

SUSSEX Police and Crime Panel has given its support to plans to increase the police's share of council tax by the maximum allowed by Government.

The increase - £14 on a Band D Property, sparked questions from the Panel about the cycle of asking residents to pay the maximum increase every year to maintain police services, and how that could ever be broken.

The Force will still need to find savings of £5million in 2025/26, the Panel heard, although Sussex Police and Crime commissioner Katy Bourne said areas of savings were being identified.

Mrs Bourne told members that the Force was facing greater costs for staff and services, as well as a £700,000 increase in national insurance payments which is not being covered by Central Government, leaving no choice but to ask for the precept increase.

"The Chief Constable has been really clear with me that she needs the precept to maintain the work done so far," she said. "I do not want to go backwards because I know the police have worked really hard to get to where they are. This is a really important time for Sussex Police."

The Panel's Budget and Precept Working Group had recommended approval of Commissioner's precept rise pointing out that 52 per cent more crimes had been solved this year compared to last, despite a seven per cent increase in recorded crime.

The Panel had expected to review the Commissioner's Police and Crime Plan 2024-28 at the meeting on Friday, January 31, which must be published by March 31.

But with the inevitable impact of the Government's Policing Landscape Reforms and the discussion and decisions about devolution in Sussex, the Commissioner said she would instead bring the draft plan to the Panel's March meeting.

An update on the plan was given, focusing on the priority areas for Sussex Police and members were given assurance that there would be enough time for their views on the new plan to be addressed before it was published.

Mrs Bourne was asked a number of questions by the Panel covering misconduct among officers, speeding and road safety, shoplifting and violence against women and girls.

One question centred around the backlog of DBS checks with concerns raised about the financial impact of delays in new school staff receiving their completed checks.

Mrs Bourne said staffing issues in the team carrying out checks were being addressed and that figures were improving and moving in the right direction.

Speaking after the meeting Panel Chair, Cllr Andrei Czolak said: "It was disappointing that we were unable to consider the Police and Crime Plan but understandable that the Commissioner needs time to reflect on the significant changes Sussex faces over the next few years.

"The Panel is becoming increasingly concerned that increasing the police precept by the maximum allowed has become the default position in Sussex to avoid adverse effects on services and I will urge the Commissioner to continue to lobby government for a funding formula which is fairer for Sussex residents.

The next meeting of the Sussex Police and Crime Panel will take place on Friday, March 14, 2025.