



The Office of Matthew Grove

Working hard to keep you safe

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Councillor David Rudd, Chair
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Dear Councillor Rudd

I refer to your letter confirming the outcome of the meeting in accordance with the Schedule 5 of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 and Part 2 of the Police and Crime Panels (Precepts and Chief Constable Appointments) Regulations 2012. I note that whilst the 9 members of the Panel present voted 5:4 against my proposal to increase the precept by 1.99%, more than two thirds of the total membership of the panel, i.e. 8 votes against, would have been needed for the proposal to be vetoed.

I have to say that I am disappointed at the brevity of the response when compared with the detailed report, documentation and evidence that supported my proposal. I had expected that if some of the Panel were not intending to support my proposal then they would have provided me with sound and reasoned arguments to seek to persuade me to adopt a different option to the one presented to them. Sadly this was not the case.

Members of the Panel I know will have been well aware of the public survey that I have commissioned and the consultations that I have been having with local people about a proposed increase of just under 2%. The survey conducted by an independent, experienced and respected company, SMSR Ltd. reinforced the feedback from my face to face conversations with local people at the events that I have held around the whole of the Force area. The survey results are published on my website and were summarised in the reports to the Panel. They show substantial support for my proposal, with 75% of those responding in favour of paying a limited amount more in the element of their Council Tax for policing to help me to limit reductions in the number of police officers and PCSOs and to enable me to invest in new technology to continue to modernise the Force.

In the meeting, no evidence was provided of what research, if any, had been undertaken by those members of the Panel rejecting my proposal. There was no comment about whether they had explained the consequences of a freeze or whether they had sought feedback from the public on the matter. Had those voting against had the same level of contact that I have had with local people and had a balanced dialogue with them then I believe that they would have had similar responses to the ones that I have had and so they may well have come to a different view.

You will recall that in the meeting, I did seek to establish, by implication, that those members who wanted to see the precept frozen were acknowledging that by not

increasing the permanent income base by the c£850k that the 1.99% rise would generate, this would mean losing funding that would allow 20 more police officers to continue to be employed. They did not counter this assertion. I note that others have already drawn the same conclusion that I have, that those voting against are actually saying that they would be prepared to see more officers and PCSOs go than would be the case under my proposal.

Whilst I acknowledge that the issue of utilising reserves was raised, and answered, I am sure that there was no discussion about further savings in back office functions. If it had been, then we would have most certainly pointed to the savings that have already been made in these areas, on the widely acknowledged collaboration with South Yorkshire Police and the South Yorkshire PCC where we have joint management teams for HR and IT, to the savings in the costs of my office and my proposals for Stage 2 transfers that include sharing services to avoid duplication and provide opportunities for efficiencies. These matters were covered in the papers submitted to the meeting.

I would also have highlighted the link with the statements in the report about the successful joint bid with South Yorkshire for funding from the pre cursor Innovation Fund that has secured grant of £1m, shared between us, to be spent on mobile technology, performance management and visibility initiatives in the current year that provide further impetus to the collaboration and our modernisation plans.

In addition, I do not believe that there was any reference in the meeting to front line policing. I acknowledge however that this could have been an interpretation of my comments around the fact that we have to make additional savings of around £32m on top of the £28.3m of reductions that have already been made and that as in excess of 80% of the budget is spent on people there will be inevitable reductions in the number of staff. I confidently believe however that it was very evident in my presentation and in the papers submitted to the meeting that the proposed precept increase was designed to make a contribution to helping to keep more officers on our streets. I believe also that everyone is well aware of my aim to ensure that the officers we do have are out and visible to the public. This is underlined by the supporting objective in my Police and Crime Plan on how I want to see increased visibility and availability of the police and other services. The Plan also sets out how I want to maximise opportunities to use technology to cope with the significant financial challenges we face as part of our efforts to maintain the service with fewer officers.

I very much regret therefore that, in my view, the debate at the meeting was limited and not focused on the issue of whether my proposal should be higher or lower but simply that a freeze was the right option with little evidence to support it.

You will by now of course be aware that the referendum limit of 2% or higher was confirmed on 5 February 2014 and so my proposal of 1.99% does not have to be revised as a result.

For your information, I can also inform you that I believe at the time of writing that 35 of my PCC colleagues have decided that they need to increase their precepts with only 7 deciding to freeze, including City of London and MOPAC.

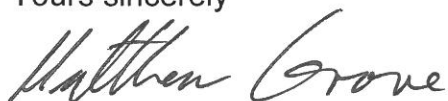
I note the outcome of the Panel meeting was only a recommendation for my consideration.

I can now report that I have had regard to the discussions at the meeting and to the contents of your letter. This reply constitutes my formal response. My thoughts and views on the issues raised are set out above.

I can confirm that I am not persuaded that I should move away from my original proposal and as a result I can now declare that the precept for 2014/15 will be £176.57 for a Band D property, an increase of 1.99%. Taking this into account and given that the vast majority of PCCs are increasing by a similar amount, the precept will remain close to the average level despite this being an area with high demand for policing.

I will of course be notifying the unitary authorities in due course to enable them to incorporate this decision into their billing arrangements.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matthew Grove". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping 'M' and 'G'.

Matthew Grove
Police and Crime Commissioner