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Surrey Police hikes its Council tax share

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Surrey Police's share of council tax bills will leap over £335 a year for the average Band D households. Lisa Townsend, Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) said the 4.3 per cent increase was needed to "maintain the level of service".

Ms Townsend told the Surrey Police and Crime panel the government "absolutely expects" PCCs to raise council tax precepts by the maximum £14 to cover the police officer wage increase (set nationally) and inflation.

The annual charge will increase from £323.57 in 2024/25 for a Band D property to £337.57 in 2025/26.

The commissioner told the panel even with the precept increase and the use of some reserves, the Force will still need to find £3.6m of savings this year and over £15m for the three years after that.

Although the commissioner said Surrey Police is one of the fastest-improving forces in the country, she stressed the increase in funds was needed to "keep us where we are". Surrey Police has more than doubled its charge rate, with an additional 3,500 offences being prosecuted, according to the PCC. Ms Townsend told the panel the increase is "against a backdrop of a massive increase year on year which our financial resources can't keep up with".

Reports state the cost to operate the Force has increased by £23.2m compared to 2024/25, meaning Surrey Police have to make a saving of £3.6m this year. Ms Townsend argued if the precept was not increased, police services would have to be cut and "achievements would be at risk".

The news comes as 59 per cent of people said they would pay more to support Surrey police in the PCC's online survey. Over 3,200 people voted in the online consultation which asked them if they would be willing to pay an extra £1.16 a month to support policing teams, based on the average Band D property.

But members of the Surrey Police and Crime Panel voted against the proposed increase in a meeting on February 3. Four councillors opposed the tax hike, four were in favour and one person abstained- leaving the chair of the meeting to cast the deciding vote which was found to be against.

"There is no doubt that all members want to support the police," said Cllr John Robini, chair of the meeting. "However, we hear time and time again how our community is struggling with finances." Yet, there were not enough votes to veto the proposal and the panel accepted the Commissioner's precept of 4.3 per cent to come into effect.

Epsom and Ewell Times explainer: First vote on principle against the rise by a simple majority of votes cast, including the chair's. Second vote a legal requirement as vetoing the proposed increase requires a two-thirds majority under the rules and that special majority was not achieved.

"I've got people in my ward who can't afford to pay their bills and feed their kids," Cllr Richard Wilson said. "This squeeze above inflation is going to take more of their pay...and make it more difficult to support their families."

Raising the council tax above inflation levels (currently around 2.5 per cent), councillors questioned whether this was an acceptable strain on residents. Kelvin Menon, Chief Financial Officer for the PCC, said: "We have a lot of historic inflation we have to cope with and cover."

The PCC's report details recruiting officers can be a challenge with high living costs in Surrey, contributing to over 11 per cent of posts vacant. Increased use of technology by criminals has also led to a growing demand for technological forensic services, with almost all crimes having a digital element to them, according to the report.