

Gwent Police
and Crime Panel

Panel Heddlu
a Throseddu Gwent

REPORT ON THE GWENT POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER'S PROPOSED PRECEPT FOR 2022/23

Background

This report is made in accordance with the Gwent Police and Crime Panel's statutory duty contained in Paragraph 3(2), Schedule 5 of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011.

Review of Proposed Precept

The Gwent Police and Crime Commissioner notified the Panel on 20th January 2022 of his proposed Police and Crime Budget and Precept for 2022/23.

The Panel considered a detailed report outlining the proposed precept for 2022/23 at a meeting held at Penallta House, Ystrad Mynach on 28th January 2022. A copy of the report is available on the Panel's website www.Gwentpcp.org.uk

The following Members of the Panel were present:

Mrs Gillian Howells, Chair (Co-opted Member)
Councillor Colin Mann Vice-Chair (Caerphilly County Borough Council)
Councillor Mrs Lisa Winnett (Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council)
Councillor Sean Morgan (Caerphilly County Borough Council)
Councillor Tony Easson (Monmouthshire County Borough Council)
Councillor Jason Jordan (Newport City Council)
Councillor David Fouweather (Newport City Council)
Councillor Mark Spencer (Newport City Council)
Councillor Gwyn Jenkins (Torfaen County Borough Council)
Councillor John Killick (Torfaen County Borough Council)
Mr P. Nuttall (Co-opted Member)

The Gwent Police and Crime Commissioner recommended a 5% increase in the 2022/23 precept and a budget requirement of £156,103,774. The Panel debated the proposed increase and considered both the impact on the residents and communities of Gwent and the needs for Gwent Police to maintain current levels of service.

The Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent set out the rationale in his report for the 5% precept proposal but highlighted that this will not give a balanced budget, with a £2.5m shortfall. Therefore, further efficiencies and contributions

from the reserves will be required. There will be a future burden upon the estates strategy and exposure to interest rates rises. The panel were advised that it is planned to review the estates strategy in the new financial year to re-align the principles for the strategy and provide assurance on value for money.

The Police and Crime Commissioner advised that his office has carried out public consultation for 12 weeks and asked the public if they would support a rise of up to £2 a month for a band D property. 1697 people completed the survey with 44% supporting the rise, 38% did not support, therefore less than 50% of public supported the increase. However, overall, the public support Gwent Police with less than 10% stating they did not support Gwent Police.

The Panel noted the significant investment required for ICT and fleet which is a short-term investment and is therefore funded from revenue. Longer term investment for estates projects would be funded from borrowing. There is no central government capital grant funding provided. Panel Members highlighted the associated risks with the potential increase in interest rates and inflation.

The panel also recognised that the 5% precept proposal was lower than the 6.82% requested by the Chief Constable as discussed at the 10th December 2021 panel meeting. The Panel acknowledged the impact on residents who face increasing energy costs and other cost of living expenses, has a subsequent impact upon society and can also result in an increase in crime. The Panel were advised of how the PCC uses the proceeds of crime funding of around £300k to support projects in communities that offer diversionary schemes for vulnerable people who are at risk of slipping into crime. The panel were advised of the range of preventative work carried out in terms of keeping communities safe.

It was confirmed that should the National Insurance increase be cancelled that the funding included in the settlement for the employer contribution, which is ringfenced, would very likely be withdrawn by the UK Government.

Clarification was provided to the panel on the non-recurrent grants that have provided a short-term surplus and can be added into Capital funds for 2022/23, thereby delaying the need for borrowing. Further detail was provided on the support costs outlined in the report and it was explained they are largely related to contracts for Estates and ICT. It was agreed that this is an area where detail could be expanded to provide more clarity. The benefits of the investment in ICT have been significantly beneficial since the Covid-19 pandemic allowing Gwent Police to change to working flexibly immediately.

The Panel was mindful of the effect on the less well off, by any increase in the precept. However, it was equally mindful that a budget that is not balanced, remains as such in perpetuity and the effects of crime mitigate in a worse way against those same people.

Recommendation

Following a full debate about the proposed Precept, Gwent Police and Crime Panel unanimously made the following recommendation to the Gwent Police and Crime Commissioner:

Noted that the OPCC bid has been reduced from the 6.82% originally advised to 5% presented to today's meeting. This was based upon the extra grant funding to offset the NI increase and the Officers funded through Operation Uplift and other associated factors covered in the presentation.

The Panel remain to have concerns about the Capital Programme and the future cost of borrowing and something which we will continue to monitor and scrutinise in future meetings.

However, in discussions, the Panel are fully supportive of the work of Gwent Police and recognise the ongoing pressures on the Chief Constable and her staff to deliver that service.

There is a value to communities which the safety and assurance offered by Gwent Police cannot be quantified in monetary terms.

In view of the concerns of the panel and the pressures and funding the panel wish to veto the 5% recommended. The Panel consider this to be too low and recommend a revised precept of 5.5% to mitigate and offset the £2.5m shortfall.

Therefore, the Panel vetoed the proposed precept proposal of 5.00% for 2022/23 which they consider to be too low.

Recommended to the Gwent Police and Crime Commissioner:

That the Gwent Police and Crime Commissioner set a revised precept of 5.5%.

28 January 2022