

My proposals for the 2015/16 precept

Since my election as the Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire I have been keen to involve the public in my emerging plans and thoughts about how we can continue to keep crime low, how we ensure that Hertfordshire remains one of the safest places to live, and how we can protect and strengthen local policing, whilst keeping the cost to the taxpayers of Hertfordshire as low as possible.

Since last year's open letter, the Chief Constable and I have had to make decisions about how to deliver improved efficiency, both financially and in service delivery, whilst improving our capability and resilience to tackle new forms of crime in the areas of safeguarding, cybercrime and child sexual exploitation. Despite these challenges, Hertfordshire Constabulary remains a top performing force - the best in its Most Similar Family (MSF) of eight police areas when looking at both absolute numbers of crime and levels of crime per population.

Meeting the challenge

In Hertfordshire, following reductions in the Police Grant Settlement (2015/16), we will need to make 7 per cent reductions which will require us to choose how we protect the services that matter most to the public - and those which have the best chance of delivering results. For Hertfordshire this will mean making savings of approximately £30m or 16 per cent by 2018/19. These figures arise from a grant reduction of £14 million, the impact of spending pressures of a further £16 million, and additional expenditure on new areas of policing capability.

However, prudent financial planning over the last three years has put Hertfordshire in a strong position to face the forthcoming cuts to the policing budget. Savings have been achieved as part of the Hertfordshire savings programme and those from collaborating with our neighbouring forces of Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire. By the end of this financial year, Hertfordshire would have achieved some £8 million of savings through collaboration, and the 2015/16 budget includes proposals to extend collaboration savings into back-office and Operational Support functions. A significant proportion of the savings required to balance the budget have already been achieved, resulting in reduced expenditure this year.

Hertfordshire has also continued to strengthen its 'reserves' position. Reserves of £38 million have been built-up to support one-off 'investments to save', to resource the

increased police officer recruitment, and to enable savings to be phased in over the medium-term. Our prudent planning means that reductions in government funding will therefore have less impact on Hertfordshire than they do elsewhere in the country.

Given these levels, the Chief Constable and I feel satisfied that Hertfordshire can use these resources in the medium-term to meet the reductions in funding, and respond to the challenges facing policing today.

I am proposing to freeze the council tax (precept) for policing so that the residents of Hertfordshire do not have to pay a penny more but will still receive a first class policing service that protects the public from harm and delivers a service that is value for money. Freezing the police element of the precept will mean that those households in Hertfordshire that pay Band D council tax will still pay £147.82 for the year for policing, the same that they have done since 2010.

If the police precept is frozen, Hertfordshire will also be entitled to the government's council tax freeze grant which equates to £0.7 million. Because of this, and projects currently in place to deliver future efficiencies, we are able to balance the books without the need to increase the police precept for 2015/16.

Your views are important

In summary, my proposal is to freeze the policing element of the council tax in Hertfordshire for 2015/16 by extending savings from collaboration and the proportionate use of reserves, whilst protecting and strengthening local policing. Let me be clear, my priorities remain to reduce crime, catch criminals and keep people safe in Hertfordshire.

This is my proposal, but I want to hear from you. I need your views and comments to help determine whether this is the right decision or not for Hertfordshire. This is your chance to have a say on the amount you pay for policing across Hertfordshire.

If you would like to comment, please send them to the.plan@herts.pnn.police.uk or by letter to the Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire, 15 Vaughan Road, Harpenden, Hertfordshire, AL5 4GZ.

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