

For Information	
Public/Non Public*	Public
Report to:	Police and Crime Panel
Date of Meeting:	7th September 2015
Report of:	Paddy Tipping, Police and Crime Commissioner
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Agenda Item:	9

*If Non Public, please state under which category number from the guidance in the space provided.

PETITION FROM UNISON REGARDING A PROPOSED REDUCTION IN THE NUMBER OF POLICE COMMUNITY SUPPORT OFFICERS (PCSOs)

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To inform the Police and Crime Panel of a petition primarily organised by Unison about the proposed reduction in the number of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs).

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Panel note this report.

3. Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 At the Panel meeting on 1st June, the PCC informed the Panel that he was expecting to receive a petition from Unison in relation to a proposed reduction in the number of PCSOs. The petition has now been received and the PCC would like to update the Panel.

4. Summary of Key Points

- 4.1 A petition containing 21,153 names was presented by Unison representatives to the PCC on 30th July 2015.
- 4.2 The petition reads: "We, the undersigned Nottinghamshire residents urge the Police and Crime Commissioner to reconsider his decision to cut 72 Police Community Support Officer posts across Nottinghamshire and look at raising this money by increasing council tax by no more than £5 per year. We feel that the loss of these posts could mean the end of local policing in our communities."

- 4.3 The Budget for 2015-16 containing proposals to reduce the number of PCSOs was agreed by the Panel on 2nd February 2015. The issue of PCSOs was again raised on 15th June 2015 and there was no enthusiasm for a referendum to breach the 2% Council Tax cap.
- 4.4 The regulations concerning referendums of this type are laid down by Government. The earliest date a referendum could be held would be 5th May 2016. This is too late to make the savings required in 2015-16.
- 4.5 The £5 per year increase proposed by Unison would be insufficient to maintain PCSO numbers at their present level. A more realistic estimate is that it would require a 10% increase to the Council Tax to fund both the proposal and the costs of a referendum. This equates broadly to a £13 per annum increase on a Band B property (the majority of Nottinghamshire properties fall into this band) and is, of course, well in excess of the 2% referendum cap.
- 4.6 Nevertheless, the PCC commissioned a YouGov opinion poll of over 1,000 Nottinghamshire residents. The question (based on the ballot paper for Bedfordshire's referendum held on 7th May 2015) was as follows:
- "Part of the council tax in your area goes to the Nottinghamshire Police and Crime Commissioner.
- For the financial year beginning on 1st April 2016, the Nottinghamshire Police and Crime Commissioner has set an increase of 10% in the amount it charges.
- If most voters choose 'YES', the increase will be 10%.
- If most voters choose 'NO', the increase will be 1.98% instead.
- Do you want the Nottinghamshire Police and Crime Commissioner to increase the amount it charges by 10%? Yes / No"
- 4.7 22% of respondents replied that they would vote in favour.
- 4.8 This result equates closely to the Bedfordshire PCC's referendum last May when 30% of voters were in favour. Historically, referendums to exceed Council Tax limits occur rarely and are normally unsuccessful.
- 4.9 Following public consultation and receipt of the petition, the decision has been made to reduce the number of PCSOs by over 70 and this process is well advanced.

5. Financial Implications and Budget Provision

- 5.1 When the Budget for 2015-16 was agreed by the Police and Crime Panel on 2nd February 2015, Nottinghamshire Police had already had to make savings of £42 million over the last three years, a budget reduction of 20%. Last year, £10.7 million was saved. In the current year, savings of £11 million (after applying the use of £1.6 million reserves) were required. It seems likely that Nottinghamshire Police would have lost 50% of its Government Grant between 2010 – 2020.

- 5.2 Any precept increase is restrained by the referendum limit at 2%.
- 5.3 Given the scale of these reductions, a major reconfiguration of services was required. As approximately 80% of the Nottinghamshire Police budget is spent on officers and staff, it was inevitable that there would need to be staff reductions. Other savings, such as a reduction in senior officers (Assistant Chief Constables and Chief Superintendents), the closure of front counters and back office services have already been made. Work continues to maximise efficiencies through joint and regional working, but more savings were still required.
- 5.4 Whilst the public consultation regarding a possible reduction in the number of PCSOs was underway; the Chancellor announced in July that options of up to 25% and 40% reductions in grant for the next Comprehensive Spending Review beginning next April should be prepared.

6. Human Resources Implications

- 6.1 Nottinghamshire Police Human Resources are following a process based on the guidance laid down by ACAS, which states: 'The criteria must be consistently applied and be objective, fair and consistent. Basing any selection on skills or qualification will help to keep a balanced workforce appropriate to the organisation's future needs'. Nottinghamshire Police has worked closely with staff and Unions throughout the consultation to ensure a fair and objective process; in what is recognised as a difficult situation for individual PCSOs.

7. Equality Implications

- 7.1 Please see 6.1 above.
- 7.2 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) was undertaken by Nottinghamshire Police and this is attached as Appendix A.

8. Risk Management

- 8.1 No new risk implications.

9. Policy Implications and links to the Police and Crime Plan Priorities

- 9.1 Where the reductions in PCSO impact is a decision for the Chief Constable, once the outcome of the redundancy process is known. Both the Chief Constable and the PCC remain committed to neighbourhood policing and all parts of the county will continue to receive the support of a neighbourhood police team.

10. Changes in Legislation or other Legal Considerations

- 10.1 There are no changes in legislation or legal considerations relevant to this issue.

11. Details of outcome of consultation

- 11.1 The public were consulted on the proposed changes and a petition from Unison was submitted during the consultation period.
- 11.2 The decision to reduce the number of PCSO posts by over 70 has not been taken lightly. It is driven entirely by the very tough financial climate. The PCC and the Chief Constable recognise the concerns of Nottinghamshire residents and value neighbourhood policing. Neighbouring Police Forces in the East Midlands employ significantly fewer PCSOs and even with the reduction in numbers, this will continue to be the case. Proposals about next year's budget (2016-2017) will be put to the Panel at its meeting in February 2016. These will be informed by decisions on the next Comprehensive Spending Review (expected late November) and the provisional grant settlement (expected mid-December). All options, including the raising of the Council Tax above the cap level, will be considered during this process.

12. Appendices

- 12.1 Appendix A: the Equality Impact Assessment.

13. Background Papers

- 13.1 Budget Report for 2015/16 (published) - agreed by the Police and Crime Panel on 2nd February 2015.
- 13.2 Findings of YouGov opinion poll of 1,000 Nottinghamshire residents in June 2015.
- 13.3 Question from Bedfordshire Precept Referendum on 7th May 2015 (published).
- 13.4 Unison petition submitted 30th July 2015.