

REPORT ON THE GWENT POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER'S PROPOSED PRECEPT FOR 2026/27

Background

This report is made in accordance with the Gwent Police and Crime Panel's statutory duty contained in Paragraph 3(2), Schedule 5 of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011.

Review of Proposed Precept

The Gwent Police and Crime Commissioner notified the Panel on 30th January 2026 of her proposed Police and Crime Budget and Precept for 2026/27

The Panel considered a detailed report outlining the proposed precept for 2026/27 at their meeting held on 30th January 2026. A copy of the report is available on the Panel's website www.Gwentpcp.org.uk

The following Members of the Panel were present:

Mrs Gillian Howells (Chair)
Councillor Nick Byrne
Councillor Marina Chacon-Dawson
Councillor Tony Easson
Councillor Farzina Hussain
Councillor Deb Jenkins
Councillor Tony Kear
Councillor Colin Mann (Vice Chair)
Councillor James Peterson
Ms Katy Stevenson

The Gwent Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) outlined a budget requirement of £196,626,892 for 2026/27. The PCC therefore recommended a 6.99% increase in the 2026/27 precept to provide general expenses of £93,321,176. The remaining budget requirement will be met from planned efficiency savings during 2026/27 of £730k and further planned efficiency savings of £2.040m (totalling £2.770m) detailed in Appendix 7b of the report. A further proposed underwriting of the remaining deficit with Reserves and Committed Funds of £5.395m to balance the 2026/27 budget was also outlined at Appendix 8.

Members heard from the PCC that the proposed Council Tax Precept annual increase of 6.99% equated to an extra £26.37 for a Band D property. The rationale for the proposal was then outlined to Members. Continued investment in projects and organisations that tackle crime and anti-social behaviour, support victims and vulnerable people, and build community cohesion was highlighted by the PCC.

The Chief Finance Officer provided further detail on the PCC's Budget Requirement and Council Tax Precept proposal for 2026/27. Members heard about unavoidable pressures of £4.7m for 2026/27, a significant amount of uncertainty when setting the budget due to issues such as the future Police Reform White Paper and limited funding detail in the Provisional Settlement, budget savings of £1.530m in 2026/27, and a total deficit of £5.395m.

When questions were invited, the Chair sought clarity on the 3% of the budget allocated to the OPCC. The Chief Finance Officer advised that 0.5% was for running the office and that the rest was for PCC controlled funding which was fully committed. Members heard that the commissioning process was over-subscribed and that the additional £1m requested as part of the budget requirement for 2025/26 was recurrent and therefore was included within the papers under discussion, but not as a budget pressure.

Assurance was provided on the suitable sampling of residents that took place as part of the Public Engagement Programme over an 8-month period. In terms of demographics the consultation was described as very comprehensive.

On Police procurement Members were advised that circa 80% of budgets used for buying in services or products were based on a collaborative footprint. At a national (UK) level arrangements with Blue Light Commercial ensured the best possible buying power, and Gwent Police also had a collective commercial procurement service alongside South Wales Police and Dyfed-Powys Police which also ensured good value for money.

One Member highlighted and sought clarity around the forecast surplus of £5.863m outlined in Appendix 9. It was stressed by officers that this figure was a forecast and was non-recurrent. The Member described this surplus as a "bonus" and outlined his view that it should be welcomed. The Member also expressed concerns about the lack of Quarter 3 data in the report as this information was being processed as part of the OPCC governance on the Monday after the Panel Meeting held on 30th January 2026. Officers advised that there would be no big shift on recurrent savings within Quarter 3. Also, as Quarter 3 only closed at the end of December 2025 it would not have been possible to hold all the necessary governance meetings prior to the Panel meeting at the end of January 2026. The Member believed the surplus should have been reflected in a lower Council Tax Precept Proposal, this view was not shared by the PCC as the amount was non-recurrent. It was also highlighted by the PCC that the proposed 6.99% was a lower figure than last year.

A Member highlighted the overspend due to Police Officer overtime and enhancements and queried the extent of the challenge this area posed for budget planning for 2026/27. The Chief Finance Officer acknowledged it was a pressure, and the Chief Constable outlined the level of ongoing scrutiny around the issue of officer overtime. On a supplementary question around the figure assigned for handling dangerous dog cases, officers outlined challenges in terms of planning as this area was demand-led and advised that contingencies had been built into the forecast for 2026/27 based on the current position in 2025/26. The Member asked the PCC how she ensures timely investigations by Gwent Police in this area and was advised by the PCC that it was predominantly through the OPCC's Accountability and Assurance Board.

On lessons learnt from previous efficiency measures officers highlighted the investment in automation and better collaboration with other Police Forces.

One Member expressed his concerns about the level of the proposed Council Tax Precept and the implications on affordability for residents, when the budget was showing a surplus. On the public engagement which showed 44% support for a rise of £2.75 per month, the Member observed that it could be argued that 56% were against any increase. It was highlighted by the PCC that the actual proposal was for an increase of £2.20 per month which is less than the figure used during the OPCC's consultation programme, and on the affordability issue Members were advised that all Local Authorities in the Gwent region operated Council Tax support schemes for residents experiencing difficulties. The Head of Communications and Engagement also provided clarity on the surveys and highlighted that qualitative data from face-to-face engagements for example, suggested that a majority of those selecting "no" or "unsure" were not against the principle of an increase, but they were in favour of a better overall service.

On the Estate Strategy a Member queried the impact on the budget of any pending costs as the revision of the strategy was not yet complete but was expected in early 2026. The PCC advised that a Joint Sustainability Strategy for all four Welsh Police Forces was in development and until this work was complete any potential impact on capital was unknown. The Chief Finance Officer advised that the 2026/27 budget did contain the key investments in operational assets that were part of the existing strategy.

Recommendation

Following a full debate about the proposed Precept, and in noting there were 2 for, 8 against and 0 abstentions, the Gwent Police and Crime Panel considered the proposed precept of 6.99% to be unacceptable. In exercising its veto, the Panel concluded that the proposed precept should be lower.

Meeting attendees heard from the Chair that a number of Panel Members had concerns over the lack of information needed for them to have total assurance on the robustness of the Commissioner's Budget Requirement and the Council Tax Precept increase proposed.

It was highlighted that budget papers were received just eight clear days before the meeting and that this left limited time for effective scrutiny.

The Chair also observed that it was unfortunate that the Panel's Finance and Estates Subgroup had not been engaged in the budget process prior to the January meeting in the same way as in previous years. However, it was acknowledged at an All-Member Briefing with the Chief Finance Officer had taken place on 16th January 2026. The importance of the subgroup was stressed, and it was highlighted that in previous years it had been an important conduit to the management of the complexity of this statutory responsibility of the Panel. It was also highlighted that this subgroup had not met since September 2025.

Concerns over the lack of financial information had been expressed by the Chair in a letter to the PCC at the end of November 2025 and to the CFO at the January Briefing. Despite being told in response that the OPCC had met its statutory obligation in terms of providing information the Chair highlighted that the information provided this year was less than previous years, and that Panels for North Wales Police and South Wales Police had budget and financial updates at most meetings.

The Chair was disappointed that an update on the Q3 position was not available until the Monday following the Panel meeting due to internal OPCC processes. The Chair also had concerns over the swing from a £2m deficit at Q2 to a revised £5m surplus, information on which was only presented to the Panel two days before the main budget and Council Tax Precept proposal meeting.

On the £1m for the implementation of the PCC's Police, Crime and Justice Plan identified at last year's budget the Chair observed that there was a lack of a compelling case for the requirement of funding suitable projects over pressurised front line policing services.

The Chair also expressed concerns over the revised Estates Strategy as there was a lack of information despite being advised last September that there would be significant financial consequences in terms of both revenue and capital spend. The lack of Estates Strategy information alongside the missing Q3 update caused the Chair to cast doubt on the validity and robustness of the 26/27 budget.

The Chair also sought greater clarity on cost saving strategies and improvements in areas such as IT solutions and software and observed that it would be helpful to understand how these extra costs are an essential part of the capital programme by having a specific cost savings briefing in the future.

The Panel remained fully supportive of the work carried out by the Chief Constable and the delivery of policing services and it was acknowledged that the answers provided by officers at the meeting had gone some way towards addressing the information required from Members. However, for a number of the Panel the limited time and availability of information to conduct full scrutiny has not been sufficient for them, from a professional standpoint, to satisfy

themselves of the financial position and precept requirement and to agree with the recommendation.

The Chair sought assurances that the OPCC would engage with the established framework of Gwent PCP Subgroups, that the revised Estates Strategy would be shared with the Panel for their input prior to publication of the final version, and that regular financial updates would be included in the Panel's Forward Work Programme.

Recommended to the Gwent Police and Crime Commissioner:

Date 30th January 2026