

**Cumbria Police Authority
15th February 2006
Agenda Item No. 8(i)**

POLICE COMMUNITY LIAISON FORUM MINUTE EXTRACTS

Allerdale PCLF, 25th January 2006

**“PRESENTATION – BUDGET PROPOSALS 2006-7 – DOUG THOMAS,
POLICE AUTHORITY TREASURER**

Doug Thomas introduced himself as Treasurer to the Police Authority and began by explaining the three parties of the provision of the police service – government, Police Authority and Council tax payers. Mr. Thomas explained the Government grants increased by 4.5% in 2006-7 and 5% in 2007-8 which leaves the Council tax to pick up the balance. The Government has a target to increase Council tax by less than 5%. This year the average national average increase was 4.1% (Cumbria 41.3%) which was lower than the figure of 5.9% for 2004-5. Mr. Thomas went on to say so we have seen quite a reduction in the average scale of tax increase with this year's increase of 4.1% being the lowest over the past ten years. He said the Government was again prepared to use capping powers which restricts authority expenditure and tax increases to reasonable levels.

Mr. Thomas continued by saying that in order to maintain the current level of service the Council tax would have to be increased – a 3% increase on a Band B property would mean 7p per week and a 5% increase on a Band B property would mean 12 p per week increase and on a Band D property a 3% increase would mean 9 p per week and a 5% increase would mean 15 p per week. In addition the Police Authority have to make efficiency savings to meet Government targets (3%) and Mr. Thomas pointed out that half the savings have to be cashable savings. Mr. Thomas then referred to a series of graphs which he had previously distributed to the meeting. The graphs showed the sharing of the costs of policing from 1995-6 to 2005-6 between the Police Grant, rate Support Grant and Business Rates and the Council tax, the rate of increase of Council tax between the years and the proportions of police authority budget, government spending assumptions and grant funding over the years.

Mr. Barry then opened the meeting up for questions. Mr. Humes said his biggest concern was what would happen to the Council tax with a merger if the merger was not with areas with similar council tax levels as Cumbria. Mr. Thomas said he would cover this later in the agenda.”

Barrow PCLF, 5th January 2006

“CONSULTATION ON THE POLICE AUTHORITY BUDGET FOR 2006/2007

Mr Douglas Thomas, CPA Treasurer, presented his budget issues paper, a copy of which had been circulated to those in attendance, together with graphs illustrating the funding of the CPA budget since its inception in 1995.

The audience expressed their appreciation of the style and content of the presentation, which is inevitably ‘simplified’ to reflect the time available and the lay nature of those in attendance.

Question raised over the course of the almost one-hour dialogue on this item and to which the Treasurer, supported where necessary by the BCU Commander responded, included:

- the nature of the Gershon review and the intention that savings should be moved from back office processes to front line service delivery
- airwave and the cost of taking the service in Cumbria compared to metropolitan area
- funding and role of PCSOs
- the merits of local taxation versus national grants
- access to European (deprivation) Funds
- concern not just for pensioner groups, but also for hard pressed families
- issue of VFM and a view that public attitude will depend on what they are looking for (eg, action on drugs versus action against inconsiderate motorists)
- acceptance of PA taking a low share of total Council Tax but no way to differentiate between acceptability of different shares when bill comes to be paid
- whether PA would be seeking voluntary contributions towards essential services as in NHS
- capacity of new technology to generate real savings as distinct from making the constabulary more efficient – and the lack of up-front funding available to adopt new systems

The engagement and dialogue was genuine and at the conclusion, the audience reflected mixed views on the level of acceptable tax increase ranging from:

- minimum increase
- maximum permitted increase to 5%
- split the difference

One of the more thoughtful contributions stated that it was all very well to present the case as between 3% and 5% - the difference being so comparatively small that the higher figure was to be seen as

acceptable – but the speaker was more concerned by the year on year cumulative effect of the adoption of above inflation increases, coupled with the impact of the recent fuel and energy increases which had to be absorbed by all sections of society.”

Carlisle PCLF, 12th January 2006

“2006/07 Budget

Mr Douglas Thomas, Treasurer, Cumbria Police Authority (CPA) outlined the budget proposals for the coming year, the increase in government grant, the implications for the increase in Council Tax and requirements to make savings. He explained that government supported spending for all public services provided by Local authorities in 2006-07 is estimated to be £83bn of which £10.5bn (an increase of £305m) is currently allocated to policing services. The CPA will receive an increase in grant allocation from the government of £2.1m (3.2%) which is a smaller increase than the previous year. Because of the rises in Council Tax in recent years, which brought protests from the public, the government has used its legal powers to “call in” the budgets of 14 local authorities, (which included 3 Police Authorities and 1 Fire Services Authority) in 2004 05, of whom 6 had their budgets ‘capped’ and also to ‘cap’ the budgets of 9 local authorities in 2005-06. Cumbria Police Authority had their 2004-05 budget ‘called in’ and were set a lower budget and Council Tax target for 2005-06, figures which were met and resulted in a tax increase of just 3.4%. This year the CPA needs a £4.1m increase in budget to maintain its present level of service. But if Council tax is restricted there would still be a shortfall and savings of £900,000 would be required if the Council Tax increase is to be kept to 3%. If the Council Tax is increased by 5% the current level of service can be maintained and only £400,000 of savings would be required to be made.

Mr Thomas reported that 80% of the budget related to manpower costs, i.e. pay, employer’s pension contributions, national insurance and other costs of employment, so the scope to make savings is restricted to the remaining 20% of the budget. If savings were required to be made over an extended period of time, savings could be made by putting front line police officers into back office posts which are currently filled by civilians, and curtailing recruitment of further civilian staff.

As part of the consultation process, the Chairman asked if the members attending the Forum felt that they got good value for money from their police force, and whether they would be willing to accept the Council Tax increase of 5% so as to reduce the impact of the savings to be made against the current level of service, or restrict the increase to 3% and with a higher level of savings to be made.

A member of the public asked why two local community police officers had recently been removed from their duties and five superintendents appointed.

Ch Supt Davidson said that he had reviewed the demands made on his officers, both on community and patrol officers who more routinely respond to reported incidents and has had need to re-define some of the boundaries, but he assured the meeting that the policy of community policing would continue through Local Policing Teams (LPTs) so that local communities could communicate with their local officer. Ch Supt Davidson said he had to look at the various roles of his officers and give more emphasis to response times so that calls for service could be met appropriately and that community officer affected would in the main stay within their LPT. He confirmed that every ward within North Cumbria policing area would be covered by a n identified community officer supported by patrol officers, special constables and Police Community Support Officers where appointed.

Ch Supt Davidson said that there had been a review of rank structures which identified a number of gaps in terms of command resilience at superintending rank. Each of the three Basic Command Units (BCUs) will have a new Superintenden post in February 2006 to directly support local policing efforts.

A member of the public questioned the use of civilian staff being replaced by police officers in back office roles. Mr Thomas emphasized that this had not happened and confirmed that Cumbria has one of the highest percentages of civilian posts. He clarified for the questioner, that what he had been trying to explain in his presentation was, that with such a high proportion of total costs representing staffing (80%), in any extended period requiring savings to be made over several years, and because police officers cannot be made redundant, and the rules require officer strength to be maintained, civilian posts are the only area for staff savings which can be made. However this was not presently in the Chief Constable's proposals - and would be a disappointing reversal of the CPA civilianisation programme if it were to occur in the future.

A question was asked from the floor about how the CPA intended to make the projected savings. Mr Thomas said the situation was currently being considered under the Gershon review which required that the Constabulary identify 3% annual efficiency savings (£2.7M) of which half should be 'cashable'. However, this would mean that if savings were taken in order to hold down council tax, they could not be reinvested in front line policing. At the same time there was a target to increase the amount of time spent by officers on 'front line policing' with Cumbria achieving one of the highest rates. He illustrated, only by way of example, that the role of custody staff does not currently score as front line policing and (for example) if this role were to be civilianised it could release police officers to front line duties. The Chief Constable is currently finalising savings proposals as part of the budget process and will present these to the CPA.

Mr Thomas said that some costs are linked to initiatives which are imposed by the government. For example, the introduction of a sophisticated secure communication system "Airwave" estimated at £1.6m pa. Next year the government have instructed that the IT systems must be improved so that all

data can be shared with other police forces, and that this will entail considerable investment in new technology.”

Copeland PCLF, 24th January 2006

“PRESENTATION – BUDGET PROPOSALS 2006-7 – DOUG THOMAS, POLICE AUTHORITY

Doug Thomas introduced himself as Treasurer to the Police Authority and began by explaining the three parties to the provision of the Police Service – Government, Police Authority and Council tax payers. Mr. Thomas explained the Government grants increased by 4.5% in 2006-7 and 5% in 2007-8 which leaves the Council tax to pick up the balance. The Government has a target to increase Council tax by less than 5%. This year the average national average increase was 4.1% (Cumbria 4.3%) which was lower than the figure of 5.9% for 2004-5. Mr. Thomas went on to say so we have seen quite a reduction in the average scale of tax increase with this year's increase of 4.1% being the lowest over the past ten years. He said the Government was again prepared to use capping powers which restricts authority expenditure and tax increases to reasonable levels.

Mr. Thomas continued by saying that in order to maintain the current level of service the Council tax would have to be increased – a 3% increase on a Band B property would mean 7p per week and a 5% increase on a Band B property would mean 12 per week increase. In addition the Police Authority have to pointed out that half the savings have to be cashable savings. Mr. Thomas then referred to a series of graphs which he had previously distributed to the meeting. The graphs showed the sharing of the costs of policing from 1995-6 to 2005-6 between the Police Grant, rate Support Grant and Business Rates and the Council tax, the rate of increase of Council tax between the years and the proportions of police authority budget, government spending assumptions and grant funding over the years.

Mr. Woolley then opened the meeting up for questions.

Councillor Clement said as he understood from the graphs the council tax payer would, in two years, be paying more then the other two funders (i.e. police grant and rate support grant and business rates). Mr. Thomas replied saying the Government were in a conundrum and were reviewing the current balance of funding. Councillor Clements then asked if the force was looking at more civilian jobs than before. Chief Inspector Stamper said it was a case of civilian posts for some tasks allowing officers to concentrate on jobs civilian staff could not perform. Councillor McAllister asked if there was an amount allowed for the type of area in which we live. Mr. Thomas said yes allowance was made for the rural locations. Councillor Clement asked if there was a merger with Lancashire would the funding be affected because of the location. Mr Thomas said it could affect things.

Mr. Woolley asked the meeting if they thought they were getting a reasonable service from the police. The general consensus was yes but Councillor Clements referred to a sustained level of community policing because the community officers were constantly being moved on. Chief Inspector Stamper said officers joined the force and were given equal opportunities and that officers moved on to different specialist posts and in some cases were promoted but he said every effort was made to maintain stability for particular areas. Councillor Clements said it was very important for a police presence on the estates in the town.

Mr. Woolley then asked a further question – would taxpayers support an increase at the upper end of the range i.e. approximately 12 pence per week for a Band B property (5%) or did they prefer an increase of 7 pence per week (3%). One member of the public said he thought the increase should be in line with inflation and said the local authority had to make savings and thought the police should do the same. Another member of the public said he felt manpower was cut all the time. Mr. Thomas said it was not legal to make police officers redundant. Mr. Woolley said officers could not be made redundant but support officers could but that such a situation meant that front line officers were doing jobs that could be done by support staff thus taking them away from front line policing and that it was a catch 22 situation. Another member of the public said most organisations made 5% efficiency savings but Chief Inspector Stamper said the Police were making these year on year. He then referred to the major change in shift systems being made this year.

Mr. Shaw said he knew Cumbria was a safe place in which to live and that Cumbria was an efficient force but he said that each year the public were being asked to pay more and more to ensure a certain level of service was being maintained and that over a period of ten years the amount being paid by the tax payer has increased dramatically. Mr. Shaw asked whether the public were getting twice as much service for their money. Chief Inspector Stamper said the Cumbria force was well placed when comparisons were made with similar forces.

Mr. Woolley pointed out that within the ten year period referred to 300 additional officers had joined Cumbria force, increased back-room staff and an improved communication system enabling the Cumbria force to communicate with any other force in the country. Mr. Woolley concluded that the meeting wanted to maintain the level of service to the county but were not totally happy with the increased costs.

Mrs. Simon said she felt the police gave a good service and she said there were many aspects of policing that the general public did not see. Councillor Clements said there needed to be a higher profile in the communities. Mr. Verity agreed that the police gave a good service.

Mr. Woolley thanked Mr. Thomas for his presentation.”

Eden PCLF, 11th January 2006

“2006/07 Budget

Michael Thompson, Director of Finance of Cumbria Police, spoke about the budget proposals for 2006/07, set against total government spending on public services of £85bn. Council Tax rose on average 4% last year which is less than in previous years. Despite this, the government “capped” some local authorities who were forbidden to raise Council Tax and had to re-submit their budgets. Cumbria had their budget “called in” and was forced to make savings. This year savings of £900,000 are needed in order to maintain the present level of services and it was suggested that Cllr Collinge ask Parish Councils at next week’s CALC meeting for their opinions on any proposed increase in Council Tax to pay for policing services.

In answer to a question from the floor, Mr Thompson confirmed that 80% of the budget relates to manpower costs, i.e. pay, pensions and employment costs. Mr Thompson posed two questions to the meeting – whether the public considered the police gave value for money, and would tax payers support a 3% increase in Council Tax to maintain the current service, or a 5% increase to improve the service still further. A questioner from the floor felt that a 3% increase in Council Tax was unacceptable and would prefer to see an even lower increase.

Mr Thompson confirmed that efficiency gains had to be made on an annual basis, and this was proving to be very difficult when these savings had to be made from 20% of the budget, i.e. the part remaining after manpower costs (80%) had been deducted.

The Chairman thanked Mr Thompson for his comprehensive report.”

South Lakeland PCLF, 9th January 2006

“CONSULTATION ON THE POLICE AUTHORITY BUDGET FOR 2006/2007

Mr Douglas Thomas, Cumbria Police Authority Treasurer, gave the background to funding of public services in general within South Lakeland area, tabling an explanatory Budget Consultation document showing comparisons between current, past and projected financial positions.

The meeting was then asked to consider whether the public received value for money regarding police services; and the following discussion ensued:

- Mr Thomas noted that the government was considering a different basis for raising monies rather than the current local-national taxations. He explained that the grant system held some ‘perverse’ incentives in the movement of staff from-to civilian-frontline policing roles etc. However - although increasingly difficult to medically

retire officers - this system could also be used positively in appropriately matching staff to vacancies.

- CS Collins agreed that the sparsity factor led to unfairness in the funding formula for rural areas.
- CS Collins said recruitment was stable, and not a problem for Cumbria – which was also one of the largest employer of women officers.
- Cumbria did not have input into new IT system decisions; however, it would expect commonality to enable dialogue with its neighbours.
- There was no separate budget to police festivals etc, concerning which Cumbria took a pragmatic approach bearing in mind presence of alcohol, road systems etc. Some charges may be inevitable - and event organisers may contact ACPO for criteria etc - however, grants were possible through local councils, neighbourhood groups etc.
- CS Collins further agreed that CSOs could play a role in activities such as festivals; and this year it was intended to explore the increased use of volunteers to work with police in all appropriate activities.

Concluding, Mr Thomas sought the meeting's views whether the Council Tax increase should be limited to nearer 3% whilst accepting the consequences for services, or whether an increase up to 5% was acceptable in order to protect services. He added that CPA would bear in mind 'best value' if necessary to reach an appropriate compromise in the level of increase."

C R Alcock
Clerk & Chief Executive
6th February 2006.