

Suffolk Police and Crime Panel

Outcomes of Consideration of the Proposed Precept Policing in Suffolk

The Suffolk Police and Crime Panel on 25 January 2013 considered a recommendation of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for Suffolk regarding the proposed precept level and Council Tax requirement for 2013-14 for policing in Suffolk. The Panel was fully represented with 13 members, two of whom were substitutes.

The Panel received a written summary paper which highlighted the following key areas for the Panel to consider:

- a) What are the legal constraints on the PCC and on the Panel, as set out in the Act, the Regulation, and in Home Office guidance?
- b) How has the PCC determined the proposed precept?
- c) What options and implications have been considered in formulating the precept, including the government offer of a 'freeze' grant?
- d) What is the proposed precept, and how does it align with the resources required to fulfil the Police and Crime Plan?

The Panel considered the following documents provided by the Office of the PCC:

- Police and Crime Commissioner's Proposed Precept Level and Council Tax Requirement 2013-14
- The Report for the Police and Crime Panel (Decision 5 - 2013)
- Appendix 1 - Scrutiny of Precepts Guidance
- Appendix 2 - Chief Constable's Budget Recommendations
- Appendix A(i) - Medium Term Financial Plan- 4 Year Overview- Option 1- take council tax freeze grant in 2013/14
- Appendix A(ii) - Medium Term Financial Plan- 4 Year Overview- Option 2- increase council tax by 1.997% in 2013-14
- Appendix E - Precept Option Scenarios
- Appendix I - Precept Level and Council Tax Requirement Options.

Copies are available on the Suffolk County Council website on the link given below:

[http://committeeminutes.suffolkcc.gov.uk/searchResult.aspx?qry=c_committee~~Police%20and%20Crime%20Panel%20\(Joint%20Committee\)](http://committeeminutes.suffolkcc.gov.uk/searchResult.aspx?qry=c_committee~~Police%20and%20Crime%20Panel%20(Joint%20Committee))

Accompanying the PCC, Tim Passmore, were Chris Jackson (Chief Executive), Claire Swallow (Deputy Chief Executive) and Chris Bland (Chief Finance Officer) from the PCC's Office, and Paul Marshall, Temporary Deputy Chief Constable.

The Police and Crime Commissioner informed the Panel that because of the effect that the economic situation was having on families, he had wanted to freeze the Precept for this year. He was able to do this for one year only because of a predicted underspend of £1 million for 2012-13, and also because of the effect of the Government Freeze Grant.

The PCC informed the Panel that the Home Secretary had announced that there would be a major review of Police Funding during 2013. The Police and Crime Commissioner had made a strong case for a fairer share of national resources for Suffolk, bearing in mind the national assets that were situated in the County, such as Felixstowe Docks, the A14 and Orwell Bridge, Sizewell Power Station, the offshore energy industry, Wattisham Army Air Corps HQ and sporting venues such as Newmarket racecourse and Ipswich Town Football Club. However, if there was a need, the precept would be increased in 2014 to cover any gaps in funding.

The Panel heard that during 2013-14, the PCC would be overseeing a review of the management of Suffolk Police to ensure that it was providing the tax payer with value for money. They would then be in a position to plan for the next 5-6 years.

The Police and Crime Commissioner responded to questions from the Panel.

The Panel referred to the graph at Appendix E on page 103 of the agenda documents, which showed the total income resulting from the two precept options. Members noted that if the precept was not increased, there would be a need for a much larger increase in precept in future.

The Police and Crime Commissioner replied that he anticipated savings would avoid the likelihood of divergence for the foreseeable future. He considered the next 12 months to be key and savings would be partially achieved through procurement and collaboration. The PCC informed the Panel, that he would be prepared to increase the precept next year. In the meantime, he was intending to reduce costs by reviewing management procedures during 2013-14.

The Panel commented that the Police and Crime Commissioner had been elected on a mandate of not raising the precept. However, at that time he had not known the detail of the budget and a recent survey quoted 60% of the population had subsequently indicated that they would be happy for the precept to be raised to maintain levels of policing.

In response to this, the Police and Crime Commissioner said that had he felt that if, after having reviewed the financial information after being appointed, he considered it necessary to raise the precept, he would have done so. The survey mentioned had been a national one, and from speaking to people locally, he had the impression that locally, most people would welcome a nil increase.

A Panel Member stated that the public would possibly rather have a gentle rise than a massive increase in future.

The Police and Crime Commissioner replied that he understood the reasoning, but did not think that the general public would consider it to be a sound reason to increase the precept now. An increase of greater than 3% in the future would require a referendum, and in his opinion there were other ways of raising funds. He said that it was too early to make long term funding commitments after 2 months in the post.

The Panel asked if the Constabulary had any comments about these proposals.

The Panel heard from the Deputy Chief Constable, Suffolk Constabulary, who reminded Members that Suffolk Constabulary had the fourth lowest net expenditure nationally, and that it would take a £17.6m rise in funding to bring funding to average, which was equivalent to 300 more staff. The service was already performing well, but were the extra funding available, it would make a significant difference. Budgets had already been significantly reduced and there were plans to deliver £4.7m of cuts over the next two years. Freezing the precept would mean having to find savings for two more years without cutting frontline staff.

Deputy Chief Constable informed the Panel that he couldn't guarantee that a freeze in the precept wouldn't result in a reduction in staffing. However, the Police and Crime Commissioner responded to this by saying that there would be no reduction in staffing as there was scope for a considerable amount of administrative efficiency improvements. He confirmed that there were currently 1180 staff, and that number would be increasing to 1200 by the start of the next financial year.

A Panel Member stated that he had yet to be convinced as the efficiencies had yet to be found and the funding formula had not yet been confirmed. He was concerned that a freeze in the precept at this point would cause long term issues for policing in Suffolk.

The Police and Crime Commissioner responded by saying that there had to be an element of trust in this and he was willing to take responsibility for the consequences. He was planning for the future, had no hidden agenda and considered his plans to be feasible. He reassured the Panel that they would be kept informed of progress.

The Decision of the Panel

The Panel accepted the responses received, but some members had reservations about the approach being proposed. Members of the Panel voted on the proposal of the PCC to take the Council Tax Freeze Grant for 2013-14, which will result in council tax in 2013-14 remaining at 2012-13 level.

On a vote being taken, 8 members voted for, 3 members voted against and there were 2 abstentions. The vote was therefore carried.

The Panel:

- 1) Agreed, by a majority vote, to approve the Police and Crime Commissioner's proposal to take the Council Tax Freeze Grant for 2013/14, which would result in Council Tax remaining at the 2012/13 level.
- 2) Welcomed the PCC's assurance that he would keep them informed of progress.
- 3) Requested for the PCC to provide the Panel with information on any significant changes to the policing of Suffolk; and
- 4) Requested the PCC to provide details of how the proposed savings were being delivered.

A copy of this report of the Panel will be put on the County Council's website on 4 February 2013.

Councillor Patricia O'Brien
Chairman of the Suffolk Police and Crime Panel

4 February 2013