

To:	The Sussex Police & Crime Panel.
From:	The Sussex Police & Crime Commissioner.
Subject:	Proposed Precept 2025/26.
Date:	31 January 2025.
Recommendations:	That the Sussex Police & Crime Panel: i) review the precept proposal; and ii) report to the Commissioner on the proposed precept.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 requires the Police & Crime Commissioner (PCC) to notify the Police & Crime Panel of the proposed precept for the coming financial year. The Panel is required to respond with a report to the PCC on the proposed precept including, if appropriate, recommendations as to the precept for the financial year.
- 1.2 Financial planning sits at the heart of good public financial management. Alongside budget preparation, performance management and reporting, the ability to look strategically beyond the current budget period is a crucial process to support the PCC's resilience and long-term financial sustainability.
- 1.3 This report presents the PCC's precept proposal which is underpinned by a revised draft four-year Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) – see Appendix 1 – that sets out the financial context for the PCC's draft revenue budget, capital programme, reserves and proposed precept decision for the next financial year 2025/26 and estimates for a further three financial years.

2.0 Consultation and Engagement

- 2.1 The PCC has been listening and talking to Sussex residents and businesses from Chichester to Rye and Brighton to Crawley.
- 2.2 In addition to meetings that the PCC has had with members of the public and elected representatives, her office has conducted several strands of listening and engagement (in person & online) through externally sourced independent surveys, correspondence to her office and on official social media channels.
- 2.3 The PCC received 3,167 responses to the annual #SaferinSussex survey; 2,210 pieces of correspondence; 76k digital engagements: 425k emails to weekly newsletter subscribers.
- 2.4 The office held discussion groups with 110 young people; visited 13 events across Sussex to meet youth workers, businesses, farmers and residents; and has just completed 20 focus groups with councillors, clerks and several chambers of commerce.

- 2.5 The Safer in Sussex survey showed that anti-social behaviour (ASB), dangerous driving and knife crime were the top concerns overall and 24% of the respondents said they had reported a crime to police in the past year.
- 2.6 All 12 local authority areas ranked ASB as the most important issue but violence against women and girls was more of a concern in large towns (Brighton and Chichester). Knife crime and county lines / drug supply ranked higher in Hastings, Crawley and Rother.
- 2.7 When asked what would most reassure residents that crime was being tackled, 50% said a more visible police presence, 19% said better police engagement and 9% said effective initiatives to tackle ASB.
- 2.8 Our community feedback showed that young people were very concerned about knife crime. Councillors and clerks relayed local concerns about drug dealing and consumption in public, organised crime and shoplifting and also spoke about public and retailers not reporting incidents to police.
- 2.9 Participants recognised the funding and demand pressures on Sussex Police and acknowledged the efforts the force had made to achieve efficiencies without reducing services.
- 2.10 The majority of feedback was that all public services needed extra funding and the police were no different, but several councillors said that Sussex Police needed to show more clearly where previous precept increases had led to extra officers and improved neighbourhood policing and higher visibility.
- 2.11 In November and December last year, the PCC also commissioned an independent polling company to survey a demographically representative sample of Sussex residents with 2,524 respondents asked about crime concerns and experiences, their satisfaction with Sussex Police and their views on levels of the police precept. The results are summarised below from paragraph 2.13.
- 2.12 Since the PCC was first elected in 2012, she has made every effort to increase transparency in police governance and accountability including making herself accessible to the media. In the past calendar year there has been 389 pieces published across local, regional, national and international media. The majority of media coverage is about funding and strengthening neighbourhood policing, the police response and the PCC leadership in tackling business and retail crime, anti-social behaviour, serious violence and organised crime (see Appendix 3).
- 2.13 Each year, the PCC office conducts a poll of Sussex residents to test their views on potential levels of precept increase. Between 13th November and 8th December 2024. A professional polling company was commissioned to get a robust sample of public opinion in each Sussex district, by age, gender, and other demographic and socio-economic classifications.
- 2.14 A total of 2,524 residents completed the survey – which is 372 more than last year. 47% of respondents were male and 51% female (as declared). The confidence interval was plus or minus 1.95% which means that, had the pollsters been able to survey every resident of Sussex, the answer to a given question would fall within plus or minus 1.95% of the actual research result on 95 occasions out of 100. For context, most national surveys operate with confidence intervals of plus or minus 3.00 to plus or minus 4.00.

- 2.15 53% of all residents supported some level of precept increase. 40% oppose any increase and 7% are exempt from paying council tax. 24% are prepared to pay up to an extra £1.75 a month; 15% are prepared to pay an extra £1.25 a month and 14% are prepared to pay an extra £0.83 a month.
- 2.16 Public support for a precept increase has risen by 3% compared to last year. Appendix 2 includes full details of the precept survey by the polling company and a summary of all engagement and polling activity conducted by the PCC office.

3.0 Overall Financial Picture and Four-Year Plan

- 3.1 Investment In Officers – the PCC has been working tirelessly since 2018/19 with the help of Sussex taxpayers and the Home Office funding to build back police officer, PCSO and specialist staff posts.
- 3.2 There were 147,746 full-time equivalent (FTE) officers in post as at 31 March 2024 in the 43 territorial police forces in England and Wales this was an increase of 0.2% on March 2023 (up 312 FTE from 147,434 officers). The government stated that was the highest number of police officers since comparable records began (in the year ending March 2003), higher than the previous peak of 147,434 FTE police officers in March 2023. Sussex proportion is approximately 2.15% of the national total.
- 3.3 Following Operation Uplift, Sussex Police must maintain a police officer baseline of 3,166 Officers (headcount). In addition to this number, the Force has committed to recruit an additional 60 police officers in the financial year 2024/2025 with an enhanced target of 3,226 officers. As of 31 March 2012, the police establishment for comparison was 2,959.
- 3.4 In terms of funding for context Sussex has:
- 18th lowest Net Revenue Expenditure (NRE) per head of population nationally at £207.50 (excluding national functions and PCC) (Most similar group = £200.33; nationally = £243.43; (Source: p.4 HMICFRS website 2023/24 [HMICFRS Value for Money Profiles](#))
 - 7th lowest precept of any PCC in England and Wales at £252.91 per Band D equivalent household 2024/25.
 - 5th lowest total funding per head of population at £196.82 (all grants and precept).
- 3.5 The Government's provisional policing settlement announced in December 2024 stated that Sussex could receive an overall cash increase of £25m (6.8%), net of adjustments for 2025/26 as follows:
- Home Office grant of £243.5m, an increase of £13.9m (6.1%) over 2024/25.
 - This includes:
 - Core Grant of £203.6m an increase of £7.3m (3.7%).
 - Employers National Insurance: £5.5m compensation for the additional costs of the increase in Employers National Insurance of 1.2%. This is £700k less than the estimated costs though.

- Officer Maintenance Funding: £7.5 million is specifically allocated as ringfenced funding to support Sussex Police in maintaining officer numbers. This funding is contingent upon the force achieving its overall officer maintenance headcount.
- Additional Recruitment Funding: Sussex Police will receive £3.2 million as an unconditional top-up grant in recognition of additional recruitment carried out.
- Neighbourhood Policing: Sussex Police will receive £2.1 million to deliver the first steps of the Neighbourhood Policing Commitment. This is part of a £100 million investment to increase the number of officers, PCSOs, and special constables in neighbourhood policing roles.
- PCC precept flexibility to increase Band D council tax precept by up to £14 would yield £10.6m pre council tax collection fund and tax base improvement.

3.6 The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill received Royal Assent on 2 November 2023. It amended the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and reduces the minimum period for the implementation of a premium for empty premises from two years to one year.

3.7 It also allows billing authorities to introduce a premium in respect of second homes (dwellings that are unoccupied but furnished), of up to 100%. 'Second homes' are properties held by their owners as a home mainly used by family/friends as holiday home, let to others as a holiday let, or for occupation while working away from home. The first bills including the premium will be issued from 1 April 2025.

3.8 Chichester and Adur councils have received significant uplifts to their taxbase for 2025/26 because of the new premiums. For Chichester, the impact of introducing the 100% premium has increased the taxbase by 2,948 band D equivalent properties (6.3%). For Adur it has increased the taxbase by 2,327.0 (3.60%). For other billing authorities that have introduced the premium the change is less.

3.9 The overall increase in the taxbase of 1.85% was higher than forecast. However, billing authorities have forecast an overall net deficit of £0.7m on the collection fund which must be paid back to them. The overall net increase is therefore £12m.

3.10 The stated policy aim of the premium is to free up housing stock for local need. If the aim is achieved, council tax receipts might reduce especially if occupied by single persons who receive a 25% discount. A prudent assumption about taxbase growth has been included in the assumptions for future financial planning.

3.11 The PCC has considered the financial and other implications of precept funding levels, use of reserves, inflation and other cost pressures against several budget scenarios as part of the financial planning process.

3.12 Costs are anticipated to increase by £30m in 2025/26 because of staff salary increases, inflation of supplies and services, the employer national insurance shortfall and other cost changes. Set against a £25m grant and precept increase requires the use of other resources and cost reductions to balance the budget.

- 3.13 The PCC with Sussex Police has reviewed all budgets in detail during 2024/25 in collaboration with the Service Transformation Programme to highlight options for identifying and delivering efficiency savings and/or generating income, with the aim of setting a balanced budget.
- 3.14 The PCC and the public (as we know from our survey and consultation results) want to maintain the investment that has been made to date - the police officers, police staff, PCSOs and smart systems and capabilities. However, we do not want to go backwards. Even with a £14 increase in the precept, the increase in the government grant and use of other resources, including earmarked reserves, it will not be enough to balance the £426.5m gross revenue budget requirement which means a further £5.0m of savings are required to balance the budget for 2025/26.
- 3.15 The draft four-year Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) sets out the financial context for the draft revenue budget, capital spending plans and proposed precept decision for the next financial year 2025/26 and estimates for a further three financial years. It brings together all resources including grant, precept, fees and charges, income for special policing and use of reserves and capital.
- 3.16 The approach set out in the MTFS is expected to deliver a balanced revenue budget for 2025/26 of £421.5m, but the future is uncertain as we await the process and outcome of the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review in Spring 2025 to learn what our grant and precept resources could be. In the meantime, assumptions have been included to estimate the future years budgets.
- 3.17 The management of the 2025/26 budget is planned to be achieved through well-constructed and managed workforce plans; the use of one-off reserves in a managed way; rationalisation of estates; new operating model efficiencies; non-pay savings; and increases to the precept. This will require careful monitoring, scrutiny and commitment to develop realistic and credible savings that will achieve a sustainable budget going forward. The PCC and Chief Constable are fully committed to taking the necessary decisions to achieve this outcome and the budget plans and actions will be closely monitored and scrutinised by both Chief Finance Officers.

4.0 Chief Constable's Investment and Requirement

- 4.1 The successful delivery of policing requires the Chief Constable to manage a complex set of resources, demands and priorities whilst reviewing and revising plans to meet changing needs. Policing is always evolving as it responds to the social, legal, political and economic landscape in which it operates. Although these changes provide challenges and opportunities, the focus for Sussex Police remains constant in keeping people safe.
- 4.2 Home Office data offers reassurance that Sussex is a safe county - neighbourhood crime remains low - Sussex is the 13th lowest force nationally (of 43 forces) for risk of crime, having a rate of 745 crimes per 100,000 population.

- 4.3 Over the last 12 months, the profile of contact from the public has changed with the force experiencing a 10% reduction in emergency calls (999) and 30% increase in non-emergency calls (101) when compared to the same period the previous year. Non-emergency contact now constitutes 56% of total contact demand.
- 4.4 Despite the reduction in 999 calls the volume of Emergency Response (Category A) incidents has been increasing, and Sussex Police attends on average 231 emergency incidents per day.
- 4.5 Over the last 12 months the benefits of the investment in new contact management technology and contact officer training have been realised. Sussex Police is now one of the best performing forces for 999 call answering time within its similar group (MSG) of forces, and consistently one of the top performing forces in the country. Sussex Police's 101 abandonment rate has almost halved over the past year, and average 101 call wait times are routinely under three minutes.
- 4.6 Public safety/welfare incidents make up the largest proportion of total incidents that the force attends. There has been a notable rise in mental health related emergency incidents, which are becoming increasingly complex and time consuming for officers. Efforts with partners continue to ensure the public receive help and support from the most appropriate service in these instances.
- 4.7 Total recorded crime has risen year on year since 2017 (with the only exception being the pandemic year of 2020). 2023 saw a peak in recorded crime and levels remain high in 2024. There have been some fluctuations in the profile of recorded crime, particularly a sustained increase in retail crime and low-level violence without injury. Neighbourhood crime, such as burglary and vehicle crime, has not grown, and Sussex is not seeing the same rises as some other areas in the country.
- 4.8 In 2024, Sussex Police recorded the highest volume of serious crime since 2016, highlighting the continued protection of the Force's proactive capabilities in disrupting drug crime. The investment that the force has made in pro-active activity has led to an increase in the number of drug trafficking offences uncovered and solved.
- 4.9 Sexual offences continue to rise year on year, driven in part by the growth of digitally enabled offending such as circulation of self-generated indecent imagery. This is a nationally growing issue, and demand in this area is anticipated to rise with the increased use of smartphones and time online.
- 4.10 The number of reported rape offences has remained consistently high with the force recording on average six per day. The Op Soteria national operating model has become embedded in force since its implementation in July 2023. Since then, enhanced training has been delivered to specialist investigators and first responders, resourcing has been increased, and the force has focused on investing in and building upon its public protection capacity. Charged outcomes for rape offences have subsequently increased but this is an area of considerable pressure for the force and therefore a programme is underway to restructure and specialise Public Protection rape and safeguarding investigation teams.

- 4.11 In addition to the force's growing investigative demand, Sussex Police continues to service both unplanned protests and pre-planned events. The force manages planned demand well by ensuring event organisers make an appropriate contribution to the resourcing of these occasions. However, large scale events such as Lewes Bonfire, and Premier League football matches are resource intensive and must be balanced against daily demand. Unplanned demand is a growing risk for the force, highlighted by the local resources needed, and the mutual aid requirement to support other forces during the rioting in response to the attacks in Southport in the summer of 2024.
- 4.12 The infographic attached at Appendix 4 shows the Sussex Police average incidents and crimes per day in 2024.
- 4.13 In 2025/26, Sussex Police is expecting to face further operational and financial challenges. Alongside the growing demand outlined above, the organisation must contend with both inflationary pressures and changes in the labour market which are creating increased competition for specialist skills and making recruitment and retention harder.
- 4.14 Sussex Police achieved its aim under the government's Operation Uplift programme of having 3,251 officers (headcount) by 31st March 2024, and is committed to maintaining a total headcount of at least 3,226 police officers (this includes 60 extra posts which were funded as additional uplift for two years by government). As of 31 March 2012, the police establishment for comparison was 2,959.
- 4.15 Looking forward, Sussex Police faces a significant challenge. Crime is continuing to grow, and the processes involved in dealing with crime are becoming more complex. Like other organisations, Sussex Police has been affected by growth in inflation which has impacted both pay and non-pay costs for the force and will continue to do so. This means that, despite substantial savings already made, the force will need to generate further efficiencies to balance the budget.
- 4.16 However, with increasing demand, and savings to find over the next four years, Sussex Police must ensure that resources are targeted where they will have most impact: protecting and sustaining the service improvements which have already been made and investing in those areas that provide the strongest outcomes for victims and the public. To support this, Sussex PCC and Sussex Police have robust business planning processes which are aligned to deliver the priorities in the PCC's Police and Crime Plan.
- 4.17 The precept increase of £14 for 2025/26 is therefore critical for Sussex Police to maintain the progress that has been made to date, sustaining the operational capacity that has been built, enabling them to make the most of their data and technology to deliver better value for money and outcomes for the public. It will ensure they can retain an effective operating model, keeping new recruits on the frontline attending more calls, more swiftly, getting more positive outcomes for victims.

4.18 A £14 precept uplift in 2025/26 would enable Sussex Police to meet the increased costs, including the shortfall in the Employer National Insurance costs resulting from the increase, whilst preserving the improvements in operational capacity and capability made through investment in previous years. It will also support the cost of delivering the change required to ensure they have the most efficient model possible, building on the investment already made in innovation such as digital support for investigation and analytics to deliver smarter evidence-based policing.

5.0 Precept Proposal

5.1 The government expectation is that local taxpayers contribute more to local policing.

5.2 The PCC has considered the financial and other implications of precept funding levels, use of reserves, inflation and other cost pressures against several budget scenarios as part of the financial planning process.

5.3 It has been calculated that a £14 precept increase is essential so that Sussex Police can meet the increased costs of pay, inflation and preserve the improvements in capacity, visibility and accessibility built up since 2018.

5.4 The PCC has scrutinised the Chief Constable's budget and listened carefully to what the residents of Sussex have been telling her. The PCC and the public, as we know from our survey and consultation results, want to maintain the investment that has been made to date in police officers, staff, PCSOs and systems and capabilities. There is no appetite to go backwards.

5.5 The council tax precept for Sussex was one of the lowest - 31 out of 37 - of English policing bodies during 2024/25 at £252.91 per annum for a Band D property. The median was £274.50.

5.6 A £14 increase on a Band D property will be equivalent to 27p per week / £1.17 per month. For context, 75% of Sussex council taxpayers occupy a Band D property or below and therefore would pay no more than an additional £1.17 per month per household for the Police element.

5.7 The PCC is, therefore, proposing to increase the Band D precept by £14 for 2025/26 taking it from £252.91 to £266.91 per annum per household. This still ensures that Sussex remains within the lowest quartile for police precepts in England.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Draft Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2025/29

Appendix 1a – Reserves Policy [included within above report]

Appendix 1b – Sussex Financial Risks Register

Appendix 1c – Prudential Indicators [included within above report]

Appendix 1d – MRP Statement 2025/26 [included within above report]

Appendix 1e – Capital Strategy

Appendix 2 – Precept Consultation Results

Appendix 3 – Engagement Summary Analysis

Appendix 4 – A Day in the Life of Sussex Police 2024 – Infographic