

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE POLICE, FIRE AND CRIME PANEL

REPORT TO THE POLICE, FIRE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER

FOR NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

6 FEBRUARY 2026

Report Title	Review of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire's proposed Fire precept for 2026/27
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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 2026/27.

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 2026/27 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 2026/27 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 Fire Precept

6.1 The Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel met in public on 4 February 2026 to review the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire's proposed Fire precept for 2026/27. The report presented by the Commissioner to the Panel is available to view at the following link: [Fire Precept 2026/27](#). The meeting was webcast live and the recording is available to view at the following link: [West Northamptonshire Council - YouTube](#).

6.2 The Commissioner introduced the proposed precept and referred to the challenges involved in developing it due to the late date when details of the funding settlement were received from the government. The final position was still not confirmed. She thanked her Finance and Communications teams for their work. It was important that Northamptonshire residents understood the opportunity to comment on the proposed precept and that she was informed about residents' priorities. She highlighted in this regard that responses to public consultation on the proposed precept had increased by 26.7 per cent compared to the previous year. The Commissioner went on to emphasise that the proposed precept reflected the effect of significant disinvestment in policing and fire and rescue during the austerity period. Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) had been further affected by Northamptonshire County Council decisions to freeze Council Tax, which had a cumulative impact on the base budget and left Northamptonshire with the lowest fire and rescue precept in the country. She had written to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) seeking additional flexibility to raise the fire and rescue precept for 2026/27 by more than £5 without a local referendum as she believed that the demands on NFRS would not be manageable within this limit. MHCLG had indicated that an increase of up to £10 may be permitted but this still needed to be agreed by the Treasury. She was the only fire and rescue authority in the country to have requested this precept flexibility. The fact that she had done so reflected the serious position facing Northamptonshire.

6.3 The Commissioner's Chief Finance Officer further advised that the Commissioner proposed to increase the precept by the maximum allowable without a local referendum by up to £12 per year for Band D Council Tax, which would be to £92.39. The Commissioner was the only fire and rescue authority seeking additional flexibility to raise the precept above £5, although up to 10 police and crime commissioners were doing so in relation to the police precept. Northamptonshire faced a clear need for additional resources. If all fire and rescue authorities increased their precepts by £5, Northamptonshire would have the second lowest precept in England and the lowest core spending power per resident by some degree. A £12 increase would still leave it with the seventh lowest precept, well below the national average, and with amongst the lowest core spending power. Northamptonshire had benefitted from the outcome of the Fair Funding Review but this did not make a significant difference to the overall financial position as grant funding made up a relatively small proportion of resources: over 60 per cent of total funding came from the local precept. The Commissioner had been advised that flexibility to increase the precept by up to £10 may be granted but no further confirmation of this had been received. The government should set out its decision in the final local government settlement to be issued in the following week.

6.4 The Panel reviewed the case for the proposed precept.

6.5 A Panel member questioned whether receipt of final funding information from the government could potentially enable the Commissioner to consider a lower increase. The Panel was advised that the Commissioner was subject to a legal deadline to set the precept and communicate this to the two local authorities. The minimum that the Commissioner would seek was a £5 increase, but this was not sufficient for NFRS to maintain current services. A £12 increase would give it a reasonable chance of doing so. NFRS had already done a large amount of work to make efficiency savings and become as lean as possible without affecting frontline services. The small size of the organisation meant there was a limit on what could be achieved. The amount of flexibility to increase the precept available to the Commissioner would not change the need to make savings, just the level of savings required. The Commissioner emphasised the seriousness of the current position. NFRS faced increasing risks from issues such as flooding and wildfires, both in Northamptonshire and as part of its national role for supporting services in other areas. If it was not possible to increase the precept by £10 it could require significant reductions in NFRS, which would affect communities in Northamptonshire and have a wider impact.

6.6 A Panel member sought confirmation of the balance between wholetime and retained firefighters in the total number of NFRS firefighters. The Panel was advised that NFRS had just over 250 wholetime firefighters and an establishment of approximately 180 retained firefighters, although not all of the retained posts may be filled at that point. Firefighter numbers and duty types were considered as part of the strategic review of needs in the county.

6.7 Panel members gave views on the case for the proposed precept during the course of discussion. It was felt that the financial position for fire and rescue in Northamptonshire was more concerning than for policing. NFRS was in a precarious position and the Medium Term Financial Plan set out the need for further savings over the next five years even if the precept could be raised to £12 in 2026/27. NFRS had previously been under-funded for years and an increase in the resources available to it should be supported. It was challenged in this regard that the fire and rescue authority reserves forecast that no funding would be received from Section 106 developer contributions. This did not seem reasonable in light of the amount of development in Northamptonshire.

7. Outcomes of the Review

7.1 At the conclusion of discussion the Panel resolved unanimously:

To endorse the proposal by the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire to increase the 2026/27 Fire Precept by the maximum amount allowable without requiring a local referendum by up to £12 per year for Band D Council Tax.

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