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BJ Harrington QPM  
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Chief Constable's Office  
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Dear BJ

Thank you for your letter of 11 January 2024, and your update letter of 19 January 2024, setting out your proposal for the Essex Police budget for the financial year April 2024 to March 2025. Your proposal documents a detailed budget request which has been built in dialogue with my officials and myself and robustly scrutinised in its development, supported by the detailed and collaborative hard work of both our teams.

As clearly stated within your letter, the public of Essex have invested heavily in Essex Police since 2016, both through the local police precept and as national taxpayers. Through my public meetings, the recent precept survey and our independent public perception survey it is clear that this support by the public is still strong. Their investment, along with the very significant efficiency savings you and your team have delivered, has empowered you to recruit a force that is bigger and stronger than ever before. While, for the time being, the growth in officers must be maintained at the current level, I welcome your commitment to deliver more for the public by increasing the capacity and capability of the force.

Because of our significant growth in officer numbers, I recognise that our force has a high proportion of officers with less than five years' experience. I fully support your proposed investment in these officers, in community policing teams, in technology and in efficiency programmes to deliver a further growth in capability and capacity. Within this, I welcome your acknowledgement of the need to continue to improve the diversity of the workforce (particularly in terms of ethnic minority representation) and to rebuild the strength of the Special Constabulary.

The force is delivering on the public's hunger to see crime down across Essex, as set out in the Police and Crime Plan 2021-2024. However, the public, and I as their democratically elected representative, require more. Crime must continue to fall, and we must work harder to protect the vulnerable, support victims and continue our strategic shift towards prevention. We must also continue to deliver our shared ambition to increase public trust and confidence in Essex Police, particularly amongst victims and women and girls.

I am reassured by your letter that, by investing as you set out, you will be able to continue to deliver more for the public and continue to fulfil our national obligations as set out in the Strategic Policing Requirement. For this reason, I thoroughly support your budget proposal and will be recommending to the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Panel my decision that, to enable its delivery, the council tax precept for Essex Police should be increased by 5.55 percent.

This budget has been built against a backdrop of a challenging financial climate. I am satisfied that we have mitigated against all unavoidable cost pressures, whilst maintaining essential policing infrastructure, enhancing policing capability and capacity, working towards delivering our force environmental ambitions and investing to save to support operational delivery. The 2024/25 budget is very much about consolidation, whilst still developing the skills of our highly motivated and dedicated workforce. The investment by the public into Essex Police has made the force the largest and strongest it has ever been, and it has been pleasing to see that investment bear fruit during 2023/24, in terms of the notable achievements you set out.

I recognise that Essex Police has a proven track record for delivering savings and efficiencies with continued success in finding new, more efficient ways of working to provide good value for the people and businesses of Essex. I thank you for the rigorous efficiency and savings process you have put in place over recent years, achieving total cashable savings of £51.7 million since 2016/17, together with £16.2 million in non-cashable savings, an overall total of £67.9 million of savings and efficiencies over the last eight years. The savings and efficiency programme is delivered over a broad range of costs, through continued collaboration activity across a variety of partners, embracing technology and digital solutions, greater efficiency in the use of the police estate and the important delivery of our disposals programme. In the budget setting for 2024/25, you have identified recurring savings of £10.4 million, as well as one off savings of £0.9 million. This total of £11.3 million establishes another year of considerable savings and efficiency programme, which will further help to maximise efficiency and effectiveness of the force and deliver value for money for Essex communities.

I am assured by your plans to invest in key operational policing to address both prevention and response capability and capacity, with a key area for investment being the Contact Management Command, which will deliver savings from improved operations and efficiencies in 2025/26 whilst delivering an improved level of service to the public and to victims of crime. In addition, the improvements in our Criminal Justice work to outsource the taking of medical statements will continue the improvements in timeliness and quality of medical statements allowing for speedier justice for victims. The budget proposal supporting investment in our ability to deal with Digital Forensics is well timed in enhancing our capability and capacity to bring serious offenders to justice, increasing our capacity to tackle increased case work and supporting the need to comply with new regulations and recommendations following the HMICFRS thematic inspection of Digital Forensics in 2022.

I commend the budget proposal to support our continued investment into the Essex Centre for Data Analytics (ECDA) partnership with Essex County Council and the University of Essex, to drive a future operating model that will increase our ability to use data in operational policing activities and whole system approaches that will enable Essex residents to be and feel safe. The benefits of a more data driven approach have already been demonstrated through partnership initiatives such as Project Minerva as well as the Knife Crime Violence Model, and I am keen to see Essex continue to lead the way in this space.

I welcome your proposals to enhance and develop the skills and capabilities of the staff and officers across the Community Policing and Town Centre Teams, through key operational training, such as crime investigation, driving courses, tutoring and the force wide leadership and supervisor development. Through this investment, we need to continue to enhance the quality of investigations, keep victims properly and regularly updated on the progress of their case, improve solved rates in key areas and ultimately bring more offenders to justice, whether this be through the courts or through out of court disposals.

I am pleased that this budget will allow the continued prioritisation of a reduction in violence against women and girls, as well as providing resources towards our ambitions around protecting vulnerable people and breaking the cycle of domestic abuse (DA), which I know has been an area of focus for the force over many years. I am also assured that the budget will accommodate the continued focus on reducing serious violence through the Serious Violence Unit and Operation Grip, targeting high harm hot spots for violent crime.

I agree that endorsement and assessment by HMICFRS is an important assurance in the performance of the force. Your commitment to building upon our recent assessments and your confidence that we are well prepared for the continuous assessment from HMICFRS and the publication of our next Police Efficiency Effectiveness and Legitimacy (PEEL) inspection report in 2025, is most welcome.

We have worked hard together with Government to ensure policing receives the investment it needs to make a real difference to our communities. Government has shown a clear commitment to invest more in policing, and 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 73 percent who gave a view said they would like to see Essex Police receive more funding to invest in getting crime down, with 66 percent of the 1,121 people who gave a view saying they were prepared to contribute £10 per year or more to invest in policing. 52 percent of the respondents said they would be prepared to pay £15 per year or more.

I do appreciate that the assumptions within the MTFs for police pay are set at 2.5 percent for September 2024 and then 2.5 percent annually thereafter. I recognise that, given the current inflationary pressures, there is a likelihood that the 2024/25 pay settlement may be more, which would require further discussion with the Home Office about the funding of any such settlement. Given that, at this stage, we do not know what next year's pay award will be, I consider your proposal to be appropriate, with the pay award built upon the assessment from the last Comprehensive Spending Review.

In addition, I am in favour of your proposal to work towards holding the General Reserve at 3 percent. This balances the need to have flexibility to manage unexpected requirements, while at the same time ensuring we are able to spend today's money on today's community.

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I thoroughly support your budget proposal and will be recommending to the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Panel on 1 February my decision that, to implement the approved budget, the council tax precept for Essex Police be increased by 5.55 percent, thereby having a Council Tax Band D of £246.42 (an increase of £12.96), for its consideration and endorsement. In doing this I am pleased to support total spending of £407.5 million (in respect of total funding and home office specific grants) and the net budget requirement of £385.5 million.

As well as continuing to oversee the delivery of the force's savings and investment programmes through my standing governance mechanisms, my team and I look forward to continuing to work alongside you and your officers on both the nationally and locally funded Safer Streets Funds, and on initiatives such as Operation Dial which, as you know, has not only contributed to the reduction in ASB noted in your letter, but has also seen a reduction in high harm crime in the identified hotspots exceeding the force-wide improvement.

Finally, it should also be noted that many of the challenges facing policing are not matters that policing can resolve alone. I look forward to working with you and through our key partnerships during the coming year to ensure that partners are willing and able to play their full role in addressing these issues, despite the financial challenges that they are also facing.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Hirst', written in a cursive style.

Roger Hirst  
**Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner**