

POLICE BUDGET 2006/07 : SUMMARY

The 2006/07 budget is critical to the success and, possibly, the continued existence of Devon and Cornwall Police. 'Normal' budget pressures of balancing the needs of a vital and growing service against the ability to pay of local people are brought into sharp relief by government proposals on reorganising the police service. It remains to be seen if Devon and Cornwall Police will be allowed to survive and develop into a stand-alone, strategic service. Whatever the future holds, the budget must be seen as a resource framework to facilitate service developments which are sensitive to local needs for local neighbourhood policing, and the wider, larger scale public protection agenda.

Key points of this budget are:

- the final stage of funding of the 3,500 police officers planned for so long now with substantial public support. By the start of the new financial year, 3,500 police officers will be in place – the largest in the Force's history. Full year funding adds some £1.7m to the budget, equivalent to some 2.5% on the police element of the council tax;
- early recruitment of 180 additional police community support officers starting now, well ahead of government grant aid. This will make a substantial contribution to neighbourhood policing and will be funded from reserves to avoid extra pressure on council tax;
- £7.4m or 3% cover for inflation. Inflation for policing is very different from the normal retail prices measure being dominated by police officers' wages set nationally and by changes in energy costs and, critically, petrol prices;
- £0.5m on accommodation for extra officers;
- £1.1m for Airwave, the Force's new communication system to national standards;
- £1.0m to help meet a range of developing spending pressures and start towards developing protective services to meet government standards;
- £7m savings to reduce pressure on council tax and keep within government capping limits. Devon and Cornwall has a record on savings second to none but delivering savings of this scale each year is becoming unsustainable;
- a capital programme of £13.8m on buildings, vehicles and equipment;
- continuing review of all future demands including running costs, vehicles, equipment and borrowing costs;
- an increase in the police element of the council tax limited to 4.9% equivalent to some 10 pence a week for the average council tax payer. This is below the government's capping limit, is still the lowest police council tax in the south west and is well below the national average.

Members will consider the overall budget and the detailed proposals including council tax on 15 February 2006. They will decide whether the above meets the most pressing needs for policing in Devon and Cornwall or whether further changes are needed. Whatever is decided, it is certain that changes in resource allocation will be necessary during the year as proposals emerge to develop the service further. Robust processes must be in place to ensure the proper management of these resource changes.