

Minutes of the meeting of the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Panel, held virtually on
Thursday, 4 February 2021

Present:

Councillor

Representing

Wendy Schmitt	Braintree District Council (Chairman)
Keith Parker	Brentwood Borough Council
Godfrey Isaacs	Castle Point Borough Council
Jeremy Lager	Chelmsford City Council
Michael Lilley	Colchester Borough Council
Holly Whitbread	Epping Forest District Council
Malcolm Maddocks	Essex County Council
Chris Vince	Harlow District Council
Mark Heard	Maldon 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 Members

John Gili-Ross
Sheila Murphy

Also in attendance

Julia Berry	Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's Head of Finance
Joanna Boaler	Head of Democracy and Transparency, Essex County Council
Pippa Brent-Isherwood	Chief Executive, Office of the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
Moira Bruin	Director of Corporate Services, Essex County Fire and Rescue Service
Annette Chan	Chief Accountant, Essex Police
Neil Cross	Chief Finance Officer, Essex County Fire and Rescue Service
Victoria Freeman	Secretary to the Panel
Jane Gardner	Deputy Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
Ben-Julian Harrington	Chief Constable, Essex Police
Elizabeth Helm	Interim Head of Finance, Office of the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
Roger Hirst	Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
Darren Horsman	Strategic Head of Policy and Public Engagement, Office of the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
Debbie Martin	Chief Finance Officer of the Chief Constable (Section 151 Officer)
Janet Perry	Strategic Head of Performance and Resources

Jo Turton

Chief Fire Officer, Essex County Fire and Rescue Service

1 Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

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

1. The following apologies were noted:

- Councillor Chris Hossack, Brentwood Borough Council (substituted by Councillor Keith Parker)
- Councillor Aidan McGurran, Basildon Borough Council
- Councillor Michael Webb, Rochford District Council (substituted by Councillor Lesley Butcher)

2. The following declarations were made by Members:

- Councillor Lynda McWilliams declared a Code Interest in that her son is a police officer. Councillor McWilliams participated fully in the meeting.
- Councillor Mark Heard declared a Code Interest in that his son is a police officer. Councillor Heard participated fully in the meeting.

2 Questions from members of the public

A member of the public had submitted questions to the Chairman, however they had indicated that they were unable to attend the meeting and would therefore be provided with a written response.

Prior to agenda item 3, the Chairman took the opportunity to thank the Chief Constable and Chief Finance Officer for presenting their budgets under the difficult circumstances surrounding the pandemic.

3 2021/22 Proposed Fire and Rescue Precept

The Panel received report EPFCP/06/21 which set out the proposed budget and precept proposal for Essex County Fire and Rescue Service for 2021-22.

In presenting the report, the Commissioner proposed no increase in the precept, therefore the precept on a Band D property was to remain at £73.89. This was in recognition of the impact of the current economic climate resulting from the COVID pandemic and an intention not to place any further financial burden on the residents of Essex. However, Essex County Fire and Rescue Service would continue to work on the priorities within the Fire and Rescue Plan and would do this by continuing to make best use of existing resources.

In order to achieve the balanced budget, it was projected that £1m of general reserves would be used and a substantial level of earmarked reserves. The budget involved substantial investment, particularly in fire protection, learning and development and operational training, continued investment in on-call

firefighters, and the continuation of investment in the ICT infrastructure. The medium term strategy would have benefited from an increase in the precept but on balance it had been concluded not to propose an increase for 2021/22.

In response to questions from the Panel the Commissioner stated:

- Recruitment and retention targets for on-call firefighters were not being met, partly due to the current model requiring individuals to reside within a specified distance of the station. A change in model and approach was being considered to ensure that local circumstances were considered, and recruitment tactics changed.
- In response to capital expenditure, it was explained that the appliances were owned and that it was not financially beneficial to lease the vehicles. Any proceeds from the sale of an appliance would show in capital receipts reserve which was earmarked and invested in capital programmes.
- The Commissioner assured the Panel that the financial situation of the service was robust, with earmarked reserves and an adequate level of general reserves.

The recommendation that there be no increase in the precept was put to the vote by the Panel Chairman. Following consideration of the report and having listened to his justification for no increase, the Panel voted unanimously to accept the Commissioner's proposal for no increase in the precept.

The Panel took the opportunity to thank the Commissioner and his officers for their engagement with the Budget Working Party and their transparency.

4 2021/22 Proposed Police Precept

The Panel received report EPFCP/07/21 which presented the police precept for 2021/22.

In presenting the report, the Commissioner brought to the Panel's attention that the budget for the financial year April 2021 to March 2022 was based on existing assumptions within the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) around central government funding, savings, inflation and pay awards.

The Government's ambition to recruit an additional 20,000 police officers nationally was well underway with 6,000 officers recruited in 2020/21 and a further 6,000 officers planned in the coming financial year. This would improve police visibility along with the published Police and Crime Plan which clearly set out the need to maintain local, visible, and accessible community policing, respond to the growth in high harm and emerging crimes as well as investment in long term infrastructure, technology and skills base.

The budget was based on a budget settlement for the 6,000 officer growth being equal to a 2.20% share of £415m, equating to 132 officers in Essex, which included 6 officers that were required to be allocated to the Regional Organised Crime Unit (ROCU); the increase in the Home Office Core Grant,

reflecting 100% of the Essex officer growth in 2020/21 and 76% share of the officer growth in 2021/22; an increased council tax precept of 4.98%; the current year forecast underspend of £2.9m; and the change in police officer pension employer contributions.

The following areas were planned for Operational Policing investment: Serious Violence Team, Domestic Abuse Proactive Team, MOSOVO, District Policing Area (DPA) Disruptor Team, surveillance, Operation Bluebird, serious and organised crime, Road Crime Team, and dog handlers. The following areas were planned for organisational safety and enabling support: Organised Crime Groups (OCG) Management Unit, Missing Person Sergeant, Crime Prevention Strategy Inspector, Firearms Training Instructors, professional standards, driver training, Data Protection Team, Federation Officer, and taser training.

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

- It there were no increase in the precept, this would negatively impact on the victims of abuse and gangs, and the prevention of crime.
- Supporting officer welfare was a priority, with an increase in support officers, training, and a focus on supporting physical and mental wellbeing.

In response to questioning, the Commissioner would provide an explanation to the separation of pay and non-pay on the Strategic Change Efficiencies and Savings Plan 2021/22.

The recommendation that there be a precept increase of 2.94%, equivalent to an increase of £9.90 a year from £198.63 to £208.53 for a Band D property, raising £6.014m 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. It was noted that Councillor Heard was not present for the vote.

The meeting closed at 4.36 pm.

Chairman
17 June 2021