

**Gwent Police
and Crime Panel**

**Panel Heddlu
a Throseddu Gwent**

REPORT ON THE GWENT POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER'S PROPOSED PRECEPT FOR 2024/25

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 Acting Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent notified the Panel on 19th January 2024 of her proposed Police and Crime Budget and Precept for 2024/25

The Panel considered a detailed report outlining the proposed precept for 2024/25 at their meeting held on 26th January 2024. A copy of the report is available on the Panel's website www.gwentpcp.org.uk

The following Members of the Panel were present:

Councillor Marina Chacon-Dawson
Councillor Gareth Davies
Councillor Tony Easson
Councillor Christine Forehead
Councillor Nick Horler
Councillor Farzina Hussain
Councillor Deb Jenkins
Councillor Tony Kear
Councillor Colin Mann
Councillor Mark Spencer
Councillor Jacqueline Thomas

Mrs Gillian Howells - Independent Co-opted Member

Ms R Jones – Independent Co-opted Member

The Acting Gwent Police and Crime Commissioner outlined a budget requirement for 2024/25 of £173,027,278. She therefore recommended an increase in the council tax precept to be levied in respect of general expenses of £79,159,573. This reflects an annual increase in Band D of 7.70% or £25 on the 2023/24 council tax precept level, thereby proposing a 2024/25 Band D council tax precept of £349.52.

There are planned efficiency savings in 2024/25 of £0.698m and further planned efficiency savings of £1.654m (totalling £2.352m) detailed in the report and a further proposed underwriting of the remaining deficit with Reserves and Committed Funds of £2.805m to balance the 2024/25 budget.

The Panel received a comprehensive presentation from the Acting Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent and the Acting Section 151 Officer.

The Panel expressed concerns of the impact of a reduced number of PCSO's, (following the reduction of Welsh Government funding) upon communities. Members stated that PCSO's are a vital link in communities and can often solve issues before they escalate and can often be the only police presence on the streets. The APCC stated that the value of the PCSO's was confirmed by the feedback received during the public engagement and they are seeking to support the gap in funding for the posts for the next 12-18 months and allow them to reduce through attrition to a level that can be sustained. The need to increase public perception of both visible and invisible policing was debated.

A Panel Member thanked the APCC and the Acting Section 151 Officer for the way in which the information was presented. The report made a very compelling case for the increase in precept, which was clearly set out. The cost of living for the public is a significant issue when considering any increase and the reduction of funding has made this process even more difficult.

The reserves were outlined and it was explained there are £14.1m, made up of a general reserve of £5m which is retained to deal with critical incidents. The remaining reserves of £9.1 are committed and earmarked for specific programmes such as the Airwave replacement. There is no Capital Reserve. Members asked if there were to be a critical incident and the £5m general reserve was used would Gwent Police be refunded. The Panel was advised that the Home Office can refund in certain circumstances, but there are no guarantees.

The Panel debated the cost pressures outlined in the report and noted there are no plans to proceed with some estates projects this year, apart from the Joint Firearms Range with South Wales and Dyfed Powys police forces. It was explained this is essential to retain the accreditation of the armed response units in all three police forces. The panel were assured there is significant governance and scrutiny of this project.

The Panel sought clarification on the increased costs for signage of £300k and were advised that this is to cover the costs to replace the royal cypher from the late Queen to His Royal Highness King Charles. This is on items such as vehicles and uniforms. Members were informed this is being done when items are being replaced on a phased basis to keep costs to a minimum.

The Panel commented on the public engagement, which had been referred to and noted that although the majority were in favour of some sort of precept increase there were still 42% not in favour of any of the increase options, which

may be interpreted as not in favour of any increase. It was suggested that this should be an option when asking the questions in future. A member stated that it is difficult to consider any increase when there are significant affordability problems in communities which is reflected in the increasing use of foodbanks.

The Panel asked how the survey was carried out, were all socio-economic groups represented. Members were advised that the OPCC carried out significant engagement across different types of communities. This consisted of 5 sessions per local authority area, including on Saturdays, with efforts to cover all types of areas.

A member sought clarification on borrowing and if it was advisable or permissible to borrow to fund short term assets and was advised it is not advisable to borrow for assets that have a short life span and are no longer in use when the loan is still outstanding.

The Panel highlighted the costs of kennelling of dangerous dogs outlined in the report and queried whether these can be passed on to the owners. Unfortunately, this is a cost for the police to cover but it was acknowledged that it was an interesting point.

A member asked if the force is still using agency staff and how is that reflected in the budget. The Panel were advised that agency staff are used, and the costs are met through savings in staff budget where there are vacancies, the typical costs in a year are approximately £608k.

Members highlighted the reduction in Welsh government funding for the school's liaison service and the potential impact upon staff and schools. The Panel were advised that there are 13 police officers employed in this service that are still part of the establishment and will need to be retained. This is a valued service and discussions are currently being held with the other Welsh Chief Constables and Police and Crime Commissioners to understand the impact and work is being carried out to look at options going forward.

The long-term funding issues were discussed in terms of the difficulty to make longer term plans when budgets are provided annually.

Conclusions

The Gwent Police and Crime Panel made the following comments in relation to the Budget recommendations:

The Panel wished to thank the Acting Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent, and the Acting Section 151 Officer, for the amended structure of the report this year. The provision of a clear presentation supported by the handout made the process much easier for members. Members appreciated the opportunity for engagement and discussion throughout the process. The information provided was clear and appropriate with detailed responses, the lack of jargon was appreciated.

The Panel would however wish to record their concerns regarding the Estates Strategy and note the pause of the Gwent Police Operational Facility (GPOF). The funding gap of £2.8m still has to be closed and it is recognised that savings of £4.4m have already been included in this budget.

Members are very uncomfortable with the increase of 7.70% due to the impact upon the residents of Gwent however extensive scrutiny and challenge has been carried out by the APCC and her office therefore the Panel have supported the increase.

Recommendations

Following a full debate about the proposed Precept, Gwent Police and Crime Panel unanimously supported the following recommendations by the Acting Gwent Police and Crime Commissioner:

- I. A budget requirement for 2024/25 of £173,027,278.
- II. The planned efficiency savings in 2024/25 of £0.698m and further planned efficiency savings of £1.654m (totalling £2.352m) detailed in Appendix 5b of the Appendices to the report.
- III. A further proposed underwriting of the remaining deficit with Reserves and Committed Funds of £2.805m to balance the 2024/25 budget (Appendix 7).
- IV. The initial Capital Programme as described in Appendices 8a and 8b;
- V. The 2024/25 proposed council tax precept to be levied in respect of general expenses of £79,159,573. This reflects an annual increase in Band D of 7.70% or £25 on the 2023/24 council tax precept level, thereby proposing a 2024/25 Band D council tax precept of £349.52. This overall council tax precept sum will be apportioned to each unitary authority according to the following table:

Unitary authorities	£	Tax base Band D equivalent
Blaenau Gwent	7,317,677	20,936.36
Caerphilly	21,423,010	61,292.66
Monmouthshire	16,939,672	48,465.53
Newport	21,435,712	61,329.00
Torfaen	12,043,502	34,457.26
Total	79,159,573	226,480.81

Date 31st January 2024