

Panel approves police precept after detailed debate

PUBLIC investment in Sussex Police that will help the force “drive forward and continue improvements” has been backed by a scrutiny panel.

At its meeting on Friday (January 29) the Sussex Police and Crime Panel supported a 7.5 per cent increase in the police’s share of council tax – the equivalent of £15 a year for a Band D household.

Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner Katy Bourne told the Panel that the proposed precept increase would help the force keep the momentum going and improve policing in Sussex.

Concerns were raised by some Panel members about the ability of residents hit financially by the Covid crisis to pay such an increase which, last year, was predicted to be just £5 for a Band D household.

Mrs Bourne told the panel that without the increase, the new initiatives and investment would not be able to happen and that the financial pressures faced by the force would have a long-term effect on policing.

“We do share empathy for the poorest residents and any decision around any potential increase is not one I take lightly,” she said. “But residents in Sussex will still be paying the seventh lowest precept in England for their police force.”

Referring to the impact of the Covid crisis, Mrs Bourne added: “Criminals have not turned into charity workers and officers need more than your goodwill at this stage. This increase is based on what the public had told me they will support; it’s three pence a day to get behind their police officers.”

Following a lengthy debate, the Panel supported the increase which will see 75 per cent of households in Sussex paying no more than £214.91 a year from their council tax to Sussex Police.

The Panel was also given an update on the draft Sussex Police and Crime Plan which has been developed with input from a working group made up of Panel members and in consultation with members of the public.

Questioned on a lack of measureable targets included in the plan and the lack of mention of equalities issues within Sussex, the Commissioner said the plan was a draft and all comments would be taken on board as work continued.

Following the decision to postpone the Police and Crime Commissioner elections due to the Covid-19 crisis, Mrs Bourne refreshed her plan which now covers 2021 to 2024.

The Commissioner introduced the draft plan to the Panel highlighting its three priorities: Strengthening local policing, tackling crime and preventing harm, relentless disruption of serious and organised crime and supporting victims and safeguarding the vulnerable.

Speaking after the meeting, Panel chairman Cllr Bill Bentley said: “At a time when every corner of our country is suffering the ongoing effects of the Covid-19 crisis, it is more important than ever that we properly scrutinise any call for our residents to pay more for the services they receive.

“We were able to have a full and frank debate with the Commissioner about her proposed precept and draft Police and Crime Plan and members were satisfied that the direction of travel was what is best for Sussex and that the increase in the precept will result in necessary and welcomed improvements and development of our police force.”

ISSUED ON BEHALF OF THE SUSSEX POLICE AND CRIME PANEL

The next Sussex Police and Crime Panel meeting will take place on March 12, 2021.

Ends.