

# Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel

**A meeting of the Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel will be held at Meeting Room G01, One Angel Square, Angel Street, Northampton NN1 1ED on Wednesday 4 February 2026 at 12.30 pm**

## Agenda

<b>1.</b>	<b>Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitute Members</b>
<b>2.</b>	<b>Notification of requests from members of the public to address the meeting</b> Any requests to speak on an item on the agenda should be notified to the Chair (c/o the Committee Manager) by 12 noon two working days before the date of the meeting.
<b>3.</b>	<b>Declarations of Interest</b> Members are asked to declare any interest and the nature of that interest which they may have in any of the items under consideration at this meeting.
<b>4.</b>	<b>Chair's Announcements</b> To receive communications from the Chair.
<b>5.</b>	<b>Minutes</b> To confirm the minutes of previous Panel meetings.
<b>a)</b>	<b>Minutes of the Panel meeting held in public on 27 November 2025</b> (Pages 5 - 12)
<b>b)</b>	<b>Minutes of the Panel meeting held in public on 4 December 2025</b> (Pages 13 - 28)
<b>SCRUTINY OF THE POLICE, FIRE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER</b>	
<b>6.</b>	<b>Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's proposed Police Precept for 2026/27</b> Guide time: 12.45 – 1.30 pm
<b>a)</b>	<b>Police, Fire and Crime Panel statutory responsibilities</b> (Pages 29 - 32)
<b>b)</b>	<b>Proposed Police Precept for 2026/27</b> (Pages 33 - 86)

7.	<b>Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's proposed Fire Precept for 2026/27</b> Guide time: 1.30 – 2.15 pm
a)	<b>Police, Fire and Crime Panel statutory responsibilities</b> (Pages 87 - 90)
b)	<b>Proposed Fire Precept for 2026/27</b> (Pages 91 - 138)
<b>PANEL OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT</b>	
8.	<b>Police, Fire and Crime Panel Work Programme</b> (Pages 139 - 150) Guide time: 2.15 – 2.30 pm
9.	<b>Police, Fire and Crime Panel meeting dates 2026/27</b> (Pages 151 - 154) Guide time: 2.30 – 2.45 pm
10.	<b>Urgent Business</b> The Chair to advise whether they have agreed to any items of urgent business being admitted to the agenda.
11.	<b>Exclusion of Press and Public</b> In respect of the following items the Chair may move the resolution set out below, on the grounds that if the public were present it would be likely that exempt information (information regarded as private for the purposes of the Local Government Act 1972) would be disclosed to them: The Panel is requested to resolve: "That under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item(s) of business on the grounds that if the public were present it would be likely that exempt information under Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act of the descriptions against each item would be disclosed to them."

Sarah Hall  
Proper Officer  
27 January 2026

## **Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel Members:**

Councillor Mark Arnall (Chair)	Dr Carolyn Kus (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Richard Butler	Councillor Sally Keeble
Councillor Daniel Lister	Councillor Craig Morris
Councillor Emily Fedorowycz	Councillor Barbara Jenney
Councillor Chris Kellett	Councillor Eddie McDonald
Councillor Andy Sims	Mr Andrew Frost
Miss Pauline Woodhouse	

## **Information about this Agenda**

### **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence and the appointment of substitute Members should be notified to [democraticservices@westnorthants.gov.uk](mailto:democraticservices@westnorthants.gov.uk) prior to the start of the meeting.

### **Declarations of Interest**

Members are asked to declare interests at item 3 on the agenda or if arriving after the start of the meeting, at the start of the relevant agenda item

### **Local Government and Finance Act 1992 – Budget Setting, Contracts & Supplementary Estimates**

Members are reminded that any member who is two months in arrears with Council Tax must declare that fact and may speak but not vote on any decision which involves budget setting, extending or agreeing contracts or incurring expenditure not provided for in the agreed budget for a given year and could affect calculations on the level of Council Tax.

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If you have any queries about this agenda please contact James Edmunds / Diana Davies, Democratic Services via the following:

Tel: 07500 605276

Email: [democraticservices@westnorthants.gov.uk](mailto:democraticservices@westnorthants.gov.uk)

Or by writing to:

West Northamptonshire Council  
One Angel Square  
Angel Street  
Northampton  
NN1 1ED

## **Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel**

Minutes of a meeting of the Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel held at Meeting Room G01, One Angel Square, Angel Street, Northampton NN1 1ED on Thursday 27 November 2025 at 10.00 am.

### **Present:**

Councillor Mark Arnall (Chair)  
Dr Carolyn Kus (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor Richard Butler  
Councillor Sally Keeble  
Councillor Daniel Lister  
Councillor Craig Morris  
Councillor Barbara Jenney  
Councillor Chris Kellett  
Miss Pauline Woodhouse

### **Substitute Members:**

Councillor Graham Cheatley  
Councillor Vinnie Whitrow  
Councillor James Towns

### **Also Present:**

Danielle Stone, Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner  
Jonny Bugg, Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer, Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner  
Vaughan Ashcroft, Chief Finance and Section 151 Officer, Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner  
Deborah Denton, Joint Head of Communications, Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner  
Councillor James Petter, West Northamptonshire Council  
Councillor Christine Ware, West Northamptonshire Council  
Sam Dobbs, Chair, Northamptonshire Police Federation  
Julia Rickards, Head of Legal (People), West Northamptonshire Council  
James Edmunds, Democratic Services Assistant Manager, West Northamptonshire Council  
Diana Davies, Democratic Services Officer, West Northamptonshire Council

There were also six members of the public in attendance.

The Chair opened the extraordinary meeting of the Panel, noting that it had been called in light of the recent case in the Court of Appeal involving the Chief Constable of Northamptonshire Police. The meeting had been requested by Panel members and had the support of the Chair and Vice Chair.

**345. Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitute Members**

Apologies for non-attendance were received from Councillors Eddie McDonald, Andy Sims and Emily Fedorowycz, with Councillors Graham Cheatley, Vinnie Whitrow and James Towns substituting respectively, and from Mr Andy Frost.

Apologies for non-attendance were also received from the Director of Governance and Monitoring Officer of West Northamptonshire Council.

**346. Notification of requests from members of the public to address the meeting**

None received.

**347. Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Cheatley declared that he had worked with Mr Ivan Balhatchet, the Chief Constable of Northamptonshire Police, around 30 years ago.

Councillor Morris declared that he had served as a police officer alongside Mr Balhatchet many years before but had no current connection with him.

**348. Chair's Announcements**

The Chair thanked Panel members for their attendance at the extraordinary meeting.

At the Chair's invitation the Head of Legal (People) provided background information on the matter before the Panel, making the following points:

- The matter related to the arrest of Ms Nadine Buzzard-Quashie by Northamptonshire Police in September 2021. Following that arrest Ms Buzzard-Quashie made a complaint to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). The ICO made an order that all police body-worn video footage should be handed over to her. Northamptonshire Police failed to comply with that order.
- A county court judge subsequently made an order that all police body-worn video footage should be handed over. Northamptonshire Police also failed to comply with that order.
- Ms Buzzard-Quashie had therefore brought contempt proceedings against the Chief Constable. That application was defended by the Chief Constable, who stated that the force had supplied all police body-worn video footage that it still retained. Judgement confirmed that the force had not complied with the order but the judge declined to hold the Chief Constable in contempt as the judge could not be sure that that the force had not supplied all of the footage.
- Ms Buzzard-Quashie appealed that judgement. The Chief Constable then conducted a data audit, which revealed the existence of further footage that ought to have been disclosed in accordance with the county court order. Consequently, the day before the appeal hearing the Chief Constable conceded the appeal.
- Mr Balhatchet was appointed as Chief Constable of Northamptonshire Police in February 2025, having held the role of Acting Chief Constable since October 2023.

**349. Response by the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner to Court of Appeal judgement**

The Chair reiterated that the extraordinary meeting had been called following a request from four Panel members in accordance with the Panel's Rules of Procedure.

The Chair then invited the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) to comment on actions she had taken in response to the Court of Appeal judgement in the case of Buzzard-Quashie versus the Chief Constable of Northamptonshire Police. The Chair thanked the PFCC for her attendance at the extraordinary meeting.

The PFCC made the following opening points:

- She thanked the Panel for arranging an additional meeting on this matter, which was better dealt with separately than at the scheduled Panel meeting on 4 December.
- She had great respect for Ms Buzzard-Quashie, who had shown significant resolve and integrity in pursuing her case. It was unacceptable that it had taken four years to get to the current position.
- The Chief Constable had taken responsibility for failings within Northamptonshire Police in relation to this case. He had not been aware of the situation until 22 October, which raised significant questions. The Chief Constable had then notified the Office of the PFCC (OPFCC) about the matter on 3 November, which was the date when he had been required to respond to the Court of Appeal.
- She had been briefed on the matter by the OPFCC Monitoring Officer on 4 and 5 November and had decided to make a voluntary referral to the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) on 6 November.
- She had formally considered suspending the Chief Constable at this point but had decided not to do so.
- The OPFCC Monitoring Officer had advised the Chair of the Panel, the host authority Monitoring Officer and HMICFRS about the situation at this point.
- The IOPC informed the PFCC on 12 November that it did not intend to carry out an investigation as it considered the civil contempt of court finding by the Court of Appeal related to the Chief Constable as a corporation sole not as an individual. However, the PFCC was advised to keep the matter under review as legal matters progressed.
- The £50,000 fine against Northamptonshire Police set by the Court of Appeal recognised that the Chief Constable was only aware of the matter at a late stage and had not been sanctioned as an individual. She considered that this validated the decision taken not to suspend the Chief Constable.
- She had made a further voluntary referral to the IOPC on 25 November for completeness, to demonstrate transparency and to provide independent oversight.
- The Chief Constable had taken a range of action to address issues relating to this case. A gold group had been set up to oversee the response to it. A peer review by another force had been commissioned. The retention time for all body-worn video footage had been extended and an audit of other cases involving such footage had been commissioned. The force had made a voluntary referral of officers and staff members to the IOPC.

- As PFCC she felt the need for additional independent assurance beyond the actions taken by the Chief Constable. She therefore intended to commission an independent review, which would be led by the Deputy PFCC. She wanted to set out the scope and terms of reference for the review before Christmas and for the review to report back as soon as possible in 2026, subject to taking into account the results of the work commissioned by the Chief Constable. She would provide reports to the Panel on these two stages before and after Christmas respectively.
- The independent review would look at how this matter had occurred and the remedial action now being taken by the Chief Constable with the aim of giving assurance that no such situation could occur again.

The Panel considered the comments by the PFCC and Panel members made the following points during the course of discussion:

- The information that the PFCC had provided was helpful.
- It was questioned how the PFCC would seek to rebuild public trust in policing following this matter, to mitigate the potential effect of it on police recruitment and to move Northamptonshire Police forward as an organisation that served all groups in the local community.
- Reassurance was sought that the review proposed by the PFCC would be sufficiently independent. It was questioned whether the Panel could be involved in developing the scope and terms of reference, which would help to support public trust and confidence in the openness of the review.
- The matter would have a significant impact on the reputation of Northamptonshire Police in addition to the cost of the fine imposed.
- The PFCC was challenged whether it would be more appropriate for her personally to lead the independent review.
- It was a challenging situation to have a chief constable who had been found in contempt of court. The criminal justice system would be undermined if members of the public were not confident that the police respected the courts.
- It had been reported in the media that the Chief Constable had missed the deadline for submitting to court a personal witness statement. This was very surprising in the circumstances and should be considered by the independent review.
- It was concerning that the Chief Constable had apparently not been aware of this case until a late stage. It was very surprising to hear that he was never informed of it over an extended period of time. When a new strategic leader took up their post they would normally ask to be informed about key issues and risks for their organisation. Strategic leaders did not want to be in the position of being surprised by significant issues.
- The actions now being taken by the PFCC seemed a correct and robust response.
- A Panel member's own experience in policing was that when a significant problem occurred it was widely known about and discussed within a force and rare for a chief constable not to know anything about it.
- A peer review by another force should be led by an individual who had no professional connections with the Chief Constable.
- This case involved actions that had amounted to contempt of court not just administrative errors. It raised serious questions about the operation and culture

of Northamptonshire Police. The matter should be subject to a systemic and genuinely independent review to rebuild trust in policing.

- It was questioned whether there had been an audit of high-risk litigation concerning Northamptonshire Police when Mr Balhatchet had become Acting Chief Constable, or when the PFCC had taken office. It was questioned whether the PFCC had received a handover briefing about any high-risk litigation.
- A Panel member commented that they had previously heard about the case that had led to the current matter, which made it more difficult to believe that the Chief Constable had been unaware of it.
- A senior leader should take responsibility if problems arose with their organisation.
- Mr Balhatchet had served with Northamptonshire Police throughout his career, which made it harder to believe he had only learnt of this matter at a late stage.
- A gold group might include senior officers who had previously been involved in Ms Buzzard-Quashie's case. A review by another police force would not be seen as transparent or objective by members of the public.
- The £50,000 fine imposed on Northamptonshire Police would be paid from public money. In this situation taxpayers could not reasonably be asked to provide additional funding for policing in the next year.
- If the independent review included an opportunity for members of the public to be involved this would assist in providing reassurance about its effectiveness.
- This case involved information not being shared with the Chief Constable. The scope of the independent review should therefore include looking at the organisational culture of Northamptonshire Police.
- The PFCC was challenged about the level of public trust in the competence and integrity of policing in Northamptonshire. This matter coming to light had coincided with the previous Chief Constable appearing in court on charges of fraud and misconduct in public office. It was not a sufficient response just to tell residents that action would be taken to prevent such issues from occurring again.
- It was questioned whether Mr Balhatchet would now pass police vetting following the Court of Appeal judgement.
- The government had announced the abolition of Police and Crime commissioners in 2028. The PFCC was asked to comment on whether scrutiny of policing in Northamptonshire could improve without this step being taken.

The PFCC made the following points during the course of discussion:

- It was right to highlight the importance of public trust in policing. She was very angry about the effect that this matter would have after the significant amount of work that had been done to engage with communities in the county and build up trust and confidence in policing.
- She would seek to be open with the Panel and with members of the public about the findings from the independent review. The OPFCC was independent from Northamptonshire Police and the review would have an independent person supporting it.
- Leaders of large organisations like a police force worked at a strategic level and could not know the details of every activity. The issue in this case was why the Chief Constable had not been informed earlier about a serious matter that had been ongoing for four years. This was unacceptable, as was not responding to a court order.

- She and the Deputy PFCC remained committed to action on equalities issues. Significant work had been done in areas such as recruitment and this would continue.
- As PFCC she had been up-front about the issues she had found after taking office, including the need to dismiss the previous Chief Constable, the loss of neighbourhood policing and the closure of police stations in the county. She was acting to rectify these issues but it would take time. She had also carried out significant engagement activity with local communities. Mr Balhatchet had played a large part in this work.
- The Deputy PFCC had investigative experience that made her well-qualified to lead the independent review. The PFCC would retain oversight of and accountability for the review.
- The contempt of court finding was a civil not a criminal sanction and not against the Chief Constable as an individual. This was reflected in the decision by the IOPC not to investigate the matter further.
- The timeliness of documents being sent to the court was a significant issue in relation to this case and one of great concern to her. The reasons why documents had arrived late after being submitted to the legal team needed to be understood. It was unacceptable to deal with a court in this way.
- When Mr Balhatchet was appointed as Chief Constable his focus was to understand the culture of policing in Northamptonshire and improve it where necessary. He had taken a bold approach, reflected in his first Policing Plan. He had emphasised to leadership teams at all levels of the force the principles of ethical policing, openness, honesty and owning mistakes. Despite this, he had still never been informed of Ms Buzzard-Quashie's case, which was unacceptable.
- Ms Buzzard-Quashie's case should have been resolved in 2021. The need now was to understand why this had not happened. The PFCC aimed to provide answers to the public on this in the New Year.
- She spoke regularly with Northamptonshire Police teams, the Police Federation and the superintendents' organisation. This provided many opportunities in which officers might have raised Ms Buzzard-Quashie's case with her but it never had been. She believed the Chief Constable when he said the same applied to him.
- This matter left her feeling furious rather than embarrassed. Trust and confidence in policing was vital, which was why she needed to know what had occurred.
- The OPFCC was independent from Northamptonshire Police. The review she commissioned would look at what had gone wrong in relation to this matter and who had been involved. It was crucial to ensure that after this situation had occurred once it could not happen again.
- Northamptonshire Police would be inspected early in 2026. This inspection would look at how the force operated at different levels and she looked forward to seeing its conclusions.
- Members of the public could take some comfort from the actions already put in place by the Chief Constable to address issues relating to this case. Her decision to commission an independent review reflected the need for an additional level of assurance on a matter as important as this. An independent person would be engaged to support the Deputy PFCC in carrying out the review.
- She was not aware of any previous media coverage of Ms Buzzard-Quashie's case before now.

- Northamptonshire Police had now provided all of the body-worn video footage relating to Ms Buzzard-Quashie's case.
- She would ensure that the independent review considered the question of whether an audit of high-risk litigation concerning Northamptonshire Police had been carried out when Mr Balhatchet had become Acting Chief Constable. She had not been in-post at that time.
- She had not carried out an audit or received a handover briefing on any high-risk litigation after being elected. If the OPFCC had been aware of this specific case she would have expected to be advised of it. The PFCC was not responsible for operational policing matters.
- The Panel member who said they had prior knowledge about the case that led to the matter was invited to speak with the independent review. It would be concerning if they had known about it but not said anything to the PFCC, who could have taken action.
- Mr Balhatchet had not spent his entire career with Northamptonshire Police: he had also served with the Metropolitan Police. He had not been serving with Northamptonshire Police when the case involving Ms Buzzard-Quashie had occurred in 2021.
- The gold group on this matter would be chaired by a senior officer who was newly appointed to Northamptonshire Police.
- The OPFCC gave significant attention to engaging with members of the public and had an ongoing programme of engagement activities. The independent review was intended to be as forensic as possible. She did not anticipate that members of the public would be directly involved in it. However, more general public engagement work by the OPFCC would continue and would inform her ongoing scrutiny of the Chief Constable.
- The independent review would seek to identify if there were any cultural issues at Northamptonshire Police that caused blockages in information-sharing and to address them.
- She had not seen any evidence from the government demonstrating that the Police and Crime commissioner model had failed. There were examples from across England and Wales of it producing excellent work. There should be a proper evaluation of the model's effectiveness. She would be in favour of an alternative approach if it could be shown to work better.

The OPFCC Chief Executive advised during discussion that the sanction by the Court of Appeal was a non-criminal matter and therefore would not have an impact on the legal framework concerning fitness to be a chief constable. However, a vetting review of Mr Balhatchet would be re-run to provide assurance.

Panel members reiterated the request for the Panel to know who would be involved in the independent review and to be able to see and have an input in its scope and terms of reference. The PFCC advised that the scope and terms of reference would be produced in the next few weeks and would be shared with the Panel as soon as they were available. The PFCC emphasised that it would not be appropriate for Panel members to be involved in carrying out the review, given that the Panel's remit was to scrutinise the PFCC. It was clarified that the Panel was not seeking this but to have an input as a critical friend in the scope and terms of reference. The PFCC indicated that she was content with this.

RESOLVED that: the Panel requests to have an opportunity to see and comment on the scope and terms of reference for the Police, Fire and Commissioner's independent review of the circumstances that resulted in the Chief Constable of Northamptonshire Police being found in contempt of court before these are finalised.

**350. Urgent Business**

There was none.

The meeting closed at 11.10 am

Chair: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel**

Minutes of a meeting of the Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel held at Meeting Room G01, One Angel Square, Angel Street, Northampton NN1 1ED on Thursday 4 December 2025 at 12.30 pm.

### **Present:**

Councillor Mark Arnall (Chair)  
Dr Carolyn Kus (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor Richard Butler  
Councillor Sally Keeble  
Councillor Daniel Lister  
Councillor Craig Morris  
Councillor Chris Kellett  
Councillor Eddie McDonald  
Councillor Andy Sims  
Mr Andrew Frost  
Miss Pauline Woodhouse

### **Substitute Members:**

Councillor James Towns

### **Also Present:**

Danielle Stone, Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner  
Jonny Bugg, Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer, Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner  
Vaughan Ashcroft, Chief Finance and Section 151 Officer, Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner  
Paul Bullen, Director of Enabling Services  
Deborah Denton, Joint Head of Communications, Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner  
Nicki Agalamanyi, Head of Legal - Corporate, West Northamptonshire Council  
Sam Dobbs, Chair, Northamptonshire Police Federation  
James Edmunds, Democratic Services Assistant Manager, West Northamptonshire Council  
Diana Davies, Democratic Services Officer, West Northamptonshire Council  
Councillor Farzana Aldridge  
There were also four members of the public in attendance.

### **351. Notification of requests from members of the public to address the meeting**

The Panel was advised that requests to address the meeting on Agenda Item 7, the Delivery of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's (PFCC) Public Safety Plan for Northamptonshire 2025-30 had been received from Mr Simon Tilley and Ms Amy Fuzzard.

**352. Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitute Members**

Apologies for non-attendance were received from Councillor Emily Fedorowycz with Councillor James Towns substituting, Councillor Barbara Jenney, and Sarah Hall, Director of Governance and Monitoring Officer, West Northamptonshire Council with Nicki Agalamanyi, Head of Legal – Corporate substituting.

**353. Declarations of Interest**

None declared.

**354. Chair's Announcements**

The Chair opened the meeting and advised that, subsequent to the extraordinary meeting of the Panel held on 27 November 2025, a verbal response had been received from the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) relating to the judgement pertaining to the Chief Constable and a statement would be read out to provide clarification:

'At the last meeting of the Panel references were made to the Chief Constable being convicted of contempt of court. The court's findings is of a civil and not criminal contempt against the Chief Constable, a corporation sole who is responsible for the acts or remissions of his employees and agents and of those under his direction or control. The finding of a civil contempt of court on the part of the Chief Constable does not amount to a conviction which is a term applied in criminal proceedings.'

The Chair made a second point regarding a request by Ms Nadine Buzzard-Quashie to speak at the current Panel meeting. Ms Buzzard-Quashie had made a request but whilst it was still being considered a further communication was received withdrawing it. Ms Buzzard-Quashie's request had not been refused. Public involvement in Panel meetings was welcomed where possible.

The PFCC was invited to update the Panel on two matters raised at the meeting held on 27 November 2025.

- The number of young people recently surveyed for their views by the OPFCC was 2,431.
- Mr Ivan Balhatchet, the Chief Constable had served with the Metropolitan Police between 2016 and 2022.

**355. Minutes**

RESOLVED that: the minutes of the Police, Fire and Crime Panel meeting held on 18 September 2025 be approved.

**356. Police Governance Reform**

The Democratic Services Assistant Manager advised that this item was intended formally to bring to the Panel's attention the recent government announcement that Police and Crime commissioners and panels would be abolished in 2028. It was open to the Panel to consider the matter as far as it was able to do so at this point.

The PFCC informed the Panel that policing and fire governance in Northamptonshire may require two transitions, one into a local board and the second into a mayoralty. A mayoralty was not planned for Northamptonshire and funding may be missed as a result. The PFCC had advised the Policing Minister that the transition would be costly and time consuming. The PFCC questioned whether the local authorities were working with partners towards a plan for the transition of governance.

The OPFCC Chief Executive informed the Panel that:

- All functions of the Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (OPFCC) would continue and transition into the new arrangements.
- That the function of governance would change with the end of Panels and the PCC roles.
- The savings package from government would be £20m per year nationally. No major staffing cuts were anticipated.
- Both the OPFCC Chief Executive and the PFCC were involved in the national transition work.
- The transition structure may be a 10-project programme of work.
- No discussions had take place relating to funding of the transition.
- Both the OPFCC and the local authorities would be responsible for their transition.
- A White Paper on police reform was projected to arrive in 2026.

Panel members made the following points:

- As a Local Authority, where the PFCC also had responsibility for the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS), there would be an additional transition element to be considered.
- The Panel may wish to consider a topic for the work programme. To carry out a scoping exercise to draw together different elements for consideration and set a timetable.
- Consideration was given to the uncertainty for staff at the OPFCC.
- The projected timing for the government White Paper, which would provide more information. The Home Office original communication had been discussed at the National Association of Police, Fire and Crime Panels Annual General Meeting. The lack of consultation, information and guidance on how to proceed had been met with frustration.

The Chair made the following points from the perspective of Leader of West Northamptonshire Council:

- In respect of devolution and the Mayoralities, the Northamptonshire Councils had advocated the best devolution deal available with Central Bedfordshire, Bedford, Luton and Milton Keynes. In July 2025 a motion was passed at Milton Keynes Council which precluded the Northamptonshire authorities. West Northamptonshire had not made an alternative submission before the deadline.
- The government had indicated that Mayoralty elections would be cancelled which had raised questions about the devolution process.
- It would be necessary to communicate with central government colleagues and to press for the best deal for West Northamptonshire.

- The reorganisation of Councils around the country could involve significant political and financial challenges, with concerns being raised about the 20 deals in 2026.
- Future updates would be communicated to Panel members.

RESOLVED that: the Panel notes the update on proposed reforms to policing governance announced by the government.

357. **Delivery of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's Public Safety Plan for Northamptonshire 2025-30**

The Chair introduced the agenda item and invited Mr Simon Tilly to address the Panel.

Mr Tilly explained the reason for his question and referred to the PFCC's remarks at the Panel meeting held on 27 November 2025 concerning Ms Nadine Buzzard-Quashie's litigation and the Court of Appeal fine and the costs award.

- As the OPFCC was the appropriate authority for police complaints at a pre-litigation Stage he asked the PFCC to outline what internal governance escalation or oversight process existed to ensure that complaints involving similar serious data handling issues or showing a clear trajectory towards litigation would be identified, monitored and acted upon in a timely way. The aim being to prevent such matters escalating and avoiding substantial financial consequences to the public purse that would impact the Public Safety Plan.
- He asked the PFCC to reassure the Panel by confirming whether the OPFCC was aware of any other impending costs, and the projected value for any similar complaints, or information governance handling issues that were on a projected potential trajectory towards litigation, and that may give rise to financial or reputational exposure. What measures were in place for the PFCC to scrutinise the Chief Constable to mitigate such cost exposures?

The PFCC responded that Section 29 of the Police Reform Act 2002 set out that the appropriate authority for the Chief Constable is the local policing body. The Chief Constable was the appropriate authority for all other officers and staff and that the Chief Constable had operational independence.

The OPFCC had a complaints model. The customer service team receives complaints and triage them. If the complaint requires escalation they are handled by the police standards board. The PFCC offered that the OPFCC's customer service team could provide the Panel with a presentation of the complaints handling work and the review process undertaken to identify patterns.

The OPFCC Chief Executive confirmed that in respect of complaints that the PFCC was the appropriate authority for the Chief Constable. In response to the question regarding other legal matters open, that would be outside of the Panel's core statutory role. He added that legal services was in the process of being brought back in-house. This would improve the oversight of legal advice, legal services and the

setting up of mitigation measures. The Panel could receive a report of the Legal Services review work.

The Panel welcomed the opportunity to learn about the complaints process and procedures topic; considered the importance of transparency of information relating to costs incurred in litigation being available for taxpayers, whilst appreciating the complexity in identifying the potential for litigation and projecting the associated costs, and assessing the impact on the tax payer and the sensitivity of such data.

The Director of Enabling Services confirmed that the OPFCC had been planning to move to an in-house legal service, it would improve the oversight of matters and identify themes and that the Head of Legal had commenced work mid-November.

The Chair invited Miss Amy Fuzzard to address the Panel.

Miss Fuzzard advised that she attended the University of Northampton and would address the topic of the PFCC's Public Safety Plan and the safe routes into Northamptonshire. The Panel were advised that:

- The designated safe route linking the community, the university and the town was now neglected and required maintenance, lighting and clear signage.
- There had been 158 reported incidents of violence and sexual offenses in one month of September.
- The students felt fearful, uncomfortable and vulnerable walking into town. The university wide polling highlighted that 51% of students felt to some degree a deep concern for their personal safety.
- There was concern that students would become isolated and lose the connectivity to the local community, culture and the town.
- The Public Safety Plan indicated that prevention was key to building safer communities. Restoring the safe route, improving the lighting and signage with regular maintenance and visibility campaigns would not be costly and would benefit students, the community and the economy. Restoration could be achieved with a partnership arrangement between the university and local leaders.

The PFCC acknowledged that the safer routes had made a positive impact. The OPFCC had previously funded safety measures, but the responsibility lay with the Local Authority and the university. The OPFCC had funding available for people with ideas that would help improve safety in the community. Northamptonshire Women's Charter had been launched, organisations were invited to sign up. The Charter aimed to scope the safety of women and girls. A directory of organisations was available to refer those requiring support to. There were Councillors on the Panel who could assist to put environmental protections in place, the PFCC would work with partners to help improve the situation.

A member of the Panel added that:

- Individual reported incidents were the responsibility for the police to manage, that prevention and community safety issues would be within the remit of the Local Authority.
- The Walking Strategy required safe routes.
- Improvements to the lighting, pavements, environmental damage could be addressed so the area would feel safer.

- A walk through could be arranged with a number of Councillors who would then identify issues, enabling solutions for improving the safety to ensure enjoyment of the town.

The Chair invited Councillor Farzana Aldridge to address the Panel.

Council Aldridge informed the Panel that she had experienced a study tour. The local residents and community members had valued the approach focused on prevention, which engaged with communities to identify hotspots and included the communities to find solutions. She asked whether the PFCC and the OPFCC would ensure that the study tours continued to be maintained and extended. The tours had resulted in all the areas requiring action being identified and action being taken quicker.

The PFCC acknowledged the positive feedback. Study tours had been an innovation of the OPFCC, the aim was to improve the safety of localities, these were prioritised using information on reported issues. The next study tour would be in Wellingborough; and the PFCC expressed an interest in working with partners, indicating there were points in the Action Plan for the Local Authority.

The PFCC then introduced the report and highlighted the following points:

- The Public Safety Plan, its 3 missions and 4 tests.
- The Northamptonshire Women's Charter conference would take place on 10 December 2025. Its aims were to improve the understanding of the drivers for the violence and to identify resolutions.
- 20% of all crimes across the county were violent crimes against women and girls, and a key mission target was for intervention and prevention, and safer communities.
- The need for visible and accessible community services.
- The Safer Streets, summer initiative, had focused on reducing shoplifting and enhancing public safety in the town centres.
- The OPFCC's team had developed bystander training products for train and taxi drivers. These had been taken up nationally by the College of Policing.
- Safer Nights Out (SNO) vehicles remain a key part of action to keep people safe in the nighttime economy.
- An unprecedent number of cases had been referred through Voice for Victims and Witnesses, they were currently holding 500 cases. Work continued in partnership with the Sunflower Centre to put in place support.
- The survey of young people's experiences with the police indicated a high level of confidence in the police's ability, but low levels of trust in the police approach towards young people.
- The OPFCC had been looking at the needs of the children whose parents were in prison, they currently had 27 cases.
- The Immediate Justice Scheme was doing amazing work out in the localities.

The Panel considered the report.

During the course of the discussion the Panel considered:

- Residents in East Northampton had reported that they had not been engaged in the Big Conversation. With the conversations driving public funding and positive change they would welcome the opportunity to participate.
- What aims the Big Conversation would focus on, whether providing public safety and confidence and assurance that the money had been spent effectively was included. They had encountered a wide demographic of people through these events and through focus groups and roundtables.
- The Deputy PFCC was attending various women's groups across the county and receiving a good level of feedback.
- The method of communicating to residents that meetings with the PFCC were taking place.
- The Sarah Everard Plan, the recent reporting highlighting that many police forces have overlooked the plan.
- The reports indicated an ongoing challenge around sexual crimes and violence against women and domestic violence.
- Providing consistency across the team for recording of crimes was challenging. As was ensuring all elements of the crime were recorded when there was more than one crime type.
- Reported crimes that remained unsolved was an indicator of the requirement for additional resources/funding.
- Victims needed to be assured that when a crime was reported it was recorded and a crime number issued.
- The improved reporting should result in, additional prosecutions and actions, which would act as a deterrent to perpetrators, however the current report did not evidence this.
- The Women's Charter and covenant would be shared at Kettering Town Council.
- Reassurance was sought that the safer plan would include, specific issues affecting black minority and migrant women and issues around the language used.
- Whether the PFCC could provide evidence that the work being carried out was achieving the aim of making the public feel safe.
- How the progress and success of the Public Safety Plan would be measured. The Home Office announcement had reduced the term of office, whether the Plan would be adapted to account for the shorter term.
- Clarification was sought regarding the PFCC figure of 20% of crimes were in the violent category and were predominantly female victims.
- Whether studies had been carried out to identify where the biggest concerns were and in which communities' violence and sexual offenses were taking place.
- Vulnerable adults and people with learning disabilities were targets and the crime was increasing across the United Kingdom.
- The Public Safety Plan's statistical data showed a slight decrease in confidence in policing which was also below the national average.
- The information provided regarding an increase in offence and the data recorded for detection and crimes solved relating retail crime was not evidenced. The positive outcomes for Northamptonshire appeared to be below the national average.

In response to questions from Panel members the PFCC added:

- The Big Conversation had included East Northampton. A public meeting had taken place at Standens Barn, it was well attended by families. Discussion topics included safety around school, in the streets and in the home. The OPFCC team had distributed helpful devices and tools. If invited, a further visit could be organised. PCSOs were active in East Northampton and there was a police presence. These events were a good opportunity to engage with people to ask about their experiences of policing and their expectations.
- The OPFCC sent out leaflets inviting people to attend Big Conversation events. Some local groups invited the PFCC to address them. In this case the group would publicise the event.
- The Public Safety Plan was a five-year plan based on the Big Conversation. Public engagement that was currently underway related to the budget and the precept setting. Soundings were taken from the public using different mechanisms. The Women's Charter would provide an opportunity to survey women in the workplace. They were taking the opportunities to hold conversations in a variety of different places, with as many different people.
- On release of the report regarding the Sarah Everard Plan – the PFCC had invited representatives of the Angiolini Inquiry team into Northamptonshire to speak. She considered that Northamptonshire was leading others in its response on this matter.
- It is known that only 15% of serious violence instances were reported to the police. It was anticipated that, when trust and confidence in policing rises, the reporting figures would increase.
- Improving awareness, support and safety mechanisms would lead women to feel safe and confident to report domestic abuse, including in the workplace.
- Closure of a Sure Start centre affected the confidence to report.
- Confidential reporting was key.
- Progress should be seen through the criminal Justice System, (CJS), The government was taking steps to improve the CJS. Other partners also need to be aware of what they can do to support victims.
- Swifter justice was required, it not within the purview of the PFCC to effect that change.
- The PFCC was the joint national lead on the CJS for the Commissioners and was in regular contact with the Home Office
- Not all victims want to have a court and criminal justice resolution. The OPFCC work with multi-agencies to support victims. Sometimes that would be in respect of housing or relocation.
- The public wanted to report a crime and for the police to listen with civility and to be kept apprised of how actions were progressing.
- The Women's Charter conference presenters would include Southall Black Sisters and Sistah Space. They represent and advocate for women from black and minoritised communities.
- Consideration was being given to whether adequate work was carried out with regards to victim blaming language in reporting. Where victim blaming language was seen it was removed.
- Public feeling was gauged during walkabouts, roundtable events, problem-solving meetings. Engagement had taken place with retailers, which had

resulted in implementing measures to support them and had seen a reduction in retail crime, resulting in happier people.

- Whist the Public Safety Plan could be adapted to reflect the reduction in the PFCC's term of office it would require further public consultation. Assuring that the operation plans of the Chief Constable and the Chief Fire Officer and the PFCC's strategic plans were aligned was the priority.
- The PFCC would provide clarification regarding the figure of 20% of crimes that were in the violent category and were predominantly female victims.
- Nationally violence and sexual violence impacting women and girls affected every demographic. The OPFCC took an approach which was about systemic change. It was important to understand collectively what systemic change looked like to enable everyone to work together to effect change.
- Some simple measures could be implemented to foster the feeling of being safe, improving lighting and cutting bushes. Carrying out prevention, intervention and enforcement. Some changes required collaboration.
- A vulnerable people's strategic group looks at issues relating to cuckooing, targeting of vulnerable adults. The government recognised the issues and they were on the agenda of the Adult Safeguarding Board.
- Effective comparison data relied on the standardising of monitoring and recording across all parties in the comparison group and inclusion of forces of a similar size and demographic. The data teams were working to better understand the national picture for collating data to improve comparison data.

In response to questions from the Panel the OPFCC Chief Executive added that:

- In respect of the report regarding the Sarah Everard Plan, Northamptonshire were not included in the list of services who were failing to achieve the required standard. The Angiolini team had visited Darby House on various occasions.
- The report of the delivery of the PFCCs Public Safety Plan would provide a progress report. The annual report would provide a fuller assessment of the performance against the metrics.

In summing up the discussions, the Panel identified topics to be included in the future work programme.

**RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Panel requests that the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner provides a report to the Panel on the outcomes of the conference on violence against women and girls on 10 December 2025.
- b) The Panel identifies the following matters as potential topics for future scrutiny:
  - Protection of vulnerable adults from crime and community safety risks
  - The role of citizens in community safety
  - The OPFCC complaints and customer service functions
- c) The Panel requests that the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner provides further information on the breakdown of victims of violent crime in Northamptonshire.

### 358. Operation of Enabling Services

The PFCC introduced the Director of Enabling Service and expressed pride in the team and the delivery of services. The PFCC referred to the requirement for fairer funding for policing and the challenge for the finance and enabling services to manage the budget. The finance position was described as 'safe'. The OFPCC, Northamptonshire Police and the FRS shared one enabling service reducing costs, improving efficiencies and delivering a value for money service.

The Director of Enabling Service informed the Panel that the shared service had been in operation for 5.5 years, explained the time frame in which it took to transition and the practices that were in place prior to the transition. Senior police officers would carry out HR and IT functions, and there was a shared service arrangement with Cheshire Police who carried out invoice processing and payments. Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service were part of the County Council and used Local Government Shared Services (LGSS). Efficiencies were identified and since the transition efficiencies had been made. The respective departments were now led by specialists in those fields. The premise of the business case had been to provide more secure, effective and efficient services for the public of Northamptonshire delivering a better quality, value for money service within the county. The report outlined the various functions carried out within enabling services, their budget was £32m of the joint police and FRS £200m budget. They held multiple contracts for a variety of services.

The Director of Enabling Services identified some key points:

- Over £500,000 of income generation through frameworks for supplies and services by selling these on to other organisations.
- Enabling Services lead nationally on the pensions framework for policing and other forces pay into the management of that. Private event organisers that required policing services were charged a fee.
- Two examples of how savings were being made with joint procurement arrangements: Microsoft licencing, over the lifetime of the contract, had realized a saving in excess of £100,000 and a £300,000 saving on the purchase of the IT service management tool.
- Sharing an IT system enabled a more robust and resilient arrangement for the two services and reduced the risk of single points of failure.
- The occupational health services had been brought back in-house improving accessibility for both services.
- The Enabling Services Team continued to explore shared service as opportunities arose.
- All of the staff were employed by Northamptonshire Police, the Director of Enabling Services reported to the Chief Constable and the Chief Fire Officer.
- Legal services would be an in-house service.

During the course of the discussion the Panel considered:

- The contracts and whether they ran beyond the term of tenure of the PFCC.
- Whether the service could provide assurance to the public that it was receiving a value for money service.
- Areas of excellence and areas remaining to be addressed.

- The challenges of recruitment and retention in the FRS.
- The plans for transferring the remaining 20% of the FRS IT systems.
- The importance of the ability for the training of future police officers to include the definition of crime categories to identify crime, ensuring effective recording and correct statistical information.
- The progress being made when lobbying for a fairer funding structure.

In response to questions from the Panel the Director for Enabling Services responded:

- A change of governance would not affect the arrangements in place under the collaboration agreement for enabling services. The contracts would novate to the successor body.
- A blue light commercial service provided a level of procurement support nationally and approached Northamptonshire when requiring additional support. A number of national agreements were managed in Northamptonshire. The White Paper would build on the existing arrangements.
- The team had been supporting the youth engagement work that was taking place, and the cultural change team had been involved in a number of public events and carried out customer surveys. They had been integral to driving the cultural change message in the FRS. Progress had been made regarding disciplinary cases within the FRS.
- A challenge remained in the recruitment into the police in respect of officer roles. The government uplift had been welcomed, it had increased the number of applicants however it was a young front-line service. Improvements needed to be made to the delivery of the training programme and the front-end challenge where stringent employment checks took place, which eliminated candidates entering the Police by approximately one third.
- The FRS recruitment function now sat in Enabling Services and recruitment was lower in volume, in the region of 6-18 people per year which would improve the Corporate oversight. A full review would be undertaken, from recruitment to routine practices and procedures to encourage diversity and that best practice procedures were adopted.
- 80% of the old IT Systems had been replaced and were used daily. The remaining 20% was included in the Plan over the next two years.
- A complete review of the police training function had just been completed, work had commenced to build on that review.

In response to questions from the Panel the PFCC responded:

- The review of the police training function was important. The government were developing a performance framework, all of the Commissioners had expressed their concern that it should not become target based. How it would impact on the service was not known.
- There were system, training and delivery and cultural issues. The officers and staff were to support the public and be responsive to them.
- Lobbying for a fairer funding formula was a national conversation, a regular conversation between the Commissioners and the Home Office. An alternative funding formula would need to maintain the integrity of larger force areas.

- The grant for neighbourhood policing had doubled and would have a positive impact.

In response to questions from the Panel the OPFCC Chief Executive, responded:

- Careful consideration would be given to the implications of potential future changes to governance, when considering entering into new contracts.
- Part of the transition arrangements would be a review of contractual considerations.
- A White Paper was due to be issued in 2026 on National Procurement Reform.

In response to questions from the Panel the Chief Finance and Section 151 Officer responded:

- A value for money assessment was carried out as part of the external audit and the reports evidenced that, there were a small number of low-level recommendations and provided assurance that Enabling Services were a value for money service.

The Chair acknowledged the progress made, the fact that the Enabling Services were leader in the field and gratitude for the work and the presentation.

RESOLVED that: the Panel welcomes the progress made by Enabling Services in Northamptonshire.

### 359. **Fire and Rescue Authority Finance Update**

The Chair invited the Chief Finance Officer to present the Fire and Rescue Authority Finance Update.

The Chief Finance Officer introduced the report which provided a mid-year update on the forecast outturn for 2025/26 which included information relating to work that was being undertaken to produce the budget for 2026/27 and he highlighted the following points:

- The FRS budget showed an overspend position of £443,000 which was expected to be pulled back by the year end. The forecast profiling for staff turnover had not been realised. The enabling services team regularly monitored the recruitment profiles and adjusted them.
- It was anticipated that the position wouldn't change and there would be approximately £4m in the reserves at year end.

The Panel considered the report and members reflected on the following points during the course of their discussion:

- The pay awards were higher than budgeted for, without additional Government grant funding, and how this would be offset. Concern was raised regarding the lack of grant funding and the impact it would have on the budget. It was questioned whether the police budget was also impacted by the pay awards and whether measures could be implemented to claw back the overspends.
- The risks associated with low reserves and the PFCCs plan to improve the position.

- Whether the pension position had been considered in light of the increased number of firefighters and the change in the pension age.
- Whether the significant costs of tackling lithium-ion battery fires had been accounted for in the budget.
- Whether the OPFCC could predict the reserves dropping below £2m.
- How the OPFCC would deal with the demands on the base budget and while managing to increase the reserves and the effect on the parish precept.

In response to questions from the Panel the Chief Finance Officer informed the Panel that:

- The fire service overspend related to the fire fighters pay award of 3.2%. They awaited a decision on the award for the leadership team. There was no additional government funding being given to the fire sector. The police received a different pay award, with additional grant funding and they employ the Enabling Services staff. An assessment would need to be made regarding the allocation of the additional grant funding. The police budget projected an overspend due to similar pressures; staffing and overtime; increase in demand for public protection and safeguarding. The PFCC did not plan to claw back the overspends for either service from the 2026/27 budgets but may consider drawing on the reserves for both services.
- The position on the reserves had improved. The 2026/27 budget would reflect opportunities to make savings to maintain or improve the level of reserves. The general reserve was currently £2m. The amount in the reserves should continue to improve with the financial processes in place.
- Enabling services in conjunction with the analysis services team planned to consider the pension position, in detail, at a senior level.
- The budget was built based on demand and risk, any payment to the reserves would be built on top of that, which potentially increased the parish precept.

In response to questions from the Panel the Director for Enabling Services informed the Panel that both the fire fighter, police staff and police officer awards were national pay awards.

RESOLVED that: the Panel notes the Fire and Rescue Authority Finance Update.

#### 360. **Policing Finance Update**

The Chair invited the Chief Finance Officer to present the Policing Finance Update.

The Chief Finance Officer introduced the report which provided a mid-year update on the forecast outturn for 2025/26 which included information relating to work that was being undertaken to produce the budget for 2026/27, and he highlighted the following points:

- The policing budget showed an overspend, a smaller percentage variance to the overall budget than the FRS budget
- The reserves position was healthy and would be maintained at that level.
- The budget was broadly in line with the predictions for 2025/26.

The Panel considered the report and members reflected on the following points during the course of their discussion:

- Grant funding and the OFPCC's confidence in funding being granted and the potential impact on the Parish precepts.
- Inflation and the financial pressures and what effect that would have on the number of officers seconded to regional offices.
- Whether staff vacancies being fulfilled quicker could be quantified in a percentage form.

In response to questions from the Panel the Chief Finance Officer informed the Panel that:

- There was certainty regarding the figure for grant funding for a period of two years. There were various types of funding streams and that some were to be spent on specific areas of work. Grants for victims, witnesses, domestic abuse and serious sexual violence had increased by 2%. General policing grants were based on estimates using assumptions and building in risks. Details regarding the police settlement, which would include information regarding the precept referendum limit, would be released mid-December.
- Special operations fell in two categories – collaborations with East Midlands and a National arrangement. The resourcing of the collaborations, with the movement of staff between their substantive posts and the seconded posts, had caused short-term variances in the budget.
- The increased rate of fulfilling staff vacancies was attributed to the improvement of the vetting process.

RESOLVED that: the Panel notes the Policing Finance Update.

The OPFCC Chief Executive provide clarity to the Panel relating to a question raised in an earlier Agenda item relating to the 20% figure that the PFCC used in respect to violence against women. The figure related to a category of crime that includes domestic abuse, stalking and harassment, rape and other sexual offences - that was 20% of overall police demand and of overall crime. That the number of general violence or street violence crimes would tip towards male victims. But on those statistics that 20% group, over 70% of victims were female of domestic abuse and the offender profile was 75%.

### 361. **Police, Fire and Crime Panel Work Programme**

The Democratic Services Assistant Manager presented the report, and highlighting the following matters:

- The work programme would be updated to include the additional topics per the Panel's earlier resolutions at the current meeting.
- The next scheduled Panel meeting would take place on the 4 February 2026 to carry out its statutory function to scrutinise the PFCC's proposed precepts for Policing and the FRS.
- The inclusion of the additional report to the Panel providing an update on the response to previous resolutions.

The Panel considered the report and members discussed the following matters:

- The changing local government environment and forward planning for the transition. Considering the Panel's future relationships with alternative strategic partnerships; joint working opportunities with neighbouring Local Authorities; staffing; and accountability and governance.
- The Panel's role for scrutiny of the PFCCs responsibility to hold the Chief Constable to account in relation to effective recording of crime and using intelligence to tackle crime.
- Northampton town centres drug related activity and the vulnerable people, the effect on housing officers and neighbourhood wardens also dealing with drug related crime; the impact on vulnerable individuals affected by cuckooing; manipulation of women; sex working; and the impact on the reputation of Northampton and the Local Authorities regeneration plans for the town centre. The PFCC to be asked to provide statistics, if available, pertaining to drug related crime, prevention methods employed, work being carried out with communities and an assessment of the measures that are successful. Discussions took place to agree the wording for the work programme topic to ensure that all of the concerns would be encapsulated.
- The Panel noted that they awaited the opportunity to see and comment on the scope and terms of reference for the PFCC's independent review of the circumstances that resulted in the Chief Constable of Northamptonshire Police being found in contempt of court, before they were finalised. The Panel heard that the PFCC had been informed of the Panel's request and had seemed agreeable to it. The topic was on the work programme and would be followed up.
- Setting a work programme that was achievable, in view of the additional preparation and planning for the topic relating to the transition and prioritising the work effectively.
- The Panel welcomed the level of statistical data provided by the OPFCC, it gave better understanding of criminal activity and areas for concern.

RESOLVED that:

- a) The Panel endorses the latest version of its outline work programme, subject to the addition of the following topics:
  - The impact of street drug dealing and the action being taken to address it in Northamptonshire
  - The implementation and impact of Police Governance Reform proposals
- b) The Panel notes the update on actions taken in response to previous resolutions by the Panel.

## 362. **Urgent Business**

There was none.

The next Panel meeting would be held on 4 February 2026 at One Angel Square,

The meeting closed at 3.10 pm

Chair: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## NORTHAMPTONSHIRE POLICE, FIRE AND CRIME PANEL

**4 FEBRUARY 2026**

<b>Report Title</b>	Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel's statutory responsibilities relating to scrutiny of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's proposed Police Precept 2026/27
<b>Report Author</b>	James Edmunds, Democratic Services Assistant Manager, West Northamptonshire Council <a href="mailto:James.edmunds@westnorthants.gov.uk">James.edmunds@westnorthants.gov.uk</a>

### **List of Approvers**

<b>WNC Monitoring Officer</b>	Sarah Hall	20/01/2026
<b>WNC Chief Finance Officer (S.151)</b>	Martin Henry	21/01/2026

### **List of Appendices**

**None**

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#### **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1. The report is intended to set out the statutory requirements on the Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel regarding scrutiny of the proposed Police Precept for 2026/27 produced by the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire.

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#### **2. Executive Summary**

- 2.1. The report summarises the Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel's statutory responsibilities relating to reviewing and making a report on the proposed Police Precept for 2026/27 produced by the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire. The proposed Police Precept appears on the agenda for the current Panel meeting as the next item of business.

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#### **3. Recommendations**

- 3.1. It is recommended that the Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel reviews the proposed Police Precept for 2026/27 produced by the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire and makes a report to the Commissioner with their views.

#### **4. Reasons for Recommendations**

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4.1 The recommendation is intended to enable the Panel to carry out its statutory responsibilities relating to scrutiny of the proposed Police Precept effectively at the current meeting.

#### **5. Report Background**

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5.1 A Police and Crime Commissioner is a major precepting authority under the Local Government Finance Act 1992 as amended by the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011. A Police 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 2011 Act.

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 must not issue it as the precept for the next year. By 15 February of the relevant financial year the Commissioner must:

- a) Have regard to the report by the Panel
- b) Give the Panel a response to its report setting out the precept that the Commissioner now proposes to issue (referred to as the 'revised precept'). If the Panel vetoed the original proposed precept because it was considered to be too high the revised precept shall be lower; if the Panel vetoed the original proposed precept because it was considered to be too low the revised precept shall be higher.
- c) Publish the response in a manner determined by the Panel.

5.6 The Panel is required to review the revised precept and to make a report on it to the Commissioner (referred to as the 'second report'). The second report may indicate whether the Panel accepts or rejects the revised precept and may make recommendations on it, including recommendations as to the precept that should be issued for the next year. The Panel must complete these actions by 22 February of the relevant financial year. A reserve meeting of the Panel is scheduled if required for this purpose. The Panel does not have the power to veto the revised precept.

5.7 If the Commissioner receives a second report from the Panel, by 1 March of the relevant financial year the Commissioner must:

- Have regard to the second report by the Panel
- Give the Panel a response to the second report
- Publish the response.

5.8 The scrutiny process concludes at this point. The Commissioner may then issue the revised precept as the precept for the next financial year or issue a different precept but only if in accordance with a recommendation made in the Panel's second report.

## **6. Issues and Choices**

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6.1 Reviewing and reporting on the proposed Police Precept is a statutory task for the Panel. The Panel should seek to carry out the task of reviewing and reporting on the proposed Police precept in accordance with its overall role of scrutinising and supporting the effective exercise by the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner of her responsibilities.

6.2 Local Government Association guidance for panels on policing and fire governance gives the following advice on good practice in this regard:

*A panel's questioning plan in relation to the commissioner's precept should focus on strategy, not numerical details and be used to seek clarification, test evidence and assumptions and explore options best able to deliver the police and crime plan through the proposed precept. Questions panels might ask their commissioner could include whether the precept enables funding to follow priorities; whether value for money is being secured; and whether there is a robust monitoring framework.*

*Panels have the power of veto over the precept. However, this a longstop, use of which should be very rare and needs to be justified. Panels should also recognise that the veto can only act as a delay; it will not prevent the commissioner from being able to re-present, and enact, a precept that is not materially different from that to which the veto has been applied.*

*If the veto is used, the panel should be prepared to provide detailed reasoning to back up why.*

## **7. Implications (including financial implications)**

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### **7.1 Resources and Financial**

7.1.1 There are no resources or financial implications arising from the proposal.

### **7.2 Legal**

7.2.1 The report concerns the Panel's statutory functions for reviewing the proposed Police Precept for 2026/27. The relevant legislation is set out within the body of the report.

### **7.3 Risk**

7.3.1 There are no significant risks arising from the proposed recommendation in this report.

## **8. Background Papers**

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Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011

Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel Terms of Reference.

Policing and fire governance – Local Government Association guidance for police and crime panels (2019)



**NORTHAMPTONSHIRE POLICE, FIRE AND CRIME PANEL**  
**4 February 2026**

**REPORT BY THE POLICE, FIRE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER (PFCC)  
AND THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER**

**PFCC PROPOSED POLICE PRECEPT 2026/27**

**PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1. To propose the 2026/27 Council Tax Precept for **Northamptonshire Police**.
2. To provide information in respect of the revenue budget, capital programme, reserves and Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) to provide context for the precept proposal.

**RECOMMENDATION**

3. The Police Fire and Crime Panel is **RECOMMENDED** to endorse:

**The proposal to increase the 2026/27 Police Precept by £15 per annum to £335.04 for Band D Council Tax (from £320.04 in 2025/26). This is an increase of around 29 pence per week.**

4. Note the information presented in this report, including:
  - a. The statement of the Section 151, Chief Finance Officer as required by Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 regarding the robustness of the budget, the MTFP and the adequacy of financial reserves (Appendix C).
  - b. A £15 Band D Precept increase provides a total 2026/27 net budget envelope of **£203.114m**, of which **£89.478m** is from the precept.
  - c. The current and future risks, challenges, uncertainties and opportunities included in the precept proposal are set out, together with the financial and operational mitigations.
  - d. Any changes required after the precept has been set, by government grant alterations in the final settlement or amended council tax base and surplus/deficit figures by the collecting authorities, may be balanced either through efficiency savings or through a transfer to/from reserves.
  - e. The current MTFP and the anticipated savings required.
  - f. The Capital Programme and Reserves Strategy (Appendix D).

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

5. This report details the 2026/27 precept proposal for Northamptonshire Police.
6. This report and proposal are the culmination of several months' work by the Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (OPFCC), the Joint Finance Team and Police colleagues. It also includes information provided by the two unitary authorities and takes account of public and stakeholder consultation.
7. The budget has been prepared considering the provisional police grant settlement which contains less detail than usual. It also accounts for more recent announcements on funding for continued growth in neighbourhood policing.
8. The PFCC acknowledges the expectation built into the funding announcements that PFCCs will increase their Band D Precept locally by £15 (4.69% for Northamptonshire) in 2026/27.
9. The PFCC and the Section 151 Officer are grateful for the updates provided by colleagues in the unitary authorities in respect of the tax base and council tax collection fund.
10. The budget is set in a context of the current economic climate and in line with the 'Safe and Sound' Public Safety Plan.
11. Despite challenges, the budget is balanced for 2026/27 with a funded capital programme and an adequate level of reserves in place. However, achieving this across the medium term will be more challenging. Prudent assumptions of future income streams have been used which identify the need for future efficiencies.
12. The PFCC has conducted, and been informed by, a survey of Northamptonshire residents to gain feedback on both the progress of the Public Safety Plan and precept intentions. The results of the survey are summarised in this report and will be available on the PFCC website in due course.
13. Following local and national investment to increase Police Officers in the county, the budget for 2026/27 and the MTFP are based on maintenance of an establishment of 1,511 Police Officers. The budget also allows for continuation of key investments implemented in recent years, such as the uplift in call handlers, vetting, staff investigators and officer wellbeing. In 2026/27, the Chief Constable has access to a further £1m to improve services.
14. The OPFCC budgets have been restructured to better reflect the costs of each specific area of delivery. In 2026/27, the statutory functions and general running costs of the OPFCC make up approximately 0.5% of the total operational police budget for the year.
15. The Section 151 Officer has reviewed the adequacy and level of reserves to ensure that funds are still available to support investment in innovative solutions and ensure the level is adequate to meet one-off short term funding shortfalls if savings and efficiencies are not identified.
16. The PFCC has been briefed on the current and emerging operational and demand challenges, and these have informed discussion on the budget allocation to the Chief Constable for 2026/27 and future years.

17. The PFCC believes that Northamptonshire is not served well by the current grant funding formula; that the county is not fairly funded in comparison to both regional and national peers and that local residents should not pay more for their services than other counties. Every year the formula is not updated, Northamptonshire is detrimentally affected.

## **PRECEPT PROPOSAL**

18. **After careful consideration of the factors outlined in this report, the PFCC proposes a precept increase of £15 a year (29 pence per week) to £335.04 for a Band D property. This will enable Police to maintain the investment in 1,511 police officers, maintain an adequate level of reserves and deliver against the new Public Safety Plan.**
19. Even after taking into account the maximum precept increase there would remain a significant savings requirement for the organisation to achieve in order to balance budgets.
20. The PFCC appreciates the impact on the taxpayer. Whilst this is a pressure on households, the PFCC needs to ensure that policing has the resources it needs to meet the current and future spending challenges but also reflects the current financial climate and the views of those who took part in the precept survey.
21. The PFCC is grateful to all those who took part in the survey and their willingness to pay more in order to safeguard and develop policing in the county and will continue to push the government for a fairer funding position for Northamptonshire.

## **PUBLIC SAFETY PLAN – ‘SAFE AND SOUND’**

22. A 5-year strategic plan was developed by the PFCC to set out priorities for how police and fire services keep our communities safe. This followed significant engagement across the county that the PFCC has called the ‘Big Conversation’ and sets out three missions:
  - a. Visible and Accessible Community Services
  - b. Professionalism and Standards
  - c. Stronger Public Safety Partnerships
23. The PFCC said:

*“The Big Conversation told me very clearly that people just want to feel safer. They want to know that police, fire, and all the public safety partners will be there when they need them.*

*Trust and confidence is such a big issue for the emergency services, and people want to know that their local services will listen to their concerns and take them seriously, and always work to the highest standards.*

*That’s why this strategic plan prioritises visible and accessible local policing, fire and rescue professionals who are fully engaged in their local communities and helping people to protect themselves from risk, improved standards across the board, and partners working together with just one aim, a safe and sound Northamptonshire.”*

24. The 2026/27 budget and updated medium term financial plan have been built to continue delivery of the Plan:
25. **Visible and Accessible Community Services** – this means building on the good work that has been done to focus on neighbourhood policing and community engagement. Greater accessibility means being visible in neighbourhoods so that people feel safe, and communities feel cared for and the PFCC will work with police leaders to ensure provision of a full spectrum of opportunities for meaningful community engagement. Police officers and staff should also be increasingly accessible through video appointments, online reporting and other routes for those whose preference is for technologically enabled contact. Great local policing can improve quality of life and feelings of safety for everyone.

The precept proposal will enable:

- a. Maintenance of officers numbers and a continued programme of recruitment that takes positive action to improve diversity and helps the workforce reflect the communities it serves.
- b. Ongoing funding of Police Community Support Officers, recruitment into vacant posts and where possible an increase to numbers.
- c. Ongoing funding of call handlers and the latest technologies that support the best methods of contact.
- d. A capital estates programme that provides premises that are fit for purpose and accessible.

26. **Professionalism and Standards** – this means building on the steps that have been taken to improve vetting and supporting officers and staff to challenge each other to be their best and root out unacceptable behaviour. The PFCC has worked with police leaders to raise the bar on integrity and make changes to local and national systems, increasing the capacity of the vetting team. There will also be a focus on the national race action plan and learning from and responding to important reports such as the Angiolini Inquiry which has turned its attention to police culture and women's safety.

The precept proposal will enable:

- a. Continued investment in additional resources to carry out vetting and funding to enable innovative and efficient vetting processes.
- b. Continued investments in the Customer Services Team in the OPFCC to handle complaints and issues from members of the public promptly and carry out investigations independently and efficiently.

27. **Stronger Public Safety Partnerships** – this means resetting the accountability relationship that service leaders have with the PFCC and to provide clearer support and challenge in driving performance improvement. The OPFCC's role in managing complaints and customer service has been deepened so that there can be even more learning from the community's experience of police and fire.

In December 2025, the OPFCC team dealing with complaints achieved the Customer Service Excellence (CSE) Standard following a rigorous independent assessment. This is a major achievement and a first for any local body that handles police complaints.

The OPFCC will also focus on diligent, financially sound management of our assets and will use transparency and audit to gain assurance that public money is spent wisely. Draft reports from external audit have given Northants Police a very positive assessment of Value-for-Money, citing very few areas for improvement.

28. The precept proposal will enable:

- a. As above, continuation of the Customer Services Team in the OPFCC that enhances learning from community complaints and feedback.
- b. Continued funding and investment in a programme of internal audit and the Joint Independent Audit Committee.
- c. Continued investment in Enabling Services across Police and Fire. This includes resources in the Commercial Team that focusses on more than just compliant procurement – they also deliver on sustainability, social value and value-for-money.

#### **PROVISIONAL POLICE GRANT SETTLEMENT 2026/27**

29. A breakdown of anticipated grant funding and proposed precept funding compared to the previous year for Northamptonshire is as follows:

<b>2025/26 £m</b>	<b>Funding</b>	<b>2026/27 £m</b>
90.042	Core Police Grant	96.994
3.338	Officer Maintenance (Uplift) Grant	-
1.633	Additional Officer Uplift Grant	-
6.644	Legacy Grants	6.644
3.824	Pension Grant	3.824
2.500	National Insurance Reimbursement	2.500
1.908	Neighbourhood Policing Grant	3.489
<b>109.890</b>	<b>Total Grant Funding</b>	<b>113.451</b>
84.406	Precept	89.478
0.851	Collection Fund Surplus	0.185
<b>85.257</b>	<b>Total Precept and Collection Fund</b>	<b>89.663</b>
<b>195.147</b>	<b>TOTAL FUNDING</b>	<b>203.114</b>

30. The 2026/27 Provisional Settlement was announced on 18<sup>th</sup> December 2025 in a written ministerial statement by the Minister of State for Policing and Crime, Sarah Jones:

*"Total funding for police forces, including Counter-Terrorism Policing, will be up to £19.5 billion in 2026-27, an increase of up to £798 million compared to the 2025-26 police funding*

*settlement. Total funding to territorial police forces will be up to £18.3 billion, an increase of up to £746 million compared to 2025-26. This equates to a 4.2% cash increase and a 2.0% real terms increase for police forces. For Police and Crime Commissioners in England the council tax referendum threshold will be £15 for a Band D property.*

*Funding for Counter-Terrorism Policing will increase by at least £52 million to £1.2 billion in 2026-27. Police and Crime Commissioners will be notified separately of force-level funding allocations for CT Policing, which will not be made public for security reasons.*

*We will publish a Police Reform White Paper in early 2026 which will set out a vision to bring policing into the modern age with the technology, innovation and structures they need to ensure policing can focus on the crimes that matter to the public and to drive out waste and inefficiency.”*

31. The total funding figures provided in the Ministers statement assume that every authority increases council tax by the £15 referendum limit. This means that almost half the overall increase to police funding quoted would be due to come from the precept.
32. There was very little detail provided as part of the initial announcement, other than the high level figures for each authority. It states that **Northamptonshire would be set to receive £113m**, but there was little detail regarding the breakdown of this amount.
33. On 16<sup>th</sup> January 2026, the Home Secretary wrote to Commissioners setting out further information on the settlement in relation to neighbourhood policing expectations and funding. This included an additional £55m for forces on the top of the provisional settlement, removal of the specific Uplift targets and grants, and clarification of the resultant neighbourhood allocation. **Northamptonshire would receive a formula share of the new grant of £0.477m taking our allocation for neighbourhoods/uplift to £3.489m in total.**
34. Unlike for local authorities and fire, there are no updates to the funding formula and no provision of multi-year funding figures in the provisional settlement.
35. We have ascertained a general principle that the settlement includes most of the grants previously awarded at the same value as last year with an inflationary uplift to the core grant of 4.2%. This is reflected in the table above.
36. **Police Uplift Grants**

The previous government provided funding for 20,000 additional police officers nationally and we understand that the grant for the initial allocation (Officer Uplift Maintenance Grant) will continue as part of the total Core Police Grant from 2026/27. The formal target previously imposed on forces has been removed, but Northamptonshire is still planning to maintain beyond that level.

The Additional Officer Uplift Grant was previously awarded following Northamptonshire's success in exceeding this Uplift target and from 2026/27 will be subsumed into the allocation of Neighbourhood Policing Grant.

However, whilst no detail is provided, there is evidence to suggest there is effectively a £0.6m reduction in this funding for Northamptonshire. This is due to a change in funding methodology.

The uplift grant was previously allocated to those forces that chose to recruit above the original target (in our case 31 more officers). However, some forces did not apply for this. In 2026/27 the grant has been used to increase the overall Neighbourhood Grant provision and then split by formula share to every force, so the grant distribution no longer reflects individual force growth. As such, those forces who exceeded recruitment targets over the past two years now effectively have less funding available to maintain them.

Following the provisional settlement announcements, a sector-wide letter was sent to the Home Secretary asking for urgent clarity and to outline the consequences of this change.

### **37. Neighbourhood Policing**

The 2025/26 final settlement included £1.908m for Northamptonshire for Neighbourhood Policing investment, which was double that originally announced in the provisional settlement. As described above, this has been increased to £3.489m for 2026/27, albeit most of this is not 'new' money.

This fund supports the recruitment of additional and redeployed neighbourhood police officers, PCSOs and Special Constables, and forms part of a multi-year programme, spanning the length of the Parliament.

This information was only released to us on 16<sup>th</sup> January 2026 and whilst the delay in this information makes resource planning and budgeting more difficult, the force has risen to the challenge to ensure budgets and workforce planning are aligned for delivery. The force, supported by the PFCC, has continued with plans to recruit neighbourhood officers, PCSOs and volunteers and progress will continue to be monitored closely.

The latest announcement refers to an additional 17 neighbourhood personnel in 2026/27 although funding provided does not fully cover the cost of new officers in their entirety and there is flexibility given to the Chief Constable to fill these roles, whether it be with officers, PCSOs or volunteers in a way that most effectively delivers alongside existing resources.

### **38. Council Tax**

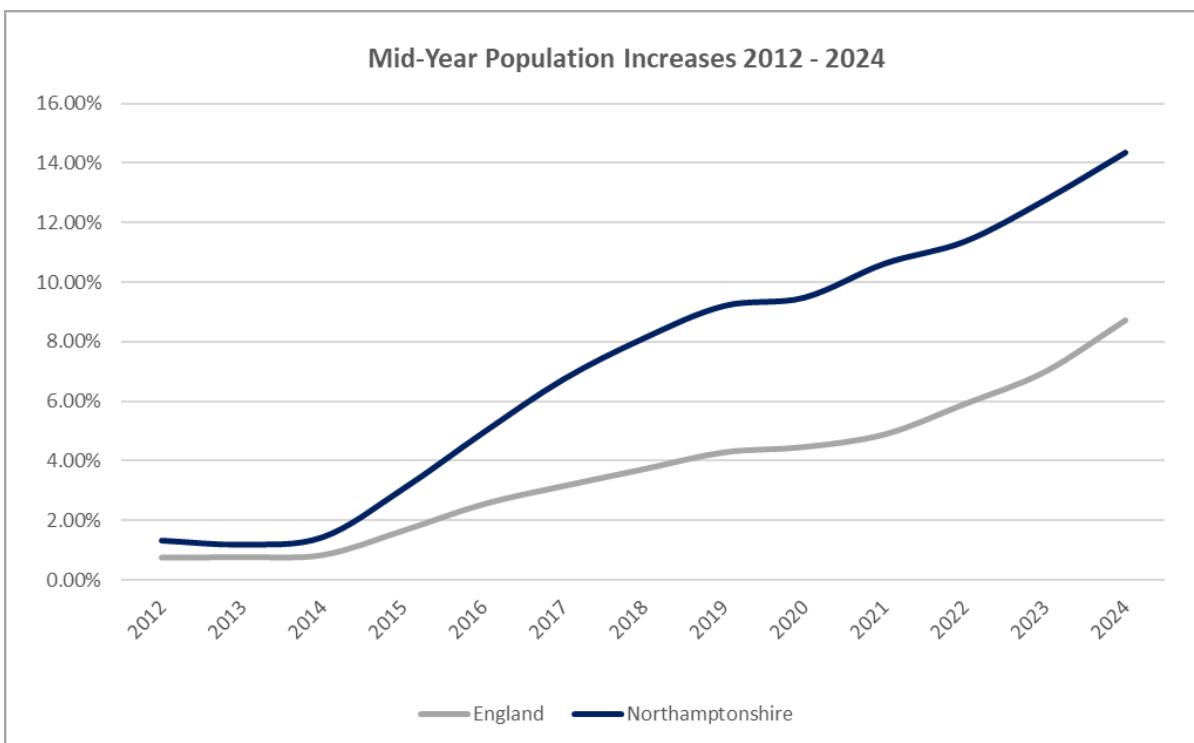
In England the Government sets the level of precept increase above which a referendum is required for PCCs. This limit for policing was not announced until 17<sup>th</sup> December, shortly before the provision funding settlement. The limit set is £15 per Band D household.

Prior to this, there was national consensus that the expected limit would be £14, as this was thought to be the amount used by government in calculating the high-level Spending Review forecasts. It is on that basis that the PFCC decided to go out for consultation.

Despite the £1 (2p per week) difference between the consultation value and the final proposal, the PFCC is happy that the outcome of the consultation gives a sufficient indication on which to inform her precept decision.

## FUNDING FORMULA AND POPULATION

39. The National Police Funding Formula, which accounts for around 56% of Northamptonshire's funding, includes population as a key factor in the allocations. However, the formula was "frozen" in 2011/12, and annual increases have been on the basis of inflation and additional officers since that time.
40. Work had been underway by government on a review of the formula some years ago but has stalled. There are currently no indications that it will be revisited any time soon.
41. A significant part of the current formula is based on population. The population in England has grown by 8.72% since mid-2012 but in Northamptonshire it has grown by 14.4%. However, the funding formula population factor in the government settlement has remained static in that time.
42. The graph below demonstrates this population increase for the period 2012 to 2024:



Source: *Mid-Year Population - Office of National Statistics*

43. Police central funding has not kept pace with this population increase and whilst local council tax base increases have contributed to total funding, central government grants, have not.
44. This means that 56% of Northamptonshire Police's funding is allocated on the basis of a funding formula which has not been updated for over 10 years. It, therefore, does not reflect current demands, does not reflect modern policing and does not reflect the significant growth in the county.
45. Band D Council Tax levels vary significantly for Commissioners across the country and the PFCC strongly believes that the current funding formula does not best serve the residents of Northamptonshire, meaning that local residents are required to fund a higher level of the policing bill than they would in other areas.

46. The PFCC will continue to work with national and regional colleagues to lobby to seek a fairer funding settlement on behalf of the residents of Northamptonshire.

#### COUNCIL TAX BASE AND COUNCIL TAX PRECEPT INCOME

47. The Council Tax and the level of precept is a fundamental part of the local government finance settlement and depends on both the level of the Band D precept and the tax base – the latter being the number of properties expected to pay council tax.

48. In Policing, the precept and the surplus on the collection fund accounts for around 44% of funding, so any variations can have a significant impact.

49. Both unitary councils have advised the PFCC of their proposed tax bases for 2026/27. A comparison of the 2025/26 and 2026/27 figures reflects an average 1.26% tax base increase (compared to 2.02% in 2025/26) as follows:

Authority	2025/26 (number)	2026/27 (number)	Increase (number)	Increase %
North	117,585.00	119,354.00	1,769.00	1.50%
West	146,150.30	147,712.60	1,562.30	1.07%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>263,735.30</b>	<b>267,066.60</b>	<b>3,331.30</b>	<b>1.26%</b>

50. This increase is higher than the average of 0.8% used by the Home Office for the policing settlement.

51. The MTFP assumes average but prudent increases in the tax base and the Section 151 Officers will continue to link in with West Northamptonshire and North Northamptonshire finance colleagues to ensure future forecasts align.

52. Total precept funding is a combination of the tax base and precept increase as follows:

2025/26 £		2026/27 £
531,898	<u>Tax base changes</u>	566,151
1,066,764	- North	499,998
<b>1,598,661</b>	- West	<b>1,066,149</b>
	<u>Precept Increase</u>	
1,646,190	- North	1,790,310
2,046,104	- West	2,215,689
<b>3,692,294</b>		<b>4,005,999</b>
<b>5,290,955</b>	<b>Total Precept Change</b>	<b>5,072,148</b>

53. The 2026/27 proposed precept increase of £15, together with the increased tax base will generate an additional £5.072m on the base budget.

## COUNCIL TAX COLLECTION FUND

54. Each year the billing authorities estimate how much of the total potential council tax income liability of taxpayers they will collect. They advise precepting authorities of any projected surplus or deficit on the Collection Fund in January of each year.
55. The PFCC appreciates the hard work undertaken by the unitary authorities in ensuring high collection rates and in providing the information to enable their inclusion in her budget and precept considerations.
56. The unitary authorities have advised of their estimated collection fund positions for 2026/27 with NNC reporting a deficit and WNC reporting a surplus:

2025/26 £m	OPFCC Share of Collection Fund Surplus / (Deficit)	2026/27 £m
0.388	- North	(0.184)
0.463	- West	0.369
<b>0.851</b>	<b>Collection Fund Surplus</b>	<b>0.185</b>

57. Due to statutory timescales, notification of the final collection fund surplus figures is sometimes not received until after the draft budgets are finalised. If this surplus results in a one-year benefit, it will be transferred to reserves. Conversely, a deficit would be offset by in-year savings or a transfer from reserves.
58. The Section 151 Officers will work closely with the unitary authorities throughout the year to monitor and understand any impact on the collection fund position for 2026/27 and future years.

## PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON THE LEVEL OF THE PRECEPT

59. Each year, the PFCC undertakes consultation via, at the very least, a survey with residents of Northamptonshire to gather their views which help to inform precept intentions.
60. There was national consensus that the expected referendum limit for policing would be £14, as this was thought to be the amount used by government in calculating the high-level Spending Review forecasts. It is on that basis that the PFCC decided to go out for consultation as it was felt that to wait for formal confirmation of the provisional settlement and referendum limit would not give the public sufficient time to engage with the survey.
61. The PFCC undertook the online survey over the period 10<sup>th</sup> November 2025 to 5<sup>th</sup> January 2026, which was over two weeks longer than in previous years. This was intended to reach as many people as possible to obtain the views of a demographically representative group of the county's population.
62. The survey was sent out to a wide range of contacts and using many different approaches to maximise engagement, as detailed in Appendix A.
63. The PFCC would like to give particular appreciation to the commitment and engagement of the Chair and members of the Police, Fire and Crime Panel, local Councillors, MPs, community

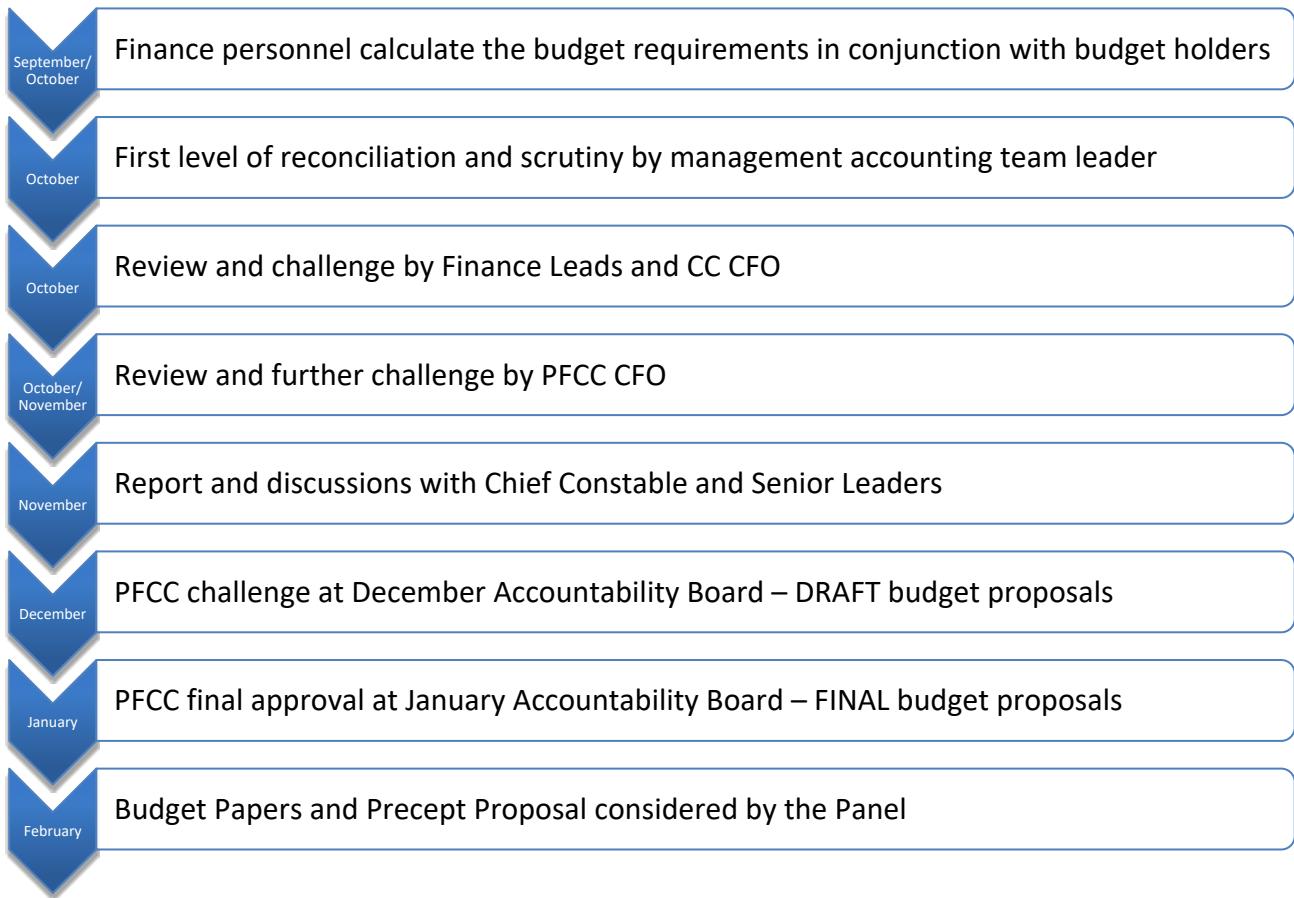
leaders and teams within the unitary authorities for their support disseminating the survey amongst local residents and contacts.

64. The online survey received 2,219 responses (compared with 1,751 last year). This is classed as a statistically relevant sample size for the County based on a 95% level of confidence. The PFCC has considered the results of the online survey which were:
  - **57.4% of residents were prepared to pay £14 or more if they were able to for Police services.**
  - 37.9% were not prepared to pay any more than they do now; and
  - 4.7% said they did not know.
65. The PFCC will consider the narrative comments in the survey and more detailed analysis which will be published on the PFCC website in due course.
66. A year into the new Police, Fire and Crime Plan, it was timely to expand this consultation to include focussed engagement to gain a wider temperature check on experiences and perceptions of the public. Results pertaining to engagement on the Plan will be shared and published in due course when analysis is complete.
67. The Commissioner will ensure that the views expressed through the survey, and the more detailed focus group consultation, are used to shape policing in the coming year.
68. The OPFCC held a Police Fire and Crime Panel workshop on the 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2026 regarding the budget and precept considerations for 2026/27, with all Panel members invited. These annual workshops have historically proved useful to give members a deeper understanding of the detail behind the budget and precept proposals.

## **BUDGET STRATEGY – APPROACH AND SCRUTINY**

69. The budget is prepared under the Joint Finance Team using an approach which provides consistency across Fire and Police. This has enabled comparability of assumptions and principles, together with best practice, resilience and a more efficient process applied to budgeting for all services.
70. Following the preparation of the budget strategy and approach in September, briefing sessions took place with all budget holders and the strategy was shared with the Joint Independent Audit Committee (JIAC) for further scrutiny and review.
71. The budget has been prepared on a zero-base where possible, in full consultation with budget holders, aligned to the Safe and Sound Plan and tested against the MTFP. This ensures that efficiencies are taken from this process where possible and that only approved increases, inflation and unavoidable pressures are built in. Detailed workings are prepared, and the format of the budget models are consistent and contain built-in checks and balances to ensure the correct information is fed through.
72. There has been a significant amount of scrutiny and challenge on the budget, and as part of these discussions and negotiations, the PFCC has sought and received assurances on the robustness of budgeting activity.

73. The table below sets out the preparation and scrutiny elements of the budgeting process:



## **2026/27 TOTAL BUDGET FOR POLICING**

74. The PFCC seeks to maximise the allocation provided to the operational police budget and allow sufficient flexibility for the Chief Constable to meet operational challenges and foster innovation. This is balanced with maintaining sufficient resources to fund the capital programme, maintain the Office of the PFCC and provide for commissioning and delivery activities for the public of Northamptonshire.

75. The policing budget is set as follows:

2025/26 £m	Budget Breakdown	2026/27 £m
153.325	Force	162.892
33.869	Enabling Services	32.707
1.000	Investment	1.000
(3.435)	Savings Plans	(3.546)
<b>184.759</b>	<b>FORCE BUDGET</b>	<b>193.053</b>
1.424	OPFCC (Office)	1.026
5.551	Commissioning and Delivery	6.161
<b>6.975</b>	<b>PFCC BUDGET</b>	<b>7.187</b>
4.629	Capital Financing	4.525
(1.216)	Transfers to/(from) Reserves	(1.651)
<b>195.147</b>	<b>TOTAL BUDGET</b>	<b>203.114</b>

76. Last year, the final amount of neighbourhood grant was double that originally budgeted and increased the 2025/26 funding envelope from £194.193m by an additional £0.954m to £195.147m. This is reflected above to ensure year-on-year comparability.

#### **2026/27 BUDGET DELEGATED TO THE CHIEF CONSTABLE – THE FORCE BUDGET**

77. The net operational police budget allocated to the Chief Constable for 2026/27 is **£193.053m**, an increase of almost £8.3m from 2025/26 as follows:

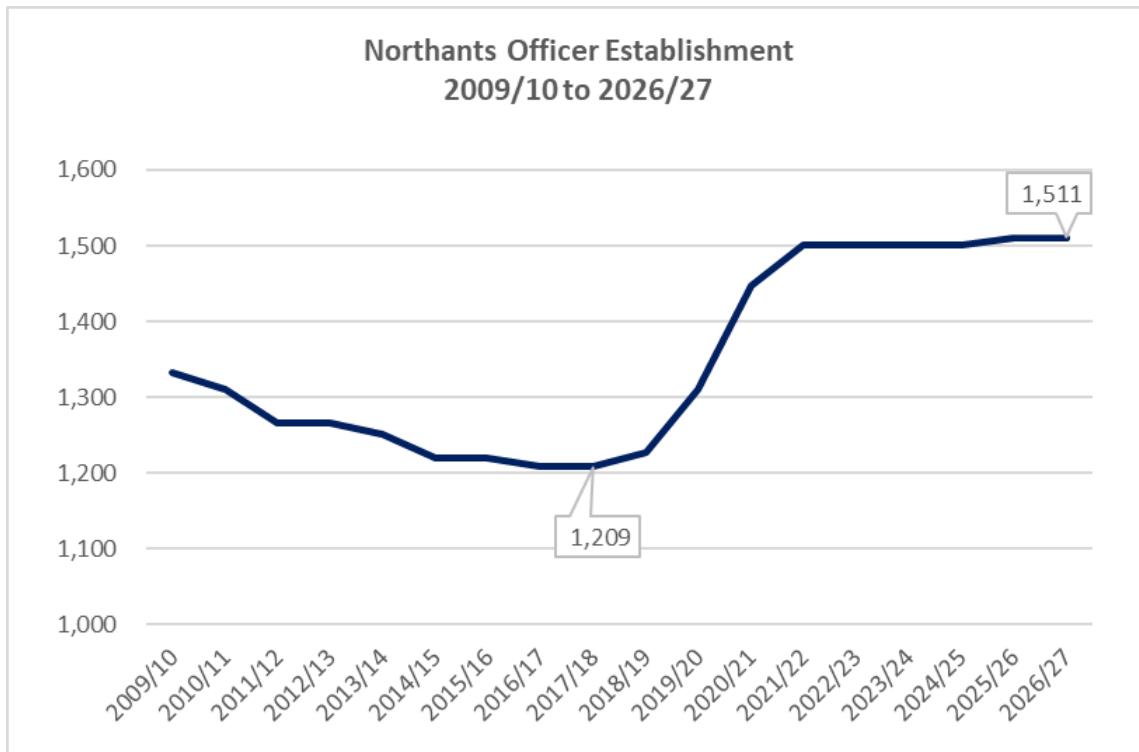
2025/26 £m	Police Budget Breakdown	2026/27 £m
104.530	Police Officers	109.088
36.323	Police Staff (Operational)	40.563
4.169	PCSOs	4.255
1.320	Other Pension Costs	1.399
0.713	Other Employee Expenses	0.740
33.869	Enabling Services	32.707
2.094	National ICT Charges (inc. PNC)	2.087
8.960	Third Party/Collaborative Arrangements	9.453
7.538	Other Non-Pay (excl. Enabling Services)	9.171
(12.321)	Income	(13.864)
<b>187.194</b>	<b>FORCE BUDGET</b> (before Investments/Savings)	<b>195.599</b>
1.000	New Investments	1.000
(3.435)	Savings Plans	(3.546)
<b>184.759</b>	<b>TOTAL FORCE BUDGET</b>	<b>193.053</b>

78. A more detailed breakdown is set out in Appendix B. Key Headlines are as follows:

- a. The budget for 2026/27 provides for maintenance of police officer numbers at establishment of 1,511 and 81 PCSOs. The officer establishment is 10 more than last year.
- b. The police officer budget requested by the Chief Constable follows a zero-based review and reflects the planned retirement and recruitment profile.
- c. Operational police staff include the control room, criminal justice teams, front counters, vetting and investigative staff.
- d. Other non-pay covers areas such as equipment, uniform, air support and forensic/pathology costs.
- e. Enabling services include the costs of joint shared teams such as HR, Finance, Commercial, Transport and DDaT (ICT), shared with Fire. It also including all associated costs of running buildings, vehicles and IT infrastructure.
- f. Collaborative Arrangements mainly comprise of our share of regional units such as East Midlands Special Operations Unit (EMSOU) that deal with organised crime, murder investigations and other specialist covert investigations.
- g. Income budgets include receipts for sponsored and seconded posts, bank interest, specific grants, commercial frameworks, special police services and other fees and charges.

## POLICE OFFICER ESTABLISHMENT

79. Historic police officer establishment is shown below:



80. In 2019, the number of police officers in Northamptonshire was lower than it had been in many years. The force maximised use of the Police Uplift Programme (PUP) and was successful in exceeding targets, gaining additional funding beyond the original uplift.
81. The new Neighbourhood Grant (NHG) for 2025/26 then provided for further officers and subsequently, our baseline establishment currently sits at 1,511. There is an ambition to increase this further should neighbourhood grants be made sustainable.
82. However, filling these posts has become increasingly challenging over the past 18 months with smaller pools of applicants, higher attrition and more failing the high standards of vetting required. There has also been a focus on high ethical standards, challenging those officers who do not portray the behaviours expected of them, which results in more leavers following misconduct procedures.
83. The force has substantial recruitment planned for 2026/27, with capacity to recruit over 130 new officers between now and March 2027, plus transferees. The cohorts allow sufficient flexibility to fully meet, maintain and even exceed the establishment target allowing for attrition, vetting failures and unexpected leavers. Built into these plans is a focus on positive action and ambition to improve the diversity of the workforce.
84. In addition to police officers, PCSOs and Staff, the Chief Constable has a variety of hugely effective volunteers providing invaluable work. This includes the Special Constabulary which delivered over 26,000 hours of unpaid duties in 2025, equivalent to a cost of around £745k in police officer overtime. Additionally, there were a whole range of other volunteers including those on horseback, independent custody visitors, scrutiny panel members and many members of the community. Northampton Guardians alone carried out over 5,000 hours of work with 731 clients. The Commissioner and Chief Constable are extremely grateful for all these efforts that help to keep people safer across the County.

#### **POLICE, FIRE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER – OFFICE BUDGET**

85. The PFCC Office budget includes the costs of the Commissioner and Deputy, Statutory Officers and the staff to administer activities such as holding the chief to account, performance management and general administration. Non-pay costs include statutory audit fees, travel, subscriptions and admin.
86. The budget for 2026/27 is as follows:

<b>2025/26 £m</b>	<b>OFFICE</b>	<b>2026/27 £m</b>
0.72	Staffing	0.76
0.31	Non-Pay	0.27
<b>1.03</b>	<b>TOTAL OFFICE</b>	<b>1.03</b>

87. These costs take into account an amount of £0.183m charged to Fire as the proportion of the Office relative to the Commissioner's role as Northamptonshire Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority (NCFRA).

88. The OPFCC provides statutory governance services to NCFRA (Fire) and has a costing methodology in place to ensure NCFRA contributes an appropriate amount. In-keeping with the Home Office Financial Management Code of Practice; where Fire costs can be reasonably estimated, they have been. Otherwise, a pro-rata funding allocation has been used, to ensure integrity and transparency of both fire and policing funds in line with the Treasury's "Managing Public Money" requirements.

89. All staff (excluding the PFCC and D/PFCC) received an inflationary pay award of 4.2% in September 2025, which was in line with nationally negotiated rate by the Police Staff Council. An assumption of 3% is budgeted from September 2026. The cost of this has been partially offset for 2026/27 through a reduction in the employer pension contribution rate.

90. The PFCC endeavours to ensure that the cost of staffing the office is less than 1% of the police budget. In 2026/27, the office budget is approximately **0.5%** of the total police budget.

91. A delivery fund is earmarked to support initiatives which are identified to drive forward work on achieving outcomes in the Public Safety Plan. The sum of £0.25m has been ring-fenced from reserves for any new requirements, project pilots or grant match-funding arising in the year ahead.

92. In addition to this, the Safe and Sound Communities Fund is in place for community, voluntary and charitable organisations to apply for funding for work to reduce harm or offending, improve community engagement or support vulnerable people across the county. The fund prioritises projects including children, women and young people with grants between £1,000 and £10,000 available. A total of £0.15m is allocated from proceeds of crime funds.

#### **POLICE, FIRE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER – COMMISSIONING AND DELIVERY BUDGETS**

93. The OPFCC undertakes a wide range of delivery activities, providing in-house services directly to residents of Northamptonshire and commissioning services from partners and other organisations. The budget breakdown of all OPFCC budgets compared to last year is as follows:

2025/26			Delivery Area	2026/27		
Total Budget £m	Grants/ Use of Reserves £m	Base Budget £m		Total Budget £m	Grants/ Use of Reserves £m	Base Budget £m
1.4	(0.4)	1.0	OFFICE	1.4	(0.4)	1.0
3.4	(2.2)	1.2	VICTIMS	3.5	(2.5)	1.0
1.2	(0.7)	0.5	PREVENTION	1.2	(0.7)	0.5
2.5	-	2.5	TARGETED YOUTH SUPPORT	2.6	-	2.6
0.8	(0.2)	0.6	CRIMINAL JUSTICE	0.8	(0.2)	0.6
0.3	-	0.3	PERFORMANCE	0.3	-	0.3
0.2	-	0.2	COMMUNICATIONS & ENGAGEMENT	0.2	-	0.2
<b>9.8</b>	<b>(3.5)</b>	<b>6.3</b>	<b>TOTAL OPFCC</b>	<b>10.0</b>	<b>(3.8)</b>	<b>6.2</b>

## **VICTIMS**

94. Voice for Victims and Witnesses is an in-house service that ensures victims and witnesses of crime in Northamptonshire are properly supported. Over 30 staff members are in place, including witness care officers, support workers and other specialists. These work to safeguard the vulnerable, resulting in safer victims and communities, and working with partners to ensure offenders are brought to justice. This includes services for local victims and witnesses of crime, anti-social behaviour, hate incidents and fire incidents, and vital services for compliance with the Victims Code of Practice and Witness Charter.
95. Grants from the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) provide around half of what is needed for the service Voice provides. These grants have been confirmed for 2026/27 and 2027/28 with a 2% increase per year. Whilst this is news gratefully received; the increase is below inflation. The PFCC is committed to maintaining this service and has ensured base budget and a level of reserves are in place to avoid any cuts to service this year.
96. The Sunflower Centre is a partnership-funded service managed by the OPFCC to provide non-judgemental specialist support to victims of domestic abuse. This includes a team of Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs), with costs shared between the OPFCC, Health and the two Unitary Authorities. Funding from the MoJ has been confirmed to continue funding complex needs specialists and staff to support victims/survivors to access support services. The demand on this service has continued to increase and additional IDVAs have been approved by the PFCC for 2026/27.
97. Victims budgets also include funding for the Sexual Abuse Referral Centre (SARC), Non-Violence Resistance and other important services commissioned with partners.

## **PREVENTION**

98. Prevention includes a number of crime prevention activities, community funding, safer streets investment and work on Serious Violence Duty (SVD).
99. Income from speed awareness courses is used specifically for road safety initiatives.
100. The Home Office provides grants for Serious Violence Duty which is used to deliver the Northamptonshire Serious Violence Prevention Partnership (NSVPP). This was formed as a multi-agency partnership to develop and deliver the Duty for the county, representing the five specified authorities and other key partners. The Partnership works with the communities of Northamptonshire to prevent serious violence, with a particular focus on children and young people under the age of 25. The strategy draws on the finding of the county's first Strategic Needs Assessment for Serious Violence.
101. However, at the time of writing, the level of SVD grant for 2026/27 had not been confirmed.

## **TARGETED YOUTH SUPPORT**

102. The Targeted Youth Support Service offers early support for children, young people and their families aiming to prevent the need for longer term and more costly and complex intervention.

There are over 40 members of frontline staff including specialists in prevention and education around knife crime and exploitation, delivering 4 strands of work:

a. Targeted Youth Team

Anti-Social Behaviour – The support and intervention offered to young people and their families includes home visits and working with young people to offer support and services to help move them away from committing anti-social behaviour. The team works in partnership with Neighbourhood Policing Teams and partner agencies across the county to reduce the likelihood of young people entering the criminal justice system. There are future plans to provide a single point of contact within schools offering prevention and intervention advice, guidance to staff and to act as a trusted adult to young people to let us know if they feel unsafe.

b. Domestic Abuse Support Team

Support and intervention offered to victims and their children by our Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVA) and Children's Domestic Abuse Advocates (CDAA). The team support young people assessed as low to medium risk of harm. The team aim to reduce the impact of family conflict and abuse, working with other agencies to ensure safety for the family, reducing the likelihood of further incidents.

c. Missing Persons Unit Support Team

The team support the Missing Persons Investigation Unit (MPIU), visiting young people who have been previously reported as missing from home. The team identify support early to reduce further missing episodes and reduce the likelihood of exploitation and harm. This intervention helps reduce demand on police time and provides a skilled trusted adult to talk to. The role plays a vital part in building trust with parents, encouraging them to share and report concerns for their child early.

d. Youth Violence Intervention Unit

The team work with young people who are at risk of harm in their communities both from other people and from the choices they make. They work with young people and parents/carers providing support and knowledge around knife crime and exploitation and how to reduce risk of harm. There are further specialisms within the team supporting girls who are exploited within personal intimate relationships and children and young people who have a parent/carer in the prison system.

e. Funds are also provided to the Youth Offending Service for Prevention and Diversion activity.

## **CRIMINAL JUSTICE**

103. Rehabilitation and Reducing Reoffending staff work closely with policing and probation partners to identify and fund opportunities to reduce reoffending and to alleviate judiciary pressures through Out of Court Resolutions. This includes:

a. Drugs Treatment and Recovery.

b. Preventing Intimate Partner Abuse (Project PIPA) Programme.

c. Funding of programmes to provide support, training and employment opportunities for offenders, aiming to break the cycle of poverty, unemployment and offending.

- d. A support and counselling service for offenders with complex needs, poor mental health and substance misuse problems.
- e. Integrated Offender Management.

104. Despite the removal of grant funding for the Immediate Justice pilot last year, the PFCC has recognised its success and will be continuing to fund the project in 2026/27. The project seeks to increase the speed and visibility of reparative action in response to ASB, primarily through funding additional staff to supervise and facilitate reparative activity. Reparative activity may include:

- a. Litter-picking in public parks and high streets.
- b. Site clean-up after council funded events.
- c. Proactive or reactive cleaning of civic memorials.
- d. Installation of hanging baskets or temporary civic notices.
- e. Gardening of communal flower beds in town centres.
- f. Cleaning of graffiti on bus shelters, tram stops or train stations or public signage.
- g. Basic repairs of damaged public property, or private property with victim/owner consent.

## PERFORMANCE

105. The OPFCC Customer Service Team is responsible for recording all complaints against the force, the informal resolution of low-level complaints and the handling of reviews.

## MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN (MTFP)

106. The MTFP covers a five-year period and is included in more detail at Appendix B. It is under regular review. The current version, updated to take into account the provisional settlement is as follows:

2025/26 £m	MTFP	2026/27 £m	2027/28 £m	2028/29 £m	2029/30 £m	2030/31 £m
197.628 (3.435)	Expenditure Savings Plans	206.660 (3.546)	218.548 (4.546)	228.932 (4.083)	235.091 (3.748)	241.168 (3.834)
<b>194.193</b>  (194.193)		<b>203.114</b>  (203.114)	<b>214.002</b>  (212.111)	<b>224.849</b>  (219.438)	<b>231.343</b>  (224.831)	<b>237.334</b>  (230.341)
<b>(0.000)</b>	<b>Shortfall</b>	-	<b>1.891</b>	<b>5.411</b>	<b>6.512</b>	<b>6.993</b>

107. The MTFP includes a requirement for cashable efficiency savings plans each year, but these will not be sufficient to meet the shortfalls identified. Efficiencies will continue to be sought from sharing buildings, robust and shared procurement practices and sharing of resources/assets where it makes sense to do so. The Chief Constable has already started work to look at a comprehensive savings plan and has identified almost £2m efficiencies so far.

Likewise, the PFCC is seeking efficiencies in the Office and Delivery budgets to ease the pressure on the force wherever possible.

108. Despite future shortfalls forecast in the MTFP, in the unlikely event that further efficiencies could not be found, the budget can be balanced in the short term by the use of reserves. However, the use of reserves is not a permanent solution, and the PFCC and Chief Constable will continue to seek efficiencies to ensure the budgets are balanced.
109. The key assumptions used to estimate the financial challenge for the medium term are:
  - a. Precept will increase annually by £15 from 2026/27 to 2028/29, and £10 each year thereafter. Formal confirmation of referendum limits beyond 2026/27 has not yet been received.
  - b. Prudent funding assumptions have been made in respect of government funding, tax base levels, and council tax collection rates. More information on funding in future years has been promised by the government in the coming months, and colleagues will continue to liaise with the local authorities to align assumptions for council tax base/collection.
  - c. In line with previous assumptions, pay increase estimates are assumed at an average of 2% per year. There has not yet been any indication of government funding to support any increases above this level.
  - d. Investment requirements can be prioritised and met from within the revenue budget or capital programme. Where appropriate, the PFCC will use reserves to pump prime investment initiatives. Any multi-year investments will be subject to review each year and may require additional savings to embed in the base budget longer term.
  - e. Further borrowing beyond the capital programme is not required.
  - f. Funding for regional collaborations will remain consistent, allowing for a reasonable level of general inflation.
  - g. It is assumed that no additional unfunded priorities or responsibilities will be given to the PFCC and Chief Constable to deliver.

## **THE FINANCIAL CHALLENGE – FUTURE RISKS, CHALLENGES AND UNCERTAINTIES**

110. The impact of a different inflation assumptions to that estimated in the MTFP are as follows:
  - a. Every 1% reduction in grant equates to circa £1.13m per annum
  - b. Every 1% in Council Tax equates to circa £0.90m per annum
  - c. Every £1 in Council Tax equates to £0.27m per annum
  - d. Every 1% in Pay equates to circa £1.7m in a full year
  - e. Every 1% non-pay inflation equates to £0.40m per annum

111. Prudent forecasts have been included where information which has not yet been finalised. Any variations between the provisional and final settlement, council tax or the collection fund will be balanced with reserves.
112. There are some further financial and operational risks, challenges and mitigations which are as follows:
  - a. The unknown timing and impact of the Police Funding Formula review on Core Grant distribution between forces.
  - b. There is a national move to consider the charging of costs in line with a Net Revenue Expenditure (NRE) rather than a funding formula methodology. This could be seen as a fairer way of distributing costs and income but until such time as the underlying funding formula disparity is addressed, it could potentially make the disparity even worse. NRE methodology currently disproportionately affects forces such as Northamptonshire who have a lower-than-average grant allocation and it bears no correlation to increasing population or households as can be seen earlier in the report. Any movement of national charging to NRE will result in cost increases to Northamptonshire.
  - c. The impact of a different core grant assumption to that estimated in the MTFP for the years after 2026/27. This will be mitigated if multi-year funding indications are provided by the government as promised in recent announcements.
  - d. The operational and financial impact of new, emerging and increasing areas of threat and demand.
  - e. The impact of national grants reducing or ceasing for regional activities such as for the Regional Organised Crime Unit (ROCU).
  - f. The capital programme requirements and the investment required to take any business as usual, innovative or collaborative work forward in advance of the timings of savings. The lack of any capital grants continues to have an impact on the revenue costs of the capital programme, which are built into the MTFP. Variations to interest rates can have a material impact on borrowing costs and treasury income.
  - g. Strategic plans for estates, fleet, digital and operational equipment are in place which inform the capital programme and revenue budgets.
  - h. The impact of partners' spending decisions which may affect services provided by the Force or PFCC.
  - i. Inflation uncertainty both in terms of future nationally negotiated pay awards and non-pay costs.

## **CAPITAL PROGRAMME**

113. A Capital Programme has been approved as part of the budget setting process, which identifies the requirements across fleet, estates, ICT and operational equipment.
114. The approved Capital Programme is as follows:

Programme	2026/27 £m	2027/28 £m	2028/29 £m	2029/30 £m	2030/31 £m
Estates	14.7	14.4	8.9	8.2	6.4
ICT	11.1	9.5	3.5	6.6	2.2
Vehicles & Operational Equipment	4.0	3.3	2.8	2.8	3.9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>29.8</b>	<b>27.2</b>	<b>15.2</b>	<b>17.6</b>	<b>12.5</b>

115. This includes provision for the latest agreed estates developments, continuing ambitions for joint vehicle maintenance and specialist training premises with Fire along with ensuring buildings are fit-for-purpose, safe and accessible in line with the missions set out in the Public Safety Plan.

116. Key investment areas include:

- Joint Asset and Workshop Facility – to replace both aging facilities at police and fire sites, providing a safer and more efficient building and equipment.
- A programme of property enhancements across the estate and particularly at Wootton Hall so that working environments are improved and buildings are ultimately cheaper to run.
- Improved front-facing policing facilities at Kettering, Corby and Towcester.
- Ongoing replacement cycle for vehicles and specialist equipment at end of life.
- Replacement of handheld devices for frontline officers, IT equipment and infrastructure, particular supporting colleagues in the control room.

117. The PFCC is required to approve a *Treasury Management Strategy* each year, setting out the policy and approach to managing investments, borrowing and cashflow, and that decisions are taken in accordance with good professional practice. This approach is required by the Prudential Code and the Code of Treasury Management published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA). It ensures that the capital investment plans of local authorities are affordable, prudent and sustainable. The Joint Independent Audit Committee (JIAC) will consider this document at their March meeting prior to it being placed on the OPFCC website.

## RESERVES

118. In considering the budget, the MTFP and level of precept options, it is important to look closely at the size, level and type of reserves held by the PFCC to ensure that they are adequate to cover the purposes for which they are held and to provide some safeguards against the future risks identified within the budget. There is also a need to ensure they are not excessive.

119. The updated Reserves Strategy is attached at Appendix D and will be published on the PFCC's website for transparency.

120. Two types of reserve are held, as follows:

121. General Reserve – There is a general reserve which is estimated at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026 at **£5.3m**. This represents around 2.6% of total funding for 2026/27 and aligns to the guideline level. The reserves strategy ensures that the general reserve will remain within guideline minimum levels over the MTFP. It is prudent to have such a reserve at this level to enable the organisation to withstand unexpected events which may have financial implications.
122. Earmarked Reserves – As at the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026 it is estimated that the PFCC will hold **£21.1m** in earmarked reserves. These are detailed in the Reserves Strategy included at Appendix D. This includes over £3.0m ringfenced to fund initiatives that deliver against the Safe and Sound Plan.

#### **ROBUSTNESS OF THE BUDGET – STATEMENT OF THE SECTION 151 CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER**

123. Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 places a duty on the Section 151 Officer to make a report to the authority on:
  - a. The robustness of the estimates included within the budget.
  - b. The adequacy of the reserves and balances.
124. The PFCC must have regard to this when considering the budget and the report must be shared with the Police, Fire and Crime Panel.
125. In their considerations, the Section 151 Officer is mindful of other associated statutory safeguards designed to support the authority:
  - a. Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 which requires the authority to make arrangements for the proper administration of its financial affairs and that the Chief Financial Officer has personal responsibility for such administration.
  - b. Sections 32, 43 & 93 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 which requires the authority to set a balanced budget.
  - c. The Prudential Code introduced as part of the Local Government Act 2003 which sets out the framework within which the authority must manage its investments, including adequate planning and budget estimates.
  - d. The external auditor's duty to assess the adequacy of the authority's proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness (Value-for-Money).
126. To reinforce these obligations, Section 114 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 requires the Section 151 Officer to report in consultation with the Monitoring Officer if there is or is likely to be unlawful expenditure or an unbalanced budget.
127. This report has set out the robust budget setting process that has taken place and the work undertaken to ensure the budget is as realistic, deliverable and achievable as possible.
128. The Chief Constable's Section 151 Officer has worked closely with the Chief Constable's Executive team, budget holders and the finance team to deliver the draft budget and savings plan, ensuring that effective scrutiny and challenge has taken place throughout. The Section 151 Officers have also worked closely together throughout the process. The PFCC has

undertaken scrutiny and strategic review of the proposals on two occasions and has been updated regularly throughout the budget cycle as appropriate.

129. The estimates and assumptions are based on the best information available at the time of formulating the budget in line with the fundamental accounting concepts and are reasonable and prudent.
130. The Section 25 Statement of the Section 151 Chief Finance Officer for Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner is included at Appendix C.

#### **LIST OF APPENDICES**

Appendix A - Consultation on the Precept

Appendix B - Medium Term Financial Plan

Appendix C - Section 25 Report of the Section 151 Chief Finance Officer

Appendix D - Reserves Strategy

#### **PERSON TO CONTACT**

Mr V Ashcroft, Chief Finance Officer,

**Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner**

## APPENDIX A

### Consultation on the Precept

The Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's Precept and Public Confidence Survey is a key annual consultation designed to gather public views on two critical areas:

- Funding for local policing and fire services – through the council tax precept and central government grants.
- Community confidence – perceptions of Northamptonshire Police and Fire and Rescue Service, including trust, visibility, and effectiveness.

The survey supports delivery of the Commissioner's Safe and Sound Plan, which sets out the strategic direction for creating safer communities across Northamptonshire. By asking residents what they are willing to pay for these services and how confident they feel in local policing, the consultation ensures that priorities reflect community needs and expectations.

This report reviews the communications activity that promoted the survey, assessing what worked well, the impact of collaborative approaches, and opportunities to build on this success in future years.

The consultation for the 2026/27 precept was conducted through an online survey, which launched on Monday 10th November 2025, and closed at midday on Monday 5th January 2026. The survey achieved 2,219 responses, making it the highest-performing consultation to date. For comparison, the second highest was the 2024/25 survey, which ran for an additional week. This suggests that the length of the consultation period has limited impact on engagement, whereas targeted communications and a robust overall communications strategy play a more significant role in driving participation.

To complement the quantitative survey, we conducted a qualitative consultation through seven professionally facilitated focus groups. These sessions were designed to ensure diversity across ethnicity, gender, age, and socio-economic background, and were held in key locations across Northamptonshire. The purpose was to gain unbiased insights into public perceptions of Northamptonshire Police and Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service, gauge support for a potential precept increase, and capture general views on service delivery.

#### Focus Group Locations and Dates:

- **Wellingborough (Darby House)** – Tuesday, 11<sup>th</sup> November
- **Kettering Police Station** – Wednesday, 12<sup>th</sup> November
- **Mereway Fire Station** – Wednesday, 12<sup>th</sup> November
- **Daventry Fire Station** – Wednesday, 19<sup>th</sup> November
- **Corby Fire Station** – Wednesday, 19<sup>th</sup> November
- **Rushden Fire Station** – Thursday, 20<sup>th</sup> November
- **Brackley Fire Station** – Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> November

### **Activity from the Communications Team included:**

- Initial press release sent to around 100 journalists and 20 newsrooms across print, online and broadcast media – 10<sup>th</sup> November.
- Press release shared on external OPFCC, Police and Fire websites
- Internal messages sent to staff of both Police and Fire asking them to complete and encourage others to complete the survey.
  - ForceNet (Police intranet)– 10/11, 22/12 and 04/12
  - Daily Orders (Police intranet bulletin) – 10/11
  - Fireplace (Fire intranet) – 10/11, 22/12 and 05/01
  - All OPFCC email
  - Email to Station and Watch Managers to asking them to encourage staff participation.
  - Weekly Bulletin (NFRS) – regular weekly reminders for staff to fill in survey up until deadline – 13/11, 27/11, 18/12 and 01/01
  - Chief Officer Blog – 07/11 and 31/12
  - Circulated link to survey to key internal stakeholders (for awareness in case contacted and to cascade) Chief Fire Officer and SLT, Chief Constable and SLT, Enabling Services and Heads of Department.
  - Inclusion in Your Shout newsletter
- Circulated news release through Northamptonshire Talking:
  - OPFCC account saw the initial release sent out on November 10 to 33,408 people, generating a click rate to the survey link of 613.
  - The Police account saw the initial communications sent out on December 04 to 45,141 people generating 783 click throughs to the survey.
- OPFCC newsletter encouraged people to complete the survey. The Commissioner's newsletter included a news article and a direct link to the survey and was shared with more than 600 recipients on our newsletter database.
- Link to survey and request to cascade sent to all unitary councillors in West Northamptonshire and North Northamptonshire, as well as respective Chief Executives. Both WNC and NNC included it in their newsletters as well as promoting it across their digital channels and to their contacts.
- News release shared with all Northamptonshire MPs, PLRs and Police, Fire and Crime Panel members with request to share it with their local constituents and to really encourage participation.
- Release and survey shared with 272 contacts at parish councils across the county, asking them to replicate the survey along with a specially designed banner on their websites. Several councils such as Roade, shared the content in their local newsletter and websites/social media channels.
- Shared release and survey with contacts at more than 40 schools and colleges across the county, requesting they encourage fellow staff and parents to complete the survey.
- News release and link to survey sent to 65 local organisations (including Women's Institute, Faith Groups Local Publications etc) and Community Safety forums.

- Shared with businesses through Northampton Town BID, Chamber of Commerce and Retail Crime Partnership and West Northamptonshire Council - Northamptonshire Chamber of Commerce engaged with us positively and uploaded the content to the Community Hub page and posted it onto their LinkedIn and Facebook page for maximum exposure.
- Emailed the consultation to Independent Custody Visitors and members of the Independent Advisory Groups.
- Shared news release and survey with contacts at various hotels across the county.
- Shared consultation with rural groups including NFU Mutual, Canal & Rivers Trust and Northants Acre, and asked them to share with their rural networks.
- Inclusion in internal blogs and specific vlogs by both PFCC and Chief Fire Officer – with objective of signposting staff and the public to the survey.
- Inclusion of an external vlog from the PFCC across digital channels explaining the purpose of the survey, why participation matters, and encouraging people to complete it.
- Regularly featured the survey in news outlets using the boiler plates in both OPFCC and Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service press releases – throughout November and December.
- ‘Time is running out’ press release sent to more than 80 journalists and newsrooms across print, online and broadcast media – 18<sup>th</sup> December.
- ‘Time is running out’ press release included on both OPFCC and Fire website and all internal and external channels.
- Second message sent out on Northamptonshire Talking from OPFCC account sent out on 17<sup>th</sup> December – as part of the OPFCC newsletter - to 33,600 people, generating a click rate to the survey link of 653.
- Second message sent out on Northamptonshire Talking from Police account sent out on December 24 to 45,141 people, generating a click rate to the survey link of 496.
- Third message ‘Time is running out’ sent on Northamptonshire Talking from Police account (December 30) which was read by 19,584 residents with 506 survey link clicks.
- Third message ‘Time is running out’ sent on Northamptonshire Talking from OPFCC account (December 22) which was read by 15,059 residents with 283 survey link clicks.
- Face-to-face engagement took place at conferences, Women’s Charter events, and meetings during the consultation period, including a focused push at the One Team meeting and during the Chief’s Chat on 13<sup>th</sup> December.
- Digital assets created by Design & Print were shared with partners and contacts and used across digital platforms, delivering a clean and consistent visual campaign.
- Delivered consistent, impactful social media campaigns across all channels, leveraging both paid and organic content to maximise reach and engagement.

Audience	Actions
<p><b>Stakeholders</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Northamptonshire Talking</li> <li>• Parish Councils and Town Councils</li> <li>• Councillors for unitary authorities (West Northamptonshire and North Northamptonshire Councils)</li> <li>• Chief Executives of unitary councils</li> <li>• Police, Fire and Crime Panel members</li> <li>• MPs</li> <li>• Local organisations (such as WI)</li> <li>• Schools</li> <li>• Businesses (including Retail Crime Partnership)</li> <li>• Independent Custody Visitors</li> <li>• Independent Advisory Group members</li> <li>• Road Safety Panel</li> <li>• Rural interest groups (including NFU, Canal &amp; Rivers Trust)</li> <li>• Hotels</li> <li>• Local and hyper local publications</li> <li>• Neighbourhood Watch Management Committee</li> <li>• Community Safety Managers at local authorities</li> <li>• Joint Action Groups</li> <li>• Northamptonshire Association of Local Councils</li> <li>• Police Liaison Representatives</li> <li>• Local criminal justice boards</li> </ul>	<p>Around 106,498 emails were read from alerts sent on Northamptonshire Talking.</p> <p>Emails were sent to all 154 unitary councillors, and 272 contacts at parish councils across the county, asking them to cascade and share the consultation, we received responses from a few of our partners such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- East Hunsbury Parish Council – across digital channels</li> <li>- Northampton Chamber of Commerce – uploaded the content to the Community Hub page and posted it onto their LinkedIn and Facebook page for maximum exposure.</li> <li>- West Northants Council – promoted across their channels and contacts.</li> <li>- North Northants Council – Local Link Newsletter as well as other comms channels.</li> <li>- Eastfield Resident Association – shared to all their members.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Internal</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• News items on ForceNet – The Northamptonshire Police intranet viewed by all officers and staff</li> <li>• All staff email to OPFCC</li> <li>• News items on Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service intranet for Firefighters and staff – repeated three times during the survey period</li> <li>• Daily Orders – link to item on ForceNet directing police staff to survey</li> </ul>	<p>News release was published on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ ForceNet – 10/11, 22/12 and 04/12</li> <li>◦ Daily Orders – 10/11</li> <li>◦ Fireplace – 10/11, 22/12 and 05/01</li> <li>◦ All OPFCC email</li> <li>◦ Email to Station and Watch Managers to asking them to encourage staff participation.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PFCC and Chief Officer vlog and blogs for both OPFCC and Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service</li> <li>• Repeated messaging during bi-weekly Pacesetter meetings for senior firefighters with requests to cascade</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Weekly Bulletin (NFRS) – regular weekly reminders for staff to fill in survey up until deadline – 13/11, 27/11, 18/12 and 01/01</li> <li>○ Chief Officer Blog – 07/11 and 31/12</li> </ul> <p>Intranet articles and all staff emails sent go to more than 3,000 police officers, police staff, firefighters, fire staff, Enabling Services staff and OPFCC staff.</p>
<p><b>Key internal stakeholders</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Northamptonshire Police Chief Officers</li> <li>• Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) Senior Leadership Team</li> <li>• Directors in the Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (OPFCC)</li> <li>• OPFCC Customer Service team</li> <li>• Police Federation</li> <li>• Unison</li> <li>• Police Superintendents' Association</li> <li>• Voice</li> </ul>	<p>Email request to cascade to their members/contacts/networks to garner as much engagement as possible.</p> <p>Circulated link to survey to key internal stakeholders (for awareness in case contacted and to cascade) Chief Fire Officer and SLT, Chief Constable and SLT, Enabling Services and Heads of Department.</p>
<p><b>Media</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An initial news release was issued to all local and regional media across Northamptonshire</li> <li>• News release was sent to hyper local publications</li> <li>• The survey featured in the December edition of the OPFCC newsletter</li> <li>• Another news release – 'Time is running out' was issued to all local and regional media across the county</li> <li>• All press releases for NFRS and OPFCC featured a boiler plate</li> </ul>	<p>X2 news release was sent to more than 20 newsrooms and other local news sites, and approximately 100 individual reporters.</p> <p>There was media coverage in Northampton Chronicle &amp; Echo, Telegraph.</p> <p>The boilerplates also strengthened calls to action following media coverage, keeping the survey in the public eye.</p>
<p><b>Digital and social – 52 native posts</b></p>	<p>Social media by network (all channels OPFCC and all NFRS). These figures are limited to people viewing and clicking links.</p>

*Post Impressions = the total number of times your post has been shown on a person's screen.*

*Account Impressions = total number of times your content has been shown on a person's screen across the whole account.*

*Post Reach = total number of times your content has been seen by different people for content added across the whole account.*

*Account reach = average number of times per day your content has been seen by different people for content added across the whole account.*

- Facebook (82k followers)

Post Impressions = 112.2k  
Account Impressions = 2.3 million  
Post Reach = 66.k  
Account reach = 4k  
Link Clicks = 228

- Nextdoor (139k members)

Impressions -15k  
Link clicks - 22

- LinkedIn (3.1k followers)

Post Impression - 1.3k  
Account Impressions - 24.4k  
Account reach - 184.9  
Link clicks - 23

- Instagram (2.8k followers)

Post impression - 1.6k  
Account impressions - 156.6k  
Post Reach - 659  
Account reach - 592.4k

- X (23.9k followers)

Post Impressions - 3.8k  
Link clicks - 68

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Northamptonshire Talking OPFCC</li> </ul> <p>Meta – Paid for  <i>(This year saw a more cost-effective year, last year's spend was about £195.61 and this year's spend was £64.91 - £130.70 less.)</i></p> <p><b>Police Comms</b></p> <p>Facebook</p> <p>Northamptonshire Talking</p>	<p><b>11/11/25</b>      Sent to 33,408      Read - 15,595      613 link clicks      416 interactions</p> <p><b>17/12/25 (as part of newsletter)</b>      Sent to 33,600      Read - 16,272      653 link clicks      362 interactions</p> <p><b>22/12/25</b>      Sent to 33,714      Read - 15,059      283 link clicks      415 interactions</p> <p><b>02/12/25</b>      Views – 12,745      Reach – 6,261      Link clicks – 257      Spend - £34.92</p> <p><b>29/12/25</b>      Views – 9,928      Reach – 5,569      Link clicks – 144      Spend - £29.99</p> <p><b>Two reshares from our posts</b>      Reach: 28,243      Impressions: 44,453      Link clicks: 75      Comments: 29      Likes: 18      Reactions: 20      Saves: 6</p> <p><b>04/12/25</b>      Sent to 45,141      Read – 20,307      783 link clicks      331 interactions</p>
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	<p><b>24/12/25</b>            Sent to 45,141            Read – 19,681            496 link clicks            192 interactions</p> <p><b>30/12/25</b>            Sent to 45,141            Read – 19,584            506 link clicks            122 interactions</p>
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This year's Precept and Public Confidence Survey delivered the highest response rate to date, marking a significant step forward in public engagement. Despite external challenges—including the national announcement on the planned abolition of Police, Fire and Crime Commissioners, high-profile leadership cases within Northamptonshire Police, and ongoing public concern over financial pressures—the consultation achieved strong participation.

A key factor in this success was the adoption of a digital-first approach. This strategy proved highly effective, demonstrating that targeted digital communications can drive engagement without compromising reach. Urgency messaging, particularly the “Time is running out” communications delivered through Northamptonshire Talking and across OPFCC and Police channels, generated noticeable spikes in responses. Consistent boilerplate messaging in press releases also strengthened calls to action following media coverage. Collaboration with Police Corporate Communications was instrumental, amplifying reach and impact—a trend mirrored by other PFCC offices.

Looking ahead, there is clear opportunity to build on this momentum. Recommendations include:

- Continuing to ask for the support of the Force to leverage their greater audience on Northamptonshire Talking and social channels for this important messaging
- Maintaining urgency messaging in the final phase of the campaign to prompt completions.
- Reintroducing printed collateral such as flyers and postcards at community events to reach audiences less engaged online.
- Diversifying communication channels by combining digital and traditional methods to maximise accessibility and participation.

By implementing these, we can sustain the upward trajectory and further strengthen public engagement, ensuring community voices continue to shape the future of policing and fire services in Northamptonshire.

**APPENDIX B**  
**Medium Term Financial Plan 2026/27 - 2030/31**

EXPENDITURE		MTFP - £15 Precept				
2025/26 £'000		2026/27 £'000	2027/28 £'000	2028/29 £'000	2029/30 £'000	2030/31 £'000
104,530	Police Officers	109,088	112,243	116,810	118,972	120,493
36,323	Police Staff	40,563	41,310	42,083	42,502	42,840
4,169	PCSOs	4,255	4,321	4,390	4,439	4,474
1,320	Other Pension Costs	1,399	1,423	1,448	1,465	1,478
713	Other Employee Expenses	740	755	770	782	792
2,094	National ICT Charges (inc. PNC)	2,087	2,204	2,323	2,444	2,568
8,960	Third Party/Collaborative Arrangements	9,453	9,642	9,834	10,031	10,232
7,538	Other Non-Pay (excl. Enabling Services)	9,171	9,234	9,019	8,312	8,479
(12,321)	Income	(13,864)	(14,907)	(16,121)	(16,397)	(16,659)
<b>153,325</b>	<b>CHIEF CONSTABLE - OPERATIONAL</b>	<b>162,892</b>	<b>166,225</b>	<b>170,556</b>	<b>172,550</b>	<b>174,697</b>
33,869	Enabling Services	32,707	34,949	37,018	38,398	39,680
1,000 (3,435)	New Investment Proposals Savings Plans	1,000 (3,546)	2,000 (4,546)	3,000 (4,083)	4,000 (3,748)	5,000 (3,834)
<b>184,759</b>	<b>TOTAL CHIEF CONSTABLE BUDGET</b>	<b>193,053</b>	<b>198,628</b>	<b>206,491</b>	<b>211,200</b>	<b>215,543</b>
1,424	OPFCC (Office)	1,026	1,056	1,086	1,116	1,146
5,551	OPFCC (Commissioning & Delivery)	6,161	6,111	6,211	6,311	6,411
2,819	Capital Financing - MRP	2,836	5,264	7,106	8,225	9,086
810	Capital Financing - Interest	689	1,793	2,705	3,291	3,898
1,000	Capital Financing - RCCO	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
100	Specific Transfers to Reserves	100	150	250	200	250
(1,316)	Specific Transfers from Reserves	(1,751)	-	-	-	-
<b>10,388</b>	<b>OTHER (Inc. OPFCC &amp; Capital Financing)</b>	<b>10,061</b>	<b>15,374</b>	<b>18,358</b>	<b>20,143</b>	<b>21,791</b>
<b>195,147</b>	<b>TOTAL GROUP</b>	<b>203,114</b>	<b>214,002</b>	<b>224,849</b>	<b>231,343</b>	<b>237,334</b>

## FUNDING

2025/26 £'000		2026/27 £'000	2027/28 £'000	2028/29 £'000	2029/30 £'000	2030/31 £'000
(90,042)	Core Police Grant	(96,994)	(100,154)	(101,869)	(102,887)	(103,916)
(3,338)	Ringfenced Officer Uplift Grant	-	-	-	-	-
(1,633)	Additional Officer Uplift Grant	-	-	-	-	-
(6,644)	Legacy Grants	(6,644)	(6,644)	(6,644)	(6,644)	(6,644)
(3,824)	Pension Grant	(3,824)	(3,824)	(3,824)	(3,862)	(3,901)
(2,500)	National Insurance Reimbursement	(2,500)	(2,500)	(2,500)	(2,500)	(2,500)
(1,908)	Neighbourhood Grant (NEW)	(3,489)	(3,603)	(3,664)	(3,701)	(3,738)
(84,406)	Precept	(89,478)	(94,886)	(100,437)	(104,736)	(109,142)
(851)	Collection Fund Deficit/(Surplus)	(185)	(500)	(500)	(500)	(500)
<b>(195,147)</b>	<b>TOTAL FUNDING</b>	<b>(203,114)</b>	<b>(212,111)</b>	<b>(219,438)</b>	<b>(224,831)</b>	<b>(230,341)</b>
<b>(0)</b>	<b>FUNDING (SURPLUS) / DEFICIT</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,891</b>	<b>5,411</b>	<b>6,512</b>	<b>6,993</b>

## PRECEPT

£320.04	Band D Council Tax	£335.04	£350.04	£365.04	£375.04	£385.04
263,735	Tax Base	267,067	271,073	275,139	279,266	283,455

## ASSUMPTIONS

Core Police Grant	7.72%	3.26%	1.71%	1.00%	1.00%
Precept (%)	4.57%	3.12%	3.03%	2.94%	2.86%
Precept (£)	£15.00	£15.00	£15.00	£10.00	£10.00
Tax Base Change - Increase/(Decrease)	1.26%	1.50%	1.50%	1.50%	1.50%
Pay Awards	3.00%	2.00%	2.00%	2.00%	2.00%

*Note: Figures may not sum due to rounding*

## APPENDIX C

### Section 25 Report of the PFCC Section 151 Chief Finance Officer

*"I have worked closely with the Force Section 151 Officer and the Joint Finance Team and have been assured by their robust and diligent approach to the 2026/27 budget setting process. I am grateful for their hard work, scrutiny and challenge throughout.*

*I have been fully briefed on the progress of the budget by colleagues prior to and throughout the budget process and development of the capital programme, ensuring I have been party to all key assumptions and decisions. Prudent evidence-based estimates and assumptions included have been based on professional estimates, peer knowledge and benchmarking. Where possible, I have aligned these with national fire, police, local authority and national technical team colleagues.*

*I have reviewed the detailed calculations in arriving at the budget requirement and Council Tax precept and find these to be robust. I also have sought and received authorisations from billing authorities in relation to tax base and Council Tax surplus/deficits and I am grateful to all partners for their support in doing so.*

*The PFCC's precept intention of £15 takes into account public consultation alongside prudent assumptions based on the best information available, the MTFP and the reserves position, and still enables an element to be ring-fenced for investment.*

*The Chief Constable and his team have been fully involved in the budget discussions and have discussed revenue and capital requirements for 2026/27 and future years with the PFCC.*

*The budget for 2026/27 has been created through a zero-based budget approach and only previously agreed growth, contractual commitments or unavoidable pressures have been built in. It is a structured and consistent process, and I have received informative responses to queries and/or points of clarification. Where I have sought changes, they have been incorporated.*

*As part of the budget proposals, the PFCC has agreed to investment proposals put forward by the Chief Constable. I will support the PFCC in monitoring these agreed investments to ensure they are delivered in accordance with the timescales and financial envelopes agreed.*

*In preparing the MTFP, working with the Force Section 151 Officer, we modelled scenarios across council tax base assumptions and precept increases to help inform the PFCC considerations in determining her precept proposal for 2026/27. As the information from the settlement and tax base became clearer, we continued to review and refine the MTFP.*

*Whilst Police grant allocations do include new funding, they still do not reflect the pressures of inflation levels experienced in recent years and do not fully cover the cost of pay awards and officer uplift targets previously imposed. As indicative funding information is not yet available beyond 2026/27, there is a high level of uncertainty around affordability of the current MTFP in the future, albeit we still expect that such information will be provided in due course as it has been for local authorities.*

*It is my recommendation that financially, it is essential to take forward the £15 precept flexibility afforded to Northamptonshire for 2026/27. This will be built into the base budget and help provide the most resilient position possible for the medium term.*

*The MTFP does require significant efficiencies to be made and assumes some will be delivered in 2026/27 and each year thereafter. However, even after these efficiencies, there are shortfalls in the MTFP. I am assured that the Chief Constable will work to identify savings and ways of working which will address these challenges over the medium term. I will support the PFCC in ensuring the Chief Constable and Force Section 151 Chief Finance Officer provide regular updates to the Accountability Board.*

*It has been possible for the PFCC to develop a budget that supports most of the Force operational pressures and demands, balances the views of the public from the consultation and gives the opportunity for further investment to support the delivery of the priorities set out in the Police, Fire and Crime Plan (Public Safety Plan).*

*There is an operational contingency available to the Chief Constable, and sufficient general reserves available should operational demands require access to these. Earmarked reserves are in place for specific requirements as described in the Reserves Strategy.*

*The detail within the above report highlights significant unknowns in the medium term. The continuing impact of inflationary pressures, the impact of a future funding formula and the future economic climate are likely to be uncertain for some time. Where possible, forecasts and estimates are included within the MTFP and all opportunities for government funding are pursued to ensure any financial impact on policing is minimised.*

*In coming to my conclusion on the robustness of the budget, I have also reviewed the capital programme and reserves strategy.*

*The capital programme is regularly updated, and all opportunities are taken to rephase the programme, seek external funding and apply for grants. All of these would assist in mitigating costs on the revenue budget.*

*General reserves are established at £5.3m which is above the guideline minimum level and as at the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026, it is estimated that there will be around £21.1m of revenue reserves in total available to support the budget and mitigate challenges if required.*

*Whilst a balanced budget is possible for the next three years, after that time, the landscape is less certain, and it is reasonable to assume that the operational and financial challenges will continue, and these are reflected as best estimates in the MTFP.*

*I conclude, therefore, that the budget for 2026/27:*

- 1. Has been prepared on a robust basis.*
- 2. Continues with the intention to maintain police officers in line with the previous national uplift, at 1,511, plus additional personnel required to achieve new targets for neighbourhood policing resourcing.*
- 3. Includes investment to help manage demand and increase efficiency and/or capacity.*

4. *The budget can be balanced for the next three financial years, with a savings plan and work is already underway by the Chief Constable to identify the balance after that time. Furthermore, reserves are adequate to mitigate the impact of the shortfalls in the MTFP over the five-year period if full savings are not forthcoming.*
5. *The financial landscape after 2026/27 is less certain and the PFCC will continue to push for certainty. The MTFP will be under regular review as savings plans progress.*

**Vaughan Ashcroft**  
**Section 151 and Chief Finance Officer**  
**Office for the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire**

## **APPENDIX D**

### **Reserves Strategy**



### **NORTHAMPTONSHIRE POLICE, FIRE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER RESERVES STRATEGY (UPDATED JANUARY 2026)**

#### **1. Reserves Strategy**

- 1.1. Reserves are a key part of medium-term financial planning with other components including revenue spending plans, income forecasts, potential liabilities, capital investment plans, borrowing and council tax levels. Decisions on these are inter-linked. Consequently, some organisations will need to maintain reserves at higher levels than others.
- 1.2. All publicly funded organisations should have a reserves strategy to demonstrate transparency and accountability, to comply with best practice financial management and to justify the levels of reserves held.
- 1.3. The PFCC maintains reserves to provide a measure of protection against risk. Without this protection, any unforeseen expenditure would have to be met either by increases in Council Tax or immediate savings (potentially through reductions in service levels).
- 1.4. The term "reserves" has a variety of technical and everyday meanings, depending on the context in which it is used. In this strategy, it is taken to mean funds set-aside at the PFCC's discretion for general or specific future purposes.
- 1.5. Reserves are required to protect and enhance the financial viability and in particular:
  - To maintain a degree of in-year financial flexibility.
  - To enable the PFCC to deal with unforeseen circumstances and incidents.
  - To set aside monies to fund major developments in future years.
  - To enable the PFCC to invest to transform and achieve improved service effectiveness and efficiency.
  - To set aside sums for known and potential liabilities.
  - To provide an operational contingency at service level.
- 1.6. Reserves should not be held to fund ongoing revenue expenditure as this is unsustainable in the long term. However, they may be important in smoothing a major financial imbalance (revenue or capital) over a longer timescale. CIPFA Bulletin 13 – Local Authority Reserves and Balances (Updated) published March 2023 states:

*“Balancing the annual budget by drawing on general reserves may be viewed as a legitimate short-term option. However, it is not normally prudent for reserves to be deployed to finance recurrent expenditure. CIPFA has commented that councils should be particularly wary about using one off reserves to deal with shortfalls in current funding. Where such action is to be taken, this should be made explicit, and an explanation given as to how such expenditure will be funded in the medium to long term.”*

- 1.7. The reserves strategy assumes that the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) is broadly balanced on a sustainable basis across the five year planning period. If the financial impact of current economic conditions continues to impact on tax base and council tax levels over the medium term, then this could impact on those assumptions.
- 1.8. Reserves should reflect the agreed financial strategy and should represent the quantified impact of risks and opportunities over the planning period, weighted for their probability.

## **2. National Guidance and Compliance with Home Office Guidance on Police Reserves**

- 2.1. The CIPFA Bulletin includes guidance on the establishment and maintenance of local authority reserves and balances, setting out the key factors that should be taken into account locally in making an assessment of the appropriate level of reserves and balances to be held.
- 2.2. There is information that each PFCC must publish in terms of police reserves. One of the key requirements is that the information on each reserve should make clear how much of the funding falls into each of the following three categories:
  - Funding for planned expenditure on projects and programmes over the period of the current medium term financial plan.
  - Funding for specific projects and programmes beyond the current planning period.
  - As a general contingency to meet other expenditure needs held in accordance with sound principles of good financial management.
- 2.3. This information is summarised across the Home Office headings as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026, together with the proposed use of the reserves held at that date as follows:

Reserve	Forecast Balance as at 31 March 2026 £m	Funding for planned expenditure on projects and programmes over the MTFP (26/27-30/31) £m	Total Forecast Revenue and Capital Reserves as at 31 March 2031 £m	Funding for specific projects and programmes beyond the current planning period £m	As a general contingency to meet other expenditure needs £m
<b>General Fund</b>	<b>5.300</b>	<b>0.700</b>	<b>6.000</b>		<b>6.000</b>
<b>Earmarked Revenue:</b>					
Insurance	1.906		1.906		1.906
Operational Equipment	0.450	(0.200)	0.250		0.250
Carry Forwards	0.200	(0.200)	0.000		0.000
Pensions	0.215		0.215		0.215
Smoothing	4.362		4.362		4.362
PFCC Initiatives	3.451	(1.843)	1.608	(1.608)	0.000
Transformation	2.967	(1.000)	1.967	(1.967)	0.000
Safer Roads	0.820	(0.080)	0.740	(0.740)	0.000
Neighbourhood	0.869	(0.869)	0.000		0.000
<b>Total Earmarked</b>	<b>15.240</b>	<b>(4.192)</b>	<b>11.048</b>	<b>(4.315)</b>	<b>6.733</b>
Collaboration	0.559		0.559	(0.559)	0.000
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>15.799</b>	<b>(4.192)</b>	<b>11.607</b>	<b>(4.874)</b>	<b>6.733</b>
<b>Capital:</b>					
Capital Reserve	0.000		0.000		0.000
S106 Developer Contributions	0.000		0.000		0.000
<b>Total Capital</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.000</b>
<b>Total Reserves</b>	<b>21.099</b>	<b>(3.492)</b>	<b>17.607</b>	<b>(4.874)</b>	<b>12.733</b>

*Note: numbers may not sum due to rounding*

### 3. General Reserve

- 3.1. In order to assess the adequacy of the unallocated general reserve when setting the budget, the PFCC, on the advice of the Chief Finance Officer, should take account of the strategic, operational and financial risks facing the authority. This assessment of risk should include external risks, as well as internal risks, for example the ability to deliver planned efficiency savings.
- 3.2. Whilst there is no prescribed level of reserves that PFCCs should hold; it is influenced by individual discretion, local circumstances, advice from external auditors, risk management arrangements and risk appetite. CIPFA guidance specifically cautions against prescriptive national guidance for a minimum or maximum level of reserves and states:

*“The many factors involved when considering appropriate levels of reserves can only be assessed properly at a local level. A considerable degree of professional judgement is required. The chief finance officer may choose to express advice on the level of balances in cash and/or*

*as a percentage of budget (to aid understanding) so long as that advice is tailored to the circumstances of the authority.”*

- 3.3. However, the minimum level of reserves may be set for the authority by the Ministers in England and Wales where an authority does not act prudently, disregards the advice of its chief finance officer or is heading for financial difficulties.
- 3.4. CIPFA indicate a minimum general reserve level is typically between 2% and 3% of net budget requirement.
- 3.5. The PFCC has considered the reserves strategy and wishes to hold a sufficient but not excessive level of reserves. In determining this position, Annexe 1 outlines how the PFCC complies with the 7 key CIPFA principles which can be used to assess the adequacy of reserves.
- 3.6. Given that the PFCC is required to meet the first 1% of any special grant requirement, and the level and range of earmarked reserves available to the PFCC, it seems prudent that the current policy is to maintain general reserves at a guideline level of around 3% of annual net revenue expenditure, with a minimum of 2.5%.
- 3.7. At present, there are no plans to use the general reserve during the period of the MTFP. However, with forecast budget increases, there is a need to ensure the level of general reserves keeps pace to ensure minimum and guideline levels are achieved as follows:

Year	£m	%
2026/27	<b>5.350</b>	2.6%
2027/28	<b>5.450</b>	2.5%
2028/29	<b>5.650</b>	2.5%
2029/30	<b>5.800</b>	2.5%
2030/31	<b>6.000</b>	2.5%

- 3.8. Where appropriate and if budget levels are higher than those forecast in the MTFP, the PFCC will endeavour to increase general reserves for additional resilience.

#### **4. Earmarked Reserves**

- 4.1. In addition to the general reserve, the PFCC holds a number of reserves which are earmarked for specific purposes.
- 4.2. The predicted position for each earmarked reserve as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026, together with an outline of its specific purpose is attached at Annexe 2.
- 4.3. At the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026, it is estimated that the PFCC will hold £15.800m in earmarked reserves which are as follows and detailed in Annexe 3:
  - **Insurance** – To set aside funds if considered prudent for civil claims (Public and Employer liability) in line with professional advice.
  - **Operational Equipment** – To smooth the impact on the revenue budget in respect of the cost of replacing operational equipment, rather than impacting disproportionately on the budget in any one year.

- **Carry Forwards** – To hold previous years underspends which are ring-fenced and carried forward for specific purposes in the medium term.
- **Pensions** – To smooth the impact of ill-health retirements and to meet the costs of any unexpected pension-related pressures in excess of budget provision where the timing of such pressures are uncertain.
- **Smoothing** – To enable the savings generated to be earmarked and released over future years as needed, smoothing the impact of funding fluctuations and timing of savings programmes on the revenue budget.
- **PFCC Initiatives** – To deliver funding towards the specific initiatives of the PFCC arising to deliver against the Safe and Sound Plan.
- **Transformation** – To support the Chief Constable in initiatives and transformative activities such as investments in technology and other innovation.
- **Safer Roads** – To use in line with specific criteria for equipment or road safety initiatives. A Road Safety Alliance is in place with partners to produce priorities and the PFCC's reserve is held for this.
- **Neighbourhood** – To capture any underspends from the in-year Police Officer and Police Community Support Officers (PCSO) budgets. It is intended that the PCSO proceeds of this reserve will be specifically used to support neighbourhoods, and that Police Officer funds are used to maintain officer strength where needed.
- **Developer Contributions (S106)** – To collect the drawn down developer contributions awarded to the PFCC in line with S106 planning arrangements. These funds will be released in accordance with the terms of the agreements, usually to fund capital expenditure. The reserve only accounts for funds once they have been drawn down and will apply funds against qualifying expenditure in line with the Treasury Management Strategy.
- **Capital** – To hold capital financing underspends or disposal proceeds. These are to be used to fund the capital programme and minimise borrowing in line with the Treasury Management Strategy.
- **Collaboration** – To hold previous years underspends on regional collaboration to fund regional asset replacements. Each P(F)CC holds their share of the regional reserves, set aside to meet future regional costs.

4.4. The forecast balance on the reserves, taking into account a prudent estimate of timings for proposals which are currently being developed is detailed within Annex 3.

## 5. Provisions

5.1. The CIPFA Statement of Recommended Practice is prescriptive about when provisions are required (and when they are not permitted). A provision must be established for any material liabilities of uncertain timings or amount, to be settled by the transfer of economic benefits. In accordance with this statutory guidance, the Force hold an established 'Insurance Provision' which is reviewed as part of the closedown process for each year.

## **6. Procedures for management and control**

- 6.1. Any drawdown from reserves is subject to the approval of the PFCC, on advice from their Chief Finance Officer (Section 151 Officer) or under their delegated authority.
- 6.2. The Local Government Act 2003 requires the Section 151 Officer to report annually on the adequacy of the reserves and this is included within the statement on the robustness of the budgeting estimates.
- 6.3. The Strategy will be reviewed annually by the Section 151 Officer as part of the Budget and Precept process.

## Annexe 1

### Northamptonshire OPFCC - Compliance with the 7 Key CIPFA Principles to assess the adequacy of reserves

Budget Assumptions (CIPFA Principles)	2026/27 Situation in Northamptonshire
<b>The treatment of inflation and interest rates</b>	<p>Northamptonshire makes full and appropriate provision for pay and price increases, informed by benchmarking with peers.</p> <p>An informed assessment is made in the Treasury Management Strategy of interest rate movements, backed up by professional independent advice.</p> <p>All income and expenditure in the budget is prepared and published at outturn prices.</p> <p>Additionally, there are operational and inflation contingencies to mitigate any volatility during the year.</p>
<b>Estimates of the level and timing of capital receipts</b>	<p>Northamptonshire has recently reviewed its estates strategy as a fundamental part of the capital programme and has made a prudent assumption of future capital receipts across the programme which are being used to fund capital expenditure and minimise the impact of borrowing on the budget.</p>
<b>The treatment of demand led pressures</b>	<p>The Force is required to operate and manage within its annual budget allocation. Overtime budgets are devolved within the Force to enable operational leaders to make decisions and the Chief Constable retains an operational contingency to support additional major incidents.</p> <p>On an exceptional basis, agreement is sought from the PFCC to utilise carry forwards to meet one off demand led pressures and demand led pressures are scrutinised and built into the budget set by the PFCC.</p> <p>Northamptonshire have identified savings in previous years which mean that opportunities for efficiencies are less than in previous years.</p> <p>The PFCC is keen to ensure the Force continue to identify efficiencies where it makes sense to do so, and an efficiency target is set as part of the budget and MTFP and detailed within the annual strategic outcomes agreed with the Chief Constable.</p>

	<p>Depending on funding availability, the PFCC has and will continue to support investment in areas that reduce demand, or which increase efficiency/capacity to deal with demand.</p> <p>General reserves are only used as a last resort to manage and fund demand led pressures.</p>
<p><b>The treatment of Planned Efficiency Savings/Productivity Gains</b></p>	<p>The Force has a plan to meet financial savings and challenges and has a good track record of achieving required efficiencies.</p> <p>The Force undertakes budget challenge meetings and reports on savings that are earmarked to offset pressures in the MTFP.</p> <p>The Force operates a governance structure which monitors investments, savings and efficiencies and is attended by OPFCC representatives.</p> <p>There are efficiency requirements aligned to the MTFP and any identified savings and efficiencies will be monitored and reviewed regularly and are only included as achieved in budgets when confirmed and verified.</p>
<p><b>The financial risks inherent in any significant new funding partnerships, collaboration, major outsourcing arrangements or major capital developments.</b></p>	<p>The financial consequences of partnership collaboration working outsourcing arrangements or capital investment are reported to the PFCC as part of the medium-term planning process. Where relevant, any additional costs are incorporated into the annual revenue budget and/or capital programme.</p> <p>There is a risk that partners will withdraw funding as their own budgets are squeezed, or that the continued viability of private sector commercial partners will be exposed to risk in the face of an economic recession.</p>
<p><b>The availability of reserves, government grants and other funds to deal with major contingencies and the adequacy of provisions.</b></p>	<p>Northamptonshire OPFCC have created earmarked reserves and provisions to meet specific expenditure items and have added to these further in this strategy. Their use and balances are detailed in Annex 3.</p> <p>Northamptonshire maintains an insurance provision, the adequacy of which is monitored in detail by the legal services insurance advisors, together with our insurance advisors. The access criteria for special grants state that PFCCS may be required to fund up to 1% of their net budget requirement themselves before the Government considers grant aid. This applies on an annual basis.</p>

	<p>Northamptonshire's general reserve provides sufficient scope to cover this eventuality.</p>
<b>The general financial climate to which the Authority is subject</b>	<p>It is anticipated that the financial climate will continue to be challenging and the medium-term financial plan reflects the “best estimate” of future inflation rates and increases in government grants and contributions.</p> <p>The Commercial team keep the authority updated on matters/risks affecting large contracts and supply chain.</p> <p>The MTFP will be regularly reviewed and updated to support operational decision making.</p>

**Annexe 2**

**RESERVES OF THE NORTHAMPTONSHIRE PFCC**  
**2026/27 to 2030/31**

	<b>Rationale</b>	<b>How and when used</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Risk If Reserve Not Held</b>	<b>Management and control</b>	<b>Review</b>
<b>GENERAL RESERVE</b>	<p>To maintain a degree of in-year financial flexibility.</p> <p>To enable the PFCC to deal with unforeseen circumstances and incidents.</p> <p>To set aside sums for known and potential liabilities.</p> <p>To support the operational contingency held at service level if demands on them exceed the contingency levels held.</p>	<p>To meet exceptional spending needs or overspends which are unable to be otherwise financed at the year end.</p> <p>To smooth the profile of funding revenue over a medium term financial period</p> <p>To allow higher spending without raising council tax on a one-off basis</p>	<p>Maintained at least 2.5% of net budget requirement.</p>	<p>The general reserve is held at a level which reflects risk, uncertainties, and volatility.</p> <p>If no reserve is held there may be insufficient resources available for major catastrophe, which could jeopardise financial status and reputation of the PFCC.</p> <p>The PFCC would have recourse to Home Office discretionary special grant if costs exceed 1% of budget or Bellwin scheme for natural disasters.</p>	<p>PFCC, on advice from PFCC CFO</p>	<p>Annual</p>

	<b>Rationale</b>	<b>How and when used</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Risk If Reserve Not Held</b>	<b>Management and control</b>	<b>Review</b>
<b>EARMARKED - INSURANCE</b>	To cover the potential and contingent liabilities of uninsured risks as assessed annually by our insurers based on claims outstanding.	The balance will increase or reduce annually dependent on the PFCC's outstanding claims record.  Reviewed/scrutinised by the Joint Finance team and by legal and claims handling experts; the annual actuarial assessment determines the level of the reserve.	Variable according to annual risk assessment	The reserve is held to cover potential uninsured risks.  If no reserve is held the PFCC is potentially open to significant excess and claims payments in year beyond available revenue budgets.  Assessment by insurers needs to be realistic not unduly pessimistic.	PFCC, on advice from PFCC CFO	Annual
<b>EARMARKED - OPERATIONAL EQUIPMENT</b>	To smooth the impact of operational equipment purchases on the revenue budget	To access the funds a costed request has to be provided.	Variable according to usage and annual risk assessment.	The reserve is held to smooth the impact of operational equipment replacement rather than have significant variations in the budget.  If no reserve is held, the risk is that equipment would have to be replaced from the current year's budget or capital programme.	PFCC, on advice from PFCC CFO	Annual

	Rationale	How and when used	Level	Risk If Reserve Not Held	Management and control	Review
<b>EARMARKED - CARRY FORWARDS</b>	To fund specific expenditure requested by the force from previous year underspends or earmarked funding received.	Business cases provided as part of the outturn report or specific funding conditions.	Variable according to financial outturn.	Establishing a reserve enables an incentive and an opportunity to utilise year end underspends in a manner which will provide additionality and benefit for the service in future years, rather than finding resources from in-year or reserves.	PFCC, on advice from PFCC CFO	Annual
<b>EARMARKED - PENSIONS</b>	<p>To meet the costs of any ill-health or injury retirements which are unbudgeted and fall directly on the PFCC.</p> <p>To cover any significant overspend on the employer contributions to the Pension Account.</p> <p>To cover costs in excess of budget relating to the administration of pension remedy, following changes to regulations.</p>	<p>Annually as required.</p> <p>Transfers out depend on the amount resulted from successful claims during the year.</p> <p>Historically there has been budget provided within the Force revenue budget for approximately 6 claims in a year. Any unused budget within a year would represent transfers in.</p>	Variable according to annual risk assessment	<p>The reserve is held to collect any underspend from ill health pensions in the budget and provides an opportunity to smooth the impact of a financial pressure or overspend in subsequent years.</p> <p>The reserve enables a flat and realistic annual budget to be set for ill-health pensions rather than being subject to annual variances.</p> <p>If no reserve is held, significant pension costs beyond normal budgeted profile could create pressure on the revenue budget or general reserves.</p>	PFCC, on advice from PFCC CFO	Annual

	Rationale	How and when used	Level	Risk If Reserve Not Held	Management and control	Review
<b>EARMARKED - SMOOTHING</b>	<p>The reserve is held to receive any efficiencies and funding in excess of the budget set and to utilise to ensure any future variations are smoothed where appropriate.</p> <p>This includes the impact of fluctuations in funding receipts from the collection fund if provided after the budget has been set.</p>	The balance will increase or reduce annually dependent on budget levels and the savings programme.	Variable according to usage and annual risk assessment.	<p>If funds were not maintained the PFCC and the Force could be required to balance the budget or funding shortfalls by in-year savings.</p> <p>There can be significant variations each year in the revenue budget whilst the timing of efficiency savings occur – this smoothing reserve will assist in mitigating that.</p>	PFCC, on advice from PFCC CFO	Annual
<b>EARMARKED - PFCC INITIATIVES</b>	<p>The reserve is held and was established from a PFCC reserve and has been supplemented by in-year underspends.</p> <p>To deliver funding to for specific initiatives of the PFCC arising from the Public Safety Plan.</p> <p>To provide funding to deliver innovative solutions and pump prime new projects.</p> <p>To fund invest-to-save projects that support the Public Safety Plan.</p>	As required – typically informed by approved business cases for bids on the Fund.	Variable according to outturn and annual risk assessment.	<p>If the reserve was not held initiatives would be funded either from the revenue budget or from other earmarked policing reserves.</p> <p>If alternative funds were not available, then there could be missed opportunities for initiatives that cannot be progressed.</p>	PFCC, on advice from PFCC CFO	Annual

	<b>Rationale</b>	<b>How and when used</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Risk If Reserve Not Held</b>	<b>Management and control</b>	<b>Review</b>
<b>EARMARKED - TRANSFORMATION</b>	To fund transformative activities and opportunities and meet initial and upfront costs of approved projects.	To access the funds a costed request or business case has to be provided.	Variable according to outturn and annual risk assessment.	If funds were not provided, the risk is that equipment or services and resources required to implement transformative projects would have to be replaced from the current year's budget or other reserves.  If no funds were available, it may be that innovative activity is hindered.	PFCC, on advice from PFCC CFO	Annual
<b>EARMARKED - SAFER ROADS</b>	The reserve is held to provide an opportunity for supporting local road safety related grants and to fund initiatives in the county identified locally and by the Road Safety Alliance.  Surpluses of fines and speed awareness course income is reinvested in replacement equipment and road safety initiatives.  The reserve is influenced by the work of the Road Safety Alliance.	As required – typically informed by approved business cases for bids on the Fund.	Variable according to outturn and annual risk assessment.	If reserve was not held then safety initiatives would have to be funded from the revenue budget, other reserves or not implemented.  This reserve can only be used in accordance with the legislation for its use of road safety related activities.	PFCC, on advice from PFCC CFO	Annual

	Rationale	How and when used	Level	Risk If Reserve Not Held	Management and control	Review
<b>EARMARKED - NEIGHBOURHOOD</b>	<p>For underspends in the Police Community Support Officers (PCSO) budget to be held to be used towards prioritising those resources and used in neighbourhoods or other associated requirements.</p> <p>The reserve also provides an opportunity to overrecruit PCSOs or to use on other neighbourhood associated activities or requirements.</p> <p>For underspends in Police Officer Pay to be earmarked to support officer strength in the future.</p>	As required – typically informed by approved business cases for bids on the Fund.	Variable according to outturn and annual risk assessment.	If funds were not earmarked, it is possible that officer or PCSO numbers would need to be reduced.	PFCC, on advice from PFCC CFO	Annual
<b>EARMARKED - COLLABORATION</b>	Transfers in relate to underspend on regional collaboration. Transfers out represent contribution towards regional decisions including capital funding.	<p>Upon requirement on decision made to contribute towards projects in relation to regional collaborations.</p> <p>Decisions made on East Midlands PFCC and CC Boards</p>	Variable according to usage and annual risk assessment.	If funds were not maintained, there would be a risk of regional projects not being supported.	PFCC, on advice from PFCC CFO	Annual

	Rationale	How and when used	Level	Risk If Reserve Not Held	Management and control	Review
<b>EARMARKED - CAPITAL</b>	To hold capital financing underspends or disposal proceeds. These are to be used to fund the capital programme and minimise borrowing.	Released to fund capital projects where deemed the most cost efficient way to do so, in line with the Treasury Management Strategy.	Variable according to outturn, usage and annual risk assessment.	If unavailable, the cost of financing capital expenditure could adversely impact revenue budgets into the future.  Capital projects may be deemed unaffordable.	PFCC, on advice from PFCC CFO	Annual
<b>EARMARKED - DEVELOPER CONTRIBUTIONS (S106)</b>	The reserve is held for funds allocated to the PFCC from developers towards the cost of infrastructure developments for Policing.  To meet the additional cost of operational requirements	To access the funds a costed request has to be provided which is consistent with the conditions of the developer contribution.	Variable according to usage.	If funds were not provided, the risk is that the additional costs would have to be factored into the capital programme.	PFCC, on advice from PFCC CFO	Annual

Annexe 3

Summary of Revenue and Capital Reserves 2025/26 to 2030/31

	Forecast Balance at 31 March 2026	Forecast Balance at 31 March 2027	Forecast Balance at 31 March 2028	Forecast Balance at 31 March 2029	Forecast Balance at 31 March 2030	Forecast Balance at 31 March 2031
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
<b><u>Held to meet budgetary risks</u></b>						
Insurance	1.906	1.906	1.906	1.906	1.906	1.906
Operational Equipment	0.450	0.250	0.250	0.250	0.250	0.250
	<b>2.356</b>	<b>2.156</b>	<b>2.156</b>	<b>2.156</b>	<b>2.156</b>	<b>2.156</b>
<b><u>Held to support the medium term budget</u></b>						
Earmarked - Carry Forwards	0.200	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Pensions	0.215	0.215	0.215	0.215	0.215	0.215
Smoothing	4.362	4.362	4.362	4.362	4.362	4.362
	<b>4.777</b>	<b>4.577</b>	<b>4.577</b>	<b>4.577</b>	<b>4.577</b>	<b>4.577</b>
<b><u>Held to facilitate change programmes</u></b>						
PFCC Initiatives Reserve	3.451	2.608	2.358	2.108	1.858	1.608
Transformation Reserve	2.967	1.967	1.967	1.967	1.967	1.967
Safer Roads Reserve	0.820	0.804	0.788	0.772	0.756	0.740
Neighbourhood Reserve	0.869	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
S106 Developer Contributions	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	<b>8.107</b>	<b>5.379</b>	<b>5.113</b>	<b>4.847</b>	<b>4.581</b>	<b>4.315</b>
<b><u>Capital Reserves</u></b>						
Capital Reserves	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.000</b>
<b>Total PFCC Earmarked Reserves</b>	<b>15.240</b>	<b>12.112</b>	<b>11.846</b>	<b>11.580</b>	<b>11.314</b>	<b>11.048</b>
Collaboration Reserves - Held locally	0.559	0.559	0.559	0.559	0.559	0.559
<b>Total Earmarked Reserves</b>	<b>15.799</b>	<b>12.671</b>	<b>12.405</b>	<b>12.139</b>	<b>11.873</b>	<b>11.607</b>
General Fund	5.300	5.350	5.450	5.650	5.800	6.000
<b>Total Reserves</b>	<b>21.099</b>	<b>18.021</b>	<b>17.855</b>	<b>17.789</b>	<b>17.673</b>	<b>17.607</b>

*Note: numbers may not sum due to rounding*

## NORTHAMPTONSHIRE POLICE, FIRE AND CRIME PANEL

**4 FEBRUARY 2026**

<b>Report Title</b>	Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel's statutory responsibilities relating to scrutiny of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's proposed Fire Precept 2026/27
<b>Report Author</b>	James Edmunds, Democratic Services Assistant Manager, West Northamptonshire Council <a href="mailto:James.edmunds@westnorthants.gov.uk">James.edmunds@westnorthants.gov.uk</a>

### **List of Approvers**

<b>WNC Monitoring Officer</b>	Sarah Hall	20/01/2026
<b>WNC Chief Finance Officer (S.151)</b>	Martin Henry	21/01/2026

### **List of Appendices**

**None**

#### **1. Purpose of Report**

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- 1.1. The report is intended to set out the statutory requirements on the Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel regarding scrutiny of the proposed Fire Precept for 2026/27 produced by the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire.

#### **2. Executive Summary**

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- 2.1. The report summarises the Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel's statutory responsibilities relating to reviewing and making a report on the proposed Fire Precept for 2026/27 produced by the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire. The proposed Fire Precept appears on the agenda for the current Panel meeting as the next item of business.

#### **3. Recommendations**

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- 3.1. It is recommended that the Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel reviews the proposed Fire Precept for 2026/27 produced by the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire and makes a report to the Commissioner with their views.

#### **4. Reasons for Recommendations**

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4.1 The recommendation is intended to enable the Panel to carry out its statutory responsibilities relating to scrutiny of the proposed Fire Precept effectively at the current meeting.

#### **5. Report Background**

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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 must not issue it as the precept for the next year. By 15 February of the relevant financial year the Commissioner must:

- a) Have regard to the report by the Panel
- b) Give the Panel a response to its report setting out the precept that the Commissioner now proposes to issue (referred to as the 'revised precept'). If the Panel vetoed the original proposed precept because it was considered to be too high the revised precept shall be

lower; if the Panel vetoed the original proposed precept because it was considered to be too low the revised precept shall be higher.

- c) Publish the response in a matter determined by the Panel.

5.6 The Panel is required to review the revised precept and to make a report on it to the Commissioner (referred to as the 'second report'). The second report may indicate whether the Panel accepts or rejects the revised precept and may make recommendations on it, including recommendations as to the precept that should be issued for the next year. The Panel must complete these actions by 22 February of the relevant financial year. A reserve meeting of the Panel is scheduled if required for this purpose. The Panel does not have the power to veto the revised precept.

5.7 If the Commissioner receives a second report from the Panel, by 1 March of the relevant financial year the Commissioner must:

- a) Have regard to the second report by the Panel
- b) Give the Panel a response to the second report
- c) Publish the response.

5.8 The scrutiny process concludes at this point. The Commissioner may then issue the revised precept as the precept for the next financial year or issue a different precept but only if in accordance with a recommendation made in the Panel's second report.

## **6. Issues and Choices**

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6.1 Reviewing and reporting on the proposed Fire Precept is a statutory task for the Panel. The Panel should seek to carry it out in accordance with its overall role of scrutinising and supporting the effective exercise by the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner of her responsibilities.

6.2 Local Government Association guidance for panels on policing and fire governance gives advice on good practice in relation to scrutiny of a proposed Police Precept that is also applicable to scrutiny of the proposed Fire Precept:

*A panel's questioning plan in relation to the commissioner's precept should focus on strategy, not numerical details and be used to seek clarification, test evidence and assumptions and explore options best able to deliver the police and crime plan through the proposed precept. Questions panels might ask their commissioner could include whether the precept enables funding to follow priorities; whether value for money is being secured; and whether there is a robust monitoring framework.*

*Panels have the power of veto over the precept. However, this a longstop, use of which should be very rare and needs to be justified. Panels should also recognise that the veto can only act as a delay; it will not prevent the commissioner from being able to re-present, and enact, a precept that is not materially different from that to which the veto has been applied.*

*If the veto is used, the panel should be prepared to provide detailed reasoning to back up why.*

## **7. Implications (including financial implications)**

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### **7.1 Resources and Financial**

7.1.1 There are no resources or financial implications arising from the proposal.

### **7.2 Legal**

7.2.1 The report concerns the Panel's statutory functions for reviewing the proposed Fire Precept for 2026/27. The relevant legislation is set out within the body of the report.

### **7.3 Risk**

7.3.1 There are no significant risks arising from the proposed recommendation in this report.

## **8. Background Papers**

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Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011

Policing and Crime Act 2017

Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel Terms of Reference

Policing and fire governance – Local Government Association guidance for police and crime panels (2019)



**NORTHAMPTONSHIRE POLICE, FIRE AND CRIME PANEL**  
**4 February 2026**

**REPORT BY THE POLICE, FIRE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER (PFCC)  
AND THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER**

**PFCC PROPOSED FIRE PRECEPT 2026/27**

**PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1. To propose the 2026/27 Council Tax Precept for **Northamptonshire Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority (NCFRA)**.
2. To provide information in respect of the revenue budget, capital programme, reserves and Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) to provide context for the precept proposal.

**RECOMMENDATION**

3. The Police, Fire and Crime Panel is **RECOMMENDED** to endorse:
  - a. The proposal to increase the 2026/27 Fire Precept by the maximum allowable without triggering a referendum by up to £12 per annum to £92.39 for Band D Council Tax (from £80.39 in 2025/26). This would be an increase of around 23 pence per week. Other precept scenarios are shown in Appendix C of this report.

The Panel is advised that this intention is dependent on the final government settlement providing precept flexibility for NCFRA and that this is issued before the PFCC sets the precept. The Commissioner will not seek to trigger a public referendum.
  - b. If additional precept flexibility is not provided, the proposal is to increase the 2026/27 Fire Precept by £5 per annum to £85.39 for Band D Council Tax (from £80.39 in 2025/26). This is an increase of around 10 pence per week.
4. Note the information presented in this report, including:
  - a. The statement of the Section 151, Chief Finance Officer as required by Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 regarding the robustness of the budget, the MTFP and the adequacy of financial reserves (Appendix D).
  - b. The PFCC has written to the government to request precept flexibility above the £5 referendum limit prescribed in the provisional local government funding settlement and

awaits a final decision. It is the intention of the PFCC to set a precept at £12 if permitted and this is the preferred scenario set out in this report. However, as the final local government settlement has not been published at the time of writing, this report reflects the position at both £5 and £12 increases.

- c. A £12 Band D Precept increase provides a total 2026/27 net budget envelope of **£38.167m**, of which **£24.674m** is from the precept. This results in a savings requirement of **£1.208m**.
- d. Should additional precept flexibility not be provided, a £5 Band D Precept increase provides a total 2026/27 net budget envelope of **£36.298m**, of which **£22.805m** is from the precept. This results in a savings requirement of **£3.077m**.
- e. The current and future risks, challenges, uncertainties and opportunities included in the precept proposal are set out, together with the financial and operational mitigations.
- f. Any changes required after the precept has been set, by Government grant alterations in the final settlement or amended council tax base and surplus/deficit figures by the collecting authorities, may be balanced either through efficiency savings or through a transfer to/from reserves.
- g. When received, any variations from business rates notified by the unitary authorities will be balanced by a transfer to/from reserves.
- h. The current MTFP and the anticipated savings required.
- i. The Capital Programme and Reserves Strategy (Appendix D).

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 5. This report details the 2026/27 precept proposal for the Northamptonshire Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority (NCFRA).
- 6. The report and proposal are the culmination of several months' work by the Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (OPFCC), the Joint Finance Team and Fire Service colleagues. It also includes information provided by the two unitary authorities and takes account of public and stakeholder consultation.
- 7. NCFRA has considered the local government provisional settlement which set out government expectations, current and future funding levels, the pre-budget engagement and the outcome of the public survey.
- 8. The PFCC and the Section 151 Officer are grateful for the updates provided by colleagues in the unitary authorities in respect of the tax base and council tax collection fund.
- 9. The proposals are set in a context of the current economic climate.
- 10. As outlined later in this report, Northamptonshire is still one of the lowest funded Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) in the country, and this would still be the case with either £5 or £12 precept increases. Precept flexibility of £5 is gratefully received but is afforded to all authorities so does not address the disparity between Northamptonshire and other FRAs. In

considering the Fire budget and proposed precept for 2026/27, the PFCC considered this national context and NCFRA's lower precept, core spending power and reserves position relative to others.

11. Despite challenges, the budget is balanced for 2026/27 with a funded capital programme and an adequate level of reserves in place. However, budget cuts will be required and achieving a balanced budget across the medium term will be more challenging. Prudent assumptions of future income streams have been used which identify the need for future efficiencies.
12. The PFCC has conducted, and been informed by, engagement with Northamptonshire residents to gain feedback on progress against the Safe and Sound Plan and the precept intentions. The results of the survey are summarised in this report with more detail available on the PFCC website in due course.
13. In order to achieve the missions set out in the Safe and Sound Plan, the PFCC worked with the Service to ensure the Fire Strategy, known as the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP), is in alignment.
14. The budget and reserves strategy includes funds to support delivery of transformational projects such as 'Your Future Service' which will optimise productivity and efficiency and deliver the best possible service to the public. In 2026/27 there is £0.25m in base budget for in-year innovation and £0.6m ringfenced in earmarked reserves.
15. The Section 151 Officer has reviewed the adequacy and level of reserves to ensure that funds are still available to support investment in innovative solutions and ensure the level is adequate to meet one-off short term funding shortfalls if savings and efficiencies are not identified.
16. Given the legacy of under-investment prior to 2019, the capital programme investment requirements continue to be significant. Revenue budget of £300k is allocated annually to support capital expenditure on the shorter life assets to minimise future borrowing costs.
17. The budget and precept recognise the importance of collaborative working with Police and the OPFCC, with Enabling Services support areas embedded across Fire and Policing under the leadership and direction of the Joint Assistant Chief Officer.
18. The MTFP has been prepared on funding assumptions informed by the multi-year settlement and latest information on council tax and business rates from the unitary councils. Whilst better funding certainty is welcomed, the results demonstrate that even with a £12 precept increase there are significant financial challenges in future years. The Chief Fire Officer has commenced work to address these shortfalls, and governance is in place for the PFCC to monitor and gain assurance on progress and impact.

## PRECEPT PROPOSAL

19. After careful consideration of the factors outlined in this report, the PFCC proposes a precept increase of £12 a year (23 pence per week) to £92.39 for a Band D property if precept flexibility is provided. This will enable Fire to maintain the investment in firefighters, push forward structural improvements, maintain an adequate level of reserves and deliver against the Safe and Sound Plan and CRMP.
20. The PFCC appreciates the impact on the taxpayer. Whilst this is a pressure on households, the PFCC needs to ensure that the Service has the resources it needs to meet the current and future spending challenges but also reflects the current financial climate and the views of those who took part in the precept consultation.
21. The PFCC is grateful to all those who took part in the survey and consultation, and their willingness to pay more in order to safeguard and develop the county's fire and rescue service.

## PUBLIC SAFETY PLAN – ‘SAFE AND SOUND’

22. A 5-year strategic plan was developed by the PFCC to set out priorities for how police and fire services keep our communities safe. This followed significant engagement across the county that the PFCC has called the ‘Big Conversation’ and sets out three missions:
  - a. Visible and Accessible Community Services
  - b. Professionalism and Standards
  - c. Stronger Public Safety Partnerships
23. The PFCC said:

*“The Big Conversation told me very clearly that people just want to feel safer. They want to know that police, fire, and all the public safety partners will be there when they need them.*

*Trust and confidence is such a big issue for the emergency services, and people want to know that their local services will listen to their concerns and take them seriously, and always work to the highest standards.*

*That’s why this strategic plan prioritises visible and accessible local policing, fire and rescue professionals who are fully engaged in their local communities and helping people to protect themselves from risk, improved standards across the board, and partners working together with just one aim, a safe and sound Northamptonshire.”*

24. The 2026/27 budget and updated medium term financial plan have been built to continue delivery of the Plan:
25. **Visible and Accessible Community Services** – this means capitalising on the service’s unique presence in our communities to maximise the impact of the prevention and protection activity that we know to be crucial. Our fire and rescue service has a strong record of reducing fires and could further extend its reach into all our communities. By working with fire leaders to deliver against the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) we will both improve response

times to the highest risk incidents and enable the service to take its place at the heart of the community. This will mean opening up fire stations to the public and making the best use of an extensive estate as a community asset, bringing highly skilled fire professionals out of the station and into the community wherever possible. There is more that they could do to protect communities and prevent harm, including closer work with other services. Inspection and national reports tell us how critical this focus on prevention, protection and supporting the vulnerable must be for a modern service.

26. **Professionalism and Standards** – this means delivering on our *Serving with Pride* strategy, which seeks to support fire professionals to create the open, inclusive workplace that we know they want to see. There is more to do to ensure that people at all levels of our service, both frontline staff and those who support them, treat each other with respect and put the public first. As with policing, there should be a strong focus on wellbeing at work for fire and rescue – with safe working practices and support for people to develop as leaders.

In the past year, the inspectorate (HMICFRS) re-inspected the service in respect of equality, diversity and inclusion and praised 'significant steps' in the right direction.

27. **Stronger Public Safety Partnerships** – this means resetting the accountability relationship that service leaders have with the PFCC and to provide clearer support and challenge in driving performance improvement. The OPFCC's role in managing complaints and customer service has been deepened so that there can be even more learning from the community's experience of police and fire.

In December 2025, the OPFCC team dealing with complaints achieved the Customer Service Excellence (CSE) Standard following a rigorous independent assessment. This is a major achievement and a first for any local body that handles police and fire complaints.

The OPFCC will also focus on diligent, financially sound management of our assets and will use transparency and audit to gain assurance that public money is spent wisely. Draft reports from external audit have given NCFRA a very positive assessment of Value-for-Money, citing very few areas for improvement.

28. The precept proposal will enable:

- a. Maintenance of sufficient firefighter, prevention and protection staff numbers and a programme of recruitment that takes positive action to improve diversity and helps the workforce reflect the communities it serves.
- b. Funding of resources to push forward the *Your Future Service* programme along with a budget for in-year investment that will give the Chief Fire Officer scope to develop innovative practice as opportunities arise during the year.
- c. A capital estates programme that provides premises that are fit for purpose, safe for all staff and accessible, providing multi-agency and community spaces where possible. This includes capital allocations for brand new fire stations for Moulton and Kettering.
- d. Continued funding and investment in a programme of internal audit and the Joint Independent Audit Committee.

- e. Continued investment in control room staff to improve resilience and effectiveness of call handling and deployments.
- f. Better uniform and equipment to enhance the safety and effectiveness of our firefighters.
- g. Continued investment in Enabling Services across Police and Fire. This includes resources in the Commercial Team that focusses on more than just compliant procurement – they also deliver on sustainability, social value and value-for-money.

## **PROVISIONAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE SETTLEMENT**

29. The government launched a consultation in June 2025, addressing funding reform for local authorities and fire authorities to inform the 2026/27 to 2028/29 Local Government Finance Settlement. This aimed to:

- a. Allocate funding based on robust evidence of local need, cost variations, and capacity to raise revenue.
- b. Simplify the funding system by consolidating discrete grants into a single, general-purpose grant.
- c. Provide multi-year settlements (2026/27-2028/29) to enhance financial stability.

30. The provisional Local Government Finance Settlement was announced by the Minister for Local Government and Homelessness, Alison McGovern on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2025. The Settlement, which for the first time in a decade, is a multi-year settlement (MYS), covering the next three financial years.

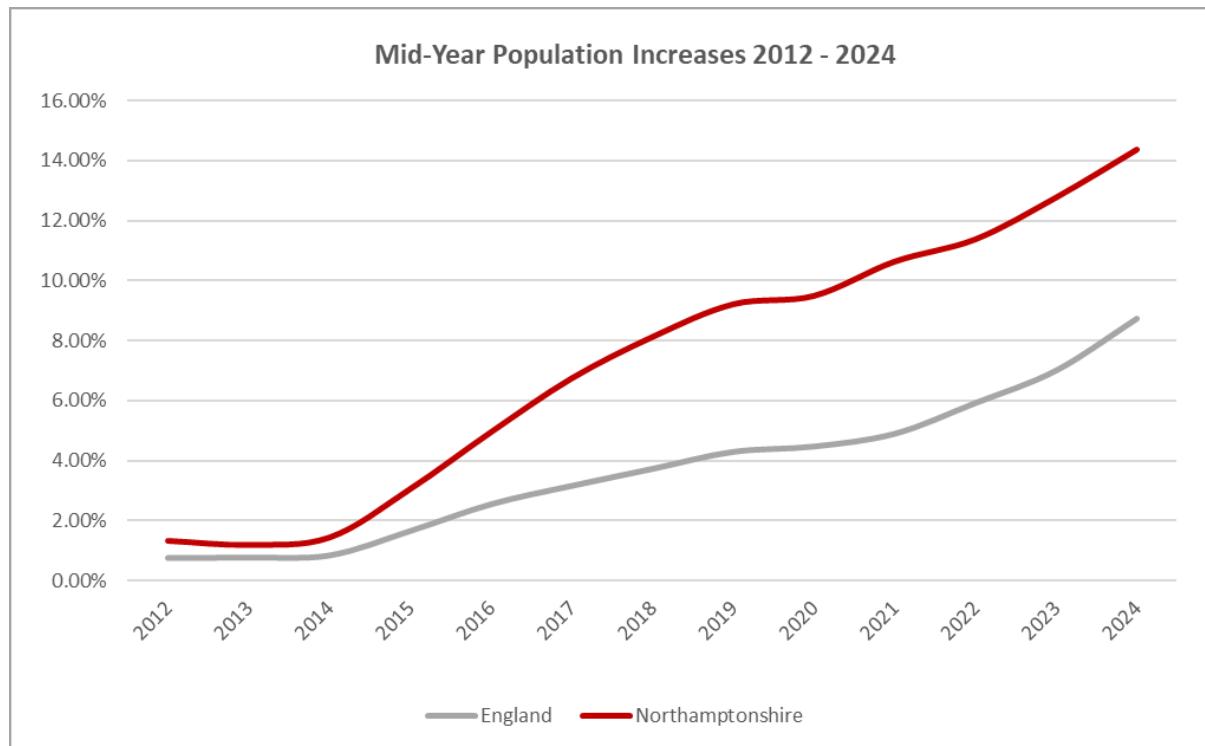
31. This marked the start of a four-week consultation which closed on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2026. At the time of writing, a date for the release of the final settlement is uncertain. It is anticipated that the final decision on precept flexibility will be included in this publication.

32. The national Technical Support Team undertook an analysis of the provisional announcements and provided a briefing including the following:

- a. Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) precept flexibility confirmed at £5 per Band D property, in line with the policy statement published in November.
- b. FRAs see a very slightly smaller share of Core Spending Power in 2028/29 (2.78%) than in 2025/26 baselines (2.80%), with grant increasing in 2026/27 before remaining approximately flat.
- c. 12 Fire Authorities see an increase in their Core Spending Power grants over the settlement period, with 19 seeing a reduction in Core Spending Power grants.
- d. Simplification of 36 funding streams – up from 33 at the Policy Statement, though most of these are not relevant to standalone FRAs.

33. The funding distribution for fire authorities uses a dedicated Relative Needs Formula, covering aspects like coastline length, deprivation, property risk, population density and sparsity.

Although the formula and methodology remain broadly the same following the review, the formula has been updated with newer data to reflect current service demands and population growth. These updates are very welcome, particularly for Northamptonshire considering the high rate of population growth seen since the last review, as shown below:



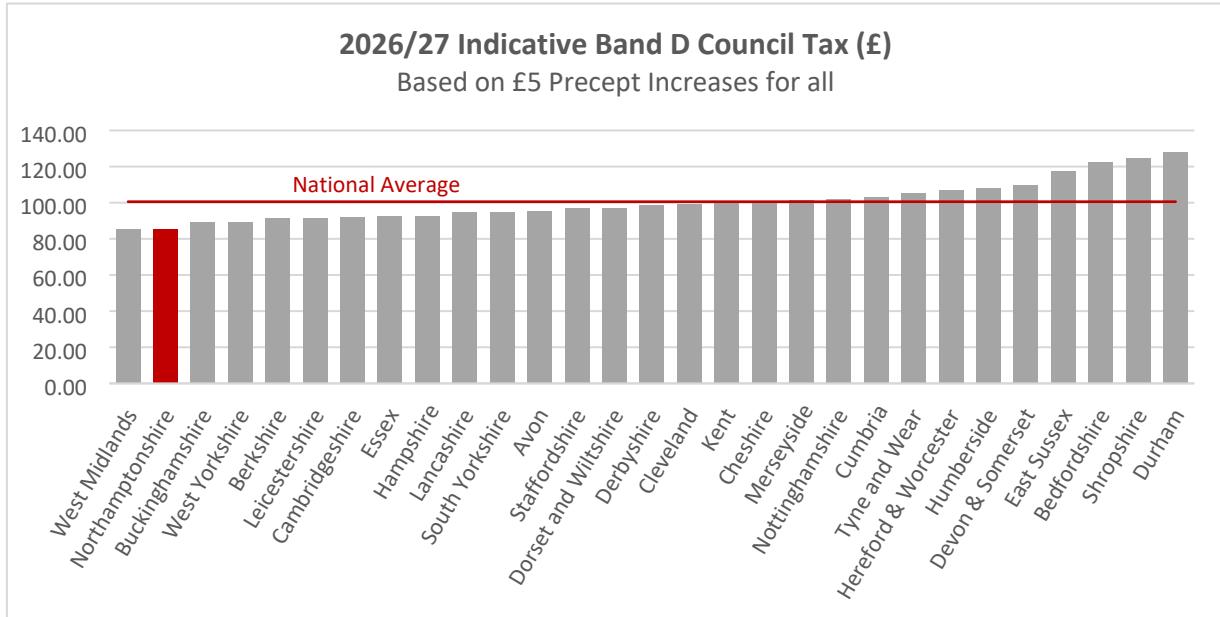
34. As expected, Northamptonshire has been one of the FRAs to receive an increase in grant share, which is positive news, but the grant still only makes up around 20% of our overall funding envelope.
35. A breakdown of anticipated grant funding and proposed precept funding, shown for both £5 and £12, compared to the previous year for Northamptonshire is as follows:

2025/26 £m	Funding	2026/27 £5 Precept Increase £m	2026/27 £12 Precept Increase £m
6.703	Revenue Support Grant	7.169	7.169
0.181	National Insurance Reimbursement	-	-
5.426	Business Rates	6.278	6.278
<b>12.310</b>	<b>Total Grant Funding</b>	<b>13.447</b>	<b>13.447</b>
21.202	Precept	22.805	24.674
0.211	Collection Fund Surplus	0.046	0.046
<b>21.413</b>	<b>Total Precept and Collection Fund</b>	<b>22.851</b>	<b>24.720</b>
<b>33.723</b>	<b>TOTAL FUNDING</b>	<b>36.298</b>	<b>38.167</b>

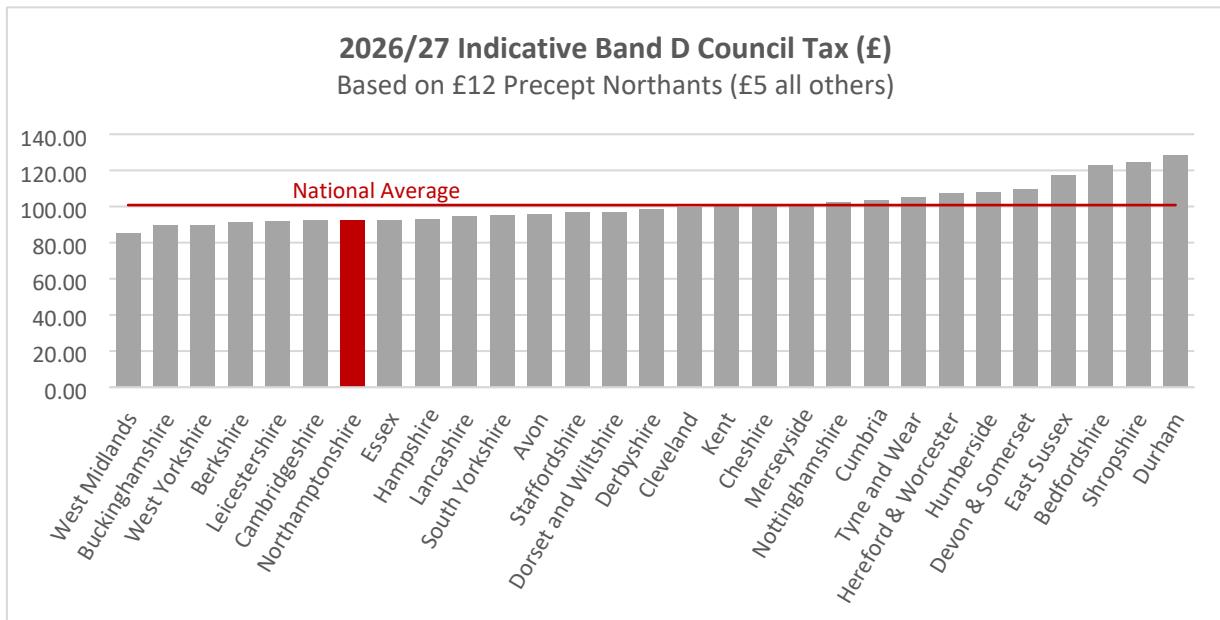
NB: Estimated Business Rates – At the time of writing, statutory deadlines were not yet due.  
National Insurance Grant has been consolidated into the Revenue Support Grant for 2026/27.

## COUNCIL TAX AND CORE SPENDING POWER – NATIONAL COMPARISON

36. If all take up the £5 precept flexibility, Band D Council Tax levels for Fire and Rescue Authorities will range between £85.19 in the West Midlands and £128.12 in Durham, with an average of £100.56 per standalone Band D property. At £85.39 Northamptonshire would still be the second lowest Fire preceptor and 15% below the average precept in the country:



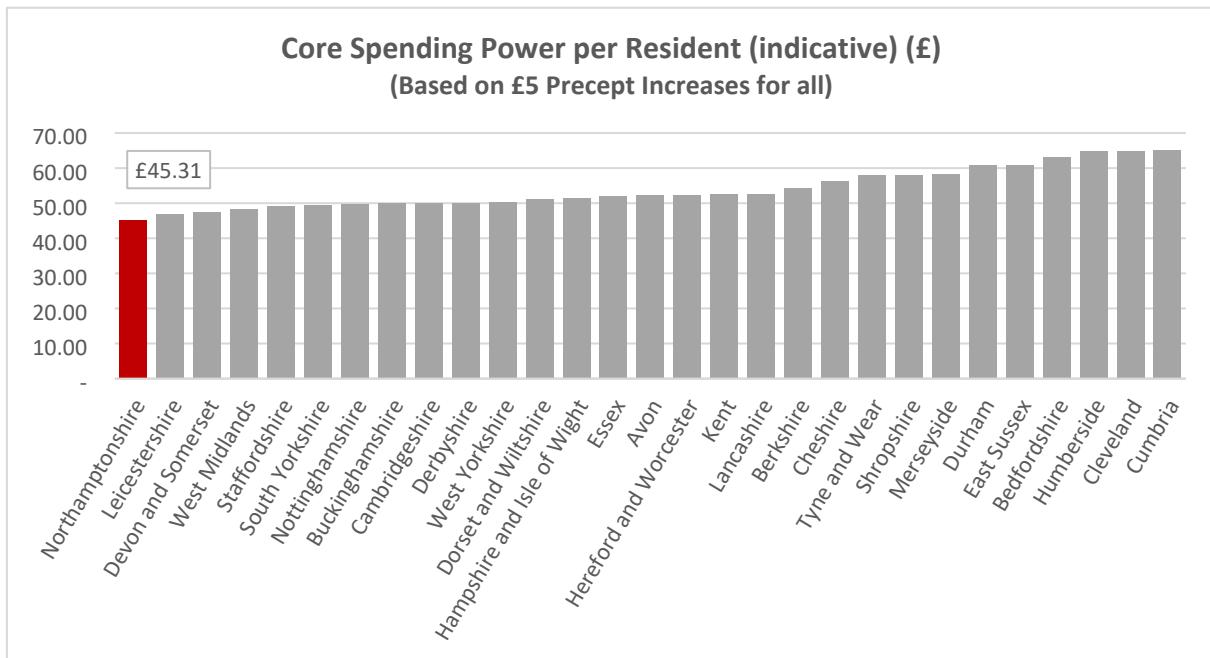
37. At £12, Northamptonshire would have the 7<sup>th</sup> lowest precept per household and still well below the national average:



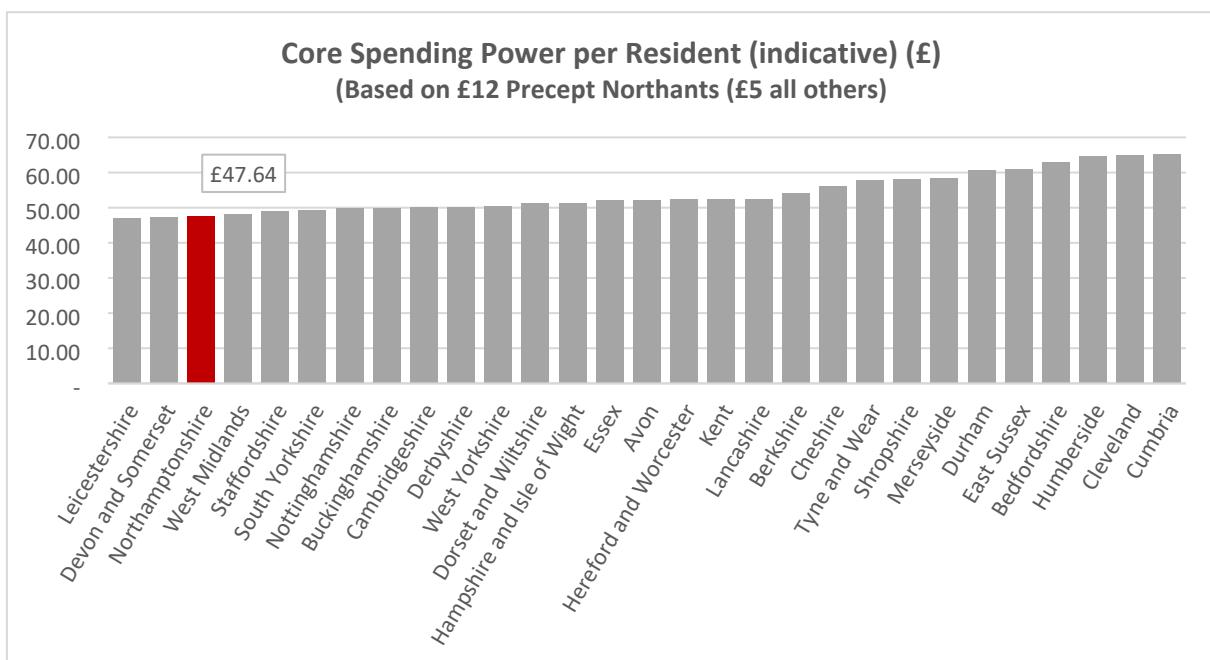
38. Core Spending Power (CSP) is a measure of the resources available to local authorities to fund service delivery. It sets out the money that has been made available to local authorities through the Local Government Finance Settlement. It includes central settlements as well as business rates and assumed council tax receipts at nationally estimated levels.

39. Despite the updates to the funding formula for population, according to provisional funding statistics, Northamptonshire still has the third lowest core spending power of all standalone authorities.

40. Furthermore, in terms of population, at £5 Northamptonshire is still reported as the lowest of all standalone authorities in terms of Core Spending Power per Resident based on estimated 2025 population forecasts:



41. At a £12 precept increase, Northamptonshire would be 3<sup>rd</sup> lowest compared to others:



42. It is important to note that the CSP figures include estimated, rather than the actual tax bases and business rates assumptions for authorities and does not include collection fund surpluses or deficits. They also assume that all other authorities increase precept by £5.

## COUNCIL TAX BASE AND COUNCIL TAX PRECEPT INCOME

43. The Council Tax and the level of precept is a fundamental part of the local government finance settlement and depends on both the level of the Band D precept and the tax base – the latter being the number of properties expected to pay council tax.
44. In Fire, the precept and the surplus on the collection fund accounts for around 63% of funding, so any variations can have a significant impact.
45. Both unitary councils have advised the PFCC of their proposed tax bases for 2026/27. A comparison of the 2025/26 and 2026/27 figures reflects an average 1.26% tax base increase (compared to 2.02% in 2025/26) as follows:

Authority	2025/26 (number)	2026/27 (number)	Increase (number)	Increase %
North	117,585.00	119,354.00	1,769.00	1.50%
West	146,150.30	147,712.60	1,562.30	1.07%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>263,735.30</b>	<b>267,066.60</b>	<b>3,331.30</b>	<b>1.26%</b>

46. The MTFP assumes average but prudent increases in the tax base and the Section 151 Officer will continue to link in with West Northamptonshire and North Northamptonshire finance colleagues to ensure future forecasts align.
47. Total precept funding is a combination of the tax base and precept increase as follows:

2025/26 £		2026/27 £5 Precept Increase £	2026/27 £12 Precept Increase £
131,028	<u>Tax base changes</u> - North	142,210	142,210
262,787	- West	125,593	125,593
<b>393,815</b>		<b>267,803</b>	<b>267,803</b>
587,925	<u>Precept Increase:</u> - North	596,770	1,432,248
730,752	- West	738,563	1,772,551
<b>1,318,677</b>		<b>1,335,333</b>	<b>3,204,799</b>
<b>1,712,491</b>	<b>Total Precept Change</b>	<b>1,603,136</b>	<b>3,472,602</b>

48. The 2026/27 proposed precept increase together with the increased tax base will generate an additional £1.603m at £5 and £3.473m at £12 on the base budget.

## COUNCIL TAX COLLECTION FUND

49. Each year the billing authorities estimate how much of the total potential council tax income liability of taxpayers they will collect. They advise precepting authorities of any projected surplus or deficit on the Collection Fund in January of each year.

50. The PFCC appreciates the hard work undertaken by the unitary authorities in ensuring high collection rates and in providing the information to enable their inclusion in her budget and precept considerations.

51. The unitary authorities have advised of their estimated collection fund positions for 2026/27 with NNC reporting a deficit and WNC reporting a surplus:

2025/26 £m	NCFRA Share of Collection Fund Surplus / (Deficit)	2026/27 £m
0.096	- North	(0.046)
0.116	- West	0.093
<b>0.211</b>	<b>Collection Fund Surplus</b>	<b>0.046</b>

52. Due to statutory timescales, notification of the final collection fund surplus figures is sometimes received after the draft budgets are finalised. If this surplus results in a one-year benefit, it will be transferred to reserves. Conversely, a deficit would be offset by in-year savings or a transfer from reserves.

53. The Section 151 Officer will work closely with the unitary authorities throughout the year to monitor and understand any impact on the collection fund position for 2026/27 and future years.

#### **PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON THE LEVEL OF THE PRECEPT**

54. Each year, the PFCC undertakes consultation via, at the very least, an online survey with residents of Northamptonshire to gather their views which help to inform precept intentions.

55. The PFCC undertook the online survey over the period 10<sup>th</sup> November 2025 to 5<sup>th</sup> January 2026, which was over 2 weeks longer than in previous years. This was intended to reach as many people as possible to obtain the views of a demographically representative group of the county's population.

56. The survey was sent out to a wide range of contacts and using many different approaches to maximise engagement, as detailed in Appendix A.

57. The PFCC would like to give particular appreciation to the commitment and engagement of the Chair and members of the Police, Fire and Crime Panel, local Councillors, MPs, community leaders and teams within the unitary authorities for their support disseminating the survey amongst local residents and contacts.

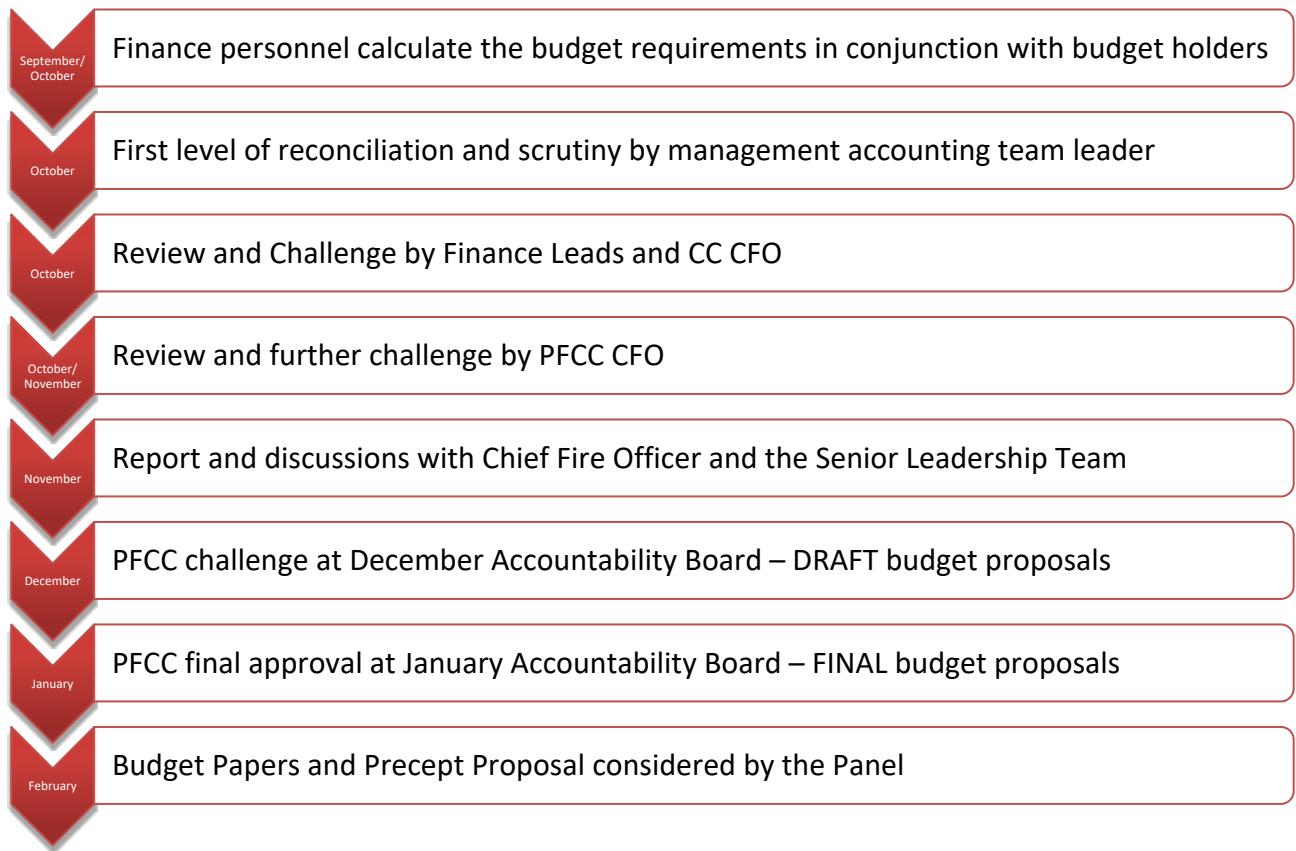
58. The online survey received 2,219 responses (compared with 1,751 last year). This is classed as a statistically relevant sample size for the County based on a 95% level of confidence. The PFCC has considered the results of the online survey which were:

- **65.7% of residents were prepared to pay £5 or more if they were able to for Fire services.**
- 28.7% were not prepared to pay any more than they do now; and
- 5.6% said they did not know.

59. The PFCC will consider the narrative comments in the survey and more detailed analysis which will be published on the PFCC website in due course.
60. A year into the new Police, Fire and Crime Plan, it was timely to expand this consultation to include focussed engagement to gain a wider temperature check on experiences and perceptions of the public. Results pertaining to engagement on the Plan will be shared and published in due course when analysis is complete.
61. The Commissioner will ensure that the views expressed through the survey, and the more detailed focus group consultation, are used to shape the service in the coming year.
62. The OPFCC held a Police Fire and Crime Panel workshop on the 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2026 regarding the budget and precept considerations for 2026/27, with all Panel members invited. These annual workshops have historically proved useful to give members a deeper understanding of the detail behind the budget and precept proposals.

#### **BUDGET STRATEGY – APPROACH AND SCRUTINY**

63. The budget is prepared under the Joint Finance Team using an approach which provides consistency across Fire and Police. This has enabled comparability of assumptions and principles, together with best practice, resilience and a more efficient process applied to budgeting for all services.
64. Following the preparation of the budget strategy and approach in September, briefing sessions took place with all budget holders and the strategy was shared with the Joint Independent Audit Committee (JIAC) for further scrutiny and review.
65. The budget has been prepared on a zero-base where possible, in full consultation with budget holders, aligned to the Safe and Sound Plan and tested against the MTFP. This ensures that efficiencies are taken from this process where possible and that only approved increases, inflation and unavoidable pressures are built in. Detailed workings are prepared, and the format of the budget models are consistent and contain built-in checks and balances to ensure the correct information is fed through.
66. There has been a significant amount of scrutiny and challenge on the budget, and as part of these discussions and negotiations, the PFCC has sought and received assurances on the robustness of budgeting activity.
67. The table below sets out the preparation and scrutiny elements of the budgeting process:



68. At the Accountability Board, the PFCC approved the budget subject to agreement on the precept and the sum of £0.25m for investments requested by the Chief Fire Officer. This included a clear commitment by the Chief Fire Officer to balance investment with meeting the significant savings/efficiencies challenge.

## 2026/27 – THE FIRE BUDGET

69. The budget for NCFRA in 2026/27 will be £38.167m with a £12 precept increase (£36.298m at £5), an increase of around £4.4m from 2025/26 as follows:

2025/26 £m	Budget Breakdown	2026/27 £5 Precept Increase £m	2026/27 £12 Precept Increase £m
20.159	Fire Fighters	21.823	21.823
3.846	Staff	4.143	4.143
1.157	Other Employee Expenses & Contingencies	1.196	1.196
7.334	Other Costs	7.593	7.593
(1.915)	Income	(1.858)	(1.858)
4.234	Governance/Support Services	4.774	4.774
<b>34.815</b>	<b>OPERATIONAL BUDGET</b>	<b>37.671</b>	<b>37.671</b>
0.892	Capital Financing	1.073	1.073
0.120	Inflation Contingency	0.190	0.190
0.100	Transfer to Reserves	0.220	0.220
(0.766)	Transfer from Reserves	(0.029)	(0.029)
<b>0.346</b>	<b>BUDGETS MANAGED BY THE PFCC</b>	<b>1.454</b>	<b>1.454</b>
0.250	New investment proposals	0.250	0.250
(1.688)	Savings Requirement	(3.077)	(1.208)
<b>33.723</b>	<b>TOTAL BUDGET</b>	<b>36.298</b>	<b>38.167</b>

70. More detailed breakdowns are set out in Appendices B and C. Key Headlines are as follows:

- The firefighter budget reflects the planned retirement and recruitment profile that aims to maintain firefighter strength as close to establishment as possible throughout the year.
- Staff posts include roles under the employment of NCFRA such as Home Safety Advisers, Prevention, Protection, Control and some support staff. This does not include Enabling Services personnel who are employed by the Chief Constable.
- Other employee costs include the pay inflation contingency, staff training, occupational health and welfare.
- Governance/Support Services mainly relates to the full cost to NCFRA of Enabling Services, including all staff and shared buildings. An inflation contingency is included for pay awards likely for police-employed staff in Sep 2026.
- Capital Financing includes the cost of Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP), borrowing repayments, interest payable and revenue funding of capital expenditure.

- f. Other non-pay budgets are based on a zero-based budget review which reflects inflationary increases and include estates, ICT, fleet, equipment and clothing.
- g. Income compromises the specific grant relating to pensions, recharges for training and personnel provided to other authorities and interest on cash balances. Interest income has been reviewed to reflect current interest rates projections and forecast cash balances.
- h. Reserves transfers reflect agreed one off drawdowns for operational equipment and contributions to earmarked and general reserves that ensure NCFRA is resilient longer term.

### **MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN (MTFP)**

71. The MTFP covers a five-year period is reviewed regularly with formal mid-year updates. Precept scenarios for £5.00, £7.50, £10.00 and £12.00 are included in more detail in Appendices B and C. The latest version at £5 is as follows:

<b>2025/26 £m</b>	<b>MTFP - £5 Scenario</b>	<b>2026/27 £m</b>	<b>2027/28 £m</b>	<b>2028/29 £m</b>	<b>2029/30 £m</b>	<b>2030/31 £m</b>
35.411 (1.688)	Expenditure Savings Target 26/27	39.375 (3.077)	42.158 (3.140)	45.358 (3.202)	47.125 (3.266)	48.691 (3.332)
<b>33.723</b>		<b>36.298</b>	<b>39.018</b>	<b>42.156</b>	<b>43.859</b>	<b>45.359</b>
(33.723)	Funding	(36.298)	(38.165)	(40.026)	(41.321)	(42.647)
-	<b>Shortfall</b>	-	<b>0.853</b>	<b>2.130</b>	<b>2.538</b>	<b>2.712</b>

72. At a £12 precept increase, the savings requirement and deficits in future years would become far more achievable:

<b>2025/26 £m</b>	<b>MTFP - £12 Scenario</b>	<b>2026/27 £m</b>	<b>2027/28 £m</b>	<b>2028/29 £m</b>	<b>2029/30 £m</b>	<b>2030/31 £m</b>
35.411 (1.688)	Expenditure Savings Target 26/27	39.375 (1.208)	42.158 (2.095)	45.358 (2.137)	47.125 (2.180)	48.691 (2.224)
<b>33.723</b>		<b>38.167</b>	<b>40.063</b>	<b>43.221</b>	<b>44.945</b>	<b>46.467</b>
(33.723)	Funding	(38.167)	(40.063)	(41.952)	(43.276)	(44.631)
-	<b>Shortfall</b>	-	-	<b>1.269</b>	<b>1.669</b>	<b>1.836</b>

73. The impact of high inflation continues to be built in with prudent forecasts and no guarantee of future funding to meet these increases.

74. The MTFP includes a requirement for cashable efficiency savings each year, but these will not be sufficient to meet the shortfalls identified in either precept scenario. Efficiencies will continue to be sought from sharing buildings, robust and shared procurement practices and sharing of resources/assets where it makes sense to do so. The Chief Fire Officer has governance in place to implement and monitor a comprehensive savings plan.

75. Despite future shortfalls forecast in the MTFP, in the unlikely event that further efficiencies could not be found, the budget can be balanced in the short term by the use of reserves. However, the use of reserves is not a permanent solution and is not recommended, and the PFCC and Chief Fire Officer will continue to seek efficiencies to ensure the budgets are balanced.

76. The key assumptions used to estimate the financial challenge for the medium term are:

- a. Precept increasing by £5 in 2027/28 to 2028/29 and £2.50 each year thereafter.
- b. Prudent funding assumptions have been made in respect of government funding, business rates, tax base levels and council tax collection rates. Colleagues will continue to liaise with the local authorities to align assumptions for council tax base/collection.
- c. In line with previous assumptions, pay increase estimates are assumed at an average of 3% in 2026/27, and 2% for the next 3 years. There has not been any indication of government funding to support any increases.
- d. Investment requirements can be prioritised and met from within the revenue budget or capital programme. Where appropriate, the PFCC will use reserves to pump prime investment initiatives. Any multi-year investments will be subject to review each year and may require additional savings to embed in the base budget longer term.
- e. Further borrowing beyond the capital programme is not required.
- f. It is assumed that no additional unfunded priorities or responsibilities will be given to the PFCC and Chief Fire Officer to deliver.
- g. Whilst we are aware that governance changes as a result of government reform and devolution will fundamentally change things post 2028, there is significant uncertainty in this regard. As such, the MTFP is forecasted on an 'as is' basis in terms of governance and scope.

## **THE FINANCIAL CHALLENGE – FUTURE RISKS, CHALLENGES AND UNCERTAINTIES**

77. The impact of a different inflation assumptions to that estimated in the MTFP are as follows:

- a. Every 1% reduction in grant and business rates equates to circa £0.13m per annum
- b. Every 1% in Council Tax equates to circa £0.23m per annum
- c. Every £1 in Council Tax equates to £0.27m per annum
- d. Every 1% in Pay equates to circa £0.28m in a full year
- e. Every 1% non-pay inflation equates to £0.10m per annum

78. Prudent forecasts have been included where information which has not yet been finalised. Any variations between the provisional and final settlement, council tax or the collection fund will be balanced with reserves.

79. There are some further financial and operational risks, challenges and mitigations as follows:

- a. Inflation uncertainty including pay awards. Mindful of this, the budget includes an inflation contingency for £0.19m to meet any unforeseen inflationary pressures arising during the year.
- b. Capital budgets have been set using best estimates on when largescale projects can realistically be completed, but it is appreciated that various factors such as procurement, contractor availability, planning and implementation capacity can impact timelines.
- c. Condition surveys for the Fire estate inform the production of maintenance and repair programmes for all Fire sites. Buildings are regularly inspected and works prioritised accordingly.
- d. The Chief Fire Officer is leading on the *Your Future Service* programme that seeks to use findings of the Emergency Cover Review to make improvements for the public with a service that is as efficient and effective as possible. Funds have been made available to drive this significant piece of work forward.
- e. Joint support services with Police managed by a Joint Assistant Chief Officer are embedded within the service to ensure that the Service has the right range and resilience of skills and expertise to build capacity and support transformative as well as business-as-usual activities.
- f. Any potential for industrial action requires contingency arrangements have previously been managed within year or from reserves. That position remains and any alternative options will be costed, and funding drawn from Earmarked Reserves.

## CAPITAL PROGRAMME

80. A Capital Programme has been approved as part of the budget setting process, which identifies the requirements across fleet, estates, ICT and operational equipment.

81. The approved capital programme is as follows:

Programme	2026/27 £m	2027/28 £m	2028/29 £m	2029/30 £m	2030/31 £m
Estates	15.6	23.8	6.7	1.7	1.7
ICT	0.9	0.8	0.6	1.3	1.6
Vehicles & Operational Equipment	3.0	2.9	0.9	1.3	1.6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>19.5</b>	<b>27.5</b>	<b>8.2</b>	<b>4.3</b>	<b>4.9</b>

82. Estates projects include new fire stations at Moulton and Kettering, and provision of new specialist training facilities.
83. Also included are essential refurbishments and funding for appropriate welfare facilities in Fire buildings, along with provision for new heating systems, roofing and other essential works.
84. Vehicles and Operational Equipment mainly comprises a rolling programme of asset replacement, including new fire appliances of which 8 are currently on order.

85. The PFCC is required to approve a Treasury Management Strategy each year, setting out the policy and approach to managing investments, borrowing and cashflow, and that decisions are taken in accordance with good professional practice. This approach is required by the Prudential Code and the Code of Treasury Management published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA). It ensures that the capital investment plans of local authorities are affordable, prudent and sustainable. The Joint Independent Audit Committee (JIAC) will consider this document at their March meeting prior to it being placed on the OPFCC website.

## **RESERVES**

86. In considering the budget, the MTFP and level of precept options, it is important to look closely at the size, level and type of reserves held by NCFRA to ensure that they are adequate to cover the purposes for which they are held and to provide some safeguards against the future risks identified within the budget. There is also a need to ensure they are not excessive.
87. The updated Reserves Strategy is attached at Appendix E and will be published on the PFCC's website for transparency.
88. Two types of reserve are held, as follows:
89. General Reserve – There is a general reserve which is estimated at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026 at **£2.0m**. This represents around 5.2% of total funding for 2026/27 and aligns to the guideline level. The Reserves Strategy ensures that the General Reserve will remain within guideline minimum levels over the MTFP. It is prudent to have such a reserve at this level to enable the organisation to withstand unexpected events which may have financial implications.
90. Earmarked Reserves – As at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026, the forecast balances on the earmarked capital reserves are **£2.339m** and revenue are **£0.982m**.
91. NCFRA has made good progress in establishing reserves since the 2019 governance transfer, and it is the view of the Section 151 Officer that general and earmarked reserves are now at an adequate level. Whilst plans are in place to utilise some earmarked funds, it will be prudent to replenish them where possible for additional resilience. This will assist in smoothing potential funding impacts and to support the funding of equipment and transformation activities.

## **ROBUSTNESS OF THE BUDGET – STATEMENT OF THE SECTION 151 CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER**

92. Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 places a duty on the Section 151 Officer to make a report to the authority on:
  - a. The robustness of the estimates included within the budget.
  - b. The adequacy of the reserves and balances.
93. The PFCC must have regard to this when considering the budget and the report must be shared with the Police, Fire and Crime Panel.

94. In their considerations, the Section 151 Officer is mindful of other associated statutory safeguards designed to support the authority:

- a. Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 which requires the authority to make arrangements for the proper administration of its financial affairs and that the Chief Financial Officer has personal responsibility for such administration.
- b. Sections 32, 43 & 93 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 which requires the authority to set a balanced budget.
- c. The Prudential Code introduced as part of the Local Government Act 2003 which sets out the framework within which the authority must manage its investments, including adequate planning and budget estimates.
- d. The external auditor's duty to assess the adequacy of the authority's proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness (Value-for-Money).

95. To reinforce these obligations, Section 114 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 requires the Section 151 Officer to report in consultation with the Monitoring Officer if there is or is likely to be unlawful expenditure or an unbalanced budget.

96. This report has set out the detailed budget setting process that has taken place and the work undertaken to ensure the budget is as realistic, deliverable and achievable as possible.

97. The Joint Finance Team have worked closely with the Fire Senior Leadership Team, budget holders and the Section 151 Officer to deliver the proposed budget and savings plan, ensuring that effective scrutiny and challenge has taken place throughout. The Section 151 Officer has undertaken scrutiny and strategic review of the proposals with the PFCC on two formal occasions and has been updated regularly throughout the budget cycle as appropriate.

98. The estimates and assumptions are based on the best information available at the time of formulating the budget in line with the fundamental accounting concepts and are reasonable and prudent.

99. The Section 25 Statement of the Section 151 Chief Finance Officer for Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Authority is included at Appendix D.

## **LIST OF APPENDICES**

Appendix A - Consultation on the Precept

Appendix B - Medium Term Financial Plan based on £5 Precept

Appendix C - Medium Term Financial Plan based on £12 Precept

Appendix D - Section 25 Report of the Section 151 Chief Finance Officer

Appendix E - Reserves Strategy

## **PERSON TO CONTACT**

Mr V Ashcroft, Chief Finance Officer,

**Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner**

**Northamptonshire Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority**



## APPENDIX A

### Consultation on the Precept

The Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's Precept and Public Confidence Survey is a key annual consultation designed to gather public views on two critical areas:

- Funding for local policing and fire services – through the council tax precept and central government grants.
- Community confidence – perceptions of Northamptonshire Police and Fire and Rescue Service, including trust, visibility, and effectiveness.

The survey supports delivery of the Commissioner's Safe and Sound Plan, which sets out the strategic direction for creating safer communities across Northamptonshire. By asking residents what they are willing to pay for these services and how confident they feel in local policing, the consultation ensures that priorities reflect community needs and expectations.

This report reviews the communications activity that promoted the survey, assessing what worked well, the impact of collaborative approaches, and opportunities to build on this success in future years.

The consultation for the 2026/27 precept was conducted through an online survey, which launched on Monday 10th November 2025, and closed at midday on Monday 5th January 2026. The survey achieved 2,219 responses, making it the highest-performing consultation to date. For comparison, the second highest was the 2024/25 survey, which ran for an additional week. This suggests that the length of the consultation period has limited impact on engagement, whereas targeted communications and a robust overall communications strategy play a more significant role in driving participation.

To complement the quantitative survey, we conducted a qualitative consultation through seven professionally facilitated focus groups. These sessions were designed to ensure diversity across ethnicity, gender, age, and socio-economic background, and were held in key locations across Northamptonshire. The purpose was to gain unbiased insights into public perceptions of Northamptonshire Police and Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service, gauge support for a potential precept increase, and capture general views on service delivery.

#### Focus Group Locations and Dates:

- **Wellingborough (Darby House)** – Tuesday, 11<sup>th</sup> November
- **Kettering Police Station** – Wednesday, 12<sup>th</sup> November
- **Mereway Fire Station** – Wednesday, 12<sup>th</sup> November
- **Daventry Fire Station** – Wednesday, 19<sup>th</sup> November
- **Corby Fire Station** – Wednesday, 19<sup>th</sup> November
- **Rushden Fire Station** – Thursday, 20<sup>th</sup> November
- **Brackley Fire Station** – Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> November

**Activity from the Communications Team included:**

- Initial press release sent to around 100 journalists and 20 newsrooms across print, online and broadcast media – 10<sup>th</sup> November.
- Press release shared on external OPFCC, Police and Fire websites
- Internal messages sent to staff of both Police and Fire asking them to complete and encourage others to complete the survey.
  - ForceNet (Police intranet)– 10/11, 22/12 and 04/12
  - Daily Orders (Police intranet bulletin) – 10/11
  - Fireplace (Fire intranet) – 10/11, 22/12 and 05/01
  - All OPFCC email
  - Email to Station and Watch Managers to asking them to encourage staff participation.
  - Weekly Bulletin (NFRS) – regular weekly reminders for staff to fill in survey up until deadline – 13/11, 27/11, 18/12 and 01/01
  - Chief Officer Blog – 07/11 and 31/12
  - Circulated link to survey to key internal stakeholders (for awareness in case contacted and to cascade) Chief Fire Officer and SLT, Chief Constable and SLT, Enabling Services and Heads of Department.
  - Inclusion in Your Shout newsletter
- Circulated news release through Northamptonshire Talking:
  - OPFCC account saw the initial release sent out on November 10 to 33,408 people, generating a click rate to the survey link of 613.
  - The Police account saw the initial communications sent out on December 04 to 45,141 people generating 783 click throughs to the survey.
- OPFCC newsletter encouraged people to complete the survey. The Commissioner's newsletter included a news article and a direct link to the survey and was shared with more than 600 recipients on our newsletter database.
- Link to survey and request to cascade sent to all unitary councillors in West Northamptonshire and North Northamptonshire, as well as respective Chief Executives. Both WNC and NNC included it in their newsletters as well as promoting it across their digital channels and to their contacts.
- News release shared with all Northamptonshire MPs, PLRs and Police, Fire and Crime Panel members with request to share it with their local constituents and to really encourage participation.
- Release and survey shared with 272 contacts at parish councils across the county, asking them to replicate the survey along with a specially designed banner on their websites. Several councils such as Roade, shared the content in their local newsletter and websites/social media channels.
- Shared release and survey with contacts at more than 40 schools and colleges across the county, requesting they encourage fellow staff and parents to complete the survey.
- News release and link to survey sent to 65 local organisations (including Women's Institute, Faith Groups Local Publications etc) and Community Safety forums.

- Shared with businesses through Northampton Town BID, Chamber of Commerce and Retail Crime Partnership and West Northamptonshire Council - Northamptonshire Chamber of Commerce engaged with us positively and uploaded the content to the Community Hub page and posted it onto their LinkedIn and Facebook page for maximum exposure.
- Emailed the consultation to Independent Custody Visitors and members of the Independent Advisory Groups.
- Shared news release and survey with contacts at various hotels across the county.
- Shared consultation with rural groups including NFU Mutual, Canal & Rivers Trust and Northants Acre, and asked them to share with their rural networks.
- Inclusion in internal blogs and specific vlogs by both PFCC and Chief Fire Officer – with objective of signposting staff and the public to the survey.
- Inclusion of an external vlog from the PFCC across digital channels explaining the purpose of the survey, why participation matters, and encouraging people to complete it.
- Regularly featured the survey in news outlets using the boiler plates in both OPFCC and Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service press releases – throughout November and December.
- ‘Time is running out’ press release sent to more than 80 journalists and newsrooms across print, online and broadcast media – 18<sup>th</sup> December.
- ‘Time is running out’ press release included on both OPFCC and Fire website and all internal and external channels.
- Second message sent out on Northamptonshire Talking from OPFCC account sent out on 17<sup>th</sup> December – as part of the OPFCC newsletter - to 33,600 people, generating a click rate to the survey link of 653.
- Second message sent out on Northamptonshire Talking from Police account sent out on December 24 to 45,141 people, generating a click rate to the survey link of 496.
- Third message ‘Time is running out’ sent on Northamptonshire Talking from Police account (December 30) which was read by 19,584 residents with 506 survey link clicks.
- Third message ‘Time is running out’ sent on Northamptonshire Talking from OPFCC account (December 22) which was read by 15,059 residents with 283 survey link clicks.
- Face-to-face engagement took place at conferences, Women’s Charter events, and meetings during the consultation period, including a focused push at the One Team meeting and during the Chief’s Chat on 13<sup>th</sup> December.
- Digital assets created by Design & Print were shared with partners and contacts and used across digital platforms, delivering a clean and consistent visual campaign.
- Delivered consistent, impactful social media campaigns across all channels, leveraging both paid and organic content to maximise reach and engagement.

Audience	Actions
<p><b>Stakeholders</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Northamptonshire Talking</li> <li>• Parish Councils and Town Councils</li> <li>• Councillors for unitary authorities (West Northamptonshire and North Northamptonshire Councils)</li> <li>• Chief Executives of unitary councils</li> <li>• Police, Fire and Crime Panel members</li> <li>• MPs</li> <li>• Local organisations (such as WI)</li> <li>• Schools</li> <li>• Businesses (including Retail Crime Partnership)</li> <li>• Independent Custody Visitors</li> <li>• Independent Advisory Group members</li> <li>• Road Safety Panel</li> <li>• Rural interest groups (including NFU, Canal &amp; Rivers Trust)</li> <li>• Hotels</li> <li>• Local and hyper local publications</li> <li>• Neighbourhood Watch Management Committee</li> <li>• Community Safety Managers at local authorities</li> <li>• Joint Action Groups</li> <li>• Northamptonshire Association of Local Councils</li> <li>• Police Liaison Representatives</li> <li>• Local criminal justice boards</li> </ul>	<p>Around 106,498 emails were read from alerts sent on Northamptonshire Talking.</p> <p>Emails were sent to all 154 unitary councillors, and 272 contacts at parish councils across the county, asking them to cascade and share the consultation, we received responses from a few of our partners such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- East Hunsbury Parish Council – across digital channels</li> <li>- Northampton Chamber of Commerce – uploaded the content to the Community Hub page and posted it onto their LinkedIn and Facebook page for maximum exposure.</li> <li>- West Northants Council – promoted across their channels and contacts.</li> <li>- North Northants Council – Local Link Newsletter as well as other comms channels.</li> <li>- Eastfield Resident Association – shared to all their members.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Internal</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• News items on ForceNet – The Northamptonshire Police intranet viewed by all officers and staff</li> <li>• All staff email to OPFCC</li> <li>• News items on Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service intranet for Firefighters and staff – repeated three times during the survey period</li> <li>• Daily Orders – link to item on ForceNet directing police staff to survey</li> </ul>	<p>News release was published on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ ForceNet – 10/11, 22/12 and 04/12</li> <li>◦ Daily Orders – 10/11</li> <li>◦ Fireplace – 10/11, 22/12 and 05/01</li> <li>◦ All OPFCC email</li> <li>◦ Email to Station and Watch Managers to asking them to encourage staff participation.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PFCC and Chief Officer vlog and blogs for both OPFCC and Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service</li> <li>• Repeated messaging during bi-weekly Pacesetter meetings for senior firefighters with requests to cascade</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Weekly Bulletin (NFRS) – regular weekly reminders for staff to fill in survey up until deadline – 13/11, 27/11, 18/12 and 01/01</li> <li>○ Chief Officer Blog – 07/11 and 31/12</li> </ul> <p>Intranet articles and all staff emails sent go to more than 3,000 police officers, police staff, firefighters, fire staff, enabling services staff and OPFCC staff.</p>
<p><b>Key internal stakeholders</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Northamptonshire Police Chief Officers</li> <li>• Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) Senior Leadership Team</li> <li>• Directors in the Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (OPFCC)</li> <li>• OPFCC Customer Service team</li> <li>• Police Federation</li> <li>• Unison</li> <li>• Police Superintendents' Association</li> <li>• Voice</li> </ul>	<p>Email request to cascade to their members/contacts/networks to garner as much engagement as possible.</p> <p>Circulated link to survey to key internal stakeholders (for awareness in case contacted and to cascade) Chief Fire Officer and SLT, Chief Constable and SLT, Enabling Services and Heads of Department.</p>
<p><b>Media</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An initial news release was issued to all local and regional media across Northamptonshire</li> <li>• News release was sent to hyper local publications</li> <li>• The survey featured in the December edition of the OPFCC newsletter</li> <li>• Another news release – 'Time is running out' was issued to all local and regional media across the county</li> <li>• All press releases for NFRS and OPFCC featured a boiler plate</li> </ul>	<p>X2 news release was sent to more than 20 newsrooms and other local news sites, and approximately 100 individual reporters.</p> <p>There was media coverage in Northampton Chronicle &amp; Echo, Telegraph.</p> <p>The boilerplates also strengthened calls to action following media coverage, keeping the survey in the public eye.</p>
<p><b>Digital and social – 52 native posts</b></p>	<p>Social media by network (all channels OPFCC and all NFRS). These figures are limited to people viewing and clicking links.</p>

*Post Impressions = the total number of times your post has been shown on a person's screen.*

*Account Impressions = total number of times your content has been shown on a person's screen across the whole account.*

*Post Reach = total number of times your content has been seen by different people for content added across the whole account.*

*Account reach = average number of times per day your content has been seen by different people for content added across the whole account.*

- Facebook (82k followers)

Post Impressions = 112.2k  
Account Impressions = 2.3 million  
Post Reach = 66.k  
Account reach = 4k  
Link Clicks = 228

- Nextdoor (139k members)

Impressions -15k  
Link clicks - 22

- LinkedIn (3.1k followers)

Post Impression - 1.3k  
Account Impressions - 24.4k  
Account reach - 184.9  
Link clicks - 23

- Instagram (2.8k followers)

Post impression - 1.6k  
Account impressions - 156.6k  
Post Reach - 659  
Account reach - 592.4k

- X (23.9k followers)

Post Impressions - 3.8k  
Link clicks - 68

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Northamptonshire Talking OPFCC</li> </ul> <p>Meta – Paid for  <i>(This year saw a more cost-effective year, last year's spend was about £195.61 and this year's spend was £64.91 - £130.70 less.)</i></p> <p><b>Police Comms</b></p> <p>Facebook</p> <p>Northamptonshire Talking</p>	<p><b>11/11/25</b>      Sent to 33,408      Read - 15,595      613 link clicks      416 interactions</p> <p><b>17/12/25 (as part of newsletter)</b>      Sent to 33,600      Read - 16,272      653 link clicks      362 interactions</p> <p><b>22/12/25</b>      Sent to 33,714      Read - 15,059      283 link clicks      415 interactions</p> <p><b>02/12/25</b>      Views – 12,745      Reach – 6,261      Link clicks – 257      Spend - £34.92</p> <p><b>29/12/25</b>      Views – 9,928      Reach – 5,569      Link clicks – 144      Spend - £29.99</p> <p><b>Two reshares from our posts</b>      Reach: 28,243      Impressions: 44,453      Link clicks: 75      Comments: 29      Likes: 18      Reactions: 20      Saves: 6</p> <p><b>04/12/25</b>      Sent to 45,141      Read – 20,307      783 link clicks      331 interactions</p>
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	<p><b>24/12/25</b>            Sent to 45,141            Read – 19,681            496 link clicks            192 interactions</p> <p><b>30/12/25</b>            Sent to 45,141            Read – 19,584            506 link clicks            122 interactions</p>
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This year's Precept and Public Confidence Survey delivered the highest response rate to date, marking a significant step forward in public engagement. Despite external challenges—including the national announcement on the planned abolition of Police, Fire and Crime Commissioners, high-profile leadership cases within Northamptonshire Police, and ongoing public concern over financial pressures—the consultation achieved strong participation.

A key factor in this success was the adoption of a digital-first approach. This strategy proved highly effective, demonstrating that targeted digital communications can drive engagement without compromising reach. Urgency messaging, particularly the “Time is running out” communications delivered through Northamptonshire Talking and across OPFCC and Police channels, generated noticeable spikes in responses. Consistent boilerplate messaging in press releases also strengthened calls to action following media coverage. Collaboration with Police Corporate Communications was instrumental, amplifying reach and impact—a trend mirrored by other PFCC offices.

Looking ahead, there is clear opportunity to build on this momentum. Recommendations include:

- Continuing to ask for the support of the Force to leverage their greater audience on Northamptonshire Talking and social channels for this important messaging
- Maintaining urgency messaging in the final phase of the campaign to prompt completions.
- Reintroducing printed collateral such as flyers and postcards at community events to reach audiences less engaged online.
- Diversifying communication channels by combining digital and traditional methods to maximise accessibility and participation.

By implementing these, we can sustain the upward trajectory and further strengthen public engagement, ensuring community voices continue to shape the future of policing and fire services in Northamptonshire.

## APPENDIX B

### Medium Term Financial Plan based on £12 Band D Precept increase in 2026/27

EXPENDITURE		MTFP - £12 Precept				
2025/26 £'000		2026/27 £'000	2027/28 £'000	2028/29 £'000	2029/30 £'000	2030/31 £'000
20,159	Fire Fighters	21,823	22,849	23,602	24,257	24,929
3,846	Staff	4,143	4,228	4,315	4,403	4,491
516	Other Pension Costs	512	526	536	547	558
641	Other Employee Costs/Contingencies	684	684	684	684	684
2,264	Estates	2,485	2,518	2,572	2,532	2,587
2,119	ICT	1,810	1,884	2,010	1,807	1,878
596	Vehicles	1,124	1,157	1,180	1,204	1,228
1,119	Equipment and Clothing	1,192	1,221	1,250	1,280	1,311
1,236	Other non-pay	982	1,002	1,022	1,047	1,067
(1,915)	Income	(1,858)	(1,835)	(1,834)	(1,862)	(1,890)
4,234	Governance/Support Services	4,774	4,870	4,967	5,066	5,168
<b>34,815</b>	<b>OPERATIONAL BUDGET</b>	<b>37,671</b>	<b>39,104</b>	<b>40,304</b>	<b>40,965</b>	<b>42,011</b>
451	Capital Financing - MRP	522	743	1,602	2,210	2,341
141	Capital Financing - Interest	251	1,097	1,984	2,228	2,363
300	Capital Financing - RCCO	300	300	300	300	300
120	Inflation contingency	190	194	198	202	206
100	Transfer to Reserves	220	220	220	220	220
(766)	Transfer from Reserves	(29)	-	-	-	-
<b>346</b>	<b>OTHER</b>	<b>1,454</b>	<b>2,554</b>	<b>4,304</b>	<b>5,160</b>	<b>5,430</b>
250	New Investment Proposals	250	500	750	1,000	1,250
(1,688)	<b>Savings Requirement</b>	(1,208)	(2,095)	(2,138)	(2,181)	(2,225)
<b>33,723</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>38,167</b>	<b>40,063</b>	<b>43,220</b>	<b>44,944</b>	<b>46,466</b>

**FUNDING (at £12)**

(6,703)	Revenue Support Grant	(7,169)	(7,195)	(7,183)	(7,255)	(7,328)
(5,426)	Business Rates	(6,278)	(6,422)	(6,552)	(6,683)	(6,817)
(181)	National Insurance Reimbursement	-	-	-	-	-
(21,202)	Precept	(24,674)	(26,400)	(28,171)	(29,292)	(30,440)
(211)	Collection Fund (Surplus)/Deficit	(46)	(46)	(46)	(46)	(46)
<b>(33,723)</b>	<b>TOTAL FUNDING</b>	<b>(38,167)</b>	<b>(40,063)</b>	<b>(41,952)</b>	<b>(43,276)</b>	<b>(44,631)</b>

-	<b>FUNDING (SURPLUS) / DEFICIT</b>	-	-	<b>1,268</b>	<b>1,668</b>	<b>1,835</b>
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**PRECEPT**

£80.39	Band D Council Tax	£92.39	£97.39	£102.39	£104.89	£107.39
263,735	Tax Base	267,067	271,073	275,139	279,266	283,455

**ASSUMPTIONS**

Other Grants	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Revenue Support Grant	3.57%	0.36%	-0.16%	1.00%	1.00%
Business Rates	2.00%	2.29%	2.02%	2.00%	2.00%
Precept (%)	14.93%	5.41%	5.41%	2.57%	2.44%
Precept (£)	£12.00	£5.00	£5.00	£2.50	£2.50
Tax Base Increase	1.26%	1.50%	1.50%	1.50%	1.50%
Pay Awards	3.00%	2.00%	2.00%	2.00%	2.00%
Inflation Contingency	2.00%	2.00%	2.00%	2.00%	2.00%

*Note: Totals may not sum due to rounding*

## APPENDIX C

### Medium Term Financial Plan – Other Precept Scenarios

EXPENDITURE		MTFP - £10 Precept				
2025/26 £'000		2026/27 £'000	2027/28 £'000	2028/29 £'000	2029/30 £'000	2030/31 £'000
34,815	<b>OPERATIONAL BUDGET</b>	37,671	39,104	40,304	40,965	42,011
346	<b>OTHER</b>	1,454	2,554	4,304	5,160	5,430
250	New Investment Proposals	250	500	750	1,000	1,250
(1,688)	<b>Savings Requirement</b>	(1,742)	(2,637)	(2,690)	(2,744)	(2,798)
<b>33,723</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>37,633</b>	<b>39,521</b>	<b>42,668</b>	<b>44,381</b>	<b>45,893</b>
<b>FUNDING (£10 Precept)</b>						
(6,703)	Revenue Support Grant	(7,169)	(7,195)	(7,183)	(7,255)	(7,328)
(5,426)	Business Rates	(6,278)	(6,422)	(6,552)	(6,683)	(6,817)
(181)	National Insurance Reimbursement	-	-	-	-	-
(21,202)	Precept	(24,140)	(25,858)	(27,621)	(28,734)	(29,873)
(211)	Collection Fund (Surplus)/Deficit	(46)	(46)	(46)	(46)	(46)
<b>(33,723)</b>	<b>TOTAL FUNDING</b>	<b>(37,633)</b>	<b>(39,521)</b>	<b>(41,402)</b>	<b>(42,718)</b>	<b>(44,064)</b>
-	<b>FUNDING (SURPLUS) / DEFICIT</b>	-	-	1,266	1,664	1,828
<b>PRECEPT</b>						
£80.39	Band D Council Tax	£90.39	£95.39	£100.39	£102.89	£105.39

EXPENDITURE		MTFP - £7.50 Precept				
2025/26 £'000		2026/27 £'000	2027/28 £'000	2028/29 £'000	2029/30 £'000	2030/31 £'000
34,815	<b>OPERATIONAL BUDGET</b>	37,671	39,104	40,304	40,965	42,011
346	<b>OTHER</b>	1,454	2,554	4,304	5,160	5,430
250	New Investment Proposals	250	500	750	1,000	1,250
(1,688)	<b>Savings Requirement</b>	(2,410)	(2,458)	(2,507)	(2,558)	(2,609)
<b>33,723</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>36,965</b>	<b>39,700</b>	<b>42,851</b>	<b>44,567</b>	<b>46,082</b>
<b>FUNDING (£7.50 Precept)</b>						
(6,703)	Revenue Support Grant	(7,169)	(7,195)	(7,183)	(7,255)	(7,328)
(5,426)	Business Rates	(6,278)	(6,422)	(6,552)	(6,683)	(6,817)
(181)	National Insurance Reimbursement	-	-	-	-	-
(21,202)	Precept	(23,472)	(25,180)	(26,933)	(28,035)	(29,165)
(211)	Collection Fund (Surplus)/Deficit	(46)	(46)	(46)	(46)	(46)
<b>(33,723)</b>	<b>TOTAL FUNDING</b>	<b>(36,965)</b>	<b>(38,843)</b>	<b>(40,714)</b>	<b>(42,019)</b>	<b>(43,356)</b>
-	<b>FUNDING (SURPLUS) / DEFICIT</b>	-	857	2,136	2,548	2,727
<b>PRECEPT</b>						
£80.39	Band D Council Tax	£87.89	£92.89	£97.89	£100.39	£102.89

EXPENDITURE		MTFP - £5 Precept				
2025/26 £'000		2026/27 £'000	2027/28 £'000	2028/29 £'000	2029/30 £'000	2030/31 £'000
34,815	OPERATIONAL BUDGET	37,671	39,104	40,304	40,965	42,011
346	OTHER	1,454	2,554	4,304	5,160	5,430
250 (1,688)	New Investment Proposals <b>Savings Requirement</b>	250 (3,077)	500 (3,140)	750 (3,202)	1,000 (3,266)	1,250 (3,332)
<b>33,723</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>36,298</b>	<b>39,018</b>	<b>42,156</b>	<b>43,859</b>	<b>45,359</b>
<b>FUNDING (£5 Precept)</b>						
(6,703)	Revenue Support Grant	(7,169)	(7,195)	(7,183)	(7,255)	(7,328)
(5,426)	Business Rates	(6,278)	(6,422)	(6,552)	(6,683)	(6,817)
(181)	National Insurance Reimbursement	-	-	-	-	-
(21,202)	Precept	(22,805)	(24,502)	(26,245)	(27,337)	(28,456)
(211)	Collection Fund (Surplus)/Deficit	(46)	(46)	(46)	(46)	(46)
<b>(33,723)</b>	<b>TOTAL FUNDING</b>	<b>(36,298)</b>	<b>(38,165)</b>	<b>(40,026)</b>	<b>(41,321)</b>	<b>(42,647)</b>
-	<b>FUNDING (SURPLUS) / DEFICIT</b>	-	<b>853</b>	<b>2,130</b>	<b>2,538</b>	<b>2,712</b>
<b>PRECEPT</b>						
£80.39	Band D Council Tax	£85.39	£90.39	£95.39	£97.89	£100.39

*Note: Totals may not sum due to rounding*

## APPENDIX D

### Section 25 Report of the NCFRA Section 151 Chief Finance Officer

*"I have worked closely with the Joint Finance Team and am assured by their robust and diligent approach to the 2026/27 budget setting process. I am grateful for their hard work, scrutiny and challenge throughout.*

*I have been fully briefed on the progress of the budget prior to and throughout the budget process and development of the capital programme, ensuring I have been party to all key assumptions and decisions. Prudent evidence-based estimates and assumptions included have been based on professional estimates, peer knowledge and benchmarking. Where possible, these are aligned with national fire, police, local authority and national technical team colleagues.*

*I have reviewed the detailed calculations in arriving at the budget requirement and Council Tax precept and find these to be robust. I also have sought and received authorisations from billing authorities in relation to tax base and Council Tax surplus/deficits and I am grateful to all partners for their support in doing so.*

*The Chief Fire Officer and Senior Leadership Team have been fully involved in the budget discussions and have worked hard to propose a balanced budget for 2026/27 to the PFCC. I am grateful for their engagement and commitment in this process.*

*In preparing the MTFP, working alongside the Finance Team, we modelled scenarios across council tax base assumptions and precept increases ranging from £0 to £24 to help inform the PFCC considerations in determining her precept proposal for 2026/27. As the information from the settlement and tax base became clearer, we continued to review and refine the MTFP.*

*The PFCC's precept intentions take into account public consultation alongside prudent assumptions based on the best information available, the MTFP and the reserves position, and still enables an element to be ring-fenced for investment.*

*It is my recommendation that financially it is essential to maximise the £5 precept flexibility afforded and if made possible increase by £12 for 2026/27. At £5, whilst it will be possible to balance the 2026/27 budget, the level of savings required has potential to require unpalatable changes to the service. The savings challenge at £12 is more achievable and when built into the base budget, it would help provide a resilient position for the medium term.*

*The Chief Fire Officer should continue to review their operational requirements and build essential and transformative investment into plans and strategies as the work progresses. Efficiency savings are needed across the whole medium term to achieve balanced budgets, and any investment requirements will need to be considered within this context. It is essential that significant operational changes and investment proposals are fully costed and considered prior to implementation to consider affordability and the wider impact of any decisions. I will continue to work with the Chief Fire Officer and Joint Finance Team to ensure this is undertaken.*

*Whilst the capital programme is approved and funded, it is ambitious and of significant value and there is an impact of both deliverability and financial cost on the revenue budget. These costs are included in the MTFP, but any changes in specifications or slippage in timescales could affect the deliverability of other priorities within the programme.*

*The capital programme is based on approved investments and best professional assumptions of realistic delivery timescales. It is essential that disposals and activities are undertaken in a timely manner to enable benefits and savings to be realised. I am assured by the arrangements put in place that the programme is regularly reviewed. Under the oversight of the Joint Assistant Chief Officer for Enabling Services, proposed expenditure is taken forward on the basis of evidence-based business cases, in full recognition of other competing priorities.*

*I have highlighted some uncertainties to the PFCC and within this report, and as such, contingencies have been ring-fenced within the revenue budget to mitigate risk. The PFCC has adequate levels of general and earmarked reserves to mitigate a likely level of in-year or medium term unforeseen financial pressures.*

*I conclude, therefore, that the budget for 2026/27:*

1. *Has been prepared on a robust basis.*
2. *In 2026/27, the budget is balanced with an agreed target for cashable efficiencies, some of which have been identified by the Chief Fire Officer already and built into the budget. A material residual savings requirement remains to be addressed.*
3. *General reserves are currently adequate and sufficient to meet essential risks and challenges. If possible, general and earmarked reserves will continue to be built up where it is appropriate and prudent to do so.*
4. *It is vital that the budget is managed within the funding envelope each year and earmarked reserves are used only where appropriate to support unforeseen issues or additional investment, not to balance the annual budget.*
5. *The future financial landscape is uncertain and whilst the MTFP can be balanced for three years, it does require the identified efficiencies to be taken forward. The MTFP will continue to be kept under regular review as the efficiency savings plan progresses.”*

**Vaughan Ashcroft**  
**Section 151 and Chief Finance Officer**  
**Northamptonshire Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority**

**APPENDIX E**  
**Reserves Strategy**



**NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COMMISSIONER FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY  
RESERVES STRATEGY (REVISED JANUARY 2026)**

**1. Reserves Strategy**

- 1.1. Reserves are a key part of medium-term financial planning with other components including revenue spending plans, income forecasts, potential liabilities, capital investment plans, borrowing and council tax levels. Decisions on these are inter-linked. Consequently, some organisations will need to maintain reserves at higher levels than others.
- 1.2. All publicly funded organisations should have a reserves strategy to demonstrate transparency and accountability, to comply with best practice financial management and to justify the levels of reserves held.
- 1.3. The PFCC maintains reserves to provide a measure of protection against risk. Without this protection, any unforeseen expenditure would have to be met either by increases in Council Tax or immediate savings (potentially through reductions in service levels).
- 1.4. The term "reserves" has a variety of technical and everyday meanings, depending on the context in which it is used. In this strategy, it is taken to mean funds set-aside at the PFCC's discretion for general or specific future purposes.
- 1.5. Reserves are required to protect and enhance the financial viability and in particular:
  - To maintain a degree of in-year financial flexibility.
  - To enable the PFCC to deal with unforeseen circumstances and incidents.
  - To set aside monies to fund major developments in future years.
  - To enable the PFCC to invest to transform and achieve improved service effectiveness and efficiency.
  - To set aside sums for known and potential liabilities.
  - To provide an operational contingency at service level.
- 1.6. Reserves should not be held to fund ongoing revenue expenditure as this is unsustainable in the long term. However, they may be important in smoothing a major financial imbalance (revenue or capital) over a longer timescale. CIPFA Bulletin 13 – Local Authority Reserves and Balances (Updated) published March 2023 states:

*“Balancing the annual budget by drawing on general reserves may be viewed as a legitimate short-term option. However, it is not normally prudent for reserves to be deployed to finance recurrent expenditure. CIPFA has commented that councils should be particularly wary about using one off reserves to deal with shortfalls in current funding. Where such action is to be taken, this should be made explicit, and an explanation given as to how such expenditure will be funded in the medium to long term.”*

- 1.7. The Northamptonshire Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority (NCFRA) was established on the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2019 with no transfer of reserves agreed as part of the business case. As such, a three year financial stability period was set to establish a more stable budget position, supported by a sufficient level of reserves.
- 1.8. Since 2019, tight financial planning, together with assistance from the Home Office enabled a sufficient level of reserves to be built up. However, work on the budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan has identified that the financial risks from inflation and other pressures are still forecast to be higher than funding available to the service. Despite annual efficiency targets, funding deficits are identified in future years.
- 1.9. The reserves strategy assumes that the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) is broadly balanced on a sustainable basis across the five year planning period. If the financial impact of current economic conditions continues to impact on tax base and council tax levels over the medium term, then this could impact on those assumptions.
- 1.10. This is recognised as a risk as when taking into account the projected shortfalls on the MTFP where savings will need to be achieved to facilitate balancing budgets in future years. If savings cannot bridge the full gap, based on current estimates, as a worst case scenario, revenue reserves can balance the gap over the five year MTFP to some extent, but this would exhaust available reserves and would impact funding available for investment.
- 1.11. NCFRA have a significant Capital programme requirement. This is continually reviewed to ensure it is both operationally deliverable and affordable.
- 1.12. Reserves should reflect the agreed financial strategy and should represent the quantified impact of risks and opportunities over the planning period, weighted for their probability.

## **2. National Guidance and Compliance with Home Office Guidance on Reserves**

- 2.1. The CIPFA Bulletin includes guidance on the establishment and maintenance of local authority reserves and balances, setting out the key factors that should be taken into account locally in making an assessment of the appropriate level of reserves and balances to be held.
- 2.2. There is information that each PFCC must publish in terms of police reserves. This guidance has also been adopted for NCFRA to ensure consistency across PFCC governed Fire and Police services in Northamptonshire. One of the key requirements is that the information on each reserve should make clear how much of the funding falls into each of the following three categories:
  - Funding for planned expenditure on projects and programmes over the period of the current medium term financial plan.
  - Funding for specific projects and programmes beyond the current planning period.

- As a general contingency to meet other expenditure needs held in accordance with sound principles of good financial management.

2.3. This information is summarised across the Home Office headings as at 31/3/26 as follows:

Reserve	Forecast Balance as at 31 March 2026 £m	Funding for planned expenditure on projects and programmes over the MTFP (26/27-30/31) £m	Total Forecast Revenue and Capital Reserves as at 31 March 2031 £m	Funding for specific projects and programmes beyond the current planning period £m	As a general contingency to meet other expenditure needs £m
<b>General</b>	<b>2.000</b>		<b>2.180</b>		<b>2.180</b>
<b>Earmarked Revenue:</b>					
Insurance	<b>0.250</b>		<b>0.250</b>		<b>0.250</b>
Operational Equipment	<b>0.096</b>	0.355	<b>0.451</b>	(0.201)	<b>0.250</b>
Smoothing	<b>0.033</b>	0.420	<b>0.453</b>		<b>0.453</b>
Transformation	<b>0.603</b>	(0.137)	<b>0.466</b>	(0.466)	<b>0.000</b>
<b>Total Earmarked</b>	<b>0.982</b>	<b>0.638</b>	<b>1.620</b>	<b>(0.667)</b>	<b>0.953</b>
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>2.982</b>	<b>0.638</b>	<b>3.800</b>	<b>(0.667)</b>	<b>3.133</b>
<b>Capital:</b>					
Capital Receipts	<b>1.607</b>	(1.607)	<b>0.000</b>		<b>0.000</b>
Capital and ESN Reserve	<b>0.314</b>	(0.314)	<b>0.000</b>		<b>0.000</b>
S106 Developer Contributions	<b>0.000</b>		<b>0.000</b>		<b>0.000</b>
Capital Grants Unapplied	<b>0.418</b>	(0.418)	<b>0.000</b>		<b>0.000</b>
<b>Total Capital</b>	<b>2.339</b>	<b>(2.339)</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.000</b>
<b>Total Reserves</b>	<b>5.321</b>	<b>(1.701)</b>	<b>3.800</b>	<b>(0.667)</b>	<b>3.133</b>

*Note: numbers may not sum due to rounding*

### 3. General Reserve

3.1. In order to assess the adequacy of the unallocated general reserve when setting the budget, the PFCC, on the advice of the Chief Finance Officer, should take account of the strategic, operational and financial risks facing the authority. This assessment of risk should include external risks, as well as internal risks, for example the ability to deliver planned efficiency savings.

3.2. Whilst there is no prescribed level of reserves that PFCCs should hold; it is influenced by individual discretion, local circumstances, advice from external auditors, risk management arrangements and risk appetite. CIPFA guidance specifically cautions against prescriptive national guidance for a minimum or maximum level of reserves and states:

*“The many factors involved when considering appropriate levels of reserves can only be assessed properly at a local level. A considerable degree of professional judgement is required. The chief finance officer may choose to express advice on the level of balances in cash and/or*

*as a percentage of budget (to aid understanding) so long as that advice is tailored to the circumstances of the authority.”*

- 3.3. However, the minimum level of reserves may be set for the authority by the Ministers in England and Wales where an authority does not act prudently, disregards the advice of its chief finance officer or is heading for financial difficulties.
- 3.4. CIPFA indicate a minimum general reserve level is typically between 2% and 3% of net budget requirement.
- 3.5. Despite progress in building reserves, NCFRA still has one of the lowest level of reserves per core spending power across all Fire and Rescue Authorities in England and Wales.
- 3.6. The PFCC has considered the reserves strategy and wishes to hold a sufficient but not excessive level of reserves. In determining this position, Annex 1 outlines how the PFCC complies with the 7 key CIPFA principles which can be used to assess the adequacy of reserves.
- 3.7. NCFRA have also considered the following factors:
  - NCFRA are required to meet costs up to a certain threshold for any claims for extraordinary funding to cover large-scale unplanned events.
  - NCFRA was established without the transfer of any reserves.
  - Local funding accounts for some 80% of NCFRA’s funding streams, which can be affected by local taxpayers and business’ ability to pay and are subject to volatility.
  - The general reserve also holds the financial risk of any potential industrial action requirements should they arise.
- 3.8. Given the above, it remains prudent to hold reserves at a reasonable level to provide a realistic and comfortable buffer to meet any eventualities, and to mitigate against any unplanned in-year changes being required.
- 3.9. The Chief Finance Officer advises that it would be prudent to maintain a sustainable and resilient level of general reserves at £2.0m or 5% of revenue budget (whichever is the higher).
- 3.10. At present, there are no plans to use the general reserve during the period of the MTFP or longer term. An annual revenue budget contribution of £60k has been included across the MTFP to ensure funds are above 5% of revenue expenditure in each year as follows:

Year	£m	% of Budget
2026/27	<b>2.000</b>	5.2%
2027/28	<b>2.000</b>	5.1%
2028/29	<b>2.060</b>	5.0%
2029/30	<b>2.120</b>	5.0%
2030/31	<b>2.180</b>	5.0%

#### 4. Earmarked Reserves

- 4.1. In addition to the general reserve, the PFCC holds a number of reserves which are earmarked for specific purposes.

4.2. At the 31/3/2026, it is estimated that the PFCC will hold £5.321m for Fire in earmarked reserves. The predicted position for each earmarked reserve as at 31/3/2026, together with further details is in Annex 2 and 3.

4.3. The purposes of each earmarked reserve are as follows:

- **Insurance** – To set funds aside where considered prudent for civil claims (Public and Employer liability) in line with professional advice.
- **Operational Equipment** – Given the age and condition of equipment transferred as part of the governance transfer, an annual operational equipment reserve contribution was established to smooth the impact and mitigate the costs of essential operational equipment replacement.
- **Carry Forwards** – To ringfence previous years' underspends for specific purposes in the medium term.
- **Smoothing** – To enable any savings generated to be earmarked and released over future years as needed, smoothing the impact of funding fluctuations and timing of savings programmes on the revenue budget.
- **Transformation** – To support initiatives and transformative activities such as investments in technology and other innovation, and in line with operational priorities. This includes funding of resources to deliver *Your Future Service*.
- **Capital Receipts** – To earmark receipts for disposal of capital assets for use as deemed appropriate to minimise the cost of future capital financing.
- **Capital and ESN Reserve** – To hold amounts set aside for capital investment, applied to the capital programme as deemed appropriate to minimise the cost of future capital financing. This specifically includes funds ringfenced for work associated with preparedness for Emergency Services Network (ESN).
- **Developer Contributions (s106)** – To collect the drawn down developer contributions awarded to the PFCC in line with S106 planning arrangements. These funds will be released in accordance with the terms of the agreements, usually to fund capital expenditure. The reserve only accounts for funds once they have been drawn down.
- **Capital Grants Unapplied** – To hold amounts grants received for specific capital investment, to be applied to the capital programme in line with the grant terms and as deemed appropriate to minimise the cost of future capital financing.

4.4. These reserves will be reviewed on a regular basis and any further opportunities to set aside earmarked reserves to support targeted expenditure and investment will be taken where appropriate.

## 5. Provisions

5.1. The CIPFA Statement of Recommended Practice is prescriptive about when provisions are required (and when they are not permitted). A provision must be established for any material liabilities of uncertain timings or amount, to be settled by the transfer of economic benefits. In accordance with this statutory guidance, there is an established 'Insurance Provision' which is reviewed as part of the closedown process for each year.

## **6. Procedures for management and control**

- 6.1. Any drawdown from reserves is subject to the approval of the PFCC, on advice from the PFCC's Chief Finance Officer (OPFCC CFO); or under the delegated authority of the OPFCC CFO.
- 6.2. The Local Government Act 2003 requires the Section 151 Officer to report annually on the adequacy of the reserves and this is included within the statement on the robustness of the estimates used for the budget and the adequacy of the proposed financial reserves.
- 6.3. The Strategy will be reviewed annually by the OPFCC CFO as part of the Budget and Precept process.

## Annexe 1

### NCFRA - Compliance with the 7 Key CIPFA Principles to assess the adequacy of reserves.

Budget Assumptions (CIPFA Principles)	2026/27 Situation in Northamptonshire
<b>The treatment of inflation and interest rates</b>	<p>Northamptonshire makes full and appropriate provision for pay and price increases, informed by benchmarking with peers.</p> <p>An informed assessment is made in the Treasury Management Strategy of interest rate movements, backed up by professional independent advice.</p> <p>All income and expenditure in the budget is prepared and published at outturn prices.</p> <p>Additionally, there are operational and inflation contingencies to mitigate any volatility during the year.</p>
<b>Estimates of the level and timing of capital receipts</b>	<p>Northamptonshire has reviewed its estates strategy as a fundamental part of the capital programme and has made a prudent assumption of future capital receipts across the programme which are being used to fund capital expenditure and minimise the impact of borrowing on the budget.</p>
<b>The treatment of demand led pressures</b>	<p>NCFRA is required to operate and manage within its annual budget allocation.</p> <p>All budgets except firefighters are devolved and managed by trained budget holders.</p> <p>On an exceptional basis, agreement of the PFCC is given to utilise carry forwards to meet one off demand led pressures.</p> <p>Demand led pressures are scrutinised and built into the budget on zero based budget principles. An agreed budget for Fire is set by the PFCC.</p> <p>The PFCC is keen to ensure that NCFRA continue to identify efficiencies where it makes sense to do so, and an efficiency target is set as part of the budget and MTFP and detailed within the annual strategic outcomes agreed with the Chief Fire Officer.</p>

	<p>Depending on funding availability, the PFCC has and will continue to support investment in areas that reduce demand, or which increase efficiency/capacity to deal with demand.</p> <p>General reserves are used as a last resort to manage and fund demand led pressures.</p>
<p><b>The treatment of Planned Efficiency Savings/Productivity Gains</b></p>	<p>In the first few years post governance transfer, NCFRA has underspent each year and used the opportunity to increase reserves as a result. Each financial year is more challenging, but it is forecast the budget will be balanced with a minimal use of reserves.</p> <p>There is a savings plan aligned to the MTFP and any identified savings and efficiencies from service or governance transfers will be monitored and reviewed regularly by the service and are only included as achieved in budgets when confirmed and verified.</p>
<p><b>The financial risks inherent in any significant new funding partnerships, collaboration, major outsourcing arrangements or major capital developments.</b></p>	<p>The financial consequences of partnership collaboration working outsourcing arrangements or capital investment are reported to the PFCC as part of the medium-term planning process. Where relevant, any additional costs are incorporated into the annual revenue budget and/or capital programme.</p> <p>There is a risk that partners will withdraw funding as their own budgets are squeezed, or that the continued viability of private sector commercial partners will be exposed to risk in the face of an economic recession.</p>
<p><b>The availability of reserves, government grants and other funds to deal with major contingencies and the adequacy of provisions.</b></p>	<p>NCFRA have built up appropriate reserves from a zero base to build a stable range earmarked reserves and provisions to meet specific expenditure items. Their use and balances are detailed in the attached annexe.</p> <p>NCFRA maintain an insurance provision, the adequacy of which is reviewed and monitored in detail by the legal services insurance advisors.</p> <p>NCFRA continue to maintain a general reserve to cover any major unforeseen circumstances, supported by</p>

	<p>earmarked reserves where appropriate to meet targeted investment in a planned manner which does not disproportionately impact on the revenue budget each year.</p>
<b>The general financial climate to which the Authority is subject</b>	<p>It is anticipated that the financial climate will continue to be challenging, and the medium-term financial plan reflects the “best estimate” of future inflation rates and increases in government grants and contributions.</p> <p>The Commercial team keep the authority updated on matters/risks affecting large contracts and supply chain.</p> <p>The MTFP will be regularly reviewed and updated to support operational decision making.</p>

**Annexe 2**

**RESERVES OF THE NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COMMISSIONER FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**  
**2026/27 to 2030/31**

	<b>Rationale</b>	<b>How and when used</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Risk If Reserve Not Held</b>	<b>Management and control</b>	<b>Review</b>
<b>GENERAL RESERVE</b>	<p>To maintain a degree of in-year financial flexibility</p> <p>To enable NCFRA to deal with unforeseen circumstances and incidents.</p> <p>To manage and meet financial risks of any industrial action requirements.</p> <p>To set aside sums for known and potential liabilities.</p>	<p>To meet exceptional spending needs or overspends which are unable to be otherwise financed at the year end.</p> <p>To smooth the profile of revenue over a medium term financial period.</p> <p>To allow higher spending without raising council tax on a one-off basis.</p>	<p>To maintain a sustainable level of £2.0m or 5% (whichever is the higher)</p>	<p>The general reserve is held at a level which reflects risk, uncertainties and volatility.</p> <p>If no reserve is held there may be insufficient resources available for major catastrophe, which could jeopardise financial status and reputation of NCFRA.</p>	<p>PFCC, on advice from PFCC CFO</p>	<p>Annual</p>
<b>EARMARKED - INSURANCE</b>	<p>To cover the potential and contingent liabilities of uninsured risks as assessed annually by our insurers based on claims outstanding.</p>	<p>The balance may increase or reduce annually dependent on the NCFRA outstanding claims record. Established in 2018/19 following advice from legal service advisors.</p> <p>Level of reserve reviewed annually with the legal services advisers.</p>	<p>Variable according to annual risk assessment.</p>	<p>The reserve is held to cover potential uninsured risks.</p> <p>If no reserve is held the NCFRA is potentially open to significant excess and claims payments in year beyond available revenue budgets which would fall on the general reserve.</p> <p>Assessment by insurers needs to be realistic not unduly pessimistic.</p>	<p>PFCC, on advice from PFCC CFO</p>	<p>Annual</p>

	Rationale	How and when used	Level	Risk If Reserve Not Held	Management and control	Review
<b>EARMARKED - OPERATIONAL EQUIPMENT</b>	To smooth the impact of operational equipment purchases on the revenue budget	To access the funds a costed request has to be provided.	Variable according to usage and annual risk assessment.	The reserve is held to smooth the impact of operational equipment replacement rather than have significant variations in the budget.  If no reserve is held, the risk is that equipment would have to be replaced from the current year's budget or capital programme.	PFCC, on advice from PFCC CFO	Annual
<b>EARMARKED – CARRY FORWARDS</b>	To fund specific expenditure requested by the service from previous year underspends or earmarked funding received.	Business cases provided as part of the outturn report or specific funding conditions.	Variable according to year end outturn and usage.	Establishing a reserve enables an incentive and opportunity to utilise year end underspends in a manner which will provide additionality or benefit for the service in future years, rather than finding resources from in-year or reserves.	PFCC, on advice from PFCC CFO	Annual
<b>EARMARKED – SMOOTHING</b>	The reserve is held to receive any efficiencies and funding in excess of the budget set and to utilise to ensure any future variations are smoothed where appropriate.  This includes the impact of fluctuations in funding receipts from the collection fund if provided after the budget has been set.	The balance will increase or reduce annually dependent on budget levels and the savings programme.	Variable according to usage and annual risk assessment.	If funds were not maintained the PFCC and the Service could be required to balance the budget or funding shortfalls by in-year savings.  There can be significant variations each year in the revenue budget whilst the timing of efficiency savings occur – this smoothing reserve will assist in mitigating that.	PFCC, on advice from PFCC CFO	Annual

	Rationale	How and when used	Level	Risk If Reserve Not Held	Management and control	Review
<b>EARMARKED - TRANSFORMATION</b>	To fund transformative activities and opportunities and meet initial and upfront costs of approved projects.	To access the funds a costed request or business case has to be provided.	Variable according to outturn and change programme.	If funds were not provided, the risk is that equipment or services and resources required to implement transformative projects would have to be replaced from the current year's budget or other reserves.  If no funds were available, it may be that innovative activity is hindered.	PFCC, on advice from PFCC CFO	Annual
<b>EARMARKED - CAPITAL RECEIPTS</b>	To hold capital financing underspends or disposal proceeds. These are to be used to fund the capital programme and minimise borrowing.	Released to fund capital projects where deemed the most cost efficient way to do so, in line with the Treasury Management Strategy.	Variable according to outturn, usage and annual risk assessment.	If unavailable, the cost of financing capital expenditure could adversely impact revenue budgets into the future.  Capital projects may be deemed unaffordable.	PFCC, on advice from PFCC CFO	Annual
<b>EARMARKED - CAPITAL AND ESN RESERVE</b>	To meet the costs of ESN and other capital requirements to support the funding of the capital programme.	Used to support funding the capital programme to minimise the cost of external borrowing on NCFRA and the taxpayer.	Variable according to activities.	If funds were not provided, the risk is that the additional costs would have to be factored into the capital programme.	PFCC, on advice from PFCC CFO	Annual
<b>EARMARKED - DEVELOPER CONTRIBUTIONS (S106)</b>	The reserve is held for funds allocated to the PFCC from developers towards the cost of infrastructure developments for Policing.  To meet the additional cost of operational requirements	To access the funds a costed request has to be provided which is consistent with the conditions of the developer contribution.	Variable according to usage.	If unavailable, the cost of financing capital expenditure could adversely impact revenue budgets into the future.  Capital projects may be deemed unaffordable.	PFCC, on advice from PFCC CFO	Annual

	Rationale	How and when used	Level	Risk If Reserve Not Held	Management and control	Review
<b>EARMARKED - CAPITAL GRANTS UNAPPLIED</b>	Used to earmark unapplied grants brought forward from the Governance Transfer with Northamptonshire County Council and any additional one off grant received from the Home Office.	Used to support funding in accordance with the grant requirements to minimise the cost of external borrowing on NCFRA and the taxpayer if purchased from capital.	Variable according to activities.	<p>The reserve is held for grants awarded for a specific capital purpose.</p> <p>This enables funds to be used in the most appropriate manner to meet capital expenditure and minimise the cost of borrowing.</p>	PFCC, on advice from PFCC CFO	Annual

Annexe 3

Summary of Reserves 2025/26 to 2030/2031

	Forecast Balance at 31 March 2026 £m	Forecast Balance at 31 March 2027 £m	Forecast Balance at 31 March 2028 £m	Forecast Balance at 31 March 2029 £m	Forecast Balance at 31 March 2030 £m	Forecast Balance at 31 March 2031 £m
<b><u>Held to meet budgetary risks</u></b>						
Insurance	0.250	0.250	0.250	0.250	0.250	0.250
Operational Equipment	0.096	0.167	0.238	0.309	0.380	0.451
<b><u>Held to support the medium term budget</u></b>						
Smoothing Reserve	0.033	0.153	0.273	0.333	0.393	0.453
<b><u>Held to facilitate change programmes</u></b>						
Transformation Reserve	0.603	0.536	0.466	0.466	0.466	0.466
<b><u>Committed to future capital programmes</u></b>						
Capital Receipts	1.607	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Capital and ESN Reserve	0.314	0.314	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
S106 Developer Contributions	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Capital Grants Unapplied	0.418	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
<b>Total Earmarked Reserves</b>						
	<b>2.339</b>	<b>0.314</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.000</b>
General Fund	3.321	1.420	1.227	1.358	1.489	1.620
<b>Total Reserves</b>						
	<b>5.321</b>	<b>3.420</b>	<b>3.227</b>	<b>3.418</b>	<b>3.609</b>	<b>3.800</b>

*Note: numbers may not sum due to rounding*

## NORTHAMPTONSHIRE POLICE, FIRE AND CRIME PANEL

**4 FEBRUARY 2026**

<b>Report Title</b>	<b>Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel Work Programme</b>
<b>Report Author</b>	<b>James Edmunds, Democratic Services Assistant Manager, West Northamptonshire Council</b> <a href="mailto:James.edmunds@westnorthants.gov.uk">James.edmunds@westnorthants.gov.uk</a>

### **List of Approvers**

<b>WNC Monitoring Officer</b>	Sarah Hall	20/01/2026
<b>WNC Chief Finance Officer (S.151)</b>	Martin Henry	21/01/2026

### **List of Appendices**

**Appendix A – Outline work programme**

**Appendix B – Update on responses to resolutions**

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#### **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1. The report is intended to enable the Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel to review the development and delivery of its work programme and to consider any related matters. The report also provides the Panel with an update on responses to previous resolutions.

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#### **2. Executive Summary**

- 2.1. The Police, Fire and Crime Panel operates a rolling 12-month work programme that provides a framework for its activity. This work programme is reported to each regular Panel meeting to enable it to be reviewed and updated as necessary. This report invites the Panel to consider and endorse the latest version of the work programme.
- 2.2. The report also provides the Panel with an update on actions taken in response to previous resolutions by the Panel.

### **3. Recommendations**

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

- a) Endorses the latest version of its outline work programme, subject to any changes that the Panel considers to be necessary.
- b) Notes the update on actions taken in response to previous resolutions by the Panel.

### **4. Reasons for Recommendations**

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4.1 The recommendations are intended to support the effective operation of the Panel and the delivery of its statutory responsibilities.

### **5. Report Background**

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5.1 The Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel (“the Panel”) represents one element of the overall governance system for policing and for fire and rescue in the county. The Policing Protocol Order 2023 sets out respective roles within this system relating to policing as follows:

*The public accountability for the delivery and performance of the police service is placed into the hands of the Police and Crime Commissioner on behalf of their electorate. The Police and Crime Commissioner draws on their mandate to set and shape the strategic objectives of their force area in consultation with the Chief Constable. They are accountable to the electorate; the Chief Constable is accountable to their Police and Crime Commissioner. The Panel within each force area is empowered to maintain a regular check and balance on the performance of the Police and Crime Commissioner in that context.*

5.2 In Northamptonshire, the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) is the fire and rescue authority for the county. The PFCC is therefore responsible for carrying out the statutory functions of such authorities, which principally consist of making provision for fire safety and prevention, fire-fighting, responding to road traffic collisions, and activities relating to other types of emergencies.

5.3 Local Government Association guidance for panels on policing and fire governance gives additional direction about respective responsibilities for operational matters as follows:

*Police and crime commissioners do not manage the day to day operations of the police force (nor the fire service in the case of PFCCs). The chief constable (and chief fire officer) retains the direction and control of the officers and staff of the force (and service). The chief constable (and chief fire officer) are responsible for the deployment of officers and operational decisions within the context of the commissioner’s plans, for the delivery of which they are held to account by the commissioner.*

*Discussion [by panels] of operational matters will be relevant as background information only insofar as they inform challenge and support on a specific, strategic issue into which the panel is looking in order to fulfil its statutory role.*

5.4 The Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011, the Policing and Crime Act 2017 and supporting legislation set out specific functions for the PFCC and the Panel in order to deliver their respective responsibilities. In the case of the Panel these functions are principally as follows:

- a) Scrutinising and reporting on the PFCC's proposed Police and Fire and Rescue precepts
- b) Scrutinising and reporting on the PFCC's Police and Crime Plan and Fire and Rescue Plan, which set out the PFCC's priorities and objectives for policing and Fire and Rescue
- c) Scrutinising and reporting on the PFCC's Annual Report on the delivery of Police and Crime Plan objectives and on the annual Fire and Rescue Statement reporting compliance with the Fire and Rescue National Framework
- d) Scrutinising and reporting on proposed appointments by the PFCC to certain positions (: Deputy PFCC; Chief Executive; Chief Finance Officer; Chief Constable of Northamptonshire Police; and Chief Fire Officer of Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service)
- e) Dealing with complaints from members of the public about the conduct of the PFCC.
- f) Reviewing and scrutinising decisions made, or other action taken, by the PFCC in connection with the discharge of the PFCC's functions and making reports or recommendations to the PFCC with respect to these matters.

5.5 The functions of the Panel must be exercised with a view to supporting the effective exercise of the functions of the PFCC.

## **6. Issues and Choices**

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### **Work Programme**

6.1 It is standard practice for the Panel to set a work programme to provide a framework within which it carries out its functions and the practical tasks these involve. The work programme is made up of a combination of statutory and discretionary scrutiny work; matters relating to the operation of the Panel; and any supporting activities such as briefings or training. The work programme covers a rolling 12-month period. The work programme is considered at the first Panel meeting in the municipal year. It is then kept under regular review by the Panel and modified or updated as necessary, with a view to ensuring that it is focussed on the aim of using available capacity to best effect. The Panel may also carry out other tasks beyond what is already included in the work programme should the need arise, for example, if it is required to scrutinise a proposed senior appointment by the PFCC.

6.2 The operation of a work programme by the Panel reflects Local Government Association guidance, which advises as follows:

*A work programme helps a panel to plan its work to reflect the resources available and its capacity...A work programme helps a panel to:*

- *evaluate issues which are and are not priorities*
- *manage its limited time and resources more effectively*
- *plan its routine business in the calendared cycle of meetings*
- *prepare for its regular special functions [: the functions set out in paragraph 5.4 (a)-(d) above]*
- *enable it to carry out value-added proactive activity such as evidence sessions and task and finish groups from time to time as capacity allows.*

6.3 The Panel considered its work programme for 2025/26 at its first meeting on 19 June 2025 and identified various topics that it prioritised for inclusion. The Panel approved a proposed work programme taking account of these topics at its meeting on 18 September 2025. The latest version of the work programme is included with this report (at Appendix A).

#### Update on responses to Panel resolutions

6.4 The Panel agreed at its meeting on 18 September 2025 that future work programme reports should include an update on responses to resolutions by the Panel involving further action. This approach is intended to assist the Panel to track the responses to its resolutions, to identify clearly whether resolutions have been addressed and to get a better picture of the outcomes resulting from its meetings. An update on responses to previous resolutions is included with this report (at Appendix B).

#### **Implications (including financial implications)**

##### **6.5 Resources and Financial**

6.5.1 The resources and financial implications associated with this report are those connected with the normal operation of the Panel and delivery of the work programme it agrees. The principal resource involved is the time, knowledge and capability of Panel members. West Northamptonshire Council Democratic Services administers and supports the operation of the Panel, using grant funding that the Panel's host authority can claim from the Home Office for the purpose of maintaining a panel for the Northamptonshire Police area.

##### **6.6 Legal**

6.6.1 The report is intended to reflect and support the Panel's statutory functions for scrutinising and supporting the work of the PFCC. The relevant legislation is set out within the body of the report.

##### **6.7 Risk**

6.7.1 The principal risk associated with the recommended decisions is that the Panel operates a work programme that is not sufficiently effective. This situation could be caused by a range of factors: for example, if the work programme did not reflect the Panel's statutory functions; if the work programme was unfocussed or included too much business to be realistically deliverable; or if the work programme was fixed at the start of the year and did not allow the flexibility to respond to issues that might subsequently arise. These risks should be mitigated by the Panel reviewing its work programme and any associated matters at each of its normal meetings during the municipal year.

##### **6.8 Consultation**

6.8.1 The development and delivery of the Panel's work programme and of processes supporting this is generally informed by liaison between the Panel and its Secretariat and the Office of the PFCC.

## **7. Background Papers**

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Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011

Policing and Crime Act 2017

Policing Protocol Order 2023

Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel Rules of Procedure

Policing and fire governance – Local Government Association and Centre for Governance and Scrutiny guidance for police and crime panels (2019)

Police, fire and crime panels – Home Office guidance (2023)

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## Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel – Outline Work Programme

MEETING DATE	STATUTORY BUSINESS	DISCRETIONARY BUSINESS	BUSINESS RELATING TO PANEL OPERATION	OTHER BUSINESS
4 February 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC)'s proposed Police precept for 2026/27</li> <li>- PFCC's proposed Fire and Rescue precept for 2026/27</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Review of work programme</li> <li>- 2026/27 meeting dates</li> </ul>	
18 February 2026 (Reserve meeting)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- PFCC's revised Police precept for 2026/27 [if required] and/or</li> <li>- PFCC's revised Fire and Rescue precept for 2026/27 [if required]</li> </ul>			
9 April 2026		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Overview of selected area of activity: domestic abuse and domestic violence</li> <li>- Overview of selected area of activity: how the PFCC is supporting and holding to account the Chief Constable and Chief Fire Officer for recruitment and retention by Northamptonshire Police and Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Review of work programme</li> <li>- Half-yearly update on operation of the Panel's functions relating to complaints and conduct matters about the PFCC</li> </ul>	

MEETING DATE	STATUTORY BUSINESS	DISCRETIONARY BUSINESS	BUSINESS RELATING TO PANEL OPERATION	OTHER BUSINESS
June 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- PFCC's Annual Report for 2025/26</li> <li>- PFCC's Fire and Rescue Statement for 2025/26</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Appointment of Panel Chair and Deputy Chair</li> <li>- Work programme 2026/27</li> <li>- Appointment of Complaints Sub Committee members</li> </ul>	
September 2026		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Joint Independent Audit Committee Annual Report 2025/26</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Review of work programme</li> <li>- Half-yearly update on operation of the Panel's functions relating to complaints and conduct matters about the PFCC</li> </ul>	
December 2026			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Review of work programme</li> </ul>	

**Additional topics identified but not yet scheduled**

- Response to serious anti-social behaviour in Northamptonshire
- Protection of vulnerable adults from crime and community safety risks
- The role of citizens in community safety
- The OPFCC complaints and customer service functions
- The impact of street drug dealing and the action being taken to address it in Northamptonshire
- The implementation and impact of Police Governance Reform proposals

## **Additional briefing sessions for Panel members**

- Development of the PFCC's proposed precepts and budgets – a workshop session in January 2026 with the PFCC and the OPFCC Chief Finance Officer to consider the financial environment and key factors informing the development of the PFCC's budget and precept proposals. This session feeds into scrutiny of the final proposals by the whole Panel at its formal meeting on 4 February 2026. The workshop session took place on 22 January 2026.
- Briefing with the Chief Constable and Chief Fire Officer – the Panel has previously sought to include in its work programme briefing sessions, held at least annually, with the Chief Constable of Northamptonshire Police and the Chief Fire Officer of Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service. These sessions are intended to give an overview of the operating environment for the two organisations and their key priorities and challenges, to help to inform the Panel in carrying out its role of scrutinising and supporting the PFCC. The last briefing was held on 16 June 2025. The OPFCC has suggested the next could be an end-of-year briefing in April / May 2026.

## **Further information**

### **(A) Statutory Business**

**PFCC's Annual Report and Fire and Rescue Statement** – The PFCC is required to produce an Annual Report on the exercise of the PFCC's police and crime functions during the previous financial year and the progress made in meeting objectives set out in the PFCC's Police and Crime Plan. The PFCC is also required to publish an annual statement of assurance of compliance with the priorities set out in the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England. The Panel must review and report on both the Annual Report and the Fire and Rescue Statement as soon as practicable after they are received.

**PFCC's proposed Police and Fire and Rescue precepts** – The PFCC's proposed precepts must be reviewed and reported on by the Panel before they can be issued. The Panel has the power to veto a proposed precept, in which case the PFCC is required to produce a revised proposal that must also be reviewed by the Panel at the reserve meeting included in the outline work programme (if the Panel does not veto either of the proposed precepts the reserve meeting will not be held). The steps involved in this process must take place by specific deadlines set in legislation.

**PFCC's Police and Crime Plan and Fire and Rescue Plan** – The PFCC must issue a Police and Crime Plan setting out their local police and crime objectives and related matters during the financial year following an ordinary election. The PFCC must also issue a Fire and Rescue Plan setting out their strategic vision, priorities and objectives 'shortly after' taking office. The PFCC may issue a Police and Crime Plan or a Fire and Rescue Plan, or may vary an existing Plan, at any time. Before the PFCC issues or varies either Plan a draft of the Plan or variation must be reviewed and reported on by the Panel.

## **(B) Business relating to Panel operation**

**Complaints and conduct matters update** – The Panel has adopted specific arrangements to carry out its responsibilities for dealing with complaints and conduct matters relating to the PFCC. These include the provision by the host authority Monitoring Officer of a half-yearly monitoring report about all matters dealt with in the preceding period. In this way the Panel is able to monitor the operation of the arrangements it has made to deliver this aspect of its statutory responsibilities

## Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel – update on responses to resolutions

MEETING DATE	SUBJECT	RESOLUTION	ACTION	STATUS
27 November 2025	Response by the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner to Court of Appeal judgement	RESOLVED that: the Panel requests to have an opportunity to see and comment on the scope and terms of reference for the Police, Fire and Commissioner's independent review of the circumstances that resulted in the Chief Constable of Northamptonshire Police being found in contempt of court before these are finalised.	The terms of reference were circulated to Panel members on 22 December 2025. Comments by Panel members were sent via the Panel Secretariat to the Office of the PFCC on 12 January 2026.	Completed
4 December 2025	Delivery of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's Public Safety Plan for Northamptonshire 2025-30	RESOLVED that: a) The Panel requests that the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner provides a report to the Panel on the outcomes of the conference on violence against women and girls on 10 December 2025.	A briefing paper provided by the Office of the PFCC was circulated to Panel members on 22 January 2026.	Completed
		b) The Panel identifies the following matters as potential topics for future scrutiny: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Protection of vulnerable adults from crime and community safety risks</li><li>• The role of citizens in community safety</li><li>• The OPFCC complaints and customer service functions</li></ul>	The topics have been added to the work programme as additional topics identified but not yet scheduled.	Completed

MEETING DATE	SUBJECT	RESOLUTION	ACTION	STATUS
		c) The Panel requests that the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner provides further information on the breakdown of victims of violent crime in Northamptonshire.	Further information was given later in the meeting on 4 December 2025 to provide context for the original point made by the PFCC that led to the request by the Panel.	Completed
4 December 2025	Police, Fire and Crime Panel Work Programme	<p>The Panel endorses the latest version of its outline work programme, subject to the addition of the following topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The impact of street drug dealing and the action being taken to address it in Northamptonshire</li> <li>• The implementation and impact of Police Governance Reform proposals</li> </ul>	The topics have been added to the work programme as additional topics identified but not yet scheduled.	Completed

## NORTHAMPTONSHIRE POLICE, FIRE AND CRIME PANEL

**4 FEBRUARY 2026**

<b>Report Title</b>	Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel meeting dates for 2026/27
<b>Report Author</b>	James Edmunds, Democratic Services Assistant Manager, West Northamptonshire Council <a href="mailto:James.edmunds@westnorthants.gov.uk">James.edmunds@westnorthants.gov.uk</a>

### **List of Approvers**

<b>WNC Monitoring Officer</b>	Sarah Hall	20/01/2026
<b>WNC Chief Finance Officer (S.151)</b>	Martin Henry	21/01/2026

### **List of Appendices**

**None**

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#### **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1. The report is intended to enable the Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel to agree its meeting dates for the 2026/27 civic year.

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#### **2. Executive Summary**

- 2.1. The report invites the Panel to consider a proposed schedule of meeting dates for 2026/27 and to agree this subject to any changes that the Panel considers to be necessary.

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#### **3. Recommendations**

- 3.1. It is recommended that the Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel agrees the following meeting dates for 2026/27:
  - Thursday 18 June 2026
  - Thursday 17 September 2026
  - Thursday 3 December 2026
  - Wednesday 3 February 2027
  - Wednesday 17 February 2027 (Reserve)
  - Thursday 8 April 2027

All meetings to start at 2.00pm. All meetings to take place at local authority venues in Northampton.

#### **4. Reasons for Recommendations**

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4.1 The recommendation is intended to support the effective operation of the Panel during 2026/27 and the delivery of its statutory responsibilities.

#### **5. Report Background**

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5.1 The Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011, the Policing and Crime Act 2017 and supporting legislation set out the statutory functions of the Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel (“the Panel”). These are principally as follows:

- Scrutinising and reporting on the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC)’s proposed Police and Fire and Rescue precepts
- Scrutinising and reporting on the PFCC’s Police and Crime Plan and Fire and Rescue Plan
- Scrutinising and reporting on the PFCC’s Annual Report on the delivery of Police and Crime Plan objectives and on the annual Fire and Rescue Statement reporting compliance with the Fire and Rescue National Framework
- Scrutinising and reporting on proposed appointments by the PFCC to certain positions (: Deputy PFCC; Chief Executive; Chief Finance Officer; Chief Constable of Northamptonshire Police; and Chief Fire Officer of Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service)
- Dealing with complaints from members of the public about the conduct of the PFCC.
- Reviewing and scrutinising decisions made, or other action taken, by the PFCC in connection with the discharge of their functions and making reports or recommendations to the PFCC with respect to these matters.

5.2 The functions of the Panel must be exercised with a view to supporting the effective exercise of the functions of the PFCC.

5.3 It is good practice for the Panel to agree an annual schedule of meetings before the start of the relevant civic year. This assists with the planning and delivery of the tasks that the Panel is required or chooses to undertake and therefore supports the Panel in carrying out its functions as effectively as possible.

#### **6. Issues and Choices**

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6.1 The Panel Secretariat has taken account of various factors in drawing up the proposed meeting dates and associated arrangements set out in paragraph 3.1 above, as follows:

- The proposed scheduling of Panel meetings through the civic year and the day of the week used reflects previous practice. The proposal that Panel meetings start at 2.00pm is a change, as 12.30pm has been the standard start time used in recent years. However, it is proposed that a 2.00pm start would allow more opportunity for Panel members and other attendees to have a break in their schedules after any morning commitments.
- The proposed meeting dates seek to take account of local authority meetings in Northamptonshire and other relevant events and avoid clashes as far as possible.

- The dates for the meetings in February 2027 reflect the statutory requirements on the Panel concerning scrutiny of the PFCC's proposed policing and Fire and Rescue precepts: the Panel must scrutinise and make a report on the proposed precepts by 8 February and, if necessary following a veto of the proposed precepts, scrutinise and make a report on revised precepts by 22 February.
- The Panel in 2021/22 agreed that local authority venues in Northampton should be the normal location for its meetings. The Panel considered that this was most conducive to supporting its stated priorities relating to meetings, which were a location that offers the ability to webcast and that is central in Northamptonshire and accessible to participants. The Panel has operated on this basis since then, with Panel meetings taking place in West Northamptonshire Council's committee meeting rooms at One Angel Square since January 2025.

6.2 It is open to the Panel to consider amending the proposed schedule of dates and start times should it identify the need to do so at this point. The Panel will then be able to maintain an overview of its meeting schedule as it moves through 2026/27 and to respond to any issues relating to it that may arise.

## **7. Implications (including financial implications)**

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### **7.1 Resources and Financial**

7.1.1 There are no specific resources or financial implications associated with this report. The normal operation of the Panel is supported by grant funding that the Panel's host authority can claim from the Home Office for the purpose of maintaining a panel for the Northamptonshire Police area.

### **7.2 Legal**

7.2.1 The report is intended to reflect and support the Panel's statutory functions for scrutinising and supporting the work of the PFCC. The relevant legislation is set out within the body of the report.

### **7.3 Risk**

7.3.1 The Panel should ensure that it agrees meeting dates for 2026/27 that can be delivered within available resources and that will enable it to carry out its role. It is proposed that the prospective meeting dates set out in this report do not involve any specific risks in this regard, as they represent a realistic schedule of meetings for 2026/27 that builds on previous practice and that reflects priorities that the Panel has previously identified.

## **8. Background Papers**

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Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011

Policing and Crime Act 2017

Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel Rules of Procedure

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