congratulated him on the good position he was leaving Dorset Police in.

The PCC thanked the Chair and Vice-Chair for their support.

36. Urgent items

There were no urgent items.

37. Exempt Business

There was no exempt business.

**Public Questions and Responses
Appendices to minutes**

Duration of meeting: 10.00 am - 3.02 pm

Chairman

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Appendix

David Sidwick

- a. Regarding burglary, please can the PCC report on the number of burglaries reported to Dorset Police in the year to March 2020, the number investigated and the number solved split by council area. What specific burglary prevention programmes other than Neighbourhood Watch did the OPCC invest in during that year (March 2019 – 2020)?

Chair, I thank Mr Sidwick for his usual questions, but, I am slightly frustrated by this. Once again, his question is for the police force, rather than myself. The information requested is also partly available in regularly published ONS statistics.

The number of burglaries recorded by Dorset Police in the year to June 2020 ¹ was 2,339 for the BCP Council area, and 1,198 for the Dorset Council area. These data represent a 14% reduction in volume from the year ending June 2019 for the BCP area, and a 19% reduction for the Dorset area.

With regards to the number investigated, again a somewhat odd question as, of course, all crimes are routinely investigated.

And with regards to the number solved, this is more complicated, as the correct terminology is the number of crimes that receive a positive outcome, for example a charge or summons. This is 9.6%, which Chair might sound low, but is actually the 8th best nationally at the time.

Finally, Chair on burglary prevention, I am slightly confused as the details are requested of initiatives undertaken during 2019/20, rather than this year. Nevertheless, I'll limit myself to three examples.

Most importantly, I gave Dorset Police the strongest possible support through precept increase, allowing the Chief Constable to maximise the numbers of officers within Neighbourhood Policing Teams. I also continue to support the work of the Integrated Offender Management programme, whose cohort includes recidivist prolific burglars, through funding the GPS tagging scheme. And finally, and perhaps most proudly the Chief Constable and I were able to launch the Dorset Bobby Van during this year, which focuses on reducing the level of domestic burglary and distraction burglary and supporting victims to feel safer in their homes.

- b. Regarding anti-social behaviour for the year to March 2020, during which Dorset had the second worst annual rate of ASB in the South of England (excluding London) – What specific programmes to cut ASB did the OPCC invest in during that year?

Chair, once again, I am dismayed that Mr Sidwick continues to ignore the detail, and incorrectly use statistics to make a political point. Despite having made this point to him on several occasions, I will reiterate the two key errors here.

Firstly, his ‘soundbite’ statistic is wrong. Secondly, antisocial behaviour has three components – which means you cannot make a sweeping statement without the context.

Chair, ASB has three components - environmental, nuisance and personal.

¹

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/recorde...>

- Personal ASB is when a person targets a specific individual or group.
- Nuisance ASB is when a person causes trouble, annoyance or suffering to a community.
- Environmental ASB is when a person's actions affect the wider environment, such as public spaces or buildings.

These national definitions show that some types of ASB are better actioned by police – for example personal ASB, whereas others – whilst policing will play a supportive role, in practice will be led by other responsible authorities – for example, environmental ASB, which in Dorset primarily rests with Local Authorities, Dorset Waste Partnership and others.

What this means is that several agencies are accountable for ASB as a whole, something the questioner consistently ignores.

As for the statistics, for the time period Mr Sidwick highlights, Dorset ranked 18th best out of the 43 forces for personal ASB rates. Of course, this is still lower than we would want, but I do need to make it clear that, for policing, the position is nowhere near as dire as he portrays.

(IF ASKED: Dorset ranked 33rd for environmental, and 35th for nuisance – meaning we were 32nd overall.)

Moving on then, there are a raft of initiatives that I have funded such as the Community Safety Accreditation Schemes and funding BIDS to work with local retailers to reduce the level of business and retail related crime and ASB, but again I will limit myself to three examples.

Firstly, as PCC, I listen to the public and act on what they tell me – therefore, in 2020 – admittedly just after the time period highlighted, I undertook an extensive public consultation on ASB, which received just shy of 4000 responses. This found, for example, that a large percentage of the public, were not aware of the correct responsible authorities for dealing with some types of ASB.

Secondly, I again gave Dorset Police the best support possible to tackle crime and ASB by increasing precept. Chair, I know I have already made this point, but I fear it needs to be made twice. PCCs are responsible for setting the police budget to allow Chief Constables the best opportunity to deliver against current and expected levels of demand. Whilst some PCCs prefer to retain higher proportions of the policing budget for themselves, and then use that to deliver projects and initiatives under their own banner, I do not, and am quite content to raise more funds to give the Chief Constable and his team the independence to deliver this operational activity free from political interference.

Thirdly and finally, Chair, I continue to link with CSPs to support their work. My office is closely linked into the wider partnership work, and of course, can influence and support. For example, my office led on establishing the Dorset Fly Tipping Group (DFTG), bringing together partners to ensure a coordinated and effective response to fly-tipping, which features in environmental ASB. Membership includes BCP and Dorset Councils, Dorset Waste Partnership (which delivers the waste collection services for Dorset Council), Dorset Police, Environment Agency, National Farmers Union, Country Landowners Association, National Trust and Dorset Wildlife Trust. A key deliverable has been the recruitment of a dedicated fly tipping co-ordinator post. Funded for one year by me, this post started in December 2019.

Patrick Canavan

The Office of National Statistics indicated a 10.8% [increase] in domestic abuse crimes for the year ending March 2020. The Coronavirus pandemic has clearly had an impact. With restrictions possibly continuing for some time, what further steps can be taken to increase resources and practical support for victims of domestic abuse? Also, could you please outline the plan to improve the conviction rate for rape and sexual assault?

I thank Mr Canavan for his question, and agree that the pandemic has clearly had an impact, although as the moment we do not yet have the ability to fully quantify that across the country due to the way that national crime stats are collated and reported.

Chair, you will know that this issue worries me greatly, and I am also grateful for the support that members have given this issue over the past several meetings where I have provided a number of updates on this matter.

To recap those, at the beginning of the first lockdown, my team acted quickly to support a DA awareness raising campaign which including targeting advertising, and printing details of how to access DA services during the lockdown period on pharmacy bags. I have also funded CARA, the Cautions And Relationship Abuse programme which works with lower risk DA offenders earlier on to prevent escalation and continued cycles of abuse.

More recently, through the £90k of funding my office secured, I have funded the Drive Perpetrator programme which works with high risk DA offenders to help change their behaviours and offer support with issues like substance misuse and mental health. Also, both my office and the Force have supported the “Ask for ANI” codeword scheme from the Home Office that provides a discreet way for victims of DA to signal that they need emergency help whilst at their local pharmacy.

Finally, with regards to our plans to improve the conviction rate for Rape and Serious Sexual Offences, or RASSO, we are part of a Wessex CPS Tri-Force RASSO Gold Group, tasked with doing exactly this. This group meets monthly, led by the three ACCs for Dorset, Hampshire and Wiltshire, and governed jointly by the Tri-Force Chief Constables and PCCs, and the Chief Crown Prosecutor.

PCCs have funded an independent review of the Force’s approaches and I am well engaged in the tactical and operational governance. An expert will be reviewing case files to help identify areas for improvement and offer up best practice.

There is a shared ambition to narrow the disparity between the number of offences that are reported to the police and the cases going to court, as well as encouraging victims to come forward and report with confidence.

The plan addresses five themes:

- Supporting victims
- Casework quality and progression
- Digital capability and disclosure
- People and Expertise
- Effective governance

Chair, actions are progressing well, but it is acknowledged that there are national issues at play, and – bearing in mind the lengthy nature of investigations and court cases – significantly improved outcomes will take some time to be realised.

Norman Brennan

- a. What effect has the pandemic had on your finances as a force and has the pandemic affected the Forces ability to continue the uplift?

I thank Mr Brennan for his questions. Chair, in highlighting the challenge of delivering the police uplift programme in the midst of a pandemic, and with limited resources, Mr Brennan makes a fair point.

The pandemic has significantly affected the Force's cashflow, and ability to plan and deliver growth that could provide new or enhanced services across the county.

Chair, you will recall that, very early on, concerns were raised about a national shortage of PPE. The issue of funding quickly arose, and as Government support was not immediately forthcoming, PCCs and Chiefs agreed to stand up a national consortium approach to procure PPE, jointly underwritten by all to a collective value of £5m. While Ministers said forces would be reimbursed for PPE, written confirmation was not received until September last year - some five months after the issue was first raised. Forces now complete monthly returns for every item of medical grade PPE used.

Similarly, as the pandemic took further hold, it was clear that policing was struggling. With significantly higher than normal levels of absences, our frontline was being asked to work harder and longer to provide cover, while also policing changeable rules and guidance.

Of course, there are no additional officers to cover emergencies, instead our dedicated officers work additional shifts. The cost of overtime was therefore accruing at significant levels, and so again PCCs and Chiefs asked the Government for help.

However, instead of a dedicated fund, Forces were permitted to use half of the £1.4m uplift grant to cover Covid-19 costs – but, at the same time, asked to keep up the pace of recruitment. This was disappointing, and meant that we had to choose between using dedicated funds to support uplift, or divert them to operational spend.

The Chief Constable and I agreed it best not to use the fund to pay for Covid-19 costs as our concern was how we would fund the uplift programme. Subsequently, some of the costs for Covid were later reimbursed ², but the Force will still have to foot the overtime bill, and some supplementary costs. Despite this challenge, Chair, Dorset's uplift programme remains fully on track, and indeed I anticipate us recruiting above the Govt figure this year and the next.

- b. With the pandemic issue prevailing, are you predicting a balanced Medium Term Financial Plan?

Chair, with regards to the Medium Term Financial Strategy, this is being covered in detail under the next agenda item. However, I am pleased to confirm that as part of the budget setting process the medium term financial strategy has been reviewed and updated, extending it until 2024/25.

Whilst, policing does not benefit from a multi-year finance settlement, and it is therefore difficult to accurately predict what our future funding position might be, our neutral position shows a balanced budget across the duration of the MTFS, the first time I can say that in nine years as a Commissioner.

² medical PPE, a proportion of income that we were not able to generate and other aspects

Appendix

PCC PRECEPT SPEECH

Thank you Chair,

Members of the Panel,

Today I formally request that you consider my proposal to raise precept for Dorset taxpayers by 6.2% or the equivalent of £15 per year for a band D property.

I will start today by laying out the current situation. I will of course include last year's precept rise in this scenario setting, with the assistance of the Chief Constable.

Last year, I was able to tell you and the public that the 2020/21 settlement meant that the Force would be able to deliver a balanced budget and recruit 50 officers as part of a three-year recruitment cycle. This was the number that had been allocated to the Force during the first year of the government's commitment to increase officer numbers by 20,000 nationally. I also informed the public that I had a concern around funding the second and third years of this cycle and that if I had been permitted by Government to set the precept at £15 a year, as had been expected and as Dorset residents said they would support, the additional £5 per household would have gone into a pot to fund officer recruitment in 2021/22.

You will know that last year's precept consultation received over 5000 responses, either online or at a series of face-to-face events. There was overwhelming agreement that Dorset Police required additional funding and nearly three quarters of respondents said they would be willing to pay an extra £1.25 a month. Notwithstanding that, I set the precept rise at £10, and this was brought to the panel and endorsed by yourselves unanimously.

The Chief Constable will shortly outline what this precept rise achieved in the last 12 months, but first I want to quickly outline our current state.

Financially, we are still facing considerable challenges. The costs relating to officer uplift, inflationary pressures and other issues still threaten the stability of our finances. These are comprehensively detailed in the Chief Finance Officers report under this agenda item.

To start with a positive, for policing, the EU Exit has passed with something of a whimper. I am one of the lead PCCs for Brexit and the impact has been a lot better than first feared. Yes, policing has lost access to some automated intelligence and data sharing systems but the more worrying scenarios of queues at petrol stations, fishing blockades and empty supermarket shelves have not (yet) come to pass.

However, the pandemic is very much still with us, crime has not stopped, and we also have the positive pressure of meeting the recruitment uplift challenge.

In terms of the pandemic, the impact on policing and partner agencies has been enormous, requiring changes in operating models and structures. The legacy of the pandemic is largely unknown but I believe that it will impact on policing both directly and indirectly in three ways:

First, the consequences of **renewed austerity**, hardship caused by furlough, and the risk of a double dip recession. There is a realistic prospect that such issues will have an adverse impact on crime, especially online crime and acquisitive crime, plus an increase in ASB. We can look at history to see this is predictable, and needs to be built into forward plans.

Secondly, whether the extended periods of lockdown are masking crimes in private spaces. It might be that a glut of historic reporting will take place once society is free of these current restrictions. Sadly, only time will tell.

And, thirdly, the impact on overall public health and wellbeing – will we see, for example, a sustained increase in serious mental ill health, addiction and suicide, especially in the youth of our society? The current trends suggest both. Despite the huge leaps made in mental health provision in this county, especially in relation to policing, this will seriously impact on police demand and police delivery.

Moving to the **Police Uplift Programme**, this has provided some welcome relief, but even here there are challenges. The government's initial plan was to increase nationally by 6000 officers in year 1, 8000 in year 2, and then a final 6000 in year 3. As a result of the pandemic, the government decided to reduce the year two target, and catch up with an increase in year three.

On a national level it could be argued that this makes sense, but locally it does create difficulties.

For Dorset, which – for the reasons mentioned earlier – had endured many years of low recruitment, we needed to rebuild our recruitment capability to attract, select and train these new officers. So, having done this, the Chief and I took the decision to stick with the year 2 plans, and to over-recruit. This will allow for efficiency savings in scaling training, and the ability to frontload our recruitment to the benefit of Dorset citizens, as it will result in us getting more officers out on the streets sooner rather than later. As a Force we are predicting that at least 64 officers will be recruited by 31 March 2021. Of course, it bears repeating that the funding provision from the government was simply for officer uplift and will not cover the ongoing officer costs and ancillary costs of the programme.

The potential impact of uplift on policing given the context we find ourselves in is hard to predict but before I outline this year's proposals, and reflect more fully on meeting the demands, I'd like to pass to the Chief Constable who can tell you about what the Force delivered with last year's precept rise.

Thank you James

I will now outline the reasons why I have asked this year for a £15 precept rise. This will be followed by my Director of Operations, Adam, who will briefly outline the results of the public consultation to assist your decision making.

My Treasurer Julie will conclude with some further detail on the figures and the process, before we go into your questions.

Intrinsic to today's proposal are several points:

1. This proposal to raise, has come from a request by the Chief Constable and his letter to me provides great detail and context.

In the interests of transparency and in order to aid understanding, this will be appended to the minutes of this meeting, along with a copy of my speech.

Please note this letter was written after the announcement of the 2021/22 police settlement, but nevertheless a few weeks ago now.

2. This proposal will provide the Force with a balanced budget for next year and allows, for the first time since I have been PCC, for a fully balanced MTFP to be presented. The picture may change as policing does not receive multi-year settlements, but this is a realistic MTFP and positive news.
3. The proposal also enables the Force to meet the unavoidable costs of providing an enhanced service in the face of a global health emergency and allow the further recruitment of additional officers. We received an additional one off Covid surge fund of £250K to enable additional Covid related targeted deployment, but the repeat of the provision is not anticipated in the 2021/2022 financial year.
4. The recruitment of at least 64 officers exceeds the Governments revised position as reflected in their spending review this year, and we will benefit from the uplift cohort earlier than expected by maximising the full advantage of the infrastructure that we have put in place to recruit and train the new officers.
5. This precept rise proposal, like last year, is announced by Government, not by me. The Government made the announcement in advance of this hearing today – indeed, they announced in December that, and I quote:

“The Government has prioritised funding for Police and Crime Commissioners in this settlement. Overall funding available to PCCs will increase by up to £703 million next year – a 5.4% cash increase on the 2020/21 settlement – if PCCs make full use of their flexibility to increase precept.”

Whilst we ponder this year's proposed £15 rise, I feel it once again appropriate to state that my view on the Government's proposal has not changed. It is a Government proposal, not mine. The traditional low level of Government

funding of all public services in Dorset, including the police, brings its own challenges, particularly around the high degree of reliance on the council tax for local services. To expect Commissioners to use the precept to bolster funding to achieve the essential policing of Dorset is not the way to run democracy.

However, if I don't raise the precept, policing will face more cuts.

I maintain my stance that this should be centrally funded by the state. On the face of it, I would understand why some may think £15 is a huge settlement for Dorset Police. Actually it enables us to achieve a balanced budget, police a pandemic and support the officer uplift programme covering the additional costs in the programme.

So let's look at our finances.

The achievements outlined in the current year have only been possible due to your support in raising the precept by £10 in the current year. This precept resulted in new income of £3.27m. Whilst that was a significant sum of money, it must be considered in the context of the overall financial pressures faced by the Force, and the increased costs mandated from elsewhere.

If the police are to continue to provide the current level of service then another significant increase in resources from the precept is required.

This is despite the fact that the Force continues to look for every efficiency and opportunity for increasing resources. The bottom line still results in a requirement for a substantial increase in the precept.

A significant element of our cost base is subject to incremental pay increases, and are beyond our control. Pay awards are negotiated nationally and officers and staff are subject to nationally imposed terms and conditions. The full year effect of the September 2020 pay award must be included in the 2021/22 budget along with the contractual pay increments and associated impact on National Insurance and pension contributions. This results in increased costs of the pay budget of £2.3m, excluding year 2 uplift officers.

Some of our challenge is because of capital financing. Capital financing costs need to increase further. Capital grant is expected to remain low, receipts from sale of premises are not expected to be significant and capital reserves are all but exhausted. We need to invest in our estate with an increasingly urgent need to provide alternative Headquarters accommodation.

Additionally, in relation to the Government uplift no funding surety for the long-term provision of these officers has been made. I've spoken before about the need for multi-year settlements, but sadly we continue to operate without certainty of supply. Not forgetting that as well as maintaining service levels, policing in Dorset needs to absorb the greater abstraction levels during the first years of officer training (and that's not to mention the impact of COVID-19 on the same).

So, in summary, members what choices do we have here today

Well firstly, I could do nothing.

That would leave roughly a £4.3 million hole in our finances, meaning that the Force would need to cut around 140 police staff jobs as these fall outside of the Government officer uplift programme.

But, I hear you ask, why not use further reserves rather than cut staff? Well, as you know from the papers you have with you today, I have used reserves, and our General Balances are sufficient as an adequate contingency amount for unforeseen shocks, but continued use of reserves is not sustainable.

If we do nothing, such cuts would most likely be directed primarily at police staff (including PCSOs) and capital investment, as I am restricted in my ability to reduce officer numbers due to the Government instruction to increase police officer numbers, and the associated requirements of the uplift grant.

Additionally, there would be no revenue investment, and our financial position moving forward with a new PCC would be seriously hampered. As other areas are approving the £15, this would make Dorset fall behind the South West and other Forces nationally, at a time when we are leading the pack in so many areas.

Headlines would be a drop in performance, with an adverse operational implication, medium and long term financing would be put at risk, with no reserves to fall back on. There would be a curtailment of PRISM investment, and an extension of vehicle life for the fleet.

The Force would also be unable to meet Govt targets on uplift.

I would respectfully remind the Members that the Minister gave PCCs flexibility to rise to a £15 precept to protect the Governments uplift of officers. To reject that call could affect overall policing numbers, indeed I am not sure we could meet the Uplift numbers. It would also remove front line officers to fill back room roles vacated by police staff redundancies.

Secondly, I could raise by just £5

A budget reduction of £2.88m would be required meaning that the Force would need to lose around 95 police staff jobs.

This is a similar picture, really, whilst the Uplift programme would be achieved, officers would replace staff vacancies caused by redundancies. There would be no investment or additional officers above the Government grant.

The would be a serious detriment on our financial position in future years, which frankly would be unsustainable...with significant dips in performance and operational impact.

Thirdly, I could raise by £10 as per last year's precept decision

I do not consider this appropriate in the current climate as this would leave roughly a £1.44 million hole in our finances, meaning that the Force would need to cut nearly 50 police staff jobs. Again, front line officers may be abstracted to back office roles

There would be a drop in contact performance, there would be no revenue investment, and a deterioration of the existing estate.... plus the investments the Chief Constable has referred to, on vulnerability, county lines etc, will not happen or will be seriously reduced. I also worry about mitigating the McCloud judgement.

Finally – We raise by £15 , which is the maximum available without the need for referendum, and deliver a balanced budget. That is my recommendation here today.

So in closing, this is my the only viable option to ensure that we deliver a balanced budget, police the continuing Covid pandemic, maximise the efficiency of delivering year 2 of the officer uplift programme and maintain the levels of police staff without reduction.

As stated last year, the budget that the panel vote for will fall into the new incoming PCC term to administer. To those candidates seeking election, I repeat last year's words of caution. "Be careful what you wish for" when you make election pledges, as this Force has a tight budget, even with a £15 rise, with little room for additionality.

Before I go to your questions on this proposal, let's just consider what our public think of a £15 raise.

Chair, I now hand to Adam for a summary of our public consultation

Thank you Adam, Chair I now hand to Julie for a summary of our finances in today's context.

Thank you Julie, Chair before we go to Questions, a closing summary from me.

While policing continues to face significant challenges that require further investment, we should all be rightly proud of the exceptional progress Dorset Police has made over the last year. The Force has a good grading from HMICFRS across all areas of inspection, including crime recording which means our communities can take real confidence in the levels of crime being reported. Crime has reduced by just over 6% in Dorset, but more importantly those offences that create the greatest harm and impact the most vulnerable in our community have reduced at a greater rate than the national average. Violence with injury has dropped by nearly 9% and sexual offences by nearly 10% meaning Dorset is the ninth safest nationally. Alongside this, those things that matter to the public such as 101 waiting times have seen significant improvement, with average answer times dropping from nearly eight and a half minutes to four and a half minutes.

All of this against a backdrop of a global pandemic, which has created a very different policing demand. During the summer, individual days saw more calls for service from

the public than any other days on record. Protests took place in Bournemouth against national restrictions and the Force had to change the way it operated while officers and staff were ill and isolating as a consequence of Covid-19. Even faced with these challenges, Dorset Police investigated serious, complex and organised crime, launched new technology and innovation such as remote video applications and went live with a new command and control system. All of this is part of the clear vision which will take Dorset on its journey from good to outstanding. The last Inspection shows Dorset Police at its best and I am sure we are all grateful for the exceptional progress made in this most testing of years.

[ENDS]

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14 January 2021

Dear Martyn

Police and Crime Panel, Future Budgets and Priorities

I would like to place on record my thanks to you and the Police and Crime Panel for your support over the last year and, in particular, your support in increasing the precept for 2020/21. I would also like to explain how Dorset Police used the additional income from the precept to benefit our local communities in Dorset and to meet our need for further investment in both core policing and specialist capabilities to continue to protect the public and meet emerging threats.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank you for your support and that of the Police and Crime Panel during the coronavirus pandemic. Whilst the health of Dorset citizens has not been as hard hit by the virus as some other parts of the country, it has thrown up specific challenges for policing. It has also impacted our available human and financial resources, with officers and staff self-isolating at times and our income generation curtailed by the cancellation of various commercial and community events, which require police support. Nevertheless, our response to the pandemic is a good example of Dorset Police being ready to deal with every eventuality in today's society. With your support I believe we have achieved the right balance between engagement and enforcement.

The pandemic contributed to this summer being particularly busy for Dorset Police with large numbers of people visiting the beaches of Bournemouth and Poole as well as the many iconic beauty spots around the County. Policing the summer surge in visitors following the initial lockdown had a significant impact on our operational requirements and on the pressure felt by officers having to work extra shifts, due in part to officers isolating after contact with people suspected of having the virus. This also had an impact on our costs of policing the summer period.

During this time the normal demands on policing continued with an increase in serious violence and major crime, including homicides, which were investigated with the perpetrators of most serious offences being brought to justice. We also adapted our

approach to aspects of routine policing with investment in remote policing teams for those people who could not be seen in person, thereby ensuring we were able to provide a service to people who were shielding.

The pandemic also caused us to speed up our investment in mobile technologies. All frontline officers now have mobile devices enabling them to deliver better services to victims of crime. This technology also allows officers to access our crime recording and back office systems without having to return to their stations. During the first lockdown we also extended this provision to many of our support staff so they could follow Government guidance and work from home.

The force stepped up detailed plans and contingencies for all eventualities around the EU exit and transition. This was a significant piece of work around business continuity which required coordination and partnership working within the Local Resilience Forum. Although the arrangements have minimised the ongoing impact that a no deal would have brought, there are operational challenges around wider law enforcement with Europe and the force will need to invest resource in this area to manage the additional demand and risk. Last year's welcome announcement from the Government concerning the return to investment in policing, with the proposed national increase of 20,000 police officers came too late to help in the early stages of the pandemic. This uplift is being phased over three years and the first year's intake was still in training during the first lockdown. Nevertheless, this investment and that of the additional precept will be critical in enabling Dorset Police to provide outstanding services in supporting the most vulnerable people of Dorset.

We have been able to respond to the pandemic and to the EU exit planning challenges despite the financial savings which have been required over the last decade and despite the growing complexity of the demands placed on policing. As both you and the Police and Crime Panel are acutely aware, the traditional low level of Government funding of all public services in Dorset, including the Police, brings its own challenges, particularly around the high degree of reliance on the council tax for local services. My colleagues and I are aware of the pressure this puts on local people in balancing their household finances and so it is important for us to continue to support you in helping local people to understand the difference the increase in the precept has made.

Dorset Police continues to be graded as "Good" by her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services, across all areas of its services, including the recent Crime Data Integrity inspection. The Force's crime data shows that Dorset has continued to drive down a reduction in crime with this year's data demonstrating a 5.1% reduction, compared to national reduction of 4.1% which is the 10th lowest in the country, thanks in part to our continued focus on crime prevention and our continuing work with our partners in local authorities. This decline in crime has continued to improve with force data now showing a year to date 11.2% reduction.

The Government's commitment to increasing the number of police officers across the country is very welcome. In order to support their commitment the Government increased its grants to Dorset Police by £4.4m in 2020/21 to pay for the recruitment and training of 50 additional officers. However, the ongoing costs of these officers is not provided for within this funding, and the increase in the number of officers, the annual pay award, annual increments for some officers and additional pension contributions added £4.9m to our costs. Furthermore, the pay award for police staff,

including PCSOs and the additional staff required to recruit and train the additional officers added a further £1.9m to our staff budget. The Force also had to meet the additional costs of over £1m on its various overheads, such as premises, supplies (e.g. software licensing costs) and transport (e.g. fuel costs), many of which are embodied in contracts. The increase in the precept was, therefore, critical in allowing us to balance our budget whilst maintaining services to the public, by providing additional resources of £3.3m.

I was clear that last year's increase in the precept was primarily required to keep pace with cost increases for similar levels of service, I am pleased that we were able to invest in a number of service improvements. I would now like to illustrate some of the benefits from the investment in our services which last year's precept has made possible.

Protecting people at risk of harm

I remain firmly committed to our focus on prevention which has been achieved largely through our neighbourhood policing teams working with vulnerable people. This has resulted in a reduction in the number of overall crimes, as well as the number of violent and sexual offences, which have reduced more than the national average for the year as a whole, due to the focus we have given these priority crime areas. However, the severity of the violence being exhibited has increased.

During 2020 we have also invested in our call handling facilities. This has resulted in 90% of emergency calls routinely being answered within 10 seconds and a more dramatic improvement in the response times for non-emergency calls, with 95% being answered within 30 seconds. The average answer time for non-emergency calls has reduced from 8 mins 25 secs in 2019 to 4 mins 50 secs in 2020. This improvement in non-emergency calls required substantial investment in staff numbers, training, management and new technology, together with the opening of an additional call-handling facility in Bournemouth which not only gave us access to much wider recruitment but also increased our resilience by having capability across two sites. To sustain this improved level of service we will need to meet the full year impact of this investment in 2021/22 and in future years, which amounts to in excess of £700,000.

I am particularly pleased that we have been able to finally resolve the problem of slow response times in our control centre. Callers now receive a more timely service thanks to the investment I have outlined above.

Of course, we have not now rested on our laurels, and in October 2020 we successfully implemented a new computer system as part of our investment in our call handling arrangements at a capital cost of £1.7m, with annual software costs of £250,000. This is part of a wider investment in our call handling facilities over the next few years, replacing older systems and enabling officers to take full advantage of mobile technologies whilst out in our communities, which will improve their efficiency and effectiveness.

We have worked closely with our colleagues in the South West Ambulance Service Trust (SWAST) to develop a Joint Response Unit. The Unit is a SWAST Rapid Response Vehicle, which is additionally staffed with a police officer, enabling us to deal effectively and sympathetically with people suffering mental health episodes by

ensuring they receive the best care which helps to reduce the demand on all public services. The evaluation of the three-month trial found a 52% reduction in waiting times for a SWAST or police resource, a 39% reduction in jointly deployed resources from both Police and Ambulance, and that 33% of patients attended were discharged at the scene, we look forward to the scheme's continuance.

We will also be improving our services in this area by the deployment of officers made possible by the Government's uplift programme, once the officers have completed their training. We propose to invest in our teams who focus on preventing the criminal exploitation of vulnerable people via county lines.

We are establishing a dedicated missing people team who will aim to reduce the number of missing people in Dorset, protect vulnerable people from harm by identifying those at risk and reducing the time people are missing by finding people more effectively through improved processes and use of intelligence. The team will also support the families of missing people while they remain missing.

We are also investing in our intelligence capacity and capability to inform specifically around high risk incidents, crimes, victims and offenders. This will improve the effectiveness of our response to dynamic serious crime, firearms incidents and missing people.

In future years we will deploy some of the additional officers to deal with emerging threats such as online and international crime.

Working with our communities

During this year we have invested in the development of online statements and signatures. This allows statements to be taken at the witnesses' convenience. The use of this new facility has grown quickly during the pandemic, with over 850 statements being taken each month. This approach to taking statements is also much more efficient for our officers with an average saving of two hours of officer time for each statement taken, providing a rapid return on investment.

The increase in the number of officers as a result of the uplift programme has allowed us to invest more officer time in neighbourhood policing. In particular we are investing in a vulnerability team who are involved in complex problem solving with those people who suffer or cause the greatest harm in our communities.

In the coming year we will deploy additional officers into neighbourhood policing. Our partners across Dorset have agreed to work more closely with us on crime prevention and addressing anti-social behaviour in our towns. We expect this work with our partners to catalyse our combined engagement with our local communities and to encourage them to work with us on the issues that matter to them.

Next year we will continue our investment in forensic collision investigation. We have already invested £70,000 in a new digital investigation scanner and in the coming year we will supplement this with investment in our collision investigation team. These investments will ensure we meet the national forensic standards which have improved as a result of technological developments.

Supporting victims, witnesses and reducing reoffending

Dorset Police continues to put victims at the heart of what we do. In the past the precept has been used to roll out restorative justice for a range of offences and to develop and commission the Bobby Van initiative. The Bobby Van is a mobile unit that provides home security, crime prevention advice and reassurance for vulnerable members of the community. The Bobby Van has been very successful, having made well over 200 visits since it went live last January. The van operator is able to provide practical help and support to people. The Bobby Van has been so successful, and I am grateful for your initiative in gaining grant funding for a second van to support vulnerable victims across the County, which we expect to launch by the end of this financial year.

We have put together a dedicated resource to transform our services around domestic abuse. Based around opportunities highlighted by our annual survey of domestic abuse victims, we have taken national best practice to utilise a whole system approach to this issue which involves specific training to all frontline officers and staff, instigating a programme for perpetrators of domestic abuse and informing schools of children in families when there has been an instance of domestic abuse.

We acknowledge that whilst 90% of the respondents to this survey stated they were satisfied with the service they had received from Dorset Police, increasing from 86% last year, there is still more that can be done. We have therefore also invested in specialist Vulnerability lawyers who support investigators in obtaining domestic abuse protection orders and other civil sanctions to help protect vulnerable victims from the most serious offenders.

Transforming for the future

As I indicated last year we have continued to invest in change based on the adoption of new technology. During this year we have invested £1m of our capital resources in replacing speed cameras with more modern devices in order to keep our roads safer. The digital cameras are more efficient and more effective than the older cameras they have replaced because they do not contain film which needs to be replaced on a regular basis.

During the last year we have also started to explore the use of process automation and artificial intelligence. Process automation allows us to automate routine and recurring tasks undertaken by our staff, such as inputting the same information into disparate databases or forms. We are trialling process automation in our arrangements for vetting and firearms licensing which currently have several manual, administrative steps. The investment in artificial intelligence allows us to interrogate and gain insight into our records much more quickly than in the past, by automatically highlighting existing patterns and trends in our data for staff to consider.

Many of our recent service improvements have been reliant on capital investment in ICT. Our 2020/21 programme for ICT investment amounted to £5.7m, with a further £6.4m earmarked for investment in vehicles, equipment and buildings, some of which is required to train and deploy the additional officers funded by the Government. The Force will have to rely on borrowing to support some of its longer term capital investments because of a lack of capital reserves and the substantial reduction in

capital grants, which have fallen to £110,000 each year, from a base of £1.3m in 2010/11.

The drive for efficiencies

The Minister of State for Crime and Policing wants police forces across the country to improve efficiency through collective procurement and shared services. As you know, Dorset has made great progress on shared services, especially with our Strategic Alliance partner, Devon and Cornwall Police. Opportunities continue to be sought to develop both the Strategic Alliance and the five-force South West collaboration, wherever practical.

With regard to shared services, all of our enabling services, such as HR and Finance, are delivered in partnership with Devon and Cornwall, with jointly appointed senior managers. This degree of integration of the enabling services is facilitated by the use of new technology. The continued harmonisation of ICT across the Strategic Alliance will facilitate further integration of functional areas, as well as minimising the costs of innovation.

The two forces also manage many of their specialist police functions through the Strategic Alliance which increases the capacity and resiliency of Dorset Police whilst minimising any financial impact. This helps to ensure we have access to the most appropriate specialists when we need them, to deliver the wide range of operations required of a modern police force.

There are currently over 20 collaborated business areas, covering the full range of operational, operational support and business support functions. Following the decision not to merge, joint governance across all four alliance corporations sole did falter somewhat, but we have re-instituted Working Together Boards, and have agreed a plan for further developing our joint governance, with a specific focus on financial and operational performance of alliance business areas, which will report back ahead of the planned PCC elections in May 2021.

With regard to procurement, Dorset Police is an enthusiastic member of the South West Police Procurement Department (SWPPD), which also includes Devon and Cornwall, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire. In the last month the decision of Avon and Somerset to join was taken which will, not only, result in a collaborated unit covering all five South West forces, but also, considerably increase the purchasing power of the partnership.

SWPPD is moving forward on a number of region-wide contracts on items such as ICT, vehicles, insurance and training. The partnership has secured savings for Dorset Police of nearly £600,000 on these items over the last 18 months. In addition, the department and the constituent Forces are working closely with the Police ICT Company which has achieved savings for Dorset Police of £150,000 in the same period. The department is also working closely with the fledgling Blue Light Commercial, which is a new national police procurement organisation, designed to harness the purchasing power of policing on a national basis.

Since last year we have also achieved efficiencies in a number of areas. Our Road Safe service has saved £189,000 in equipment and bank charges and we have

reduced the costs of our cleaning contracts by £120,000 per annum. We have made a variety of savings as a result of changes in the way we do business due to coronavirus, including saving over £60,000 on travel and conference costs. We are planning to embed these new ways of working in the way we do things after the pandemic is over so that some benefit comes from the crisis. As part of this we have reduced our capital budget for the replacement of pool cars and repurposed some of the existing pool, including increasing our provision of electric vehicles.

I have already mentioned some of our investments in new technology which will make the Force more efficient and effective. Our investment in mobile technology and remote working was accelerated during the early part of 2020, to address the need for people to work from home as a response to the coronavirus. We were successful in speeding up the roll-out of appropriate devices for many of our staff, who have continued to work at home most of the time since the first lockdown.

Finally in this section, similarly to previous years, I have restated our commitment to maintaining an Innovation Fund, which is overseen by an Innovation Board co-chaired by the Deputy Chief Constable and your Chief Executive, and supported by our Innovation and Efficiency Officer. The Board has continued to meet during the last year and has promoted many of the initiatives to which I have referred above. It remains our intention to ensure the Board continues to meet to consider innovative ideas and to promote them with seed-corn funding to get the ideas off the ground.

Increased demand

Last year I mentioned there had been an increase in some of the most demanding and complex crimes. As I have mentioned already the number of crimes and the number of serious crimes have reduced over the last year. This forms part of a sustained reduction in recent years due to our focus on crime prevention. In the current year this sustained reduction has also been exaggerated by the lack of an evening and night-time economy during the coronavirus lockdowns.

I have already mentioned the impact of coronavirus caused by an increase in visitors to Dorset throughout the summer following the end of the first lockdown. This had severe operational impacts on our officers, who had to work additional shifts due to this increase in demand. As we look forward to the summer of 2021, we expect similar impacts, but significant uncertainty remains.

As I write this, the Government expectation is that the first four priority groups within the population, some 15 million people, will be vaccinated by 15 February. Should this happen, and should both the lockdown and the vaccinations have the desired effect, it is possible we may see an easing of restrictions in February. However, it has been widely reported that lockdown might be extended until 23 March, and that some restrictions may stay in place until May.

Recognising this uncertainty, it is prudent to plan for a period of restrictions, necessitating greater enforcement, which could potentially last for some months longer. Should the lockdown persist for a protracted period, it is very likely that Dorset will continue to be subject to additional demand through organised protests, as we have seen over the past several months. We will continue to take robust action against

individuals' intent on flouting the very clear advice to stay at home, as the vast majority of Dorset residents would expect us to.

As we return to normality there is likely to be increased demand for policing as the evening and night-time economy reopens. Some of the expected social impacts of the virus in terms of higher unemployment and increased social deprivation; greater educational divide; and increased mental health issues have yet to come to the fore but when they do they will have a significant impact on policing. In addition we have yet to see the potential impact of increased domestic abuse and a lack of school provision on our young people. Over the next few months we will seek to understand the medium term implications of the pandemic for crime and disorder in Dorset, as society as a whole will seek to understand the wider impacts.

Despite the reduction in the number of crimes, we are seeing an increase in their complexity. Many of the serious sexual and violent offences involve vulnerable victims. Investigating and prosecuting these more complex and harmful offences creates intensive demands on the Force and its criminal justice partners. Furthermore, the Force and its partners need to put in place effective safeguarding arrangements for the victims. This is why we are utilising the uplift in officer numbers to prioritise our work with vulnerable people.

At the same time, our officers and staff are having to manage growing court delays and continuing to support victims and witnesses, some of whom may be vulnerable, for extended periods. The recent Lord Chief Justice announcement that courts and tribunals must continue to function during lockdown is welcome, but social distancing guidelines mean that footfall in our courts must be kept to a minimum. Our Crime and Criminal Justice department, Victims Bureau and Victims and Witness Unit all continue to support victims and witnesses to the best of their ability, but this is becoming increasingly complex to manage.

Likewise, the work we do in preparing case files is set to increase dramatically as some point in the near future. The Attorney General's guidance on disclosure will increase the administration required for all prosecutions.

Demand for police involvement is increasing in non-crime areas such as people who go missing or who are suffering mental ill-health crises. Such incidents account for a large proportion of police time even though the police are often not the most appropriate agency to provide a service. We are addressing this area of demand by the creation of the dedicated missing persons' team and by working in partnership with SWAST, as mentioned above.

Criminals are increasingly using technology to perpetrate offences and their use is accelerating as many more people rely on online shopping as a result of the coronavirus. Again, we intend to use the additional capacity created by the uplift programme to focus increased attention in this area. In addition our work with artificial intelligence will enable us to access, analyse and understand the digital data available to us.

The financial outlook for 2021/2022

The investments and achievements I have outlined above have only been possible because of your support in raising the precept by £10 in the current year. This precept increase resulted in additional income of £2.9m, representing 2.0% of our budget, with a further £400,000 being generated by the increase in the tax base. Whilst these are substantial amounts, they should be considered in the context of the overall financial pressures facing the Force.

The current year's precept enabled us to maintain service levels by meeting inflationary costs, external pressures and the continuing shortfall in funding from Government. The £4.4m increase in Government grant did not meet the additional costs associated with the Government target for increasing the number of police officers and the pay awards agreed by the Government, as detailed above.

We are very grateful for the level of support you provided in the current year and for the support of the Police and Crime Panel in covering the shortfall in our central funding. Unfortunately the financial pressures next year are even greater, as indicated in the provisional financial settlement announced on 17 December. Another significant increase in the precept will be required if we are to continue to provide the current level of service, including the improvements we have already made this year, often achieved by the redirection of resources.

The provisional financial settlement indicates Government support for Dorset Police will increase next year by £3.4m. To receive all of this additional funding we will need to recruit a minimum of 49 additional police officers next year as our contribution towards the national uplift of 20,000 officers over the four years ending 2022/23. However, we have estimated the cost of the additional officers and the full year impact of last September's pay award and increments at £4.5m.

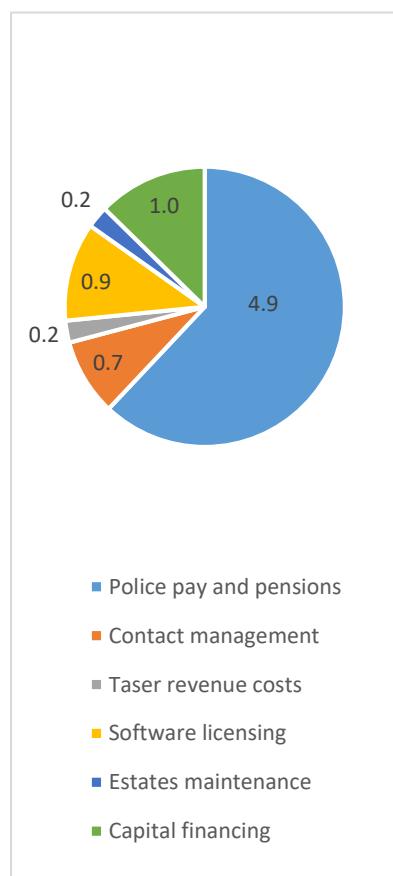
Our initial recruitment plans for next year were based on Dorset needing to recruit 68 officers out of a national total of 8,000 for the year. As part of the Spending Review, the Government reduced the recruitment target to 6,000. However, we are continuing to plan to recruit more than the minimum number of officers to take full advantage of the infrastructure we have put in place to recruit and train the new officers. This will allow us to start to reduce this infrastructure during the latter part of 2022/23, thereby making revenue savings, and allow Dorset to benefit from a front-loading of the police office uplift programme. Meeting the costs of the additional officers will, of course, result in additional pressure on our revenue costs in 2021/22, amounting to in excess of £250,000 but it means we will benefit from the uplift cohort earlier than expected by the Government.

As you know, the annual funding settlement from the Government does not just include the grants awarded by the Government to support Dorset Police. It also includes the Government's criteria for the level of increase in the precept for which a local referendum would be required (commonly referred to as the "cap"). The provisional financial settlement announced on 17 December included a cap of £15 in the increase in the precept. Ministers have made it clear they will support Police and Crime Commissioners in increasing the precept by the full £15 and have pointed out the increase amounts to an average of £1.25 per month for each household. However, you will still require justification for any increase in the precept.

Medium term financial planning and budget setting

When I presented the Medium Term Financial Plan last year, based on the best available intelligence at the time from both NPCC and APCC, I included an assumption that a cap of just under £5 would be set by the Government for 2021/22. Forecasting the budget requirement and funding on this basis was expected to generate an additional precept of £2.1m of which £700,000 was based on an assumption that the tax base would increase by 1% over the last year. These assumptions, whilst accurate at the time, have since proven to be overly optimistic. In fact the tax base has fallen thereby reducing the expected increase in the precept by a further £1m to £400,000. I expect £1.2m of this reduction in the precept to be made up by additional Government support although some will be required for future years. In addition, I expect £80,000 of our share of the 2020/21 deficits incurred by the Collection Funds to be met by Government grant to the Billing Authorities. These grants will bring the increase in Government grants to £4.7m.

Our Medium Term Financial Plan originally identified a shortfall in 2021/22 of £2.2m but the reduction in the tax base and the deficits, net of the additional Government support will increase this shortfall by £900,000 to £3.1m. Since then cost increases have added to this expected deficit but we have made savings in various budgets across the Force, to reduce the cost pressures to £8m, so we would ideally need a precept increase of £17.35 to balance the budget for 2021/22.



The majority of the additional costs are associated with the additional police officers, the full year effect of the 2020 pay award and pensions changes. These amount to a total additional cost of £4.9m. I have already mentioned above the additional costs associated with sustaining the improvement in contact management will amount to £700,000.

The additional revenue costs associated with the extra tasers we bought using Government grant as part of their taser uplift programme, to keep our officers and the public safe, will add £150,000 to the budget. Cost increases in the software used by the Force will add £900,000 to our costs in 2021/22.

Implementing a maintenance programme for our estate will add £200,000 to our costs but we would hope this will lead to budget reductions in routine maintenance in the medium term. Approximately £1m of the additional cost is associated with financing the capital programme of the Force. We expect to incur borrowing charges and debt repayments in 2021/22, together with an increase in the revenue contributions to capital, to finance short-life capital assets including ICT and vehicles.

The decision on the appropriate increase in the precept is clearly one for you to reach. To assist you I have set out a variety of options available, each with its own implications for the Force and I would ask that each is considered against the total cost pressures of £8m. The options are shown below:

	Precept Increase				
	£0	£5	£10	£15	£17.35
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Central Grant	4.7	4.7	4.7	4.7	4.7
Precept	-1.7	-0.3	1.1	2.6	3.3
Total	3.0	4.4	5.8	7.3	8.0
Budget Requirement	8.0	8.0	8.0	8.0	8.0
Shortfall / (Surplus)	5.0	3.6	2.2	0.7	0

The final “option” in the table is not really an option as it would breach the referendum cap. Although we have not yet identified the additional savings required to balance the budget at the level of the cap, I am confident that over the next few weeks we will identify savings that would not necessarily impact on the quality of the services provided. I would not be confident that we would be able to make sufficient cuts to balance the budget without adversely affecting service delivery to the public, if the precept increase were to be set below the level expected by Ministers.

I believe a precept increase of £15 will allow us to continue to innovate in the way we use technology to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Force. A precept increase of less than this would reduce our investment in new technology and would start to create a gap in our response to those criminals who harness the power of technology, often to prey on the more vulnerable members of the community.

We will continue to explore every opportunity to identify savings and efficiencies to mitigate demand. Many of our unavoidable cost increases, including inflationary pressures and ongoing investment in innovation and spend necessary to continue to meet demand, has been largely matched by efficiencies driven out of the budget process. As part of the budget process we have achieved savings of £650,000. This is in addition to the procurement savings mentioned above of £750,000.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the level of savings achieved over the last few years the Force again needs an increase in the precept in excess of inflation. This is because of the following factors:

1. Continued real term reduction in government funding.
2. Increased demand in complexity.
3. Continuing financial pressures.
4. Diminishing opportunity to achieve cashable savings.

Central funding becomes ever more complex with the Force receiving a combination of general and specific grant streams. The general grant is designed to support the Force in providing its core requirements. The original model was based on the premise that an individual taxpayer should face the same council tax requirement for the same level of service irrespective of where they live. However, the funding model moved

away from this principle some years ago, as part of the Government's response to the financial crash of 2008.

When the Spending Review was announced, the Chancellor was clear that any additional Government resources for the Police was aimed specifically at the uplift in officer numbers whilst the core grant, which is supposed to finance all other expenditure would not increase. The Chancellor's aim was that the shortfall in the core grant would be made up by the £15 cap in the precept.

Capital requirements

As already mentioned, our capital financing costs were expected to start to increase in 2021/22 as we move to a more sustainable capital financing model. Our aim is for all short-life fixed assets, such as ICT and vehicles to be financed from revenue contributions to revenue. This would mean borrowing would be reserved for longer term assets such as the estate. This strategy has been developed because Dorset Police has no capital reserves and very little surplus property, which could be used to generate capital receipts.

Whilst this strategy remains the most appropriate sustainable approach to capital financing, the implications on the revenue budget are significant. The strategy would result in the revenue costs of the capital programme increasing from £2.4m in 2020/21 to £7.9m in 2024/25. The capital programme includes substantial investment in the estate over the next few years but there is an underlying need to invest over £4m each year in short-life assets. The aim over the life of the Medium Term Financial Plan is to increase the revenue contributions to capital to this level.

In order to try to minimise the impact on the revenue budget, we have reviewed the capital programme of the Force in detail with the aim of reducing it to the minimum required to be an efficient and effective Force. We have achieved this by taking in excess of £4m out of the capital programme over the next four years, including a £2.6m reduction in short-life assets in the current year and 2021/22. Despite these reductions the five year programme up to and including 2024/25 still totals £44m.

The Force will continue its investment in new technologies to improve its efficiency and effectiveness. We will maximise the benefits from our continuing investment in mobile policing and agile working to minimise future estates investment as well as facilitating better use of officers' time, enabling them to be fully mobile in the service they deliver.

The Force receives a capital grant from the Government each year but this has been reduced from its former levels. The grant has now shrunk to £110,000 each year, compared to £1.3m in 2010/11. We do not expect the grant to recover to its former levels and is more likely to disappear completely in future years.

Continuing financial pressures

We remain delighted that the Government has chosen to invest in policing through its programme to increase officer numbers and its programme to improve their safety by financing the acquisition of additional tasers. The uplift of 20,000 officers will be delivered by the Government a little slower than originally anticipated, with 6,000 being

planned for 2021/22 rather than the original expectation of 8,000. This is, presumably, a response to the damage to the public finances caused by the pandemic. I remain hopeful that Dorset Police will be able to achieve its original timetable for its share of the 20,000 officers. Although this will increase our costs in the 2021/22 it should enable us to step back the recruitment and training infrastructure earlier than would otherwise be the case. Adhering to the original timetable may also generate additional reward grant from the Government, if other forces fail to deliver their allocated number of officers.

The additional support provided next year by the Government is welcome and it will meet the additional cost of recruiting and training the officers for the uplift programme but it does not fully meet the additional cost pressures I have identified above. I suspect the Government is aware of this because Ministers have indicated they will fully support Police and Crime Commissioners who implement the maximum increase in the precept allowed without a referendum.

Fortunately the Government has not established any significant grant conditions concerning the deployment of the additional officers, although the expectation and my intention is for them to fulfil front line roles. This is dependent on there being adequate funding to meet the core costs of the Force as well as the additional costs of the additional officers, including for the longer-term. The increase in the precept will be critical in achieving this funding requirement. A lack of funding would raise the possibility of some officers having to be used to replace current staff resources in roles where a warranted officer may be desirable but not essential.

In addition to the indexation of our contracts, we are facing a range of increased financial challenges which are unavoidable if we wish to continue our current service levels.

Your support in meeting the rising costs set out above would place us in a powerful position to continue our work in transforming for the future. This will mean continuing to invest in new technologies and capabilities over the coming years. Our planning is well underway and as we benefit from the new officers joining the Force, we have planned against our operational and public service risks. We have undertaken detailed work to understand how we need to use all new investment to continue to keep the communities of Dorset safe through focusing on vulnerability, prevention and crime and harm reduction.

We have set our ambition on delivering outstanding services. We have been assessed by HMICFRS as 'Good' and our ambitions for our service stretch beyond this, to be 'Outstanding'. We are positioned well through the support of communities, partners and key stakeholders to achieve this. We continually test ourselves to ensure that we are efficient and effective. However, without further investment and in light of increasing cost pressures, a real risk to our future plans and most importantly, our ability to keep our communities as safe as possible is at risk.

Looking Forward

Whilst the challenges are significant and have increased as a result of the pandemic, I am optimistic that we are in a good position to rise to them. The additional investment

in the Police, particularly the additional officers through the uplift programme will enable us to:

- enhance our response in tackling anti-social behaviour, impacting local communities through dedicated resources working in our neighbourhood teams with our partners across Dorset;
- further enhance our local county lines teams, to target those criminal networks who exploit vulnerable people to deal drugs and harm local communities;
- create a dedicated vulnerability capability, focused on the highest harm victims and offenders including domestic abuse;
- establish a new team focused on finding missing people and working with partners to help reduce the risk of them going missing again;
- develop a multi-agency capability, with our partners, to help to identify and jointly respond to the needs of the most vulnerable people in Dorset;
- increase our resources in contact management to provide an even better service to the public when contacting the police;
- support you in commissioning a second Bobby van to supplement the success of the first; and
- accelerate the development of the cadet schemes across Dorset.

Through this investment, we will accelerate our plans to take Dorset Police from “Good” to “Outstanding” while protecting those who are the most vulnerable.

We are still trying to understand the implications for crime and disorder in Dorset over the next few of years caused by the pandemic. There is likely to be greater deprivation caused by higher unemployment. We do not know the medium term impact for our young people of reduced access to schooling and a greater educational divide. There is also likely to be an increase in people suffering from mental health issues.

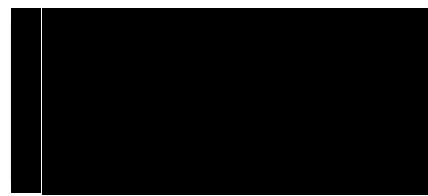
Conclusion

I would like to repeat my thanks to you and the Police and Crime Panel for the confidence you have shown in recent years, in agreeing to substantial increases in the precept for Dorset Police.

I am disappointed that once again the Government has decided to push more of the burden for financing the police onto local council taxpayers. However, at least they have given clear guidance as to the scale of the budgetary challenge facing the Police by indicating they expect a precept increase of £15. I have already detailed this challenge, caused by the increase in officer and staff pay and pensions, the need to improve our call handling, the increase in software contracts and the lack of capital resources to secure the necessary investment in vehicles and ICT, if we are to meet the challenges of modern policing.

I will, of course, let you know if anything changes in the budget projections, as you consider the precept for next year. I am also happy to respond to any queries my letter may generate.

Yours sincerely



James Vaughan
Chief Constable

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