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An Open Letter - Woefully inadequate police funding for Cheshire

Dear Chancellor

As you are no doubt aware, the role of a Police and Crime Commissioner is an incredibly important one, as it is my job to give a voice to people our communities about their policing priorities – and to work with our force leadership and our partners to deliver on them.

Since being given the honour of being elected as Police and Crime Commissioner for Cheshire I have worked hard, along with force leadership and with thousands of residents across our county, to understand Cheshire's policing priorities.

And, during my time in office, I have made a promise – a promise to do everything in my power to help deliver on those priorities that matter most.

But these are at risk.

And it's a risk that sits squarely with the Government, so I hope the voices of the people of Cheshire are heard and considered at Westminster before it's too late.

The voice of the people of Cheshire

When it comes to telling me their policing priorities, the people of Cheshire have spoken very loudly and clearly.

They want to see real neighbourhood policing; they want us to tackle new and emerging threats to our way of life; they want us to put victims first and to protect the most vulnerable members of our society; and they want us to prevent anti-social behaviour and disorder in their communities.

They also want a police service fit for the future and a service that is connected with, and accessible, to their local communities.

The voice of the people of Cheshire is reflected in my Police & Crime Plan for 2016–2021, [“Delivering even safer communities for the whole of Cheshire”](#).

A woefully inadequate funding settlement

As you will also be aware, it is my job to set out the resources available to the Chief Constable to deliver on these policing priorities efficiently and effectively and set the police budget following allocation of the police grant by the Government and to set the police council tax precept for Cheshire.

As the voice of the people of Cheshire on policing at a local, regional and national level I have to say that the flat police cash settlement – if it is indeed set in stone for the Chancellor’s Autumn Budget – is woefully inadequate if we are to address the real and genuine concerns of our residents.

I want to set aside the party politics – I can assure you this is far more important than that – and focus on the voice of reason and on the facts.

Setting out the facts on a national level

I’ll start with the facts on a national level, some of which were shared recently by colleagues at the recent National Police Chiefs’ Council (NPCC) and Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC) Annual Summit.

Speaking jointly at the summit, Chief Constable Dave Thompson, NPCC Lead for Finance and West Midlands Police and Roger Hirst, APCC Lead for Finance and Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, said that more people are reporting crime, and the crime that is reported has changed and is increasingly complex.

They also said that the current flat cash settlement means force budgets fall in real terms, as we have to absorb the cost of inflation, commitments, new demands and investment. This weakens our policing system and leading to difficult decisions on not only what we do but crucially what we can no longer do. This is a national problem.

Published only recently, the latest annual efficiency report from Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire & Rescue Services backed this up, reporting rising recorded crime – an increase of 11%, the largest annual rise in a decade; falling workforce numbers – predicted to be nearly 3,000 fewer officers come 2020/21; demand on call centres for both 999 and 101 calls - up 10.5%, and increases in cybercrime.

It prompted Steve White, Chair of the Police Federation of England and Wales to say that: “The demand on our already thin blue lines are too great.”

Setting out the facts for Cheshire

When it comes to the ‘thin blue line’ in Cheshire, I’d say we are now stretched to breaking point.

In the past seven years, Cheshire Constabulary has made huge savings – over £60 million in fact. Analysis by the Police and Crime Commissioners Treasurers’ Society shows Cheshire Police have suffered a cash cut of 23% since 2010 and a real terms cut of 37%. We only have £8m in reserves, most of which is already earmarked for new technology and emergency situations. Similar analysis is available for other forces.

Considering this has been done by minimising the impact on our frontline services it is an amazing achievement.

I can honestly say that the Constabulary has done an incredible job to find these savings by improving processes, finding efficiencies through stronger collaboration and by streamlining our estate to generate long-term savings.

I personally have already found ways to cut spending in the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner by a substantial amount, which means we are one of the best value, and second lowest per head in terms of cost, OPCC's in the Country. Doing things smarter and better is something we all bear a responsibility for.

However, whilst we've been doing this, we've also found that spending cuts in other public services have caused the public to rely more and more on the police service for help.

And we've done this against a backdrop of recorded crime increasing by 28 per cent in the past 12 months in Cheshire alone, with areas such as hate crime, violence, missing from home cases and domestic abuse seeing particular increases.

Add this to emerging new crimes, such as cyber-crime, modern slavery and online grooming, which are often complex and resource intensive and this all places additional strain on our service.

On top of new crimes our amazing teams of officers across Cheshire are facing on a daily basis, we also have other pressures such as rising inflation, an upsurge in non-recent sex abuse cases and changes to the national security environment.

Despite all this, the safety and security of all the people of Cheshire has remained of paramount importance to the force and myself. And that will never change.

By flat lining funding, you are making the job of protecting our communities harder and harder.

Flat lining our funding

A flat cash settlement from the Government in the Autumn Budget, as it seems to be, doesn't take into account the rising costs and demands on our already stretched police service here in Cheshire.

It doesn't consider the increasingly challenging future environment, and will weaken the resilience in our service to respond to these increases in demand.

If it is true that the Government opts to flat -line our funding allocation, it means that, over the next three years, we will need to find further savings of more than £13 million.

That's around £4million in year one, £5million in year two and a further £4 million in year three.

Combined that's over £73million worth of savings in just over a decade, which is quite simply unsustainable.

It's unfair to the people of Cheshire and it's unfair on those who are aiming to ensure our force is the very best it can be.

So we are making our voice heard loudly. And we are fighting for a fairer settlement.

Hand on heart, I hope you're listening.

Shifting the burden to the people of Cheshire?

By generating savings of more than £8million every year over the last seven years we're at a point now where more than 76 per cent of the police budget is spent on officer and staff pay.

Adding to that, we have a one per cent pay increase on the horizon, the very least our public sector workers deserve. But the financial burden intensifies.

Put bluntly, the Constabulary has exhausted nearly all of its options for efficiency savings.

The Government may assume we can dip into the force cash reserves. With finding over £57million worth of cuts means we don't have the luxury of a secret horde of cash to dip into when things get a bit stretched. We only have £8 million of mainly earmarked reserves. We are at a tipping point in preserving police services.

It's unrealistic to expect us to preserve cash when we've had to use all the funding we have simply to maintain a status quo.

So, with a force stripped to the bone to find efficiencies it means one of only two things.

It means cost increases through the precept or cuts in frontline officers, staff and PCSOs.

So, it could mean were forced to ramp up the police precept – when many homes are already struggling. And so our communities will end up facing the burden of Government failures to provide adequate funding.

Or we will lose the things that matter most to the people of Cheshire when it comes to feeling safe and secure in their homes and communities – a strong police presence.

With 91 per cent of police officers serving in the heart of our communities, and the other nine per cent supporting them, it will inevitably mean cuts to our frontline, the very thing the people of Cheshire want us to prioritise.

And it makes our efforts to help achieve a visible community police presence, through PCSOs for every ward in Cheshire, an almost impossible task, but one that we are determined to achieve.

We will do our best to find a way through. We always do. But there's no hiding that this is at a much higher risk and the responsibility rests on your shoulders.

A 'Criminals Charter'

Government need to wake up to these funding challenges before it's too late, before your legacy and that of the Home Secretary is a 'Criminal's Charter'.

More resources need to be made available to the police, not less, to enable them to protect the public effectively.

Overall funding needs to be increased if the service is to address emerging crime and demands.

Government needs to find smarter ways to evolve the current funding mechanism, to provide forces like ours with additional funding to support local needs.

I assume the priority of maintaining public confidence in our policing remains a prerequisite for this Government as it has for many Governments before?

It's time for Government to listen and all of us to act

As budget cuts bite deeper due to austerity – and if the Government refuses to listen to the people of Cheshire – we will be faced with making some incredibly difficult decisions when it comes to the future of the force in Cheshire.

I want to be very clear about that. And I'll reiterate that the responsibility for this rests with the Government.

That's why I'm calling on the voices of the people of Cheshire to be heard in the corridors of power before it's too late.

I hope these facts are not lost on you as Chancellor and that the Home Secretary is fighting for an adequate share of what we know and appreciate are challenging financial times for the Government.

Fighting for a better settlement

I made a promise to fight for the people of Cheshire, but I'm also encouraging everyone who cares about their safety and security, and that of their communities and their families, to join me in making sure that our collective voices are heard.

Therefore, I'm encouraging people to write to me at the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Cheshire and I will send all of their responses to you and to the Home Secretary.

Alternatively, I'm calling on them to lobby their local MPs and representatives to fight for their interests on their behalf.

Together, we can make sure that, when it comes to a fair policing settlement for Cheshire, the Government cannot bury their head in the sand on this important issue.

I guess we'll see when you make the key announcements in this year's Budget.

Cheshire will be watching with interest.

Yours sincerely,



David Keane
Police & Crime Commissioner for Cheshire