Appendix 2

Police and Crime Panel – 6th February 2026

Agenda item - 5 Budget and Precept

Question from Cllr Rampton: The report identifies that the £1m funding for visible policing hot spots is not present. How would you propose that the positive outcomes from Op Track can be maintained?

The hotspot policing funding will not be continued in 2026/27 as a specific grant. This was one of the few grants that was not distributed on the basis of funding formula and enabled Dorset to significantly increase the amount of hotspot policing that could be undertaken, delivering 1963 hours of patrols from 1st April to 31st December last year. A small portion of the funding from the last two years has been used to create an app, used to set out foot patrol routes and local intelligence for officers, and help them record patrols, and outcomes including the use of police powers, and this data will be instrumental in how the hotspot patrols are taken forward and monitored.

The visible patrols have seen reductions in anti social behaviour and whilst the data for this current year have not yet been evaluated, the previous year found that a reduction in ASB was achieved in two-thirds (67%) of the hotspot areas.

There is clear evidence that this approach should therefore be built into the Neighbourhood Policing Team's business as usual, but this may need to be balanced against their other day to day priorities. The increase in funding for enhancing the neighbourhood teams under the neighbourhood policing guarantee in 2026/27 is significantly less than the £1m previously received for hotspot policing, therefore resources would need to be moved from elsewhere to maintain at the current level.

Question from Cllr Canavan: Where does the PCC believe that the efficiency savings can be found? What are the consequences on operational policing if those efficiency savings cannot be fully achieved?

Given that around 85% of Dorset Police's budget is on direct workforce costs such as pay and pension contributions, it is important that Project Evolve, the Force's continuing programme to equip the force to serve the public, whilst addressing financial sustainability and resilience has had an initial focus on staffing. A key area of work to date therefore, under phase 1 of Evolve, has been a wholescale leadership review and building of a new operating model to optimise and reduce the number of supervisory ranks, and release officers back onto the frontline. Phase 2 is now in place and will continue to drive further, iterative improvements through until 2030.

Some of the areas being looked at to drive further efficiency savings in phase 2 include:

• Reducing or removing vacant posts that are not critical or where operational impact is limited, and the work can be delivered differently. and rebalancing the Force to prioritise police staff roles most in need.

• Identifying where process efficiencies can be realised through artificial intelligence or robotic process automation to reduce bureaucracy and double-keying – ultimately freeing up time for officers and staff to serve the public.

• Reviewing income generation opportunities with partners, further collaboration opportunities with Alliance and Regional Forces, and commercial opportunities through considering utilities, licensing and other supplier contracts and through moving to regional and national procurement arrangements which offer better economies of scale.

• Learning the lessons from Priority Based Budgeting which looked at Alliance departments working across Devon and Cornwall and Dorset and progressing with a local implementation of this approach – Productivity Efficiency Reviews – which focus solely on Dorset areas of business.

In terms of the impact on operational policing should these efficiencies not be found – this is a hypothetical and therefore difficult to answer. Please understand, this is not obfuscation on my part, but transparency – as there are no plans in place as to what areas of delivery might have to be curtailed should the opportunities to achieve the efficiency savings required not be identified.

What I can say however, is what has happened in the past. Dorset Police has a tightly controlled process that oversees its productivity and efficiency delivery, and my Office has good engagement with this process, including being specifically consulted each time a vacancy is proposed for deletion within the Force, along with any potential repercussions on the Police and Crime Plan delivery, and how that is proposed to be mitigated. That is now established process and will continue. So, whilst I cannot say what might happen in some hypothetical future, I can say what the process will be to ensure whatever happens is fully understood and best mitigated.

Question from Cllr Canavan: What are the implications of the removal of the police numbers uplift scheme restrictions, and what impacts will that have on police numbers?

It is a little early to say what the actual implication will be given Forces are still awaiting the detail of the delivery and reporting requirements of the initiative, but the intention is clearer, and both the Chief Constable and I welcome this.

Members will have heard me speak before about the restrictions that the previous police officer uplift programme and maintenance target has had on policing, in that for several years individual Chief Constables have been constrained by being required to maintain the overall number of police officers at an artificially high level in the face of reducing budgets.

In Dorset, this has meant that we had to lose over 70 skilled and experienced police staff through the mutually agreed resignation scheme, plus have had to manage reductions in PCSOs, control room and contact services staff, and numerous other staff posts by not recruiting into the roles when they have become vacant. This has meant increasing numbers of police officers have been fulfilling roles traditionally carried out by police staff.

This is obviously not sustainable, and therefore it is hoped that this new approach will help address this and rebalance the workforce mix in a positive and more efficient way.

Question from Cllr Woode: Previous years have identified a funding gap, but the Commissioner has remained able to deliver on his key priorities. What are the implications of the 2026/27 budget gap on delivery of the Police and Crime Plan?

Thank you, and yes, I am tremendously proud of the actions Dorset Police and my Office have taken in previous years to have protected Police and Crime Plan delivery in the face of reducing budgets and increasing demand, but you are right to suggest that this position is not infinitely achievable.

Previously, delivery has been smoothed through a combination of efficiency savings, careful financial management, and the use of reserves to manage short-term pressures. However, the 2026/27 position is more challenging in a number of important respects.

Firstly, the scale and persistence of the funding gap means there is now far less flexibility in the system. Many of the efficiencies that could be achieved without impacting delivery have already been taken in previous years. As a result, further savings increasingly carry a risk of affecting capacity rather than just improving efficiency – in other words we are no longer in a position whereby the savings can be absorbed with little impact.

Secondly, whilst the Chief Constable and I remain absolutely resolute on protecting the core priorities of the Police and Crime Plan – and will continue to work to align budgets as best we can to sustain those priorities as far as possible – very challenging and very difficult choices often must be made to prioritise certain areas of policing over others.

A good example that Members will be well aware of here, is the conscious decision that the Chief and I agreed to prioritise emergency call response performance over non-emergency call response performance. That is, of course, not to say that we regards those calls as being of lesser importance, far from it as these remain a good source of local intelligence that enable criminals to be bought to justice and victims protected, just that – in the face of not having sufficient resources to do everything, difficult and far-reaching decisions have to be made.

The implication of the budget gap on future delivery, therefore would include:

• Slower progress against some longer-term ambitions in the Plan, particularly those reliant on transformation or service development.

• Increased pressure on support functions that underpin frontline delivery, which can obviously directly affect performance.

• Reduced resilience in the system, meaning less ability to absorb unexpected demand, major incidents or further financial pressures, and

• Significant and growing pressures on our workforce, exacerbating health and wellbeing concerns, which – again as Members are aware of – manifest themselves in higher-than-average sickness absence rates.

Question from Cllr Gibson: What level of confidence is there in the assumptions on Council Tax levels up to 2030? The projected increase levels look low compared to local authority assumptions.

There are two elements to forecasting council tax, the increase in the taxbase and the referendum limits. In terms of the taxbase, this has been around 1% for a number of years, however, there is still some concern that the full impact of the second homes premium and the resulting reductions in second homes has been felt, based on the experience of Welsh authorities when this policy was introduced. Both Local Authorities took slightly different approaches to factoring in the second homes premium therefore a prudent average assumption of 0.7% has been used in the central case forecast.

In terms of the referendum principles, the assumption of £10 has been used as that was the previous maximum applied in the previous CSR. There have been no further confirmations on the assumptions used in the current CSR therefore the Force have chosen to plan on a prudent level of council tax. Clearly a multi-year settlement would make the process of forecasting council tax income significantly easier, but we have no information beyond 2026/27.

Question from Cllr Sidaway: The risks outlined in the paper appear quite generic and without detail of the likelihood, impact and mitigation. Is there an under-pinning document that contains more detail?

Yes, there is – that's correct.