

Councillor Mike Durke  
4 Badminton Gardens,  
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SA5 5DT

30<sup>th</sup> January 2019

*Dear Mike,*

On Tuesday, January 29<sup>th</sup>, the Police & Crime Panel for South Wales endorsed the Police & Crime Plan for 2019-2023 and enabled us to go ahead with an increase in the council tax precept of £2 a month on Band D properties in South Wales. These decisions enable me and Chief Constable Matt Jukes to continue the outstanding work that we have developed in recent years to keep our communities in South Wales safe and confident.

We are encouraged to find that the public of South Wales appreciate our work and we received the best ever response to the consultation that we undertook in advance of the precept recommendation. I can assure you that the recommended rise in the Precept was taken without enthusiasm. It reflects the Government's wish to shift the burden of costs from central taxation to local council tax-payers, but it was necessary to avoid putting the safety of the public in South Wales at risk.

South Wales Police are performing well in responding to crime and to a variety of other threats and challenges, but we are also performing well in terms of preventing crime and disorder, intervening early with "prompt positive action" and working with partners and the public to protect vulnerable people, support victims and maintain neighbourhood policing.

The increase in precept amounts to an extra £24 per year for someone living in a band D property – a rise of 46p a week - but as you will be aware, most people across South Wales will pay less than this because most properties fall in a lower taxation band. The increase has been brought about by the recent Police Grant announcement of a real terms cut in police funding together and the expectation by Ministers that Commissioners will raise significant money from local council tax payers by £24.

By failing to provide an adequate police grant settlement, the UK Government has shifted the burden of police funding on to council tax-payers, passing the responsibility to local Police & Crime Commissioners to find the money that Ministers recognise is needed to provide effective policing.

The financial challenge faced by the whole of the public sector is significant, but specifically in terms of policing South Wales there are some key facts:



- Around a third of the Police Grant - £45m – has been cut since 2011/12
- £51m of savings have been made so far - £58m expected by 2020
- Government provides no money to meet the extra cost of policing the Capital City of Wales
- There's a black hole in pensions funding – only partly-funded this year and uncertain in future
- We pay £1m each year in the Apprenticeship Levy but cash for training remains uncertain
- There's increased demand on policing but 90% has little to do with crime
- The police are often the agency of first resort, not just last resort, for those in crisis
- Over the last 20 years, £92m has been redistributed from South Wales to other forces in Wales, so we do not get the money that the Police Funding Formula indicates we should receive.

The funds raised by the precept do not end our financial challenges - we will still have to make savings of £7.2m to achieve a balanced budget.

The precept rise is the minimum needed to enable South Wales Police to maintain a sharp focus on the priorities I have set for making our communities safer.

For many years, council tax-payers in South Wales paid less for policing than households in the rest of Wales. They will still pay significantly less for policing than households in North Wales and only slightly more than people living in Dyfed Powys and Gwent. On every measure it is clear that South Wales Police provides the best possible value for money in terms of cost to the local tax-payer. Our communities rightly expect to receive an effective policing service that keeps them safe – neither the Chief Constable nor I are prepared to withdraw from local communities or to stop tackling low-level offending, or to miss opportunities for preventing crime. That's what made the precept increase essential.

### **Police & Crime Plan**

Each year, we refresh the South Wales Police & Crime Plan in response to our conversations with partners, the public and latest developments in criminal justice and policing (including financial challenges). Essentially the 2019-23 refresh:

- reaffirms our shared determination to protect neighbourhood policing and other key aspects of policing and partnership working in the face of significant financial challenges
- develops and enhances the activities aimed at delivering the priorities set by the Commissioner in collaboration with the Chief Constable
- clearly defines the distinct yet complementary roles of Commissioner and Chief Constable
- reaffirms the powerful ethos of co-operation between us and with others in making South Wales one of the safest places to live and work

It is widely recognised that policing alone cannot deliver these ambitions. So the refresh further builds on my role as Commissioner in working with partners (devolved and non-devolved) to improve the Criminal Justice System and recognises the opportunities arising from the unique devolved landscape within which we work in Wales.

Neighbourhood Policing sits at the heart of our strategy. We will strengthen the role of our Community Support Officers (PCSOs) as local problem-solvers and their role in listening to, engaging with and empowering local communities to be resilient, safe, and confident. It means involving everyone, protecting the vulnerable, maintaining high levels of victim satisfaction and working with partners. These are set out in specific detail in the Plan. That's why our leadership teams play a full part in Public Services Boards working with local government, the NHS and other partners on local delivery and on the refreshed vision of Community Safety in Wales. Our aim is "more partnership through fewer, better-focussed meetings".

Our achievements to date have created a strong foundation on which to build, but we must always strive to improve our service and respond effectively to new demands. The South Wales Police & Crime Plan is the foundation on which we can continue to deliver excellence to the communities of South Wales. I will be writing to you shortly with a personal copy of the Plan.

### **Contacting South Wales Police – 999 and 101 non-emergency number**

When people need the police – whether for a life-threatening situation or non-emergency enquiry – it is essential that they receive a good service. This continues to be my priority – even more so in the face of the challenges we are up against. Demand through calls to South Wales Police is increasing by around 5% year on year with no extra money from Government to help meet the extra demand. Close analysis of the figures show that South Wales is performing better than many forces – but there are occasions when our resources have to be focussed on answering 999 calls, and some callers experience delays when they call the non-emergency 101 number. Last summer, forces across England and Wales experienced a particular spike in calls with some forces struggling to cope. The work we have done in South Wales meant that we were able to weather the storm – but it has been extremely challenging.

That's the background against which we have developed new ways in which the public can contact us, investing in a number of new systems which members of the public in South Wales can choose:

- **Online Crime Reporting** - this simple to use online form and means you can now report a crime from your computer or mobile phone.
- **Track My Crime** - allows victims of crime to track the status of their report online without having to call the 101 line. This is currently being rolled out across the force area.

- **Social Media** - Twitter and Facebook are a part of everyday lives, so many members of our local communities now direct/private message us. We are now receiving over 3,000 contacts per month, this digital service provides a quick time contact into the Public Service Centre.
- **Choice when calling 101** - when you ring us we want to get you to the right person to get the right response as swiftly as possible and, whilst an automated telephone system can be frustrating for the caller, the evidence is that this is helping us to direct your calls more efficiently and keep resources on the frontline. We are continuing to review people's experience of calling in to our 101 public service centre following the introduction of our automated switchboard last year.
- **Web Chat** - later this year our call handlers will be able to speak to users who prefer a digital service via an integrated digital chat service

We can't put extra money into the systems without cutting back on the officers and staff who provide a response in your community and in every community across South Wales but we can "think outside the box". So we have to "do more with less" by improving systems and increasing efficiency and that's why I am keen to work with you to understand your local experience and how we can further improve the experience of those who contact us. We want to do even better, so we are testing our systems with people from our communities, including Race Equality First, Age Concern and those representing vulnerable people. And when we ran into problems last year it was individual local councillors who alerted me to the issues that they and their constituents were experiencing.

That's why we want to invite you to be "part of the solution" by visiting our public service contact centre and helping to test out these new ways of communicating. **One of my team will be in touch to offer that opportunity and I can promise you an interesting session and a chance to meet some of the remarkable people who answer the calls and support the officers and staff responding to the public every day and through every night of the week.**

If you have any ideas or information that can help us as we work to make things even better please do get in touch,



Rt Hon Alun Michael JP  
Police and Crime Commissioner for South Wales