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Our ref: SC/NA

Police and Crime Commissioner Mark Shelford  
*BY EMAIL ONLY*

Your Ref:

Date: 18<sup>th</sup> January 2022

Dear Police and Crime Commissioner

### **2022/23 BUDGET PROPOSALS AND PRECEPT CONSIDERATIONS**

As you progress towards a decision on the 2022/23 budget and precept, I wanted to write to outline my budget proposal for next year in the context of our forecasts across the medium term. This follows the Government's announcements in the autumn budget and Spending Review in October and the police funding settlement published in December 2021.

My request is to continue to support the investment in policing in Avon and Somerset by increasing the precept by the maximum that you are allowed. In making this request I recognise the many considerations you will be weighing up, including;

- The expectations of central Government that their investment in policing is matched by continued local investment; and
- The feedback from our communities, many of whom will be concerned about increases to costs of living, including council tax.

I am ambitious for the future and the opportunities this flexibility presents. The growth in our officer numbers as part of the Government's Uplift plans, combined with our proactive plans for a perpetrator focussed approach to tackling crime, internal culture change and leadership development, will ensure we deliver on the direction set out in the Government's Beating Crime Plan and in your Police and Crime Plan for Avon and Somerset.

The Spending Review announcements made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in October 2021, and subsequently confirmed through the settlement announcements before Christmas, establish that you have the flexibility to **raise the police precept by up to £10 for an average band D property** in 2022/23. This flexibility was offered as part of a wider set of announcements which also confirmed;

- The share of additional officers we are expected to recruit is 183, taking our cumulative officer growth to 456, resulting in a headcount of 3,291 by March 2023;
- The total revenue grant funding you will receive is to grow by £9.3m (4.5%) in 2022/23 – this includes an increase to the amount that is ring-fenced and only paid in arrears on achievement of Uplift recruitment targets throughout the year;
- We are expected to fund a reasonable pay award for officers and staff, recognising that pay was frozen for all but the lowest earners in 2020, and that pay increases are important for morale, recruitment and retention. Our plans include the assumption of a 3.5% pay award from September 2022, generating an increase in cost of £5.2m in 2022/23 (£8.9m for a full year effect in future years);
- We are expected to absorb the costs of the increases to national insurance brought about through the new social care levy, which will cost us a further £1.9m in 2022/23;

- We are expected to create capacity through efficiency and productivity increases – including £100m in recurring savings which has been included within these settlement calculations for future years;
- The capital grant funding you will have received in previous years (£0.3m in 2021/22) is being completely removed, thereby requiring capital expenditure to be wholly funded through other sources. At present, our capital plans present a residual deficit in 2025/26, however I am reassured that we have the time to plan for how we would close this deficit.

An increase of £10 in the precept would raise an additional £7.4m in funding in 2022/23. This is the total forecast increase after adjusting for movement to our council tax base, and after we have accounted for a share of the deficit forecast against council tax collection – both of which continue to be impacted as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic.

With the increase in both grant and council tax funding, we will be able to achieve the growth in officer numbers and support the pay award of 3.5% for both officers and staff. In addition, we would be able to absorb some other acute inflationary pressures which the MTFP document explains, and enable some limited investment in areas which help us improve our productivity and performance. This balanced position is only achieved after;

- We have identified a further £3.0m in revenue savings – achieved as a consequence of adopting more home working as a permanent feature as we plan for working life after the pandemic restrictions, as well as through realising procurement savings, through savings from the adoption of a new mobile phone operating system and through growing our income generation and recovery – particularly in estates. We have also released some savings from headcount achieved as a consequence of restructures within our enabling services functions;
- We have recognised adjustments to our budget as the average cost of a police officer continues to reduce in line with growing high numbers of new recruits. Although this reduction is only temporary, and as officer numbers stabilise and we move to a position where we will sustain rather than grow officer headcount, this cost will gradually increase over time creating further cost pressure.

## **An unfair funding formula**

Avon and Somerset Police receive nearly £43m less when compared to the average police service funding – the equivalent of over 800 additional police officers.

This situation arises from the way in which police grant funding is currently distributed. We receive the lowest grant funding per head of population compared to those police services covering the eight largest cities<sup>1</sup> in England and Wales – of which Bristol is one. While we have been successful in attracting some additional ring-fenced funding in support of specific initiatives, such as the serious violence reduction grants, this is time bound and does not address the underlying funding inequality we face.

We welcome the Government's intention to review the formula for police grant funding distribution. We hope through this review the grant funding inequality will be addressed, and we welcome your support and that of the Police and Crime Panel and local MPs in continuing to make our case here.

Our funding position, combined with a decade of austerity during which time we have had to realise £86m (28.7%) in savings, has meant we have had to be innovative in ensuring it remains efficient. This has been achieved in a number of different ways, most notably through our insight-driven approach using ground-breaking data analytics and data visualisation tools to help inform everything we do. Our efficiency has been recognised as outstanding by HMICFRS but we are not complacent. Continuing to grow organisational capacity through efficiency and productivity remains a focus for us.

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<sup>1</sup> London, Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds, Liverpool, Sheffield, Newcastle, Bristol

## Growing pains

We now know we will be expected to have delivered an additional 456 officers against a 2019 baseline by March 2023, resulting in a target headcount of 3,291. Delivering this increase in officer numbers is not without challenge. To achieve the target headcount (and balance natural attrition) we estimate we will have needed to recruit nearly 1,300 new officers into policing in the 48 months between April 2019 and March 2023.

The growing pains generated by the implementation dip of this rapid officer growth, mean that we are yet to fully reach our potential. Our challenges include;

- The level of abstraction of PCDA and DHEP officers while undertaking their studies alongside performing their police officer roles. Recruiting to target officer numbers does not immediately translate to a fully deployable officers on the frontline and as a result our response timeliness rates are impacted. A more experienced, deployable workforce will happen, but it will take time to achieve;
- The growth in officer numbers does not immediately translate to the growth in specialist areas we want to grow. This is true across all specialist areas, and is particularly the case as we build our investigative capacity and capability. We have plans in place to realise this specialist growth, but again they will take time to fully realise. As a result our overall positive outcome rate remains too low at 12%, reflecting the continued efforts we need to make in improving investigative standards as we build capability;
- The changes introduced this year through the Attorney General guidelines for disclosure and the Director General guidelines for charging have created additional pressures on frontline officers and staff. Unaddressed this has the potential to significantly impact on officer and staff capacity, undermining the benefits of officer Uplift. We are working with other forces to highlight these concerns and seek pragmatic solutions.

Beyond 2022/23 our financial forecasts predict that even with a maximum precept increase, we will continue to face tough choices to identify and deliver further savings. This is as much required by our financial position, as it will be by our continued need to create the capacity to support and enable reinvestment into priority areas. My promise to you was to get ahead of this requirement with a clear savings plan. We will work closely with you and your team to develop this plan over the coming year, so that we can progress further savings as we enter the 2023/24 financial year.

## Plans for the future- key areas for investment

We have substantially finalised our plans for how we will deliver our service with the extra officers we're recruiting. These plans, which we continue to advance throughout 2022/23, recognise our key areas for investment. These are:-

1. Instilling a **relentless focus on the perpetrators of crime**, through which we will bring a focus on;
  - Tackling high harm crime through increases in county line and organised crime group disruptions;
  - Targeting burglary and knife crime offenders;
  - Delivering high quality, timely and successful investigations for Rape and Serious Sexual Offences (RASSO), cyber-crime and financial crime.

This will be achieved through investment in areas such as;

- Growing our investigative capacity for **Operation Bluestone, Operation Ruby and Operation Topaz** – an investment of **118 additional officers** is planned in this area – helping us to deliver high quality, suspect focussed investigations for the victims of rape and serious sexual offences (RASSO);

- Growing the capacity of our **Internet Child Abuse Team** – an investment of **16 additional officers**, of investigative and protective services for vulnerable children;
- Growing our **Incident Assessment Unit** capacity – an investment of **41 additional officers**, to ensure timely and effective desktop investigations where attendance is not needed or sought;
- Developing our drones unit capacity – an investment of **7 additional officers**, trained in using this increasingly important capability in helping us to manage a whole range of different demands for our service in the most efficient and effective way;
- Growing the capacity of our **Tactical Support Teams** – an investment of an **additional 28 officers** into specialist capabilities such as Roads Policing, armed firearms officers and dog handlers, providing the tactical capabilities which support the tactics we will use in bringing perpetrators to justice.

2. Increasing the **focus on crime prevention**, through which we will be;

- Establishing and utilising effective diversions and interventions for emerging offenders;
- Improving the monitoring, management and rehabilitation of high-harm offenders, in conjunction with partners;
- Preventing and reducing neighbourhood crime, anti-social behaviour (ASB) and rural crime – protecting our most isolated and vulnerable communities, making them feel safer.

This will be achieved through investment in areas such as;

- Growing the capacity of our **Integrated Offender Management** teams – an investment of **35 additional officers**, helping us to improve the monitoring, management and rehabilitation of high harm offenders in conjunction with our partners;
- Refocussing and growing the existing **proactive capabilities**, embedding this capability within our neighbourhood policing teams – an investment of **62 additional officers** to support the prevention and reduction of neighbourhood crime and anti-social behaviour;
- Growing our **violence reduction and early intervention** teams – an investment of **26 additional officers**, engaging, supporting, educating and diverting young people, reducing the likelihood of their involvement in violence and knife crime;
- Growing our **rural affairs** unit – an investment of **2 additional officers**, preventing crime and protecting some of our most isolated communities.

In addition to these areas of growth, we plan to bring focus on further aspects of our work, realising some of the opportunities as we build a police service fit for the future. This includes;

- Having the courageous conversations, and leading the **cultural change** as an organisation which ensures that Avon and Somerset Police commands the trust and confidence of all our communities;
- Ensuring we are investing in our **leadership development** at all levels, enabling and equipping officers and staff to lead organisational and cultural change. We plan to do this through growing our innovative Leadership Academy, providing support and guidance to our people on their leadership journeys;
- **Creating capacity** for frontline officers and staff by bringing a relentless focus on removing the barriers and frictions that prevent them from doing their jobs as efficiently as possible, and by boosting their personal resilience and wellbeing, becoming a truly trauma-informed organisation.
- Putting the **victim at the heart of what we do**. While there are strong aspects of victim satisfaction (e.g. dwelling burglary 78%, violent crime 79%, initial contact 93% and overall treatment 90%), our overall rates have reduced. A focus on improving victim experience is vital to our future service provision.

The uplift in officer numbers has marked a very welcome and necessary change in direction for policing. We are conscious that unless this investment can actually be seen to make a difference in our communities, the support for policing may wane once again. We remain determined to bring every focus we can on achieving the demonstrable improvements in our outcomes that you will rightly expect of us.

If we look to 2025/26, we could have a very bright future and our communities will be the beneficiaries. Your continued support through a £10 increase in the precept will ensure we can continue on this journey and do so by the shortest, most efficient and most direct path.

In closing I want to pay tribute to the officers and staff within Avon and Somerset Police. I never fail to be impressed with the exceptional work they deliver each and every day, to meet our demand and deliver exceptional service. I know that through the plan that I and my team are working on to build a service fit for the future, we will continue to be successful in holding the thin blue line – the line between order and chaos, between safety and danger, between justice and injustice.

Yours sincerely



Sarah Crew  
Chief Constable  
Avon and Somerset Police

### **Headlines for 2021**

- Our public confidence levels have remained consistently strong (79%), with the Crime Survey for England and Wales placing us as the 9<sup>th</sup> highest force nationally for public confidence;
- Through the work of our Crime Data Integrity taskforce, we have delivered notable improvements in our crime recording compliance, and this continues to remain a key area of focus for improvement activity;
- Our call handling performance has remained strong with abandonment rates of less than 0.1% for 999 calls, and only 6.5% for 101 calls – this has been achieved against a backdrop of nearly a 6% increase in call volumes, with these increases in demand being particularly felt across the summer and into the autumn as lockdown restrictions were eased;
- We introduced Operation Bluestone in June. It's a pioneering, evidence-led approach to investigating rape and sexual offences, developed by leading academics with input from colleagues across the Criminal Justice System and victim groups. While there is a long way still to go, we are pleased to see some green shoots in our response to improving outcomes for rape and serious sexual offence victims, with noted improvements in our CPS engagements and in volumes of cases charged;
- Improvement to crime recording practices, as well as growing confidence to report to the police, have resulted in increases in recorded domestic abuse (+4.3%) and sexual offences (+28%);
- Neighbourhood crime is falling (-6.5%) in 2021, with robbery (-11%), burglary (-8%), vehicle offences (-5%) and theft (-2.4%) all showing reductions;
- The investigative response into the Bristol riots on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2021 is the largest single investigation ever undertaken by Avon and Somerset Police, and the largest investigation into a riot anywhere in the country for 30 years. While this investigation remains ongoing, twelve people have now been sentenced, receiving a combined total of almost 50 years in prison;

- In September we hosted PCCs, senior policing leaders, officers, staff and partner organisations, coming together for the National LGBT Policing Conference. Through this event we explored some of the challenges facing LGBT+ colleagues and communities and equipped attending delegates with fresh and innovative ideas to takeaway and implement, to create a brighter and more inclusive future for every LGBT+ individual;
- We have further grown our Robotic Process Automation capacity using the investment made in 2019, and to date we have automated 36 separate processes, completed 1,442,950 transactions and saved nearly 71,519 hours;
- We have delivered a number of new projects across our police estate, opening new neighbourhood bases in Wells (collocation with Fire Service), Williton (collocation with local council) and a new enquiry office for Weston-super-Mare (collocated in the town hall).