

NORTH YORKSHIRE POLICE, FIRE AND CRIME PANEL

REPORT TO THE NORTH YORKSHIRE POLICE, FIRE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER

Precept Proposals for Policing and Fire and Rescue – 2020/21

On 31 January 2020 the North Yorkshire Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (“the Commissioner”) formally notified the North Yorkshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel (“the Panel”) of her proposed precepts for policing and for the fire and rescue service for 2020/21. The Panel is required to review the proposed precepts and report on its decision, including any recommendations, to the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner by 8 February of the relevant financial year.

The Panel met on Thursday, 6 February 2020. Membership of the Panel at the meeting was:

Craven District Council	Cllr Richard Foster
Hambleton District Council	Cllr Peter Wilkinson
Harrogate Borough Council	Cllr Michael Chambers MBE
North Yorkshire County Council	Cllr Carl Les
Richmondshire District Council	Cllr Helen Grant
Ryedale District Council	Cllr Tracie Middleton
Scarborough Borough Council	Cllr Liz Colling
Selby District Council	Cllr Tim Grogan
City of York Council	Cllr Keith Aspden
City of York Council	Cllr Ashley Mason
Community Co-opted	Santokh Singh Sidhu
Community Co-opted	Paula Stott

The Panel would like to thank the Commissioner, Chief Constable Lisa Winward and the Commissioner’s colleagues from the OPFCC, who attended the meeting on 6 February and assisted in providing responses to the questions and issues raised by the Panel.

Fire precept proposal

The Commissioner presented a proposal to set the fire and rescue element of the Council Tax precept at £72.69 for 2020/21, which represents a 1.99% increase (or £1.42) over the 2019/20 level for a Band D property.

In reviewing the proposal, the Panel took into account the need to satisfy the statutory requirements of setting a Council Tax requirement and a balanced budget for 2020/21. The proposal put forward achieves a balanced budget with no unfunded shortfall for 2020/21. However, the Panel noted that the national settlement and monies raised through the precept will not enable the level of investment in the fire and rescue service which is required going forward.

The Panel also wished to note the challenges for the service (and for North Yorkshire Police) over the next few years in respect of steep increases to employer contributions to pensions and the vulnerability implicit in the service's reliance on future government grants filling any shortfall.

However, it was acknowledged that the Commissioner is also heavily restricted by the precept cap placed by the government, whereby an increase of more than 2% would trigger a referendum. The Panel welcomes the continued efforts by the Commissioner to influence central government on the matter of precept flexibility for fire and rescue services.

Decision – Fire precept proposal

The Police, Fire and Crime Panel supported the Commissioner's proposal for a precept increase of £1.42 (for a Band D property) for 2020/21.

As far as the Panel is concerned, this ends its scrutiny process of the Commissioner's proposed precept for fire and rescue for 2020/21.

Policing precept proposal

The Commissioner presented a proposal to the Panel to set the police element of the Council Tax precept for 2020/21 at £265.77, which represents an increase of £10 (or 3.91%) over the 2019/20 level for a Band D property. This level of increase is at the maximum permissible to the Commissioner without triggering a referendum.

The Panel noted the particular funding pressures on the policing budget for 2020/21. These include the estimated £4.9m to deliver the recruitment of 58 additional police officers under Operation Uplift, where a grant of £1,635k is being

provided centrally to potentially cover off all costs associated with the delivery of this recruitment. Pay awards have also seen a 2.5% increase, which was higher than anticipated, in addition to inflationary increases for some contracts and national projects.

The Panel heard that the £10 increase for a Band D property is required to ensure a balanced budget. The proposal therefore achieves this with no unfunded shortfall. The Panel consider that the proposed precept increase will be critical in ensuring that service levels within the police force are maintained into 2020/21.

Decision – Policing precept proposal

Due to the need to maintain the service in the face of various funding challenges, the Panel supports the Commissioner's proposal to increase the policing precept for 2020/21 by £265.77, which represents an increase of £10 (or 3.91%) over the 2019/20 level for a Band D property.

As far as the Panel is concerned, provision of this report ends its scrutiny process of the Commissioner's proposed precept for policing for 2020/21.

However, the Panel has some concerns in respect of the 'underspend' from the 2019/20 precept uplift, which are separate to the statutory consideration of this year's precept proposal, but which formed part of the discussions around setting the 2020/21 precept. The Panel wishes to formally note these concerns within this report, below.

Precept uplift 2019/20 and 'underspend'

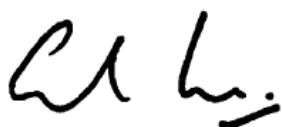
In the context of considering the uplift being sought by the Commissioner for 2020/21, the Panel wishes to convey its significant concerns regarding the £600,000 underspend of funds raised through the 2019/20 precept. The Panel consider that a very difficult decision had to be made by them in February 2019, to agree the revised policing precept proposal from the Commissioner (following an initial veto) for a substantial 9.9% increase over the 2018/19 level. This decision was predicated on those funds being deployed in the main for the visible improvement of neighbourhood policing.

While the Panel understands that there have been delays to the officer recruitment process and that the Commissioner as such wishes to retain funding from the police until officers are fully deployed, the Panel had based its decision-making in 2019 on there being potentially just over £200k underspend. As a proportion of the £3.3m levied, the Panel has concerns that the underspend is therefore three times this amount. The Commissioner has presented proposals at Appendix 5 of

her report to Panel to direct this funding towards projects which are ostensibly of value to the community. However, the Panel considers that there may also be other vital areas where this funding could have been deployed to good effect, such as in further tackling County Lines.

The Panel also considers that there may be prudence in not looking to spend these outstanding funds immediately. The Panel has invited the Commissioner to consider retaining the underspend to enable the next Commissioner in post to take a view on how this significant amount of funding could best be directed.

The Panel's significant concerns around the underspend from last year's uplift and its deployment have, as a consequence, led the Panel to again consider exercising its power of veto in relation to the 2020/21 policing precept proposal. However, a majority view of this was not held across the Panel and the Panel also recognised the critical need for funding to go into the police force in 2020/21.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Carl Les'.

Councillor Carl Les
Chair, North Yorkshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel

6 February 2020