



# SUSSEX POLICE & CRIME PANEL

## Sussex Police and Crime Panel

29 January 2021

### Precept and Plan Working Group

### Report by the Chairman of the Working Group

#### Focus for scrutiny/Summary

This report is intended to inform the Panel of the findings of its Working Group, which acted as a critical friend to the Commissioner in the development of:

- The draft Police and Crime Plan 2021/24
- The proposed policing precept for 2021/22.

It summarises the issues considered by the Group and sets out its recommendations.

#### Recommendations

1. That the Panel reviews the proposed performance measures and targets, to confirm these are realistic, appropriate, and measurable.
2. That provision be made in the reserves to mitigate against the unforeseen financial impact of COVID 19, over and above that currently identified.
3. While significant benefits would arise from both £10 and £15 precept increases, the Group would support a £15 increase, if Recommendation 2 could be adopted, and if the Panel could satisfy itself of the additional value of the services which would accrue due to the extra £5, at this time of uncertainty and national emergency.

## 1. Background and Methodology

- 1.1 This Working Group was established by Sussex Police and Crime Panel at its meeting of 28 June 2013, to act as critical friend to the development of the Police and Crime Plan, and report its findings back to the Panel. At the January 2014 meeting, it was agreed that the Group would meet at the appropriate point during each year's cycle (while always reporting back to the Panel's precept meeting), and that the Group's terms of reference would expand to include consideration of budget and precept development.
- 1.2 The Coronavirus Act 2020 enacted the postponement of Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) elections, from May 2020 to May 2021; further

postponement is currently under discussion. In summer 2020 it was identified that the PCC intended to publish a new Police and Crime Plan in early 2021. At its meeting on 27 October, the Group agreed to vary its terms of reference to include scrutiny of the developing Plan.

- 1.3 The Group met three times, on 27 October, 27 November 2020 and on 12 January 2021, following the policing settlement announcement. The Group heard evidence from officers of the Office of the Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner (OSPCC), namely Iain McCulloch (Commissioner's Chief Finance Officer), Mervin Dadd (Chief Communications and Insight Officer), Mark Streater (Chief Executive) and Graham Kane (Head of Performance), supported by staff from Sussex Police.
- 1.4 The Panel has a statutory duty to review the proposed precept and draft Police and Crime Plan, and to make reports and recommendations to the Commissioner. The Group's deliberations and recommendations are intended to provide greater assurance for the Panel's statutory scrutiny, to be undertaken at its formal meeting on 29 January 2021.

## **2. Discussion and Recommendations**

On behalf of the Panel, the Group focussed on a number of matters in detail, including those which follow:

### **Draft Sussex Police & Crime Plan 2021-24**

- 2.1 The Group were keen to understand the justification for the expense and resources involved in producing a new Plan, before PCC elections currently planned for May 2021, after which an incoming PCC would want to publish their own Plan. The PCC was of the view that the existing Plan required updating as it was no longer fit for purpose, given the recent appointment of the new Chief Constable, the impact on policing of COVID 19, and Operation Uplift. However, an incoming PCC would be free to publish their own Plan, once in office.
- 2.2 The Group went through the draft Plan in detail and commented in turn on each of the "Public's Priorities" at its first meeting and reviewed how their suggestions had been addressed in the subsequent draft at the second meeting. Overall, the Group was pleased with the timely input it was able to make to the Plan preparation process, and the positive manner in which their observations and recommendations has been accommodated.
- 2.3 A provision in Schedule 7 of the Police Reform and Social Act 2011 (the Act) states that a Plan should set out the means by which the Chief Constable's performance in providing policing will be measured. However, the Group was not able to review the proposed performance measures, since these had not yet been finalised.

**Recommendation 1**

That the Panel reviews the proposed performance measures and targets, to confirm these are realistic, appropriate, and measurable.

**Financial Planning and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy**

- 2.4 The Group was able to consider the present budget position, in particular the impact of COVID 19 on costs, revenue (particularly from Gatwick Airport) and council tax. Members were pleased to note that recruitment plans remained on track, despite the public health emergency.
- 2.5 The Group posed detailed questions around the level of reserves which, as a proportion of gross expenditure (according to data published by Grant Thornton for 31/3/20) appeared to be the second lowest among 42 forces of England and Wales. Although the proposed reserve appeared appropriate based on current assumptions, the Group felt consideration should be given to creating a reserve for (as yet unforeseen) costs associated with COVID 19, given the likelihood that the full impact was not yet fully understood.

**Recommendation 2**

That provision be made in the reserves to mitigate against the unforeseen financial impact of COVID 19, over and above that currently identified.

- 2.6 The Group identified that the savings proposals for 2021/22 were relatively easy to achieve (and potentially reverse), and not structural/efficiency savings (which would be ongoing). Officers agreed with this characterisation, the intention being to create some breathing space to allow more fundamental proposals to be developed.

**Precept Consultation and Engagement**

- 2.7 The Group was briefed on the consultation arrangements and feedback. Although the precept survey itself had been well publicised, straightforward to access, and had garnered a reasonable sample size, the Group raised concerns that the existence and operation of the focus groups continued to be somewhat opaque, and that members most often only became aware of focus groups held in their communities from OSPCC reports, after a meeting had already been held – which might call into question the reliability of the arising feedback.
- 2.8 The Group also questioned how well, in its totality, the make-up of the sample represented the population of Sussex, and was encouraged to learn that efforts had been made to improve engagement with younger

people, they being more likely to have a lower-than-average household income. Citizens panels, or similar, selected to compensate for underrepresentation in the sample, would enhance the weight of the conclusions, and the Group welcomed the efforts to make the data increasingly representative.

- 2.9 Overall, the Group felt that the consultation had been thorough and effective, particularly in the light of the numerous challenges presented by the pandemic. The Group was encouraged to learn that residents reported an improved visible policing presence, and that this had in turn boosted public confidence. The Group noted that a majority of survey respondents supported a policing precept increase of £15 on a band D property.

### **Proposed Precept 2021/22**

- 2.10 The Group considered two potential precept increases of £15 (the maximum allowable under the settlement), and £10 (both on a band D property), in the context of the police settlement, the council tax collection fund and tax base, and numerous financial pressures. OSPCC and Sussex Police staff guided the Group through the various stages of the budget's development.
- 2.11 Regarding previous precept increases, and how effectively this public money had been spent, the Group was pleased that the ambitious recruitment plans remained on course (despite the pandemic) and that the public appeared to have noticed the resulting improved policing presence. The Group also acknowledged that Sussex Police, having started a recruitment process earlier, were in a better position than many forces.
- 2.12 The Group considered how the income from the £10 and £15 options would be spent. It:
- Noted that Sussex Police had invested the money from previous precept increases well, in services which were acknowledged and valued by the public.
  - Noted the public support for a £15 increase indicated through the survey.
  - Noted the importance of the Force continuing to publicise its achievements in order to further build public confidence.

At the same time, the Group also:

- Recognised the financial hardships that many households were facing, and that there was currently no end in sight to the pandemic, and the associated economic downturn.

**Recommendation 3**

While significant benefits would arise from both £10 and £15 precept increases, the Group would support a £15 increase, if Recommendation 2 could be adopted, and if the Panel could satisfy itself of the additional value of the services which would accrue due to the extra £5, at this time of uncertainty and national emergency.

**3. Working Group Resource Implications and Value for Money**

- 3.1 The cost of the Working Group has been met from within the funding received by Sussex Police and Crime Panel from the Home Office.

**4. Risk Management Implications**

- 4.1 Reviewing the proposed policing precept is a core statutory duty of the Panel. A failure to adequately undertake this duty risks breaching the applicable sections of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011.

**5. Other Considerations – Equality – Crime Reduction – Human Rights**

- 5.1 There are no implications which compromise human rights. The recommendations treat all members of the community equally.

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**Appendices:** None

**Working Group Members:**

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Councillor Johnny Denis  
Councillor Jackie O'Quinn  
Mr Peter Nightingale  
Mrs Susan Scholefield (Chairman)  
Councillor David Simmons  
Councillor Norman Webster  
Councillor Rebecca Whippy