

Telephone: 01733 452281
E-Mail: Jane.webb@peterborough.gov.uk
Please ask for: Jane Webb
Our Ref:
Your Ref:

The Rt Hon Kit Malthouse, MP
Minister of State (Minister for Crime and Policing)

Via email: kit.malthouse.mp@parliament.uk



Cambridgeshire Police and Crime Panel
c/o Legal and Governance
Town Hall
Peterborough
PE1 1HF

21 April 2021

Dear Minister

CAMBRIDGESHIRE POLICE AND CRIME PANEL

I write as chair of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Police & Crime Panel to raise with you some issues of interest and concern to the Panel, which are set out below.

Yours sincerely,

Edward Leigh Chair,
Cambridgeshire Police & Crime Panel

Police funding

Funding of policing is being shifting from central grant funding (general taxation) to Council Tax precepts. The driving principle of local taxation for local services makes sense and creates local accountability. However, we question the appropriateness of Council Tax, as currently structured, as the mechanism for raising local taxation, as it does not correlate well with people's net or disposable income (ability to pay) nor with their wealth.

We urge the government to review how policing is funded in general and in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough in particular:

- Is the balance between central and local taxation fair and reasonable? • Is the current structure of Council Tax fair and proportionate?
- Is the funding formula for the central grant reflective of local needs?
- Is the size and scope of capital grants appropriate?
- Should non-discretionary national infrastructure be funded centrally?

We note that:

1. The Council Tax precept for policing has been increased by 35% in five years (£183.15 in 2016/17 to £247.59 in 2021/22 for a Band D property).
2. Band-D properties are now liable for nearly £2,000/year, or £1,000 per adult for a two-adult home. The burden on single-occupiers is disproportionately high. The rules on homes in multiple occupation create widely varying individual liabilities.
3. The national funding settlement for the Cambridgeshire Police and Crime Commissioner and Constabulary is the fifth lowest per capita in England and Wales.
4. There are specific challenges and cost pressures arising in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough from the rapid growth in population.
5. Policing costs are increasing faster than funding, even though Commissioners have taken the full permitted precept increase (without a referendum) in each of the past five years, as advised by the Home Office.
6. This is despite making substantial efficiency savings through collaboration, reorganisation of estate assets, and use of new technology.
7. The uplift in police officer numbers is most welcome, but the attached funding is insufficient to cover all the overheads associated with recruiting, training, equipping and supporting new officers.
8. The rules for uplift funding effectively ring-fence 55% of the constabulary's entire budget, meaning that larger cuts have to be made to other areas of policing and crime prevention.
9. The negligible capital grant (£135,000 per annum) is wholly inadequate to cover investment in national policing systems and infrastructure, such as the Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme (ESMCP), yet alone renewal of local buildings, facilities and ICT systems.
10. This is forcing the Commissioner to take on high levels of debt (up to £90 million in the current Medium Term Finance Strategy), the servicing of which will reduce operational funding for many years to come.

Remote meetings

We urge the government to reconsider its decision not to extend the legislation permitting remote council meetings. Remote-meeting has proven to work and, in many ways, to be more effective and efficient than in-person meetings. There appear to be no rational grounds for taking this option away from local authorities. Instead, local authorities should be allowed to use their discretion as to how to conduct meetings effectively, efficiently and, most importantly, safely.

We note that:

1. The Panel has been able to continue its work effectively and efficiently through remote meetings using Zoom and Microsoft Teams. The public meetings are also live-streamed on YouTube and available for the public to review at any time.
2. Undoubtedly, the Panel's work is now more accessible to the media and general public. Inperson meetings rarely attracted an audience, and almost never more than one person. The videoed meetings are watched live or as a recording by over fifty people and, in some cases, by over a hundred people.
3. Video recordings provide a more accessible, complete and accurate public record of decisions and statements than typed minutes, creating greater transparency and accountability.
4. The cost savings of remote meeting, in terms of officer travel time and expenses, members' travel expenses, and catering (when briefings are held in the morning and public meetings in the afternoon) are significant.
5. The reduction in carbon emissions associated with travelling to meetings and air-conditioning meeting rooms are also significant.
6. Remote or hybrid meetings (where some members are present in person, and others via a remote video and/or audio link) enable members to attend who may not otherwise be able to because of conflicting commitments, caring responsibilities, disability or ill health.
7. At 7th May, a large proportion of the population, including some councillors and local authority staff, will still not have been vaccinated. Much is still unknown about the future risks associated with COVID-19 and mutations of the virus.
8. Public health professionals are advising the public to remain cautious about social contacts, especially indoors, even after being vaccinated.

Police & Crime Commissioner elections

We urge the government to amend legislation so that the next Police & Crime Commissioner (PCC) elections occurs in 2025, and four-yearly thereafter.

We note that:

1. Because of the postponement of last year's elections, the PCC election coincides this year with the Cambridgeshire County Council and Combined Authority mayoral elections.
2. Previous PCC elections have coincided with no other elections in some areas (district, city or unitary).
3. Turnout is typically higher when more than one election coincides.
4. A higher turnout in all districts/unitaries lends greater legitimacy to the outcome.
5. By rescheduling PCC elections in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough to 2025 and four-year thereafter, they will always coincide with at least the mayoral and county elections.

