

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE POLICE, FIRE AND CRIME PANEL
REPORT TO THE POLICE, FIRE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER
FOR NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

7 FEBRUARY 2025

Report Title	Review of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire’s proposed Fire precept for 2025/26
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1. Purpose of Report

1.1 The report is intended to set out the results of the review by the Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire’s proposed Fire precept for 2025/26.

2. Executive Summary

2.1 The Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire is required to notify the Police, Fire and Crime Panel of the Fire precept that she proposes to issue for the next financial year. The Panel must review the proposed precept and make a report on it. The Commissioner must have regard to this report and respond to any specific conclusions or recommendations from the Panel before issuing the final Fire precept.

3. Recommendations

3.1 It is recommended that the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire:

- a) Has regard to this report by the Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel arising from its review of the proposed Fire precept for 2025/26 in accordance with the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 Schedule 5 Paragraph 5(2)(a).
- b) Gives the Panel a response to this report in accordance with the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 Schedule 5 Paragraph 5(2)(b).

4. Reasons for Recommendations

- 4.1 The recommendations are required to complete the Panel's review of the proposed Fire precept for 2025/26 produced by the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, in accordance with the Panel's statutory responsibilities.

5. Report Background

- 5.1 A fire and rescue authority is a major precepting authority under the Local Government Finance Act 1992. The Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner is the fire and rescue authority for the county under the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire (Fire and Rescue Authority) Order 2018. A Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner may not issue a precept under Section 40 of the 1992 Act until it has been subject to scrutiny by the relevant Police, Fire and Crime Panel according to the process specified in Schedule 5 of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011, as amended by the Policing and Crime Act 2017.
- 5.2 Schedule 5 of the 2011 Act, supporting Regulations, and the Rules of Procedure for the Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel require:
- a) The Commissioner to notify the Panel of the Commissioner's proposed precept by 1 February of the relevant financial year
 - b) The Panel to review the proposed precept
 - c) The Panel to resolve to:
 - i) Support the proposed precept without additional qualification or comment; or
 - ii) Support the proposed precept and make additional recommendations on it; or
 - iii) Veto the proposed precept provided that the Panel makes that decision by the required majority, which is that at least two thirds of the persons who are members of the Panel at the time when the decision is made vote for it.
 - d) The Panel to make a report to the Commissioner on the proposed precept, setting out the results of its review, by 8 February of the relevant financial year. If the Panel votes to veto the proposed precept the report must state that the Panel has done so and set out its reasons for doing so.
- 5.3 If the Panel does not veto the proposed precept the Commissioner must:
- a) Have regard to the report made by the Panel
 - b) Give the Panel a response to its report and to any recommendations in the report
 - c) Publish the response in a manner determined by the Panel.
- 5.4 The scrutiny process concludes at this point. The Commissioner may then issue the proposed precept as the precept for the next financial year or issue a different precept but only if it would be in accordance with a recommendation made in the Panel's report.
- 5.5 If the Panel vetoes the proposed precept the Commissioner is required to produce a revised precept, which must be subject to further scrutiny by the Panel.

6. Review of the proposed Police Precept

- 6.1 The Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel met in public on 5 February 2025 to review the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire's proposed Fire precept for 2025/26. The report presented by the Commissioner to the Panel is available to view at the following link: [Fire Precept 2025-26](#). The meeting was webcast live and the recording is available to view at the following link: [West Northamptonshire Council - YouTube](#).
- 6.2 The Commissioner presented the proposed precept and budget, which were based on an increase in the precept of £5 per year for Band D Council Tax to £80.39. The Commissioner noted that there were only five Police, Fire and Crime commissioners nationally and since being elected she had appreciated the value of this model. It opened up opportunities for efficiencies such as by establishing shared enabling services for Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) and Northamptonshire Police. NFRS reserves had been rebuilt. Work was also continuing to develop a new estates strategy and a planning application for a major new fire station in Moulton was about to be submitted. The Commissioner felt that experience in Northamptonshire demonstrated the benefits of the Police, Fire and Crime commissioner concept. Her proposed precept for 2025/26 represented a modest increase and was the maximum permitted without a local referendum. Members of the public understood the value of having a well-equipped, high performing fire and rescue service. There was always scope for improvement and the Commissioner wanted NFRS to improve response times. However, the amount of fire protection and prevention activity that NFRS carried out had significantly reduced the number of serious fires in the county and people were much safer as a result. Future plans needed to enable NFRS to respond effectively to new demands such as dealing with wildfires and flooding resulting from climate change.
- 6.3 The Commissioner's Chief Finance Officer further advised that the OPFCC had now received final business rate figures from the two local authorities, which were slightly better than the estimates included in the proposed budget but did not have a material impact. The £5 increase in the precept proposed would still leave Northamptonshire as one of the lowest precepting fire and rescue authorities in the country.
- 6.4 The Panel reviewed the proposed precept, the resources it would provide and how these related to the priorities and demands facing NFRS.
- 6.5 A Panel member agreed with the proposed increase in the precept given the overall financial context faced in 2025/26. It was highlighted that the Commissioner's proposed budget needed to deal with shortfalls or reductions in government funding in a range of areas: National Insurance contributions reimbursement, pension grant; funding floor grant; and services grant. Northamptonshire already had the lowest core spending power of all standalone fire and rescue authorities and these further pressures risked creating an untenable position. It was felt that the Panel would back the Commissioner in making representations to the government on this matter as fairer funding had been sought for years. NFRS did an excellent job with the resources available to it but it was vital to ensure that Northamptonshire residents were as safe as possible. The Commissioner agreed with the concerns raised and noted that the final local government

settlement had been disappointing. She had raised this with the government and would continue to make representations at national level about the need for fairer funding for Northamptonshire, particularly given years of disinvestment in NFRS under Northamptonshire County Council due to competing priorities. The government should also recognise that demands on fire and rescue services were changing. The Panel was further informed that the Chief Fire Officer was involved in representations to the government through the National Fire Chiefs Council. Some other fire and rescue authorities had been even worse affected by the latest settlement than Northamptonshire.

- 6.6 Panel members recognised the increasing impact of issues resulting from climate change. The impact of flooding had been clearly demonstrated locally by the floods on 24 November 2024. NFRS needed to be able to provide a robust response, including having the resources to deploy to several locations at once. Reassurance was sought that services would be able to change to meet changes in demand. The Commissioner advised that NFRS was carrying out a major review of emergency cover using a risk-based approach, which would shape the future. Further information on this could be shared with the Panel.
- 6.7 A Panel member emphasised the need for NFRS to be able to operate safely, which had been put at risk in the past by funding reductions under Northamptonshire County Council. The reassurance given by the Commissioner about NFRS's current effectiveness was very welcome and justified the proposed increase in the precept. Another Panel member noted that NFRS had been in the position of operating safely for several years. The Commissioner highlighted that the last HMICFRS inspection of NFRS had produced the best report for some time and had confirmed that Northamptonshire residents were safe. The Commissioner subsequently advised that NFRS currently had 250 full time and 250 retained firefighters. Firefighters received continuous training and the proposed budget included a significant increase in the training budget. A Panel member commented that the daily work carried out NFRS gave reassurance that its personnel were well-trained.
- 6.8 A Panel member questioned whether there was scope for NFRS to generate income from delivering training on the Cobra system as it had done in the past. The Commissioner responded that different income generation streams were being considered as a means of increasing available resources.
- 6.9 A Panel member highlighted that NFRS could potentially seek funding from the Integrated Care Board for carrying out wellbeing and safety checks on residents as part of the place-based service model. The Panel was advised that this would be considered.
- 6.10 A Panel member sought reassurance about the ability to manage the financial impact of responding to a massive emergency incident in Northamptonshire. Reserves represented 2 per cent of the total budget and the Commissioner would need to find the equivalent of another one per cent before being able to apply to the government for additional funding. However, if these resources needed to be used on the response to a major incident they would not be available for other purposes. The Panel was advised that there were various options for meeting the cost of a major incident. There were contingency funds managed by the Chief Fire Officer and

a small separate contingency. The fire reserves also included a £2m general fund for these purposes, which represented approximately 6 per cent of the total budget. If there was a major incident and this had to be used it would only be necessary to find the equivalent of one per cent of the total budget before the Commissioner could apply for additional government funding. There was considered to be enough scope within reserves to deal with a major incident. If resources from the general fund were used the Medium Term Financial Plan would have to make provision to restore them, as the Reserves Strategy set a minimum level of £2m.

- 6.11 A Panel member questioned the risk to the MTFP that could arise if Council Tax collection rates were not at the level anticipated. The Panel was advised that the OPFCC relied on the estimates provided by the two local authorities. Based on these, a modest surplus on the Council Tax collection fund was built into the MTFP and this usually proved correct. This had not been the case during the COVID-19 pandemic when Council Tax collection rates had been significantly reduced. However, the government had provided additional funding to mitigate the impact of this on police and fire budgets. Overall, it was considered that the MTFP took a very prudent approach on Council Tax collection rates.
- 6.12 Panel members raised and commented on other matters connected with the proposed precept and budget during the course of discussion. It was highlighted that the Panel had seen the benefits produced by shared enabling services over several years and it was positive that the Commissioner had reached the same conclusion. The development of the new fire station in Moulton was noted and the Commissioner was encouraged to ensure sufficient provision in the north of the county. Panel members were generally supportive of the proposed precept and it was commented that the proposed budget was clear and understandable.

7. Outcomes of the Review

- 7.1 At the conclusion of discussion the Panel resolved:

To support the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire's proposed Fire precept for 2025/26.

8. Background Papers

Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011

Policing and Crime Act 2017

The Police and Crime Panels (Precepts and Chief Constable Appointments) Regulations 2012

Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel Rules of Procedure