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Thank you for your emails of 21 April addressed to myself and the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, raising a number of issues, which I will address in turn.

Police funding

Council tax levels are a local decision and elected Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) will rightly want to consider what they are asking people to pay to fulfil their strong desire to keep our streets safe. The council tax referendum principles are not a cap, nor do they force local authorities to set taxes at the threshold level, but rather they are an additional local democratic check to prevent excessive increases.

The funding settlement for 2021/22 includes an additional £415 million to enable the recruitment of a further 6,000 officers in year two of the Police Uplift Programme. Cambridgeshire will receive up to £164.7 million, an increase of £8.5 million on the 2020/21 settlement.

This Government is aware of the concerns many in the policing sector hold over the current formula, and we have stated publicly that the current arrangements are out of date. We recognise that a number of forces continue to hold concerns on the current funding distribution, particularly as we increase investment in policing for the recruitment of 20,000 additional officers. There are a number of longer-term decisions the Government must make on delivering funding for future years in the context of the upcoming full Spending Review in 2021. This includes carefully considering the approach to allocating officer numbers in advance of taking decisions for year three of the 20,000 officer uplift.

A new Home Office chaired Efficiency in Policing Board will improve the evidence based on efficiencies delivered to date, identify opportunities for gains over this and future Spending Review periods, share best practice in relation to the delivery of efficiencies, and monitor and support delivery of gains.

Remote meeting

Colleagues at the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government have confirmed that since 4 April 2020, local authorities have had express provision to hold meetings remotely through regulations introduced through section 78 of the Coronavirus Act 2020. These arrangements do not apply to meetings after May 6 and extending the regulations to meetings after this date would require primary legislation.

The Government has considered the case for legislation carefully, including the significant impact it would have on the Government's legislative programme which is already under severe pressure in these unprecedented times. We are also mindful of the excellent progress that has been made on the vaccination programme and the announcement of the Government's roadmap for lifting COVID-19 restrictions. Given this context, the Government has concluded it is not possible to bring forward emergency legislation on this issue at this time.

Minister Hall wrote to council leaders on 25 March to make them aware of the situation and the full announcement can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-guidance-on-safe-use-of-council-offices>.

We are supporting ongoing legal action for remote meetings to be ruled as permissible under existing legislation. The court hearing was held on 21 April. In the event the action is not successful, the temporary provisions in the Coronavirus Act regulations will not apply to meetings after May 6, and so councils should continue to prepare for that eventuality. Guidance has been issued to help councils to meet safely and securely.

PCC Elections

Elections for PCCs are run on a national basis across England and Wales ensuring that all PCCs are elected on the same cycle. As you will know, the May 2021 elections were postponed from their original date of May 2020 due to the pandemic. Following the May 2021 elections, the next PCC elections will take place in May 2024 bringing the elections back to their original cycle. This retains national alignment of PCC elections which also align with the majority of combined authority mayoral elections.

I trust this addresses the issues you have raised.



Kit Malthouse MP