

15 February 2021

Councillor Chris Batters,
Chair of the Police and Crime Panel,
The Council House,
Plymouth City Council,
Armada Way,
Plymouth
PL1 2AA

Sent by email: democraticsupport@plymouth.gov.uk

Dear Councillor Batters,

Police and Crime Commissioner's Response to the Panel's Report on the Precept

Thank you for sending your Panel report following the consideration of the precept for 2021/22 at the meeting on 5th February 2021. A second amended report was received on 9th February 2021, after the scrutiny period elapsed. We have responded to the original report but will look to support the amendments where possible.

I was delighted to receive unanimous support to the precept increase which will see a significant increase in police officer numbers along with increases in our contact centres, investigative staff and police technology. The year ahead will be challenging as we work through the impact of the pandemic, and is expected to be a busy year with domestic tourism and the visit of world leaders to Cornwall for the G7 Summit.

With regard to your specific recommendations, I have provided my formal responses below:-

- a. That given strong public support for Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) across the region, further consideration should be given to bringing about some growth in PCSO numbers where they are needed, in place of some of the warranted officers.

Response:

The Chief Constable and I value the work that Police Community Support Officers do, and this is why the budget still supports their role in the organisation. However, I do not support a reduction in warranted officers, and I do not believe the public do either. The consideration of the workforce mix is ultimately a decision for the Chief Constable in his operating model and he has previously advised the Panel of the flexibility provided by warranted officers in deployment. Since then I have worked hard to bring in new roles that complement the workforce for Devon and Cornwall Police and created the Bluelight Fund in the budget to do just this:-

1. We now have more Tri-Service Officers in Cornwall. We were the first in the country to create this role to particularly better support our more rural and coastal areas. This is a collaboration between the police, fire and ambulance services. These exemplary officers are stationed at Looe, St Just, Hayle, Fowey, Polruan, Perranporth, St Dennis, Lostwithiel, Bude and Liskeard, with expansion this year to Callington, Helston and Torpoint.
2. Another country first are the Community Responders in Devon – on-call firefighters who are supported to be Special Constables and carry out policing duties while awaiting a fire shout. These are based in Dartmouth, Newton Abbot, Okehampton, Honiton, Crediton, Cullompton and Totnes.
3. A national pilot scheme exploring whether we can pay the Special Constabulary for doing additional shifts during Covid and funded by the government's Covid Enforcement Fund, with the aim of introducing a Police Reserve Scheme similar to the Armed Forces to help deal with our summer surge requirements. I will be lobbying for legislation change should the pilot be deemed a success.

In my budget proposals, I included additional funding for the Blue Light Collaboration elements to specifically include maritime and coastal areas along with funding to continue the successful element of the Special Constabulary pilot. Considering the steps taken to diversify the options around the workforce mix and the Chief Constable's advice I am not planning to amend my budget proposals to increase the number of PCSOs by reducing the number of warranted officers.

- b. That the “flat-lined” Commissioning budget does not fully exploit the potential advantages of community-oriented crime reduction opportunities, and that some growth in this area should be implemented when possible.

Response:

As you know we are already pioneering a public health approach through our Serious Violence Prevention Programme that I am doing in partnership with the Chief Constable. As an area that does not receive government funding for a Violence Reduction Unit because our levels of violence are lower (we are the 9th lowest in the country) we do not meet the threshold. So, I asked in last year’s budget to support £1million of council taxpayers’ money to support this initiative and it is being, and will continue to be, used for commissioning purposes to tackle inherent violence in our communities.

I did however, welcome the panel discussion on the importance of the commissioning function within the OPCC. So, I will be actively looking for opportunities to increase the funding available to the wider commissioning budget during this year while I am the Commissioner.

- c. With a bumper “staycation” season predicted this year, the Police and Crime Commissioner should consider in co-operation with Local Authorities, how best to resolve the summer policing surge as soon as possible.

Response:

The planning for the summer surge has already started. In December the Joint Leadership Board received a report on the evaluation of the initiatives undertaken during the summer of 2020 with a view to taking these forward for this summer.

The added likelihood of a significant summer surge in Devon and Cornwall this year will mean these plans will require an additional level of attention. Local authorities play an important role, in particular in their stewardship of public spaces and licensing responsibilities. I will expect the police planning team to work closely with local authorities and those in the tourism sector when developing their plans.

Also, we aim to introduce a Police Reserve Scheme similar to the Armed Forces which could help deal with our summer surge requirements, as I have mentioned above. I will be lobbying for legislation changes should the pilot be deemed a success.

- d. That any future Medium Term Financial Strategy includes force-wide measures to implement carbon reductions to reduce the effects of climate change, in partnership with Local Authorities as appropriate.

Response:

My team have developed an environmental policy which is available here https://devonandcornwall.s3.amazonaws.com/Documents/Our%20information/Key%20document/SUS_POL_Sustainability%20Policy_200423.pdf. The force have appointed a Sustainability and Environmental Manager who is due to start imminently. This role will focus on the economic, environmental and social sustainability of our force including carbon footprint, bringing together existing projects and innovations with a broader longer term strategic approach. I will always use the approach of balancing these three elements with operational effectiveness to ensure my priority and the Chief Constable's is to keep our communities safe.

Force-wide measures are already in place. For example, I have responsibility for the police estate, which is managed by my office and have set a carbon management plan with specific targets in the Estate Strategy. Please remember the new Exeter Police Station has won awards and is in the top 10% most sustainable buildings in the country.

I believe that the current Environmental and Sustainability strategy and the work already being taken forward in both the OPCC and force will deliver force-wide measures to implement carbon reductions.

- e. That the Police and Crime Commissioner brings to the Panel a detailed assessment of the financial risks and force sustainability given the risk assessment presented in the report and the significant growth in cost base.

Response:

I am pleased that the panel recognise the volatility and risk around the funding streams. I propose the Police and Crime Panel receive a report in June 2021 setting out the key risks at that time and the mitigations and actions being taken to minimise the impact on Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. To be comprehensive this report will be reliant on information provided to me by the local council tax collecting authorities.

- f. That the Police and Crime Commissioner redoubles her efforts to lobby government to ensure a fairer share of central government funding in future.

Response:

As Police and Crime Commissioner I have worked hard to ensure the people of Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly receive value for money for their investments and do all I can to ensure safety is paramount. We are still one of the lowest cost forces per head of population at 52p compared to the England and Wales average of 61p. So, money goes further in Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

My office and myself have been at the centre of discussions over funding formula change highlighting how poorly the formula serves the people of Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly and the need for 'levelling up'. This fact was acknowledged last month on Radio Cornwall when the Policing Minister highlighted that the case for our area is regularly raised with him by me. The Police and Crime Panel has also been supportive in those efforts.

In the autumn of 2019, we all took a journey to Westminster to lobby the Policing Minister with our MPs about receiving a Special Grant for our summer surge and sparsity challenge. We committed significant time and resource to producing a grant bid. While we were unsuccessful in this bid due to the government applying stricter rules around their criteria for award, we have certainly raised the profile of our challenge with the people who can help us.

A review of the funding formula is scheduled to take place in the next two years and our programme of influence and evidence gathering will be structured around that – building networks of support, both within our area and in areas similarly impacted.

Over the last year our efforts to better influence government and continually raise the profile of the issues affecting the people of Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly have been put in place. We have introduced a resource within my office to focus solely on this work. This post provides greater capacity for our influencing work in areas such as the funding formula and the potential for special reserve force to support surge challenges in policing.

I will continue to focus on securing a stronger funding deal for our area that recognises the challenges of tourism, rurality and isolation and hope to be able to seek assistance from the panel and from council leaderships and MPs from

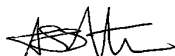
across the peninsula in making this case. However, I feel it is important to make sure that we use the funding we do get wisely and effectively not just only lobby the government for more money. I must be accountable for what I do and my asks of the Chief Constable to do the best with what we have. With such a large investment and commitment from both the government and our residents I will, as part of my role in holding the Chief Constable to account, ensure accountability for the resources policing have and how they use them.

It is why I will continue to:

- Maintain my lobbying for a fairer funding formula,
- Maintain the applications to secure additional opportunities of funding from the government like Safer Streets
- Explore alternative funding streams through the Serious Violence Prevention Programme
- Collaborate further with partners including the emergency services, the private sector, the wider public services and voluntary/community groups
- Continue to scrutinise and support the police to use what they do have efficiently and effectively.

In pursuance to the legislation I will be publishing this response on the OPCC website today.

Best regards



Alison Hernandez
Police and Crime Commissioner