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Councillor Alec Byrne
Chairman of the Norfolk Police and Crime Panel
c/o Jo Martin
Scrutiny Support Team
4th Floor
Norfolk County Council
Martineau Lane
Norwich NR1 2DW

Our Ref: SWB/kw
Reply to: Stephen Bett
Direct Dial: 01953 424458

7 February 2014

Dear Councillor Byrne,

Norfolk Police and Crime Panel – Review of proposed precept for 2014-15.

Thank you for your letter dated 31 January, 2014 asking me to reconsider my proposal for a modest rise in the police precept with a view to bringing forward a lower figure.

In the course of preparing the budget the Chief Constable presented to me a strong and compelling case for an increase in the council tax, not only so that I can secure ongoing funding but also to reduce slightly the level of cuts required of the service. The Panel was also able to hear first-hand from the Chief Constable about the growing pressures on the service and I think it was apparent to everyone in the room that even after efficiencies from our nationally-recognised collaboration with Suffolk Constabulary are taken into account Norfolk Constabulary still has a financial mountain to climb.

For Norfolk, the collaboration has already delivered around £11m in efficiencies, a further £11m is planned to come out by 2017/18, but even with a 2% rise in the police element of the Council Tax the force will still have some £9m to find by March 2018. No-one can be in any doubt that we face extremely difficult decisions over the next few years. That is the reality of the situation.

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As Members heard from the Chief Constable, Norfolk Constabulary is a highly performing force, and is making good progress in many areas. The force clearly recognises the need to pull the purse strings tighter but is equally clear that demand in some areas is rising. The force is seeing the emergence of new patterns of offending including increased reporting of serious sexual offences and domestic violence and more cases of adult abuse and child exploitation. These crimes often involve vulnerable members of our communities and are more often than not complex and difficult investigations and require appropriate resourcing. None of this can, or will, be ignored.

It was of vital importance to me to ensure all the residents of Norfolk had every opportunity to have their say through an extensive consultation process. As my Chief Executive Mark Stokes informed the Panel, we received over 1000 responses. Overall 53% were in favour of a 2% rise with 47% in favour of a freeze.

The Panel was also informed that in addition there were telephone responses from three people, all of which supported a freeze. One of the calls was from a North Walsham resident claiming to be acting on behalf of 39 neighbours who voted for the freeze. Taking all these votes into account the totals would be 51% in favour of a 2% rise with 49% in favour of a freeze.

The full consultation breakdown and all comments made are available on our website at www.norfolk-pcc.gov.uk

Interestingly at the public meetings, after people had heard the case direct from the Chief Constable the votes were 90% in favour of a rise, 2.5% in favour of a freeze and 7.5% choosing to abstain.

On Wednesday this week we heard that the government had set the referendum limit at 2% (increases of 2% or more would automatically trigger a referendum). I have been keeping a close eye on other Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) and note with interest that the vast majority have proposed a 2% rise. It seems obvious to me that PCCs up and down the country are recognising the increasing pressure on constabulary budgets and the need for a modest precept rise.

Taking all of the above into consideration, including the Panel's comments and subsequent letter, I can confirm that I will increase the police element of the Council Tax by £3.96 per annum (1.9722%) to £204.75 (Band D) for 2014-15.

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This is not a decision I have taken lightly but I strongly believe that it is the right one for the residents of Norfolk.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Stephen Bett".

Dictated by and E-signed in his absence
Stephen Bett
Police and Crime Commissioner for Norfolk