

Minutes of the meeting of the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Panel, held in Committee Room 1, County Hall, Chelmsford, CM1 1QH on Thursday, 6 February 2020

Present:

Councillor	Representing
Wendy Schmitt (Chairman)	Braintree District Council
Maria Pearson	Brentwood Borough Council
Godfrey Isaacs	Castle Point Borough Council
Jeremy Lager	Councillor, Chelmsford City Council
Mike Lilley	Colchester Borough Council
Nigel Bedford	Epping Forest District Council
Malcolm Maddocks	Essex County Council
Frances Mason	Harlow District Council
Lesley Butcher	Rochford District Council
Ian Shead	Southend-on-Sea Borough Council
Lynda McWilliams	Tendring District Council
Joycelyn Redsell	Thurrock Council
Colin Day	Uttlesford District Council

Co-opted Independent Member

Kay Odysseos

Also in attendance

Pippa Brent-Isherwood	Chief Executive, Office of the Essex PFCC
Neil Cross	Chief Finance Officer and Section 151 Officer, Essex County Fire and Rescue Service
Jane Gardner	Essex Police, Fire and Crime Deputy Commissioner
Karl Edwards	Director of Corporate Services, Essex County Fire and Rescue Service
Victoria Freeman	Secretary to the Panel
BJ Harrington	Chief Constable
Roger Hirst	Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
Rick Hylton	Acting Chief Fire Officer

1 Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

The report of the Membership, Apologies and Declarations was received.

1. The following apologies were noted:

- John Gili-Ross, Co-opted Independent Member

- Councillor Michael Helm, Maldon District Council
- Councillor Hossack, Brentwood Borough Council (substituted by Councillor Maria Pearson)
- Councillor Aidan McGurran, Basildon Borough Council
- Councillor Webb, Rochford District Council (substituted by Councillor Lesley Butcher)

2. Councillor Lynda McWilliams declared a Code Interest in that her son is a police officer. Councillor McWilliams participated fully in the meeting.

2 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 January 2020 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman following the agreed amendments below:

- Councillor Mike Lilley was not in attendance at the meeting as shown.
- Councillor Mike Webb was Vice Chairman of the Castlepoint, Rochford and Raleigh Community Safety Partnership.

3 Questions from members of the public

There were none.

4 Proposed Essex Police Precept for 2020/21

The Panel received report EPFCP/06/20 which presented the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's proposed police precept for 2020/21.

The Commissioner was accompanied by Chief Constable BJ Harrington; Pippa Brent-Isherwood, Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer of the Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner; and Jane Gardner, Deputy Commissioner.

As part of the 2020/21 Police Grant, the Government had provided £750m to support the recruitment of 20,000 additional Police Officers, divided into three tranches, 6,000 officers in 2020-21; 8,000 in 2021-22; and 6,000 in 2022-3. Of the £750m, £50m would be retained centrally to support the recruitment of officers and of the remaining £700m grant, £168m would be ringfenced to support the individual force recruitment targets for 2020/21. Essex would receive a share of £15.8m.

The Commissioner explained that during discussions with the Prime Minister, Home Secretary and the Home Office, it had been made clear that the most urgent need was at the very front line of policing and direct support through territorial policing, and therefore the agreement was that

the first 6,000 officers would come in their entirety to the 43 territorial police forces in England and Wales.

Essex Police had continued to deliver not just all they could in terms of community safety for the public but also increased productivity and continued efficiency savings, which meant that Essex could recruit an additional 151 police officers in 2020/21, of which 135 would be funded through the Government's Police Uplift Programme and a further 16 officers.

The Commissioner explained there were also internal cost pressures and inflation to consider and it was felt necessary, after a long period of stability and inflationary erosion of public sector pay that it was necessary, appropriate and commendable to be backing the 2.5% pay increase for police officers and staff and that he expected this trend to continue. Furthermore, there were additional costs such as insurance, fuel and technology investment, and in order to cover these it would be necessary to make a moderate increase in the council tax precept to 2.94%.

Investment was the next phase, with the recruitment of additional police officers into local and visible policing; investment in town centre teams and an increased strength of operational support and road policing; the new young peoples and schools policing teams; strengthened gangs team and investment in violence and vulnerability. The Service had been successful in reducing burglary, anti-social behaviour and theft across the county and there were improving signs in relation to violence, although there had yet to be an impact on assault rates.

In response to questions from the Panel the Commissioner and the Chief Constable stated:

- The Commissioner was confident that on the back of the investment being made and plans for deployment that there would be a decrease in crime, at which point, consideration would be given to increasing reserves, however he felt that building reserves would be the wrong decision at present.
- With regards to the capital investment programme, in the medium term there was a programme of estate improvement and an estate strategy, which included the refurbishment of key stations across the county and repair costs and an investment in technology. The future capital programme would need to be funded through borrowing against fixed assets. Due to the good work by the estate teams and technology teams, expenditure had been moderated and no new debt would be incurred by the year end. Expenditure on all principal stations and custody facilities would be needed to ensure that they were safe places; and Essex Headquarters required refurbishment, however this expenditure would not impact on the ability to resource the front line.

- Essex Police would be investing £331,000 in the development of the Media and Communications Strategy and a team to communicate and engage with the public. It was explained that media was a powerful tool in terms of prevention, intervention and engagement and also for recruitment.
- Although the budget settlement had enabled investment in the force, continued efficiency savings would be needed to balance the budget and cover the medium term deficit. The 2020/21 budget required Essex Police to make cashable savings of £4.734m.
- The Force Control Room had experienced a year on year increase in 999 calls, in order to improve call handling capacity, it was proposed to increase the number of call handlers to assist with the increased demand. Other means of reporting were being addressed to reduce the time taken to speak to an operator, such as online reporting. The Resolution Centre Programme had been established to seek to resolve solutions quickly and offer a more convenient form of reporting for residents, leaving officers on the front line able to respond quicker to more urgent emergencies and be more proactive with preventative work.
- The Estate Disposals revenue of -£0.161m related to the running costs of those buildings which would be disposed of during the following year.
- There was a Section 22 agreement in place between all forces in the country to support the National Air Police Service. Essex benefited from the service which was hosted by West Yorkshire Police on a cost reimbursement basis.

The recommendation that there be a precept increase of 2.94%, equivalent to an increase of £5.67 a year from £192.96 to £198.63 for a Band D property, raising £3.7m of additional council tax receipts was put to the vote by the Panel Chairman. Following consideration of the report and having listened to his justification of the need for an increase, the Panel voted to accept the Commissioner's proposal for a precept increase with 12 for; and two against (Councillors Day and Lilley).

5 Proposed Essex Fire and Rescue Service Precept for 2020-21

The Panel received report EPFCP/07/20 which presented the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's proposed Fire and Rescue Service precept for 2020/21.

The Commissioner was accompanied by Pippa Brent-Isherwood, Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer of the Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner; and Jane Gardner, Deputy Commissioner.

In presenting the report, the Commissioner brought to Members attention the long term history of the Essex County Fire and Rescue Service, particularly around the cultural change programme and the improvement of the Service as a place to work. An increased efficient delivery of the Service remained a priority and a key area for further investment was in operational training and development, with £900,000 having been invested in 2019-20 and a forecasted £500,000 for 2020-21 and a capital investment of £548,000. Ongoing training and development was key and backed by the peer review and Her Majesty's Inspectorate. Also highlighted was Technical Fire Safety and there was an action plan for its delivery. £500,000 had been forecasted for investment in Technical Fire Safety in 2020-21, alongside £500,000 of revenue investment and £500,000 of capital expenditure. The Service had established an On-call Development Programme, which would look to improve the recruitment and retention of On-call firefighters, review their current terms and conditions and identify areas where additional support would be most effective. There was a need to update information and communication software, at a cost in excess of £2.8m over this year and the next.

In response to whether the budget would overcome the issues raised in Her Majesty's Inspectorate report, the Commissioner stated that the programme for cultural improvement was heading in the right direction and that this had been recognised. There had been a significant move forward. It had been the Commissioner's view that there was a need to change the way the Service recruited, and appraised and defined its development plans; there was a need to improve learning and training, and promotion programme, and put in place an improved complaints procedures, all of which had been completed. The Commissioner believed that if the Service received the budgeted resources and the plan remained on track, that the Service would receive good ratings from the Inspectorate.

The recommendation that there be a precept increase of 1.99%, equivalent to an increase of £1.44 a year from £72.45 to £73.89 for a Band D property, raising £935,000 of additional council tax receipts was put to the vote by the Panel Chairman. Following consideration of the report and having listened to his justification of the need for an increase, the Panel voted unanimously to accept the Commissioner's proposal for a precept increase.

6 Dates of the next meetings

The Panel will next meet at 2.00pm on Thursday, 13 February 2020 in Committee Room 1, County Hall. There will be a pre-meeting for Panel Members only, commencing at 1.00pm.

With no urgent business, the meeting closed at 3.22 pm.

Chairman
4 June 2020