

## Suffolk Police and Crime Panel Outcomes of Consideration of the Police and Crime Commissioner's Proposed Policing Precept for 2023/24

1. On 27 January 2023, the Suffolk Police and Crime Panel considered a recommendation of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for Suffolk regarding the proposed precept level and Council Tax requirement for 2023/24 for policing in Suffolk.
2. The agenda and papers for the meeting are available on the [Suffolk County Council website](#).
3. On 14 December 2022, the Home Office published the [Provisional Police Grant report 2023 to 2024](#). This set out the total money going into policing for 2023/24, and how much each individual PCC was likely to receive. For 2023/24 the Home Office also gave PCCs in England the flexibility to increase local funding by setting a maximum £15 precept increase for a typical 'Band D' property.
4. 13 members of the Panel were present at the meeting. The PCC was accompanied by his Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer, Head of Communications and Engagement and Chief Finance Officer. Suffolk Constabulary's Chief Constable was also present.
5. The Panel reviewed the PCC's detailed precept report and the associated Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2023/24 to 2026/27, which included his proposal to increase the precept by **£14.94 (6.0%)** per annum for a 'Band D' property.
6. The PCC's decision papers in this regard are available on the [PCC's website](#), decision references [2-2023](#) and [3-2023](#).
7. The MTFP was prepared following notification of the provisional 2023/24 settlements from the Home Office and in conjunction with a range of assumptions summarised within the report.
8. The Panel noted that two options had been considered by the PCC in determining the precept. The detail and rationale for each option are set out in the PCC's decision papers referred to above.
9. In summary, Option 1 (an increase of £9.99 [4.00%] per annum) would result in the Constabulary delivering a balanced budget in 2023/24, but with no surplus precept funding for further investment. Option 2 (an increase of £14.94 [6.0%] per annum) would result in the Constabulary delivering a balanced budget *and* additional funding of £1.3m, allowing investment in the following activities:
  - **Implementation of a Rapid Video Response for victims of domestic abuse** to provide an immediate video response to a call that would otherwise require attendance in person; and

- ***Increased digital engagement between the public and Constabulary to deal with calls through digital channels and deliver the capacity and capability to deal with public contact via the growing range of social media platforms in the same way the Constabulary currently deals with 999 and 101 telephone calls.***
10. In introducing his report, the PCC advised that this year's decision on the precept had been the most difficult of his 10 years in office. However, his priority had to be protecting Suffolk Constabulary's ability to fight and prevent crime. The PCC referred to the ongoing savings programme in the MTFP, with over £2m forecast to be saved over 2023/24. Additionally, collaboration with Norfolk Constabulary had contributed £22.6m to Suffolk in 2022/23, and this collaboration would continue.
  11. An important factor when considering the precept was the 21% increase in 999 calls on the previous year. Other major impacts included the significant increase in fraud, and in audit fees which now amounted to six figures. It was also well documented that demand in other areas of the public sector was often taken up by the police, and there was no compensation for this. This additional demand distracted the police from fighting and preventing crime.
  12. The PCC was aware that the Suffolk policing precept had increased in past years, but he could not in all honesty put forward proposals that did not support the Constabulary. Grants to the Constabulary had not increased with inflation, with no compensation for the fact that the policing element of the Council Tax had been frozen in previous years as requested by the Government. For 2023/24 whilst inflation was at around 10%, the Constabulary's funding would only increase by 1.8%. Therefore, if the precept was not supported, the consequences could be serious.
  13. The two proposals to be funded from the additional precept would move the Constabulary forward and increase the support it was able to give to victims of crime, in particular domestic violence victims.
  14. The PCC was conscious that people were struggling on low incomes, and in an ideal world would not increase the precept at all. However, that had to be balanced with the situation the Constabulary found itself in. Pensions and Universal Credit would rise with inflation in April 2023, and those in the most difficult situations were also able to receive help with the cost of living. The PCC's role was not only to ensure the Constabulary was as efficient and effective as possible, but also adequately resourced in order not to erode its capability.
  15. The Panel received an update from members of the PCC's staff on his [survey](#) to capture the views of Suffolk residents on the proposal for the precept increase. The survey was open for responses between 5 and 26 January 2023 and asked: "*As a council tax payer in Suffolk, do you agree with my proposal to increase the policing element of the council tax for 2023/24 by 29p a week [for a Band D property]?*". There had been 2,116 responses to the survey, 56% of which supported the proposal.

16. The Chief Constable was present at the meeting and advised the Panel that whilst she was clear on what the Constabulary should be doing, this had been eroded over the years, in part due to providing policing services which were outside of its scope in order to support other public services which were not available 24 hours a day. She explained the planned impact of the two initiatives to be funded by the increased precept.
17. The first initiative aimed to increase access in the control room so that anyone who wished to contact the Constabulary was able to. Currently a third of calls into the control room were abandoned, and the Chief Constable did not find this acceptable. This initiative would expand that access, and would also increase the Constabulary's digital capacity to deal with, for example, the increased volume of dash cam and CCTV footage which was sent to it.
18. The second initiative looked at the Constabulary's key victim area; one third of all crime in Suffolk Constabulary was domestic abuse, and since 2018 domestic incidents referred to the police had increased in Suffolk by 71%. The ethos behind the project was that the sooner support could be provided to someone in a domestic violence situation the better, but it was also about providing control over the way victims were able to contact the police. The initiative would provide an opportunity for face to face contact with victims within minutes of an incident, or at a time of their choosing. The interaction could also be recorded, providing valuable evidence.
19. The PCC felt that this investment was essential to ensure Suffolk Constabulary continued to deliver a high-quality service, kept the public safe and protected the most vulnerable members of the community. The Force was working hard through collaboration projects and would continue to make savings, and the PCC was confident that the proposals would increase confidence and satisfaction with the police within communities.
20. The Panel was aware of the major impact on the police in taking on matters which were the responsibility of other agencies, and felt strongly that other partners needed to step up, and the PCC was well placed to influence this with his involvement in a number of local partnerships.
21. Members discussed the proposed RVR scheme and the fact that it was not always as easy to see bruises on black or brown skin. Members asked what measures would be in place to increase the confidence of people with black and brown skin to come forward and report domestic abuse, and to convince them that this new service would be of benefit to them. These important issues would be integrated into the training for staff involved in the project. Additionally, engagement was ongoing with organisations supporting victims of domestic abuse from all members of the community, although there was more work to do in ensuring that all victims received the response which was most appropriate to their needs. Being able to see the victim, rather than just hear a voice on the phone, would improve the service provided to all sectors of the community. Members' comments would also be passed to the Constabulary's Public Confidence, Satisfaction and Engagement Board for consideration.

22. Concerning the increased digital engagement, Members understood that a physical presence was not the only presence of the police, and that a digital presence was important, particularly for the younger generation. However, older people may not be so digitally aware, and communication may need to be improved so that they were aware of what was available to them.
23. Members questioned the PCC on a variety of other matters including accessing Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and S106 funding, monitoring of the impact of the new projects, the Constabulary's broader transformation project, the impact of not agreeing the increased precept, the potential to increase participation in the precept survey, and improving communication with the public.
24. In conclusion, the Panel considered that the two proposals would make the police more visible and approachable, and that there was a need to change the public's perception of what police visibility actually meant.
25. Members thanked Suffolk Constabulary for the level of service delivered to the residents of Suffolk against a difficult background of demand and financial pressures. Whilst it was difficult to support increases in taxation at a time when peoples' finances were stretched, it was crucial that the Constabulary continued to deliver a good service to the public and to develop the way it delivered that service. The public wanted greater visibility and accessibility of officers, and that was what the proposed precept increase was attempting to provide. Members also appreciated that the Constabulary continued to make savings, including through the collaboration project with Norfolk Constabulary.

### **The Decision of the Panel**

Following consideration of the information provided, the Panel:

- a) **supported** the PCC's proposal to increase the precept by £14.94 (6.0%) per annum in 2023/24 (11 votes in favour and 2 against).
- b) **agreed** that the Panel Chairman would make a formal report on behalf of the Panel on the PCC's precept, by the statutory deadline of 8 February 2023.

A copy of this report will be uploaded onto the County Council's [website](#).



**Councillor Mark Jepson**  
Chairman of the Suffolk Police and Crime Panel

27 January 2023