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7<sup>th</sup> May 2019

## **Policing Spending Review – Precept Survey**

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Dear Steve,

I write to you as Police and Crime Commissioner for Lancashire, on behalf of council tax payers across the county, in response to the Spending Review Precept Survey.

Whilst I welcome the Home Secretary's statement that he will prioritise funding for policing, I strongly believe it is not sustainable to rely on the council tax precept to bridge the funding gap and it is unfair to continue passing the burden of years of austerity in policing onto local council tax payers.

Whilst I'm grateful for the public's continued support here in Lancashire, there is understandably growing concern and angst amongst residents that they are being asked to stump up more and more money for policing which is not benefiting Lancashire and providing the investment in policing services they deserve.

The continued reliance on council tax increases to generate income for policing is unsustainable and places an unfair burden on the poorest sections of our communities. Put simply, the current national funding level for policing is insufficient to provide the level of service required by the public.

More funding needs to come from the government grant increases and not from further council tax increases. Furthermore a long term plan is required for police funding which addresses the growing pressures on the service instead of papering over the cracks that years of underfunding have caused.



As reasoned by my fellow Labour PCC, this approach is far too piecemeal to provide an effective remedy for situations that could have been prevented with the application of consistent local partnership working, and well-resourced neighbourhood policing.

Furthermore, whilst counter terrorism (CT) and serious organised crime (SOC) are not seen as local issues, they are frequently only resolved by sufficiently-funded neighbourhood policing.

Whilst it's encouraging that police leaders have committed to a joint approach to prepare for the Comprehensive Spending Review, I remain concerned that year on year 12 month settlements do not allow for effective planning and management of resources, with multi-year financial settlements needed to allow for effective financial planning. Flat cash settlements do not reflect the impact of committed pay and price inflation.

If government do not listen and continue to demand large sums of police funding to be paid for through even greater hikes to the council tax precept, then it is for government to set out what they expect residents to pay and where the limit is to be set.

Any increase to the precept limit, whether it is a % increase or a cash limited increase, is an inherently unfair method for generating the funding that policing clearly needs, as acknowledged by the Home Secretary, and automatically favours areas of the country that are 'better off'.

This further reinforces my view that funding should be provided by government through grant so that inequalities in wealth and levels of deprivation can properly be reflected, instead of applying a subjective increase to council tax that does not consider the differing level of ability to pay across the country.

Almost 60% of properties in Lancashire are classed as either in Band A or Band B (the lowest two bands) therefore increasing the intake from Band D properties contributes less, than it would do in more prosperous areas with more Band D properties. This exacerbates existing inequality of service faced by people living in poorer areas, which characteristically have higher demand for policing in the first instance.

What this means in practice is how any funding settlement placing greater emphasis on council tax precepts will leave Lancashire receiving lower levels of funding to tackle crime.

A postcode lottery of police funding will persist, regardless of referendum limits, until proper funding is provided through grant by central government. Arbitrary setting of a limit is inherently unfair and unequal.

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The Funding Formula currently under consideration must reflect the level of need in each area of places like Lancashire, as well as the demand placed upon policing in that area.

People are clear with me that they are happy to pay a reasonable increase in order to secure effective services, but do not consider vast increases justifiable or fair and I have to agree.

We, in Lancashire have had enough. The very suggestion of burdening council tax payers with further increases for policing are unjustifiable, unsustainable and a slap in the face for the hardworking, honest residents and there needs to be an alternative.

Lancashire residents expect a police force that is properly funded by central government, and that is able to respond appropriately with the relevant resources when needed.

It is therefore only right that any increases in the precept paid for by local taxpayers should be spent on improving local services, and that the Treasury must make adequate resources available for national policing from the public purse: the government should not lean on local taxpayers to foot the bill for the vital policing initiatives that keep us all safe, when many of them are already feeling the strain financially caused by years of austerity and the increased cost of living.

As a result of continued austerity, Lancashire Constabulary's resources are extremely stretched with 800 fewer officers and 350 fewer staff.

Despite having already made savings of £84m, even with the full £24 council tax precept increase in 2019/20, Lancashire Constabulary will still have to find savings of £18m by 2022. Combined with rising demands on the service, increasing costs through inflation, unfunded pay awards and growing online threats, it is the government's responsibility, not the council tax payers to ensure the police has sufficient resources to keep our county safe.

As Police and Crime Commissioner for Lancashire it is incumbent on me to ensure that Lancashire receives a fair funding settlement which is also sustainable and flexible enough to adapt to periodic change in demographics and criminality whilst providing consistency for forward planning.

The National Audit Office found that decisions made in Whitehall on police funding has been ineffective and detached from the changing nature of policing and it cannot be sure that overall funding is being directed to the right places.

With these considerations in mind, I implore you to ensure that any future funding settlements remove the reliance on the police precept to ensure they are fair to the people of Lancashire, and prioritise sustainable funding where it is needed. I would welcome the opportunity to be involved in further discussions that inform this issue in the future.

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Yours sincerely

*Clive Grunshaw*

Clive Grunshaw  
Police and Crime Commissioner for  
Lancashire

