

Minutes of the meeting of the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Panel, held in Committee Room 1 at County Hall, Chelmsford on Tuesday, 7 February 2023

**Present:**

**Councillor**

Davida Ademuyiwa  
Frankie Ricci (Chairman)  
Keith Barber  
Russ Savage  
Michael Lilley  
Paul Stalker  
Ross Playle  
Mark Heard  
Ian Shead  
Lynda McWilliams  
Gary Collins  
Maggie Sutton  
Aidan McGurran

**Representing**

Basildon Borough Council (substitute)  
Braintree District Council  
Brentwood Borough Council  
Castle Point Borough Council  
Colchester Borough Council  
Epping Forest District Council  
Essex County Council  
Maldon District Council  
Southend-on-Sea Borough Council  
Tendring District Council  
Thurrock Council  
Uttlesford District Council  
Co-opted Member for Balanced Appointment

**Co-opted Independent Members**

Sheila Murphy

**Also in attendance**

Gemma Bint	Democratic Services Officer
Pippa Brent-Isherwood	Chief Executive, Office of the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (OPFCC)
Sophie Campion	Senior Democratic Services Officer, Secretary to the Panel
Annette Chan	Chief Accountant, OPFCC
Neil Cross	Chief Finance Officer, Essex County Fire and Rescue Service
Jane Gardner	Deputy Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
Ben-Julian Harrington	Chief Constable, Essex Police
Roger Hirst	Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
Darren Horsman	Strategic Head of Policy and Public Engagement, OPFCC
Rick Hylton	Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive, Essex County Fire and Rescue Service
Debbie Martin	Chief Finance Officer, OPFCC
Carlie Mayes	Maldon District Council, named substitute (observer)
Janet Perry	Chief Financial Officer, OPFCC
Emma Tombs	Democratic Services Manager
Dawn Walters	Management Accountant, OPFCC

**1 Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest**

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

1. The membership of the Panel was noted.
2. The following apologies were noted:
  - John Gili-Ross (Chairman)
  - Cllr Mike Garnett, Harlow District Council
  - Cllr David Dadds, Basildon Borough Council, substitute was Cllr Davida Ademuyiwa
  - Cllr Jude Deakin, Co-opted Member for Balanced Appointment
  - Cllr Arthur Williams, Rochford District Council
3. The following declarations were made by Members:
  - Councillor Lynda McWilliams declared a Code Interest as her son was currently a serving Essex police officer and her granddaughter was a serving special police officer. Councillor McWilliams participated fully in the meeting.
  - Councillor Mark Heard declared a Code Interest as his son was currently a serving Essex police officer. Councillor Heard participated fully in the meeting.
  - Councillor Frankie Ricci declared a Code Interest as his step-son was currently a serving Essex police officer. Councillor Ricci participated fully in the meeting.

## **2 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on the 8 December 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

## **3 Questions to the Chairman from members of the public**

There were none.

## **4 2023/24 Proposed Fire and Rescue Precept**

The Panel received report EPFCP/01/23 which set out the proposed budget and precept for Essex County Fire and Rescue Service for 2023-24. The budget had been set in line with the objectives included within the Fire and Rescue Plan 2019-2024.

The Commissioner introduced the report setting out the proposed budget and precept for Essex County Fire and Rescue Service and highlighting the areas of focus linked to the Fire and Rescue Plan priorities. The Commissioner made reference to the main risk areas including the challenging economic situation, uncertainties within the funding sources and the on-going pay offer negotiations and potential industrial action. The Commissioner also gave some feedback from the precept survey which had been undertaken.

The Panel considered the detailed information provided on the budget and precept proposals. During the discussion members of the Panel asked a number of questions to seek clarification and test the evidence and assumptions, to

ensure that they were satisfied that the proposed Precept enabled delivery of the objectives included within the Fire and Rescue Plan 2019-2024 and represented value for money.

During the discussion the following points were made:

- Clarification was sought regarding the preparations and potential effect on the proposed budget of industrial action. The Commissioner and Chief Fire Officer confirmed that this had been looked at in detail, including the financial impact, ability to run the service and provide resilience cover by trained fire and rescue officers. It was hoped that it could be avoided but contingencies were in place.
- In testing the assumptions made in the proposed budget, a question was raised regarding what contingencies had been put in place for funding inflationary rises and market pressures. The Commissioner confirmed that provision had been made and there was flexibility with the general reserves if re-prioritisation was required.
- Clarification was given regarding the training budgets which had remained in line with the increase in the overall budget.
- An explanation was provided regarding how the precept flexibility to increase the precept to a higher level this year without a referendum, impacted on the medium and longer-term stability of the budget. There were a number of variable factors relating to the current economic situation but the aim was for a sustainable service, providing value for money and a balanced budget. It was acknowledged that further saving would be needed over the next couple of years to ensure sustainability.
- The Commissioner confirmed that he was content with the level of recruitment to the service.

It was agreed that further information would be provided to the Panel on the following:

- Detailed information on training budgets for the past 5 years.

The recommendation that the Essex Fire and Rescue precept be increased by £4.95 (6.57%) for the 2023-24 financial year for a property in Band D was put to the vote by the Panel Chairman. Following consideration of the report and having listened to the Commissioner's justification for the increase, the Panel voted 12 in favour to accept the Commissioner's proposal without qualification or comment, with one abstention. It was

**Resolved:**

That the Panel supported without qualification or comment, the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's proposed increase in the precept of £4.95 (6.57%) for the 2023-24 financial year for a property in Band D. The precept payable for a Band D Council Tax property would increase from £75.33 to £80.28.

## 5 2023/24 Proposed Police Precept

The Panel received report EPFCP/02/23 which presented the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's proposed police precept for 2023/24.

The Commissioner introduced the report setting out the proposed budget and precept for Essex Police and highlighting the areas of focus and investment linked to meeting the priorities of the Police and Crime Plan. The Commissioner also gave some feedback from the precept survey which had been undertaken. The Chief Constable highlighted some areas which had seen an improvement due to investment in those areas.

The Panel considered the detailed information provided on the budget and precept proposals. During the discussion members of the Panel asked a number of questions to seek clarification and test the evidence and assumptions, to ensure that they were satisfied that the proposed Precept enabled delivery of the objectives included within the Police and Crime Plan 2021-2024 and represented value for money.

During the discussion the following points were made:

- Members acknowledged the work of the Budget-Setting Working Group during the budget and precept setting process and the opportunity for all Panel members to gain an understanding of the process and background information to prepare for consideration of the precept proposals.
- In response to a query relating to where the newly recruited officers under the police uplift programme would be placed and how members of the public would see the benefit, the Commissioner outlined the teams and areas of focus and the increased visibility and presence.
- Some issues were raised by Members regarding a lack of visibility in rural areas, the response to low level crimes including retail crime, rising crime rates and lower solved rates and whether paying a higher precept would see improvements in these areas. The Commissioner highlighted areas of success where there had previously been focus and investment and the crime rate in those areas had decreased as a result. It was explained that there were specialised teams in place such as the rural crime team and business crime team. The Commissioner made reference to some points that had affected the crime figures including comparisons to the period of Covid where crime figures were distorted due to lockdowns and some new crime definitions which had been brought in. The Commissioner highlighted areas of focus including violent crimes and explained that he was confident and optimistic that with the increase in officers and the interventions which were being put in place, residents would see improvements.
- It was confirmed that additional support staff had been put in place to support the increased number of police officers, but not to the same level.
- In response to a question related to investigation and detection rates, it was confirmed that there was a focus on improving investigation. The Chief Constable outlined some areas where there had been some incremental improvement.

- In testing the assumptions made in the proposed budget, a question was raised regarding what contingencies had been put in place for funding inflationary rises and market pressures. The Commissioner confirmed that substantial provision for further inflation had been built in and there were strong assumptions around energy and fuel increases. There was some availability within the general reserve but other operational reserves had depleted due to rising costs. Depending on future pay settlements there would be robust discussions with the government on funding.
- In response to a question raised regarding potential impact from planning decisions, it was explained that there was a balance between increased tax revenue from new housing and increased demand on services. Lobbying was taking place to amend the current planning system to take into account emergency services.
- It was confirmed that there was no charge to residents for investigation of crime.
- It was clarified that there were different routes into recruitment to the service which included apprenticeships, degree holders and non-degree holders.
- Issues around the investigation of domestic violence cases, support for victims and working in partnership with other agencies were raised. In response the Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner and Chief Constable set out what investment had been made in this area, the work of the partnership board which brought together all key stakeholders and the work which had been done to better understand needs in this area and provide a better service. It was explained that there had been a huge amount of investment in investigators and improvements in working relationships with the Crown Prosecution Service. Advisors were in place to provide better support to victims. Prevention work was also done through education, through the joint education services provided by the Police and Fire service but also through the Essex County Council public health programme providing information on healthy relationships.
- Clarity was provided regarding measures in place on vetting processes and standards of professionalism within the service.
- Confirmation was given regarding training budgets, on-going refresher training and specialist skills training.
- Members asked what could be done to encourage better engagement levels in the precept survey in future. It was confirmed that different strategies were tried each year. A suggestion was made to involve local Community Safety Partnerships in future.
- It was confirmed that funding which had been received previously from some local Councils, to assist in increasing the number of officers, had been welcome particularly when resources were tight. However, where this funding may be re-directed in future, there would not be a cut to the number of police officers.

It was agreed that further information would be provided to the Panel on the following:

- Detail on increased level of support staff within the service.
- Detailed information on training budgets for the past 5 years.

The recommendation that the Essex Police precept be increased by 6.84%, equivalent to an increase of £14.94 a year, from £218.52 to £233.46 for a Band D property was put to the vote by the Panel Chairman. Following consideration of the report and having listened to the Commissioner's justification for the increase, the Panel voted 11 in favour and 2 against to accept the Commissioner's proposal without qualification or comment. It was

**Resolved:**

That the Panel supported without qualification or comment, the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's proposed precept increase of 6.84%, equivalent to an increase of £14.94 a year, from £218.52 to £233.46 for a Band D property, raising an additional £9.91 million of council tax receipts.

**6 Date of Next Meeting**

The Chairman confirmed that the reserve meeting date of Monday 20 February 2023 would not be required due to the Panel's decision to support the proposed precepts.

The Panel noted that the next meeting would take place on Tuesday 21 March 2023.

There being no urgent business, the meeting closed at 12.16pm.