

Report from the Police and Crime Panel Working Group

19 January 2018

Precept Working Group – Final Report

Report by the Chairman of the Working Group

Summary

This report is intended to inform the Panel of the work of the Working Group looking at the process undertaken by the Commissioner in determining the proposed policing precept for 2018/19. It sets out the issues considered by the Group, and its recommendations.

Recommendation

That the Panel notes the areas the Working Group was able to scrutinise, and considers these in conjunction with the Commissioner's policing precept proposal, presented under agenda item 5.

1. Background and Methodology

- 1.1 This Working Group was established by Sussex Police and Crime Panel at its meeting of 28 June 2013, to act as critical friend to the development of the Police and Crime Plan 2014/17, and report its findings back to the Panel. At the January 2014 meeting, it was agreed that the Group would meet at the appropriate point during each year's cycle (while always reporting back to the January Panel meeting), and that the Group's terms of reference would expand to include consideration of budget and precept development.
- 1.2 During 2017 the Group met twice, on 25 September and 28 November 2017. The Group heard evidence from Mark Streater and Iain McCulloch (Commissioner's Chief Executive and Chief Finance Officer, respectively), and from Miranda Kadwell (Corporate Finance Manager, Sussex Police).
- 1.3 The Panel has a statutory duty to review the proposed precept and make a report to the Commissioner on the proposed precept. The report may include recommendations.
- 1.4 In support of the Panel's statutory duty, the Group acted as a critical friend to the Commissioner as the medium term financial strategy (MTFS) developed, questioning and testing the underpinning assumptions. The Group then scrutinised the budget "build process". The Group's deliberations and recommendations are intended to inform and provide greater assurance for the Panel's statutory scrutiny of the proposed policing precept, at its formal meeting on 19 January 2018.
- 1.5 The Group was briefed virtually on the provisions of the draft policing grant settlement announcement on 19 December, but not on whether/how the Commissioner planned to take advantage of the increased cap, on any

modelling to support such a proposal, or on how any additional funds so raised might be spent.

2. Discussion and Recommendations

On behalf of the Panel, the Group was able to scrutinise a number of matters in detail, including those which follow:

2.1 Budget Pressures:

The Group considered the variety of budget pressures and the implications thereof, including year-on-year reductions in the Government's grant funding, technical obsolescence, pay increases, the Apprenticeship Levy and inflation.

2.2 Maximising Revenue

The Group questioned whether sufficient use had been made of potential revenue sources. Particular areas of focus included charges for the policing of Gatwick Airport, for music festivals and other large public gatherings, and developer contributions. As well as the staff resources dedicated to these efforts, the Group considered the available sanctions in the event of non-payment and the reputational implications for Sussex Police when policing support was denied for events lacking a statutory requirement for such. The Group also questioned about lobbying efforts to secure a general power of competence for police & crime commissioners (PCCs), as was currently enjoyed by local authorities.

2.3 Collaborative Working

The MTFS set out a programme of collaborative workstreams with neighbouring police forces. The Group was keen to understand how the PCC ensured Sussex residents paid the correct share of any investment required, and, equally, realised the correct share of any savings. The Chairman and Vice Chairman had established an ongoing dialogue with their counterparts in Hampshire, Surrey, and Thames Valley, and were also working closely with the PCC to ensure appropriate scrutiny of the Commissioner's role.

2.4 Implications for Partners

The Group explored the extent to which Sussex Police worked with partners to explore the collective impact of funding reductions, including with local authorities and the voluntary sector.

2.5 Value for Money and Efficiency

The Group felt slightly more could have been done to report in-year progress in implementing measures funded through the 2017/18 precept increase, (and the Commissioner's role in addressing any performance issues) albeit mention had been made in the MTFS reported to the Panel's October 2017 meeting.

2.6 Precept Consultation

The Commissioner held a consultation on whether Sussex residents would be willing to pay more to sustain police service levels. The Commissioner has a statutory duty, before proposing the policing precept, to seek the views of local residents. The Group noted that the practice of undertaking a public consultation to fulfil this duty was widespread among PCCs, and that the outcome is advisory, not binding.

2.7 Precept

The Group did not review the proposed precept. However, the Group learned that the MTFS assumed the maximum allowed £5 rise per Band D household, in line with the flexibility offered by the Government's approach to the diminishing policing grant existing prior to 19 December. The Group questioned the underlying reasons for the inclusion of a £5 rise within the MTFS, including the impact of not increasing the policing precept.

The settlement announcement on 19 December allowed for far greater increases than the planning assumption of a £5/band D household rise. The Group did not have the opportunity to consider these possibilities.

3. Working Group Resource Implications and Value for Money

- 3.1 The cost associated with the Working Group has been met from within the funding received by Sussex Police and Crime Panel from the Home Office.

4. Risk Management Implications

- 4.1 Reviewing the proposed policing precept is core statutory duty of the Panel. A failure to adequately undertake this duty risks breaching the applicable sections of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011.

5. Other Considerations – Equality – Crime Reduction – Human Rights

- 5.1 There are no implications which compromise human rights. The recommendations treat all members of the community equally.

TFG membership

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Eileen Lintill, Chichester District Council
Christian Mitchell, West Sussex County Council
Tony Nicholson, Lewes District Council
Peter Nightingale, Independent Member
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