

**Gwent Police
and Crime Panel**

**Panel Heddlu
a Throseddu Gwent**

REPORT ON THE GWENT POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER'S PROPOSED PRECEPT FOR 2023/24

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 2023 of his proposed Police and Crime Budget and Precept for 2023/24

The Panel considered a detailed report outlining the proposed precept for 2023/24 at their meeting held remotely on Microsoft Teams on 27th January 2023. 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
Councillor Marina Chacon-Dawson
Councillor Lynda Clarkson
Councillor Gareth Davies
Councillor Tony Easson
Councillor Christine Forehead
Councillor Farzina Hussain
Councillor Deb Jenkins
Councillor Tony Kear
Councillor Mark Spencer
Councillor Jacqueline Thomas

The Gwent Police and Crime Commissioner outlined a budget requirement of £161,586,891 for 2023/24. He therefore recommended a 6.82% increase in the 2023/24 precept to provide general expenses of £72,998,181. The remaining budget requirement will be met from planned efficiency savings during 2023/24 of £1.142m and further planned efficiency savings of £2.762m (totalling £3.904m). A further proposed utilisation of Reserves and Committed Funds of £3.457m to balance the 2023/24 budget. The report also outlined an initial capital programme at appendix 7.

The PCC assured the Panel that when he was considering the proposed budget he was mindful of the impact of the cost of living crisis upon communities and families in Gwent. His role is to challenge the Chief Constable on the delivery of the Police and Crime Plan but to do that he has the responsibility to ensure that Gwent Police can perform at an optimum level and are adequately resourced to keep communities safe. The Commissioner reminded Panel Members of the Chief Constable's budget presentation at the Panel's December meeting, which followed months of work by her office and the OPCC to understand demand pressures and risks. The PCC stated that he is committed to ensure that Gwent Police are equipped to respond to the challenges they face and this is a reality facing policing today after many years of austerity. The PCC emphasised that local policing is a valued service in communities with the majority rating them as excellent or good. The informal and formal consultation carried out when the budget was being prepared resulted in more than 1300 people being spoken to and an additional 800+ people completing an online survey. This showed that 61% favoured one of the proposed increases in precept.

The Panel were advised that the level of precept proposed still requires the use of reserves to balance the budget, which although acceptable in the short term is not in the long term. There will be a recurrent shortfall of £3.5m which will need to be risk managed, delivered from further cashable efficiencies or met from reserves or committed funds. The proposed budget also places a burden on future borrowing to fund the Estates Strategy within the Capital programme and heightens the risk of exposure to negative fluctuations in interest rate growth. There has been a review of the Estates Strategy with the draft findings presented to the PCC last week and this is partly reflected in the report to the Panel.

The PCC outlined how representations have been made to the Home Office on the unsustainable funding for Policing by the PCC and the need for additional funding to meet the needs of the service.

The Commissioner stated that this is the most difficult budget that they have prepared, and he re-assured the Panel that he has carefully and methodically evaluated the Chief Constables requested budget which she stated was needed to operate an efficient and effective service. This has been considered alongside the requirement to produce a balanced budget, and affordability for residents in the current cost of living crisis. He stated that anything less than the 6.82% precept would jeopardise the ability of the Chief Constable to protect and reassure the people of Gwent.

The Panel stated that the report is very complex and detailed, and expressed concern that for some it was difficult to understand in the time allowed, whilst acknowledging it is also available for the public to consider online. It was suggested that the process could be reviewed before next year and look at the process and with the involvement of the Finance subgroup. It was recognised that there are time constraints within the process, and this must be balanced against the desire to provide the most up to date information. It was agreed that

OPCC would welcome the opportunity to work with the Finance/Estates group during the year ahead.

Panel members sought detail on the public consultation carried out, particularly how the public were engaged and the consultation was organised. The OPCC advised that there were 23 engagement events allowing face-to-face contacts where the public were also able to access to other advice and services. There were online opportunities as well.

The Panel discussed the efficiency and effectiveness of the Estates Strategy in terms of affordability. Members recalled the December meeting when the Panel were advised by the Chief Constable the current custody suite is not fit for purpose. The budget outlines that the planned Gwent Police Operational Facility project will be deferred for two years, because of increased borrowing costs, construction costs and inflation. Members asked if planning for the project that has been delayed will continue, so that when money is available it can proceed without delay. Members were reassured that planning will continue, so that when funds are available the project can be started immediately. The demolition of the old HQ site and the sharing of the business case for the GPOF was requested. The need to press ahead with the Joint Firearms unit was discussed and Members were advised that this must proceed due to accreditation needs. The Panel asked that the Finance/Estates Group are kept informed of the changes to the Estates Strategy going forward.

The Panel have been made aware what areas of the budget can be cut and what cannot be cut, mainly Police Officers and PCSO's. In addition, they noted the use of reserves is a short-term fix as eventually that money will run out. Therefore, this budget has uncertainties, and the Panel Members stated they understood they are being asked to approve the precept on that basis.

The Panel sought further detail on the impact of the delays to the ESN project which is not likely to go ahead until 2029/30. Members were advised that the main risk is around the continued use of Airwave and the supply of equipment but this is an issue across all Police Forces and they are working together to manage the risk.

Clarity was sought on Unrecoverable Income, Telematics and the Capital charge under expenditure, and assurance that the IT costs were value for money.

Following a detailed discussion with the Police and Crime Commissioner, Chief Constable and the Chief Finance Officer, the Panel considered the Commissioners proposal to a 6.82% increase in the policing precept.

The Panel wished to place on record their thanks to Mr Darren Garwood-Pask, Chief Finance Officer, for engaging the Finance/Estates Sub Group and Panel in early discussions about the Commissioner's detailed budget and precept report, also for his detailed and comprehensive answers.

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:

Having considered the report and the responses from the Police and Crime Commissioner, Chief Constable and the Officers of the OPCC the Panel recognise the difficult environment in which the force continues to operate. The Panel would like to record that they do have concerns over the use of reserves to offset the funding gap whilst appreciating the funding situation.

Therefore, the Panel, consider that the proposed precept of 6.82% is acceptable.

Recommended to the Gwent Police and Crime Commissioner:

Date 31st January 2023