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west midlands
police and crime
commissioner

Our reference:

Cllr Darren Cooper
West Midlands Police and Crime Panel
Scrutiny Office
Birmingham City Council
Victoria Square
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11 February 2015

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dear Darren,".

Thank you for your letter of 7 February 2015 and for the Police and Crime Panel's report on my proposed precept for 2015/16.

Taking each of the Panel's comments on my budget proposals in turn, my responses are as follows.

5. i) General

There are three reasons why I felt it necessary to increase the precept:

- (a) To reduce the level of savings which would otherwise have to be made in 2015/16
- (b) To continue the strategy of addressing the "grant/precept ratio" issue
- (c) To protect the tax base for the future

5. ii) Reserves

My report to your meeting explained in some detail how the level of reserves has arisen and it is, of course, because we have that level of reserves available that I have been able to continue the recruitment of police officers. A careful balance has to be struck about the use of reserves to support recurrent expenditure. The Medium Term Financial Plan includes the full use of the £31m in the Budget Reserve and the financing arrangements for the Capital Programme assume that the Capital reserve will also be fully used over the medium term. Aside from the reserves which are earmarked for specific purposes, e.g. the Insurance Reserve it is estimated there will be £12m in the General Balance and £25m in the Budget Resilience Reserve, which will provide some flexibility to deal with further reductions in Government Grant beyond the current Medium Term Financial Plan. Our proposed use of reserves is prudent, reasonable and appropriate.

5. iii.a) Support Staff Funding

The Chief Finance Officer set out the reasons for the increase in the budget for Support Staff, which included the cost of the recently announced pay offer, additional employer's pension costs and the cost of the additional police staff posts which will be funded by disestablishing the same number of police officer posts, which are currently vacant. Overall this will make a significant saving. The note from the Chief Finance Officer distributed after the Panel meeting as agreed set out details of the deployment of these additional police staff posts, the majority, but not all, of

which will be in the new custody blocks, undertaking duties which would otherwise have to be covered by warranted police officers.

5. iii.b) Police Recruitment

The additional information provided at the Panel meeting by Mike Williams showed that at 1 April 2015 we expect to have 7187 police officers in post and at 31 March 2016 we expect to have 7001. If it were not for the new recruits then the March 2016 figure would be 6812. In other words the new recruits of the next financial year will halve the loss of officers. I am sure, like me and the Chief Constable, the Panel welcomes the recruitment of new officers.

5.iv) Engagement with the public

I am sorry that the Panel was disappointed with the reporting in the Solihull News. The report was an accurate record of the Panel's public meeting held on 19 January where I gave a foretaste of my proposed budget and precept. It is a matter for the Panel how it manages the recording of its meetings by the media. I have, as you know, a legal obligation to publicise and consult on my proposed precept and I think the process for setting the precept, including the role of the Panel, has been made clear in my reports to the Panel meetings on 19 January and 2 February.

In the circumstances I believe we had reasonable engagement with the public on the proposed precept but we are always willing to look at new ways. The Panel's suggestion to identify opportunities with the districts to signpost my consultation alongside their own budget consultation is very welcome. This would mirror our approach with community safety colleagues where we work closely with the local policing and crime boards on engagement activities to help determine local priorities. If the Panel members could let the Districts know, that would be very helpful. We shall look forward to working in a fruitful partnership with them.

Whilst my consultation closed at 9:00 am on 2 February very few responses came in at the last moment. My report to the Panel was informed by the responses that we had received by the time the report was written. Nothing that we received subsequently would have changed that report. The timescales are dictated by central government. Working within those strictures and giving the Panel realistic information in time for their deliberations is challenging.

I hope that the above comments are helpful and I am grateful to the Panel for their support on this matter. I have made the decision today to set a Band D Precept for 2015/16 of £106.55 which is an increase of 1.99% compared to 2014/15. For most households in the West Midlands the increase is worth 4p per week or less. A copy of my decision will be available on my website <http://www.westmidlands-pcc.gov.uk/>

I shall look forward to working with the Panel to help in whatever way I can to improve its oversight of the budget and staffing profile throughout the year.

Yours ever,



David Jamieson
Police and Crime Commissioner