

Date: 21st January 2022

BJ Harrington QPM
Chief Constable
Chief Constable's Office
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Dear BJ

Thank you for your letter of 17th January 2020, setting out your proposal for the Essex Police budget for the financial year April 2022 to March 2023. Your proposal forms a comprehensive budget request and builds upon, and reflects the discussions, assumptions, and investments we have reviewed jointly in the last few months.

I welcome your proposals to deliver against the ambitions set out in the new Police and Crime Plan, the Government's Beating Crime Plan, our legal responsibilities, and our national obligations to the Strategic Policing Requirement. This is an exciting budget, which enables us to continue to grow the force in a sustainable way, consolidates what we have achieved so far and will make a significant difference to our ability positively to affect the communities we serve. I look forward with confidence in us continuing to work together to make Essex even safer.

It is pleasing to see your proposal to recruit an additional 200 officers: 180 officers as part of the Police Uplift Programme and a further 20 through the precept flexibility. This investment by the public into Essex Police will mean that by the end of March 2023, the force will have an officer establishment of 3,755 police officers. This is over 900 more police officers (an increase of almost 32%) since May 2016, and will make the force the largest and strongest it has ever been. Importantly this extra strength should also enable the force to make significant progress in preventing crime, tackling drug driven violence, protecting the vulnerable and supporting victims of crime.

Essex Police is an efficient force that provides good value to the public. I recognise your continued success in finding new, more efficient ways of working for the people and businesses of Essex, through continued collaboration activity across a wide range of partners, embracing technology and digital solutions, greater efficiency in the use of the police estate and the important delivery of our disposals programme. I thank you for the efficiency and savings process you have put in place over recent years and that through the budget setting for 2022/23, you have identified in year savings of £4.662m and full year savings of £3.757m.

I acknowledge the pay disparity between forces in South and Eastern England as compared to London, and believe it is right to increase the South East Pay Allowance by £500, to help to ensure the recruitment and retention of our essential police officers and staff.

I also recognise that policing has had a very challenging two years and I understand the complexity and impact on crime from the Government's Covid restrictions, followed by planning for what this has meant to crime and policing as the restrictions ease. I appreciate how Essex Police has stepped up during this period, to target crime prevention, serious violence and increase the visibility of the force by investing officers into front line areas that address these issues.

We have worked hard together with Government over the last five years to ensure policing receives the investment it needs to make a real difference in our communities. The Government's recent three-year funding settlement shows a clear commitment from them to invest more in policing. This is underpinned by the ongoing support from our local communities. Over 2,000 members of the public completed the precept survey this year, and 79% of people who gave a view, said they were prepared to pay up to an additional £10 per annum or more to invest in policing. This is a significant increase from last year and a clear indication, supported by the many conversations I have had, across the county, that both the public and Government are willing to invest more in policing. They want a strong force that can get crime down and create the safe communities, we all want to live in.

Police officer remuneration is an important part of building this, and like you, I support a fair pay settlement for officers, that at the same time ensures we are delivering on our promise to the public, to make a tangible difference in their communities. Throughout the budget development process, we have included the assumption of a 2.5% pay increase in each year of the MTFS, based on the three-year settlement covering pay awards for police officers and staff of between 2% and 3% per annum.

The Police Remuneration Review Body (PRRB) will be making a recommendation to the Government in respect of the pay award. Following the Government's decision, we will have certainty over the pay award, and be able to act on this locally and ensure that the decision is reflected in our MTFS. This will provide certainty for officers, staff, and the public, whilst enabling us to have a fully informed discussion in respect of future funding and investment priorities, including discussions with the Home Office. The APCC and the NPCC will both make submissions to the PRRB ahead of their recommendation, and we will have to balance our desire to see an improved living standard for police officers and staff against the need to invest in the capability and capacity to reduce crime and prevent harm to the public. Affordability of both will be important considerations, as will the Government's preparedness to fund additional pay awards beyond the three-year funding envelope they have already laid out.

At this stage we do not know what the Government's decision will be, and as such I do not believe it is appropriate to create an earmarked reserve for an unknown, potential, additional cost of the pay award. The budget that I will present to the Essex Police Fire and Crime Panel will move your proposed earmarked reserve back to the General Reserve.

The General Reserve, as with an earmarked reserve, will of course only be able to provide one off funding, to cover any excess cost of the pay award in 2022/23, only. Once the Government has made their decision, we will have the certainty we need to work through the local implications of the pay award, including for the medium term, and determine whether further funding conversations are required, directly with the Home Office.

The budget proposal you have presented is an ambitious and exciting proposal that will make a significant difference to community safety across Essex. It is a proposal that is supported by the detailed, collaborative, hard work of both of our teams and the clear support offered by Essex residents.

I strongly support your budget proposal and will be recommending to the Essex Police Fire and Crime Panel that the council tax be increased by 4.79%, thereby having a Council Tax Band D of £218.52, an increase of £9.99. In doing this I am also pleased to support your net budget requirement of £352.2m. I will be submitting the budget paper, which I will share with you, to the Essex Police Fire and Crime Panel by Friday 21st January 2022.

The plans we share for Essex Police continue to be ambitious and promise a significant improvement in public safety over the coming year. I am confident that the net budget requirement you have proposed will support the delivery of these plans, and subject to the one amendment, described above, I will be putting this budget to the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Panel and making the proposal of an increase of 4.79% in the Council Tax Precept for Policing for their consideration and endorsement.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Roger', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Roger Hirst
Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner