

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ESSEX POLICE AND CRIME PANEL HELD AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD, ON 31 JANUARY 2013

Present:

Councillor

Malcolm Buckley
Graham Butland
Chris Hossack
Jeffrey Stanley
Ian Wright (vice Bob
Shepherd)
Tim Young
Mary Sartin
John Jowers
Paul Sztumpf
Penny Channer
Jo McPherson
Tony Cox (vice Ian
Robertson)
Peter Halliday
Angie Gaywood (vice
Gerard Rice)
Robert Chambers

Representing

Basildon Borough Council (Vice-Chairman)
Braintree District Council
Brentwood Borough Council
Castle Point Borough Council
Chelmsford City Council

Colchester Borough Council
Epping Forest District Council
Essex County Council (Chairman)
Harlow District Council
Maldon District Council
Rochford District Council
Southend Borough Council

Tendring District Council
Thurrock Borough Council

Uttlesford District Council

Apologies for Absence

Bob Shepherd (with Ian Wright as his substitute)	Chelmsford City Council
Ian Robertson (with Tony Cox as his substitute)	Southend Borough Council
Gerard Rice (with Angie Gaywood as his substitute)	Thurrock Borough Council
Ann Haigh	Co-opted Member

The following Officers were in attendance throughout the meeting:
Colin Ismay, Head of Scrutiny and Lead Governance Officer, Essex County
Council, Secretary to the meeting
Paul Warren, Chief Executive, Rochford District Council

1. Election of Chairman

It having been duly moved and seconded it was

Resolved:

That Councillor John Jowers be elected Chairman.

2. Appointment of Vice-Chairman

It having been duly moved and seconded it was

Resolved:

That Councillor Malcolm Buckley be appointed Vice-Chairman.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Shadow Panel held on 25 October 2012 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4. Declarations of Interest

The following Councillors declared a personal interest in Agenda item 7 (The Proposed Police Precept for 2013/14):

Robert Chambers	as a member of Essex County Council and the Essex Fire Authority
Penny Channer	as a member of Essex County Council
Tim Young	as Vice-Chairman of the Essex Probation Board and as his wife is a member of Essex County Council
Graham Butland	as a member of Essex County Council and as a member of Great Notley Parish Council
Jo McPherson	as a member of Safer Essex.

5. Questions to the Chairman from Members of the Public

There were no questions from Members of the Public.

6. The Proposed Police Precept for 2013/14

The Panel considered report EPCP/01/13 by the Secretary to the Panel setting out the process for the Panel to review the Commissioner's proposal for the Precept for 2013/14. The Commissioner's proposals were set out in an Annex to the report and comprised a covering report, Financial Statement and a Statement relating to the Police and Crime Plan.

The Commissioner, the Chief Constable and the Acting Chief Executive were in attendance for this item.

The Commissioner's Revenue Budget strategy is as follows.

- i) To maintain the current Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) of achieving a total of £42.2m savings over the 2010 Spending Review, ending 31 March

2015. The position for 2014/15 will be reviewed following the Government's announcements regarding the 2013 Spending Review.

- ii) To accept that this strategy was based on an anticipated increase in the precept for policing of 2.5% in both 2013/14 and 2014/15.
- iii) To recognise fully the Commissioner's responsibilities in reducing crime and disorder.
- iv) To apply in full the £1.246m grant received in 2013/14 from Government for commissioning community safety and crime reduction initiatives from partners. This compares with a grant of £1.374m in 2012/13.
- v) To develop the basis for commissioning of community safety and crime reduction initiatives during the early part of 2013/14, ensuring this commissioning is co-ordinated with that of the Whole Essex Community Budget programme.
- vi) To accept the Government's recognition that Forces with low precepts have the flexibility to increase their precept by up to £5 a year for a Band D property. For Essex this would represent an increase of 3.62%.
- vii) To maintain sufficient reserves to meet working capital needs, essential investment and unforeseen events.
- viii) To note that revenue reserves have halved since 2010 and are at a level where careful monitoring is required.
- ix) To seek a policing precept that will lift Essex from the bottom of the table of shire counties to a more prudent and responsible position.

The Commissioner's proposal was to increase the precept in 2013/14 by 3.49%, equivalent to a £4.77 a year increase for a Band D property thus raising £2.75m of additional receipts.

The Chairman introduced the process and explained how the veto would work. He reiterated his understanding of the validity of the Government's recognition that Forces with low precepts have the flexibility to increase their precept by up to £5 a year for a Band D property. He pointed out that the Panel had to make a judgement between the needs of an under-funded Force and the pressure on local authorities not to increase the Council Tax in 2013/14. He then invited the Commissioner to speak to his report.

The Commissioner explained that he was well aware of the political situation and the difficult financial circumstances that local authorities faced. He pointed out that 2013/14 will be year three of the four-year plan that requires £42.2m savings by 2015 and an increase in the precept of 2.5% in both 2013/14 and 2014/15. Savings of £42m equate to the loss of 900 individuals. The Commissioner has realised in the early stages of his new role the concerns expressed by the public about the visibility of Police Officers. He had decided that in general it would be

best to proceed with the current plan and to maintain the status quo whilst addressing the issue of lifting Essex from the bottom of the table of shire counties. In order to achieve the current four-year plan would require the Commissioner to propose as a minimum an increase in the precept of 2.5%. By proposing an increase of £3.49% the Commissioner aimed to lift Essex from the bottom of the table for shire counties and to increase spending on crime reduction by creating a crime reduction fund of £500,000. If he does not take advantage of this opportunity now it is unlikely to occur again.

The Chairman then asked each Member in turn to make their response to the Commissioner's proposal, when the following comments were made.

In favour of the proposal

- The challenge facing the Commissioner in putting together proposals in just 10 weeks was recognised.
- Members were not comfortable about raising the Council Tax but the Commissioner had made his case for the coming year.
- It is not a problem in itself if Essex is at the bottom of the table for Shire Counties.
- The Panel will need to review progress against the budget during the year.
- It was agreed that Constituents wanted to see police officers on the street.
- Harlow is a poor area where crime levels are high particularly in relation to anti-social behaviour and the public want to see something done about this.
- Public perception needs to be informed as to why a tax increase is necessary and the public need to understand the implications of not having the increase at the level proposed.
- The need for any increase would require careful explanation but if the opportunity for a rise is not taken there is a danger that what has been achieved might be put in jeopardy.
- The proposed increase was legal and not unreasonable. There appeared to be no unreasonable expenditure in the budget.
- This was a one-off opportunity and the public wanted to see more officers on the street.
- The Commissioner clarified that the proposed budget would not lead to more officers on the street as the existing plan provides for fewer officers; more officers would be lost without the proposed increase.
- There was a need for greater partnership working to deliver common goals.
- Throughout the next financial year the Panel will be looking for evidence of outputs being maintained.

Not in favour of the proposal

- The Commissioner has not provided sufficient evidence that this represents a good idea and that it is absolutely necessary.
- It is too soon to come forward with this recommendation after only 10 weeks in the post.
- It would have been helpful to have given the source of statistics used.
- Essex is in the middle ranking for the number of officers employed but was still achieving a reduction in crime; there appeared to be no correlation between the number of officers and crime figures.

- A better understanding of the outcomes expected from the proposals was needed.
- The public's wish for more officers on the street is based on a perception of crime rather than the reality.

The Commissioner responded that he was grateful for the understanding of the complexity of the issue. He was not making the proposal lightly. His role was to hold the Chief Constable to account and this will be a real process. He agreed that there needed to be an understanding of the link between the budget and what is delivered. Comparisons of crime figures and numbers of officers between authorities are difficult as the crime profile of the authorities will also differ. He paid tribute to the level of efficiencies achieved by the former Police Authority. The increase related to one third of income. He referred to the challenges of serious organised crime driving local crime and the need to be able to respond to the special security role of Stansted Airport. He outlined his plans for local engagement in each of the authorities' areas. Dealing with fear of crime is a real challenge and visible policing is a difficult issue. The proposals are about protecting the future. He did not want Essex to be top of the table for Shire Authorities but he did not want it to be the lowest.

In response to further questions the Commissioner made the following points. He explained that whilst he was trying to understand the funding flows he will be allocating the community safety funds again for next year. More imagination was needed in delivering the capital programme and rationalising the use of assets. The use of mobile technology was being developed in order to reduce the need for officers to return to the office. The Commissioner was a supporter of the Safer Colchester initiative and would like to see more schemes like it across the County but felt that Divisional Commanders needed to come to their own views on use of resources. He undertook to provide the Panel with a separate note on reserves. The funding provided to Essex as the terrorism lead for the East of England can only be used for this purpose. He agreed to look at funding going direct to Southend and Thurrock. Where funds have been made available this year for Domestic Violence they will be available for 2013/14. He clarified the position with regard to the funding of PCSO posts: if an authority was proposing to cease the match-funding the Commissioner needed early notification. The Commissioner explained that actual crime was different to reported crime and everything should be done to encourage people to report incidents. The Commissioner will be looking into how the Police respond to reports of crime.

In response to a question the Chief Constable on behalf of the Commissioner clarified the process for the recording of incidents.

It was then proposed by Councillor Chambers and seconded by Councillor McPherson that the Panel support the Commissioner's proposal to increase the precept by 3.49% without qualification or comment. Before the motion was put to the meeting it was agreed that there be a named vote.

The motion having been put it was declared to be carried by 13 votes for and two against.

Those voting for the motion were Councillors:

Malcolm Buckley	Mary Sartin	Jo McPherson
Chris Hossack	John Jowers	Tony Cox
Jeffrey Stanley	Paul Sztumpf	Angie Gaywood
Ian Wright	Penny Channer	Robert Chambers
Tim Young		

Councillors Graham Butland and Peter Halliday voted against.

It was therefore

Resolved:

That the Panel support the Commissioner's proposal to increase the precept by 3.49% without qualification or comment.

7. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for 21 February 2013.

Chairman
21 February 2013