

## **Panel agrees council tax rise for police services**

COUNCIL tax bills for police services will rise by £10 for a Band D property, despite early concerns raised by members of a police and crime watchdog.

Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner Katy Bourne set out her plans to the Sussex Police and Crime Panel to use additional money to pay for more enforcement, more investigations and a greater police presence in the county and online.

In a report, the Panel's precept working group said it would support a £5 annual increase, but had concerns about asking residents to pay more given last year's £24 rise for the average Band D household.

Chairman of the working group, Susan Scholefield, said members had only been able to discuss possible options due to a delay in the announcement of Government funding for 2020/21.

Introducing her budget, Mrs Bourne said her proposal gained overall support from members of the public during a consultation, but that she could understand people questioning the need for the average £10 increase when Government has announced its own investment to boost police numbers.

But the Commissioner set out the work Sussex Police has to deal with every day including a total of 2,500 contacts, 700 emergency calls, 37 mental health incidents, 35 missing people, 39 domestic crimes, 13 residential burglaries, 123 cases of violence, 73 thefts and five rapes.

Mrs Bourne added: "That is just one day. Day two is not a new day. Officers have to continue working on all these cases and deal with the next day's events."

The panel was assured that the increase – the equivalent of no more than 20p per week for 75 per cent of households in Sussex, will be targeted to areas including investment in the force's tactical enforcement unit, dogs unit and road policing, an increase in the number of detectives employed and an increase in police presence online and in rural areas.

Members approved the Commissioner's proposed precept, despite concerns raised that some residents could struggle to pay the increase for improvements they don't see any evidence of.

The Panel also considered the Police and Crime Commissioner's estates strategy and how it supports the Police & Crime Plan 2017-21 and provides value for money to Sussex taxpayers.

Members were keen to highlight the non-financial benefit of many police buildings across Sussex, and Mrs Bourne agreed that visibility was extremely important with police buildings acting as a "real front door to the police" and giving the public confidence.

Reacting to a question about climate change and the force's efforts, Mrs Bourne said:  
"Greening up our estate is really important, we have an environmental committee and we are looking at all aspects of the estate, down to fleet. We already have lowest emission per square metre of any force in the country."

During the meeting, Panel members also raised concerns about improvements to the police's non-emergency police number, the force's efforts to tackle antisocial behaviour involving young people and efforts being made to support the mental health of officers.

The next meeting of the Police and Crime Panel meeting will be Friday, June 26, 2020.

Ends.