

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Remote Meeting of **Police and Crime Panel** held via Microsoft Teams on **Thursday 4 February 2021 at 10.00 am**

Present:

Councillor L Hovvels (Chair)

Durham County Council:

Councillors D Boyes, P Crathorne, J Nicholson, S Quinn, A Savory and M Simmons

Darlington Borough Council:

Councillors J Dulston, B Jones (Vice-Chair) and Wallis

Independent Co-opted Members:

Mr N J H Cooke and Mr D K G Dodwell

1 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

2 Substitute Members

There were no substitute Members.

3 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 October 2020 were conformed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

Matters Arising from the minutes:

Councillor Boyes referred to a query he made at the previous meeting regarding check point criteria and asked whether any information was now available. In response S Caddell advised that she had held discussions with the Chief Constable regarding the query raised and as the disposals policy was currently under review it was not possible to provide any further information at this time, however suggested that the force could attend a

future meeting to discuss. It was agreed that the topic should be placed on the agenda for the next meeting.

5 Media Report

S White, Acting Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner introduced and welcomed L Constantine who had been recently appointed to the role of Media and Engagement Officer.

The Media and Engagement Officer proceeded to provide an update of press coverage concerning the work of the Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner since the previous meeting (for copy see file of Minutes).

S White commented that he wished to highlight that despite the prolonged lockdown period, engagement and consultation had still been undertaken and in order to reach those people who would not normally engage, radio had also been used as a platform to get the key messages out to as many people as possible.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

6 PCVC Proposed Precept

The Panel considered a report of the Office of the Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner which updated the Panel on the process for setting the Policing precept for 2021/22, and sought the Panel's support for an increase of £15 per household per year for properties in Band D, and commensurate increases for other properties (for copy see file of Minutes).

G Ridley, Chief Finance Officer highlighted key pressures on the revenue budget whilst noting that government funding, which was reviewed every 12 months by government, provided for a Police Grant increase of 3.5% to £97.8m, allowing for an additional 68 Police Officers to be employed within Durham and Darlington. However, no additional funding would be provided beyond that.

He went on to explain that in order to achieve a balanced budget for 2021/22 (£140.4m), it would be necessary to increase the precept by the maximum permitted; £15 per household, per year (Band D).

The Acting PCVC explained that in terms of planning and looking ahead many assumptions were factored into budget forecasting as funding was only provided for a period of 12 months, which made looking ahead far more challenging.

He further noted that consultation on the precept had been stifled because of the ongoing situation with COVID-19, however the PCVC had ran an online survey and had undertaken awareness raising via social media and radio.

The Chair invited the Clerk to the Panel to set out the procedure and process when considering the precept report. The Clerk to the Panel confirmed the timescales to consider the proposed precept in accordance with the Regulations. The Clerk outlined the option of the Panel to veto the proposal and that this would require agreement by two thirds of the full membership to veto (for copy see file of Minutes).

Councillor Boyes commented that he wished to congratulate the PCVC on the level of consultation undertaken, whilst noting that the results were not clear cut showed an indication of the times we were living in and highlighted that many people in County Durham were struggling. He therefore queried whether there were any in-force efficiencies that could be achieved or reviewed, for example the police vehicle fleet. Despite that he added that he supported the proposed increase.

Councillor Wallis raised a number of queries, the first being regarding funding settlements; secondly, whether statistics were available regarding consultation responders and whilst recognising that there was increased poverty in our communities, if the Panel chose not to support the increase what areas of the budget would not be funded and would it be possible to utilise reserves to meet those budget needs.

In response the Acting PCVC advised that the current funding formula was significantly outdated, and in many cases unfair when compared to other forces across the country. However, it was interesting to note that similar issues were reflected across the country, with 70% of PCC's proposing a maximum precept rise in 2021/22. He added that whilst he acknowledged that an increase shouldn't necessarily be the first thing that we always want, the force was still dealing with a significant period of 10 years of reduced funding against a picture of increased policing demand.

He further provided details as to the impact on the budget and policing should a lower or nil increase be agreed, highlighting that increased hardship often resulted in increased policing demand. If the precept was raised by only £10 there would be around 20% less PCSO's and Police Officer recruitment targets would not be met.

Further discussion ensued regarding use of reserves and the Acting PCVC explained that if reserves were used this year to fund the budget shortfall this would leave a larger budget deficit based on the assumptions forecast over the next 3 years. In relation to the query raised as to who the consultation was reaching, he explained that the young and old were the hardest groups

to engage with, however these groups had been targeted and it was promising to note that 900 18-34yr olds had responded. In addition, ethnic minority groups, also provided 300 responses to the consultation, a category group which had been previously hard to reach.

Councillor Nicholson added that in her area she knew all too well that people who were working were struggling financially and were visiting foodbanks for additional help. She therefore felt that whilst a small monthly increase it was one that added additional pressure to those already struggling and therefore added that she would struggle to support the proposed £15 increase.

Councillor Jones added that whilst he understood the points raised regarding those in our communities who were struggling financially, people did want an efficient police service and therefore felt it would be wrong to deny the increase.

Mr Dodwell commented that from experience where charges had been frozen for a period of a year it created year on year problems going forward.

Councillor Dulston further echoed the comments of Councillor Boyes regarding how the message regarding custody provision improvements was communicated and furthermore echoed those comments made regarding the use of reserves to fund the budget shortfall in 2021/22.

Moved by Councillor Boyes, **Seconded** by Councillor Jones and

Resolved:

- (i) That the current position of the consultation and the expected outcome be noted;
- (ii) That the proposed £15 precept increase at Band D with the same percentage applied to all Council Tax bands be approved;
- (iii) That there be no veto of the Acting PCVC proposal;
- (iv) That the Chairman respond to the Acting PCVC and the response be published online.

7 PCVC Decision Records

The Panel considered a report of the Acting Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner which provided an update on the Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner's decision register for 2020-2021, and addressed the forward plan (for copy see file of Minutes).

Resolved: That the content of the report be noted.

8 Quarterly Performance Report

The Panel considered a report of the Durham Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner's Office which provided performance against the Police, Crime and Victims' Plan 2018-2021 (for copy see file of minutes).

Councillor Savory at this point declared an interest in the item, specifically points raised regarding Community Speedwatch as he she had been involved with this project in her division at Wear Valley.

Councillor Boyes in referencing page 8, paragraph 29 of the report asked for some clarity to be provided regarding the way in which crime was recorded as he had concerns that if there was not a consistent approach across the country it made the job of comparing and contrasting figures extremely difficult. He went on to raise a second point relating to mental health and drug and alcohol issues and how it was perceived that having the public health budget taken away from the council next year would impact Durham on a crime level.

In response the Acting PCVC responded by noting his shared frustration regarding performance reporting, given that it had been a topic of discussion for many years. However, it was positive to note that Durham was good at reporting and this was evident when it had been found to be an efficient and effective force. As a result of Durham's reporting mechanisms being so accurate this did have the tendency to skew figures somewhat, however he was confident that the Chief led a force that which was at the top end of performance. It was further suggested that the Chief be invited to attend a future meeting to discuss in more depth.

With regards to the second point raised, the Acting PCVC noted his shared concerns regarding the loss of Public Health funding and reduction in support that would be available to those who needed it.

Resolved: That the content of the report be noted.

9 Commissioning Activity

The Panel considered a report of the Acting Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner which provided an update to Panel Members regarding key decisions and considerations at the Commissioning Boards held between 1st October 2020 and 31st January 2021 (for copy see file of Minutes).

Resolved: That the content of the report be noted.

10 Joint Independent Audit Committee Report

The Panel considered a report of the Acting Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner which provide an update on a recent report taken to the Joint Independent Audit Committee (JIAC) in respect of use of consultants by the Office of Police, Crime & Victims Commissioner for Durham, as well as by Durham Constabulary (for copy see file of Minutes).

Resolved: That the content of the report be noted and accepted.

11 Complaints Update

The Panel considered a report of the Monitoring Officer and Clerk to the Police and Crime Panel which provided an update on the implementation on the procedure for handling complaints relating to the Police, Crime and Victims Commissioner (PCVC) or the Deputy Police, Crime and Victims Commissioner (where appointed) and to provide an update on the number of formal complaints received since the last meeting. (for copy see file of Minutes).

Resolved: That the content of the report be noted.

12 HMICFRS Inspection Reports

The Panel considered a report of the Acting Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner's Office which outlined the findings of the recent inspections conducted by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS), upon which Police & Crime Commissioners are required to comment (for copy see file of Minutes).

Resolved: That the Police and Crime Panel notes

- (i) the content of the inspection report.
- (ii) that all HMICFRS inspections were postponed due to the initial COVID-19 emergency but resumed in October 2020.