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Comisynydd Heddlu a Throseddau Gwent | Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent: Jeff Cuthbert B.Sc., MCIPD

In determining the Budget Requirement for 2020/21 the Commissioner has had regard to the Police and Crime Plan 2017/21; the Policing Visions 2025; the Strategic Policing Requirement; the Chief Constable's view of the financial resources required to deliver the operational requirements of the Plan; the level of resources to be allocated for commissioning other than from the Chief Constable and the cost of running the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner.

The Commissioner has approved, in consultation with the Police and Crime Panel:

1. A budget requirement for 2021/22 of £147,554,856;
2. The planned efficiency savings in 2021/22 of £676k and further planned efficiency savings of £3.102m (totalling £3.778m) detailed in Appendix 5b of the Annex to this submission;
3. The further proposed utilisation of the Reserves and Committed Funds (Appendix 7)
4. The initial Capital Programme as described in Appendices 8a and 8b; and
5. The 2021/22 proposed precept to be levied in respect of general expenses of £64,159,178 (equivalent to a Council Tax Band D of £287.96) and that this sum be apportioned to each City/County/County Borough Council according to the following table:

Unitary Authorities	£	Tax Base Band D Equivalent (£)
Blaenau Gwent	5,987,866	20,794.09
Caerphilly	17,506,027	60,793.26
Monmouthshire	13,451,170	46,711.94
Newport	17,417,143	60,484.59

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Torfaen	<b>9,796,972</b>	<b>34,021.99</b>
Total	<b>64,159,178</b>	<b>222,805.87</b>

The precept shown in the above table generates the following amounts of council tax for the various bands:

<b>Council Tax Band</b>	<b>£</b>
A	<b>191.97</b>
B	<b>223.97</b>
C	<b>255.96</b>
D	<b>287.96</b>
E	<b>351.95</b>
F	<b>415.94</b>
G	<b>479.93</b>
H	<b>575.92</b>
I	<b>671.91</b>

## **REPORT ON THE POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER FOR GWENT'S REVISED COUNCIL TAX PRECEPT PROPOSAL FOR 2022/23**

### **INTRODUCTION**

1. This report is made in accordance with the Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent's (Commissioner) statutory duty contained in Paragraph 6, Schedule 5 of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011.

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## BACKGROUND

2. The Commissioner notified the Gwent Police and Crime Panel (PCP) on the 20<sup>th</sup> of January 2022 of his Budget Requirement and Council Tax Precept Proposal for 2022/23. The PCP considered a detailed report, annexe and associated appendices in support of the Proposal at their meeting held at Penallta House, Caerphilly Borough County Council on the 28<sup>th</sup> of January 2022.
3. Following a full debate regarding the proposed increase, considering both the impact on the residents and communities of Gwent and the needs for Gwent Police to maintain current levels of service, the PCP unanimously resolved to veto an increase of 5% on the Commissioner's Council Tax Precept Proposal for 2022/23. It was within the PCP's gift however, whilst vetoing the Council Tax Precept Proposal increase, to recommend to the Commissioner an alternative increase for his consideration.
4. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of February 2022, the Commissioner received the formal veto report from the PCP, requesting him to consider the recommendation to increase his Council Tax Precept Proposal to 5.5% for 2022/23. In coming to this conclusion, the PCP noted a number of factors which the Commissioner took into account when reducing his originally planned Council Tax Precept increase down from 6.82% (prior to the receipt of the 2022/23 Provisional Settlement), to the actual Council Tax Precept Proposal increase of 5% submitted to the PCP. These factors will be further discussed in paragraph 7 below; however, in drawing to their conclusion, the PCP also highlighted:
  - a) Their concerns regarding the cost of borrowing in relation to the planned Capital Programme; particularly the cost of implementing the Estate Strategy. The Commissioner assured the PCP that a review of the Estate Strategy will be undertaken at the commencement of the 2022/23 financial year. This will be undertaken in collaboration with the PCP's Estate Reference Group and other key stakeholders, in order to realign Operational Policing and the public's requirements (incorporating both the principles of VFM and environmental sustainability), with an appropriately risk-based approach to funding;
  - b) Their support of the work of Gwent Police and recognised the ongoing pressures on the Chief Constable and her staff to deliver that service;

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- c) The value to communities that the safety and assurance offered by Gwent Police, cannot be quantified in monetary terms; and
- d) In view of the concerns raised at the 28<sup>th</sup> of January 2022 PCP meeting, particularly relating to pressures and funding, the PCP considered the proposed increase in Council Tax Precept to be too low and recommended a revised Council Tax Precept increase of 5.5%, to mitigate and offset the current £2.5m budgetary deficit for 2022/23. The PCP was mindful however, of the effect on the less well-off of any increase in the Council Tax Precept. However, the PCP was equally mindful that a budget that is not balanced, remains as such in perpetuity and the effects of crime can manifest in a worse way against those same people.

## CONSIDERATION OF THE GWENT POLICE AND CRIME PANEL'S PRECEPT VETO REPORT

5. The Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner, Chief Finance Officer and Chief Executive met on Friday 28<sup>th</sup> January 2022 to consider the initial veto response. Upon receipt of the PCP's formal veto report and recommendation on the 4<sup>th</sup> of February 2022, the Commissioner and Chief Finance Officer held further discussions to consider the report's implications.
6. The Commissioner commended the valued challenge and scrutiny the PCP provided during the budget setting process. He acknowledged the well-made and well-presented points discussed at the meeting and outlined in the PCP's report. He also conveyed his appreciation for the work undertaken by his Chief Finance Officer in the early engagement with the PCP (including both the Finance and Estate Reference Groups) during this budget setting round; his detailed Budget Requirement and Council Tax Precept Proposal 2022/23 report; and also, his detailed and comprehensive answers given at the meeting.
7. In determining his response and recommendation to the PCP's veto report, the Commissioner revisited the factors which he considered when revising the Council Tax Precept increase down from the 6.82% (requested by the Chief Constable and planned in the Medium-Term Financial Projections (MTFP) prior to the receipt of the 2022/23 Provisional Settlement), to the 5% reflected in his Budget Requirement and Council Tax Precept Proposal 2022/23 report. The six factors for moving from 6.82% to 5% were:

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- a) The receipt of the 2022/23 Provisional Settlement confirmed that the entire increase in Central Government Grant Funding in 2022/23 was ringfenced specifically for delivering a set number of new Police Officer posts (through the Police Officer Uplift Programme (PUP)) and their associated consequential costs on a future-proofed basis and to meet the local requirements to fund an additional 1.25% of Employer NI contributions. However, the Central Government Grant Funding for PUP in the short-term provides a non-recurrent revenue contribution to capital to fund both short-term and long-term assets; but does not remedy the need for sustainable funding for the Capital Programme. Therefore, a higher Council Tax Precept than that proposed would better provide sustainable capital funding, acknowledging however, the forthcoming review of the Commissioner's Estate Strategy;
- b) The expectation from Government for Police and Crime Commissioners to maximise Council Tax Precept increases to £10 per annum (p.a.) in England, to invest in the Policing Service and complement the PUP. The equivalent Council Tax Precept from a Welsh perspective at the informal capping/referendum limit is 5%. Historically, increases in Council Tax Precept for Police and Crime purposes in Wales of up to 7% have not be considered unreasonable and have not been capped previously. Following the PCP meeting of the 28<sup>th</sup> of January 2022, where the 5.5% veto increase was proposed, a meeting with Welsh Government Officials took place at which the new increase was discussed (amongst other matters) and no concerns were raised;
- c) A 5% increase on Council Tax Precept was perceived as a better reflection of the results of the Commissioner's public engagement exercise, which sought views on a Council Tax Precept increase of £2 per month, equating to an 8.33% rise. The results of the survey, whilst not achieving over 50% support from respondents (and therefore prompting the move to 5%), still concluded that 44.2% supported the principle of up to a £2 per month increase. Conversely, 38.2% of respondents would not support the principle of up to a £2 per month increase; 15.6% of respondents were unsure; and 2% of respondents did not answer the question. Therefore, upon reflection, with the largest percentage of respondents supporting a £2 per month increase (noting that the Commissioner's initial 5% Council Tax Precept Proposal increase amounted to only a £1.20 per month increase), the PCP's veto proposal amounting to a £1.32 per month increase aligns itself with the majority, in a statistically robust sample of Gwent residents;

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- d) Similar to above, the move to a 5% increase in the Council Tax Precept Proposal reflected early positive engagement with the PCP's Finance Reference Group. The Finance Reference Group reaffirmed the public's view that although they are exceptionally supportive of Gwent Police, the stark reality of the economic factors beyond Policing, such as unprecedented rises in utility costs and inflation growth on fuel and more general commodities, places an unaffordable ask at the feet of Gwent Council Tax Precept payers. However, Members of the PCP's Finance Reference Group and the wider PCP Members at the meeting of the 28<sup>th</sup> of January 2022, recognised the need to strike the right balance between supporting their constituents and the wider population of Gwent, with supporting the Commissioner in delivering an efficient and effective Policing Service to those same people;
- e) An acknowledgment that Policing nationally and the Force itself have responded magnificently to Covid-19 and foresee the increased Policing demands (and costs) continuing over the short to medium-term. However, the Commissioner himself acutely acknowledged the economic impact of Covid-19 and inflationary burdens across the Communities of Gwent and to this end, needed to balance the local investment expectations of the Government (which it is expected will be replicated by other Commissioners across England and Wales); those of the Chief Constable to deliver an effective and efficient Policing Service too; with the affordability of the increase to Gwent residents. Therefore, similar to the point above, the Commissioner welcomed the views of the elected representatives on the PCP to adjust the Council Tax Precept Proposal upwards, to better ensure that Policing Services are maintained; and
- f) With the above five factors acknowledged however, although the 2022/23 Provisional Settlement had been more positive than expected for the Policing Service in the short-term, it must be acknowledged that the 2022/23 Provisional Settlement has only confirmed the funding for the first year of the 2021 Comprehensive Spending Review. Therefore, until the full economic impact of Covid-19 and Brexit are known, funding in years two and three of 2021 Comprehensive Spending Review could be more punitive as the Office for Budget Responsibility's forecasts are revised. To this end, in the original Council Tax Precept Proposal, the future Council Tax Precept increases within the MTFP revert back to 6.82% from 2023/24, due to the uncertainty of the funding position. However, even reverting back to 6.82% from 2023/24 onwards does not remedy the forecast recurrent deficit of £9.773m by 2026/27. An increase of 5.5% for 2022/23 whilst not significantly reducing the forecast deficits,

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does reduce the 2022/23 deficit from £2.525m to £2.202m and the 2026/27 forecast deficit from £9.773m to £9.341m.

8. The above factors accepted however in considering the PCP's veto recommendation, the Commissioner (and the PCP Members themselves) recognise the incredibly hard decision they need to reach in balancing the affordability of any increase on residents, against the Commissioner and Chief Constable's vision to make Gwent a safer place to live, work and visit.

## RECOMMENDATION

9. The narrative above discusses the specific factors which, in the Commissioner's view, justifies the PCP's veto recommendation for a 5.5% Council Tax Precept increase. However, both the PCP's report and discussions at the meeting, clearly identify the uncertainty of future funding and the financial challenges within the current MTFP to 2026/27. Therefore, it is important to maintain consistent and ongoing dialogue with PCP's Finance Reference Group, to ensure future risks and opportunities are considered and acted upon in a timely manner. The Commissioner therefore maintains his commitment to robust financial monitoring (including the identification of savings) and continued investment in front-line Policing Services. Furthermore, the PCP's Estate Reference Group will be actively engaged in the imminent review of the Commissioner's Estate Strategy. The terms of reference for the review are currently being drawn up and will be shared in due course.
10. Having taken into account the PCP's veto report and recommendation against the considerations outlined above, the Commissioner intends to issue his revised Council Tax Precept of £68,144,822 for 2022/23, equivalent to a Council Tax Band D of £303.80, reflecting an increase of 5.5% or £15.84 p.a. Therefore, the Commissioner's revised Council Tax Precept Proposal increase will be £1.44 p.a. more than his original Council Tax Precept Proposal increase of £14.40 p.a.
11. The revised Council Tax Precept of £68,144,822 will be apportioned to each City/County/County Borough Council according to the following table:

Unitary Authorities	£	Tax Base Band D Equivalent
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<b>Blaenau Gwent</b>	<b>6,342,390</b>	<b>20,876.86</b>
<b>Caerphilly</b>	<b>18,550,851</b>	<b>61,062.71</b>
<b>Monmouthshire</b>	<b>14,391,857</b>	<b>47,372.80</b>
<b>Newport</b>	<b>18,485,844</b>	<b>60,848.73</b>
<b>Torfaen</b>	<b>10,373,880</b>	<b>34,147.07</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>68,144,822</b>	<b>224,308.17</b>

12. The Council Tax Precept shown in the above table generates the following amounts of Council Tax Precept for the various bands:

<b>Council Tax Band</b>	<b>£</b>
<b>A</b>	<b>202.53</b>
<b>B</b>	<b>236.29</b>
<b>C</b>	<b>270.04</b>
<b>D</b>	<b>303.80</b>
<b>E</b>	<b>371.31</b>
<b>F</b>	<b>438.82</b>
<b>G</b>	<b>506.33</b>
<b>H</b>	<b>607.60</b>
<b>I</b>	<b>708.87</b>

13. The Commissioner requests that this report is circulated to PCP Members for their immediate consideration, in order to meet the statutory timetable and to also expedite the next stages in order that the Local Authority Billing Authorities can finalise Council Tax Bills for 2022/23.

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