

PCC Question and Answers

1 February 2024

Actions:

N/A

Budget Paper:

1. **Dr Mytton** - As part of the PCC's public Precept survey he asked, "How much more would you be willing to pay to help Dorset Police keep investing and improving the service you receive?" He stated that the equivalent of an increase of £30 a year, based on a Band D Council Tax, was the amount that Dorset Police really 'needs' to be able to invest in the future, deliver efficiencies and provide service improvements. He has been capped by the Govt to £13 a year:

- What is the overall financial value of this shortfall?
- What activities is his Office or Dorset Police not undertaking due to this shortfall in revenue?
- What assurance can the PCC provide that the taxpayer's safety is not impaired by this shortfall?

The extra £17 a year would have generated just over £5.1m. This would have meant that the Force would not have needed to consider all the areas for savings as outlined in the report and could potentially have looked to reverse some of the staff posts which have been lost in the current year – although clearly the expectation that the Force drives efficiency in all that it does would remain.

The Force could also have been looking at ways to improve services. I have previously said I would have like more than 70 additional officers, and this could have gone a long way towards that. The Force would like to invest in more resources on the frontline, both in officers and PCSO's but as we know, the restrictions in the amount council tax can be increased means this is not possible.

The savings and reviews are not being made in isolation. The proposals by the Chief Constable to balance the budget have been carefully prepared, considering the need to achieve financial savings alongside the need to maintain, and where possible enhance, frontline service provision. The savings proposals are aligned to the operating model review, which is intended to develop the current model further, where possible improving services to the public, while looking at opportunities to improve productivity and efficiency.

2. **Cllr Barrow** - How much financial debt is the PCC overseeing and what is it costing the Dorset taxpayer per year in order to service this debt? Can the PCC outline why this servicing of debt is a good use of funds, instead of investing in frontline services?

We currently have £16m of long term debts which costs around £660,000 in interest each year, equivalent to around 4%. As the panel will be aware, there is no specific capital funding provided by the Home Office anymore, therefore, other than what we can afford to fund from our revenue budget, the only other source of funding for the capital programme is from borrowing.

In recent times, borrowing has funded new vehicles, improved IT systems and investment in our estate such as roof replacements, improvements of the training facility at Ferndown and of course the new HQ building. Ensuring that our staff have the right infrastructure is critical to ensuring the frontline can deliver the service the public expects.

Many of these projects also deliver benefits to the revenue budget both now and in the future. For example, the upgrading of boilers and installation of solar panels should reduce our utilities costs in the short term but also reduce the likelihood of having to pay to offset carbon in the future.

3. **Cllr Canavan** - What assurance has the PCC sought in order to clarify that the £15M capital budget is achievable in year, based on the track record of delivery in the past; and what impact will slippage have on the revenue budget?

The Capital Programme has undergone extensive scrutiny from formal boards such as the Capital Strategy Group, Resource Control Board and Joint Leadership Board as well as detailed challenge by both Chief Finance Officers. As a result of this, almost £1.9m of schemes has been moved to 2025/26 from the original proposals put forward by budget holders.

Many of the larger schemes are either already underway or have substantially completed the planning and procurement stages and are almost ready to start on site therefore are considered achievable in the next financial year. There will always be an element of slippage due to delays in procurement processes or unexpected issues arising once schemes start on site and a small allowance for slippage has been factored into the budget.

Slippage generally has positive impacts on the budget as borrowing doesn't need to be undertaken until a later date therefore incurring less interest and minimum revenue provision isn't charged until the financial year after work is completed. Occasionally there may be additional maintenance costs, for example additional patching repairs until a roof is replaced but generally these are kept to a minimum.

4. **Cllr Jespersen**- What action has the PCC taken to redress the imbalance suffered by Dorset taxpayers on the amount they have to pay in Precept towards policing?

Response by PCC (00:55:11 on recording)

5. **Cllr Keddie** - Policing visibility is one of the main themes in the PCC's Police and Crime Plan. With the proposal that police officers will backfill police staff posts, what assurance can the PCC give that the Ch Cons is ensuring that the people of Dorset are getting the most out of their Precept, in terms of frontline policing, and that he is meeting the pledges in his Plan?

I can assure the Panel that the Chief Constable has no intention of simply putting police officers into police staff roles where there is no value in doing so. There will however be instances where there is a justified case to use an officer – but only where the use of an officer in this way adds value. Dorset Police has a long history of employing police staff in roles where their specialist skills are vital to the policing service, and it is unfortunate that restrictions in the use of the police grant, and the relatively low level of funding received mean that it is necessary to look for savings in staff roles now.

In an ideal world we would have enough funding that we would not need to be considering this course of action but for all the reasons we have already discussed this is where we are.

At this point in time the number of posts which have been identified in the saving plans as having the potential to be carried out by a police officer, having previously been held by a member of police staff, is 16. To give some assurance, an example where police officers have been used in such a way was the recent resourcing changes in the contact centre where the additional policing perspective is providing more insight and assisting with deployment decisions.

The operating model review is designed to ensure that the Force maintains and where possible enhances front line services and is fully aligned with the need to provide financial savings, using police officers and police staff in ways that make best use of their specialisms within the funding restrictions. Officers will only be taken from the front line where to do so will enable them to make a positive difference on policing outcomes.

The Force will also be using technology to achieve more efficient and effective policing solutions to mitigate the impact of the saving plans. With these changes it remains fully expected that the Police and Crime Plan will be delivered.

6. **M Short** - The PCC has presented a balanced budget, but he also states that there remains a budget gap of £2.7M. The budget gap saving reviews have not yet been undertaken. Can the PCC please clarify how a balanced budget can be presented when these reviews have yet to be undertaken?

Whilst the service reviews have not yet been completed, behind each area is a list of potential savings options that have been put forward by budget holders and commanders as areas that could be delivered. As a backstop these could all be delivered during the year and total more than the required £2.7m in a full year, resulting in a balanced budget. However, before these are accepted by the Force Executive, they wanted a more fundamental look at the service areas, taking a detailed look at those options put forward and their implications, but also looking at other options – what does best practice look like, what do other forces do, are there alternative options?

Some areas have vacant posts which can be held vacant pending the outcome of the review, therefore savings can be delivered from 1 April, whilst others have only been factored in from October giving time for the review to be completed and implemented.

The Force has a good track record of delivering savings. In the current year, 85% of the savings have been delivered as planned. In order to mitigate the risk that some savings won't deliver as planned, further options are being pursued which may be able to be delivered earlier than planned if required, or if not will contribute towards the 2025/26 budget proposals.

My Office and I will carefully scrutinise progress on delivery of the savings plan through the Efficiency Board and Resource Control Board, and will ultimately report to yourselves through the Quarterly Monitoring Report during the year.

Strategic Questions

N/A

Quarterly Report

Priority One - Cut Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour

Priority Two – Make Policing More Visible and Connected

Cllr Canavan - Given that there continues to be concerns around difficulties with reporting will the PCC commit to commissioning a review of all mechanisms available to the public to report issues to the Police?

In March 2023, Dorset Police switched to using the national Single Online Home (SOH) website. SOH has been introduced across the majority of forces over the last few years to bring uniformity and consistency to finding out more about local policing services.

Essentially, the site offers a 'digital front counter' – making reporting non-emergency matters easier and quicker – enabling members of the public to share relevant information with the right team within Dorset Police as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Dorset Police tracks the number of public contacts that are made through the SOH site, and these data are considered monthly at the Force Performance Board, chaired by the Deputy Chief Constable, and attended by my Chief Executive.

In December 2023, there was 3219 contacts made through the site, or a little over 100 per day. I hope members will recognise that is not an unappreciable number, and therefore does demonstrate – along with the fact that the number of public contacts through SOH continue to increase – that large numbers of the public are able to quickly and effectively make contact with Dorset Police.

At the same time policing as a whole continues to push for further development to the national SOH site, recognising that further investment needs to be made to offer better connectivity and transparency of information to the public.

Locally in Dorset, our public contact systems and processes remain, essentially, under constant review – with one or more elements continually being tested, upgraded, further developed or better optimised.

This overall programme of work is managed through CDEM – the Contact Demand Engagement Management programme – which covers the full range of mechanism available to the public to contact Dorset Police, including:

- telephony, SOH and online reporting,
- front desk counters in police stations, public access points in public locations such as supermarkets and shopping centres, and mobile police stations, and
- also addresses the factors that underpin those services such as staff recruitment and retention, and ICT systems stabilisation and development.

My Director of Operations represents me on the CDEM Programme Board, and customer services is examined through the Use of Police Powers and Standards Scrutiny Panel, which I chair. To be clear, then, myself and my office keep public contact and reporting under regular review and will continue to do so robustly, while recognising the challenges that affect all police forces, on behalf of the public.

Priority Three – Fight Violent Crime and High Harm

Priority Four – Fight Rural Crime

Priority Five – Put Victims and Communities First

FY 23/24 Q1 finance questions:

- We heard this morning that funding is tight for the next FY. Can the PCC outline why there is no plan for the £3m capital receipt for the sale of Bargates?

The capital receipt from the sale of Bargates, is significant and there are no further capital receipts in the pipeline at this sort of value therefore the decision on how best to utilise the funds needs to be carefully considered. This will include the impact on the revenue budget, both from reducing the costs of borrowing and from any efficiencies from the project itself, but also service improvements for the public or becoming more sustainable.

Two potential projects which could be considered for funding from the capital receipt are the replacement contact system or the investment in electric vehicles and infrastructure. Business cases are still being developed for these projects and the funding will be considered once the full information is available.

In the meantime, the capital receipt forms part of our cash investments and is earning interest, currently at an average rate of just over 5%.

Rehabilitation:

N/A