

Panel backs increase in Sussex Police precept

PROPOSALS to increase the amount residents pay for their police service in Sussex has been supported despite concerns.

Sussex Police and Crime Panel supported an increase in the force's council tax precept of £13 a year on a Band D property - the maximum allowed.

Presenting her budget for 2024/25 at a meeting of the Panel on Friday, January 26, Sussex Police Commissioner Katy Bourne told the Panel the increase was necessary to protect the improvements made in previous years.

"We know the investment is working," she told the Panel, pointing to the increase in the number of police officers, a 23 per cent drop in neighbourhood crime, a 33 per cent reduction in residential burglaries, and improvement in call answering times for 999 calls and 101 non-emergency calls.

A provisional Government settlement of £25 million and additional costs totalling £33 million, leaves Sussex Police with a shortfall of £8 million. "I don't want to put all that hard work and all those sacrifices that Sussex residents have made over the years at risk," said Mrs Bourne. "And we don't want to go backwards."

A working group set up by the Panel to consider the Commissioner's financial position and plans reported that they were unable to reach an agreement on whether back the £13 increase and there were mixed reactions to the proposals at Friday's meeting.

There was concern about the burden the additional cost places on residents who are already struggling with increasing costs, with some suggesting that Sussex Police can't "go on forever" asking people to pay more.

The Commissioner said she had personal experience of the financial difficulties some residents faced and understood the burden this increase would add, but said: "It's important that we have a police force in place to keep you safe, otherwise what stands between you and the criminal fraternity?"

The Commissioner's budget was approved by the Panel after a vote and members also agreed to join Mrs Bourne in making the case for fairer funding for Sussex Police to central Government.

Cllr Judy Rogers, Chair of the Sussex Police and Crime Panel, expressed her thanks to members of both the working group and panel for all their work on reviewing the proposed precept.

Speaking after the meeting, she said: "We appreciate that it is vital for the police force to be financially supported and that it is a very difficult time for many Sussex residents currently who are struggling with current rising bills and the cost of living. The Panel was pleased to hear about the success of the recruitment of new officers and welcome the plans for increased visibility on the streets of Sussex."

The Panel also received a report on Stop and Search Powers as part of their scrutiny of the Commissioner's efforts to ensure they are used effectively and appropriately.

There was some concern about the increased chances of people who identify as black being stopped and searched – with those people being 8.6 times more likely to be searched than those identifying as white.

Panel members were told that there was training in place and independent scrutiny of stop and searches, as well as regular monitoring to ensure there are positive outcomes to stop and searches.

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Mrs Bourne told the Panel: “There is a huge amount of scrutiny around this and rightly so because this is one of the most intrusive powers that police officers have, but it is also one of the most powerful powers they have.”

There were questions about the way data was broken down and recommended the Commissioner reassure the Panel that the independent Stop and Search Panel specifically considers how outcomes are split by age, ethnicity and gender.

The next meeting of the Sussex Police and Crime Panel will take place on Friday, March 22.

Ends.

Notes to editors

Members of the public are encouraged to submit written questions to the Panel to enable it to challenge the Commissioner on issues residents feel are important. Written questions to the Panel must be submitted two weeks before the meeting and can be sent to Sussex Police and Crime Panel by email: pcp@westsussex.gov.uk

Full reports shared with the Sussex Police and Crime Panel can be found at www.sussexpcp.gov.uk

More information about the role of the Police and Crime Commissioner can be found at www.sussex-pcc.gov.uk

A webcast of Sussex Police and Crime Panel meetings can be viewed www.eastsussex.gov.uk/yourcouncil/webcasts/