



# CUMBRIA POLICE AUTHORITY

Thursday, 20<sup>th</sup> December 2007

## **FUNDING DEBATE GETS UNDERWAY**

With the announcement on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2007 of the first ever three-year Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement (for the years 2008-09, 2009-10 and 2010-11) under the latest Formula devised by government, Cumbria Police Authority and its Chief Constable have set to work identifying what priorities for policing to fund. They're looking hard at the likely effects on services if the Authority has its hands tied over the level of tax increase it is allowed to seek, on what level of contribution the public of Cumbria can properly be asked to make. This announcement has also given the opportunity for Cumbria Police Authority to respond to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) invitation for feedback on the effects of this settlement over the next three years, and a chance to comment on the underlying formula which government uses to calculate it.

Responding to the Formula Review proposals, Cumbria Police Authority expresses concern at its overwhelming dependency on the protection given by a grant 'floor' that has increased from the modest figure of under £1m in 2005-06 to over £12m for 2008-09. The Authority believes much of this adverse change results from inappropriate statistical drivers chosen in the formula for determining and distributing grant under the 2006-07 review; a grant system favouring urban forces where Cumbria finds itself as a 'statistical outlier'.

Council-tax payers in Cumbria are currently paying a 'Band D' tax of £171.09p which is £58.40p (52%) above the equivalent figure of £112.69p which would apply (before protection) for the supported figure of £73m government uses to calculate Cumbria's grant entitlement in 2008-09. However, the Authority does not believe for a minute that effective policing in Cumbria can ever be delivered to an acceptable standard for this figure of around £73m, assumed in government's grant formula for 2008-09, as compared to our current actual budget of £94m. Ministers well know the high standards being achieved by Cumbria Police Authority and its Constabulary and so are once again being asked to agree to an independent review of the impact of the grant system on Cumbria's grant entitlement.

Cumbria Police Authority always expected what government itself admits is a tight financial settlement for the three-years to 2010-11, but still reports disappointment at Government's failure to recognise the increasing costs of service provision faced by Police Authorities, many resulting from changes of emphasis or priority demanded from the centre. Since the 2005 HMIC report "Closing the Gap" highlighted Protective Services as a realm of policing where too few resources were applied (with force mergers as government's initially-preferred solution), finding the extra cost of enhanced Protective Services whilst still supporting and improving Neighbourhood Policing has become the biggest challenge.

This is particularly true in Cumbria where – like most shire counties - the development of some protective services started from a low base but must deliver fixed service standards within a very short time. All these extra costs fall on local taxpayers who need better understanding of how the results of serious and organised criminality impinge on their own localities. The Authority is also disappointed at how policing – whose inflationary pressures are not limited to the retail price index but include the sort of non-domestic factors in crime described above - has received an overall Settlement of just 2.7%. Yet, even for shoppers

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and ordinary householders, the overall RPI shows current inflation at 3.4%, whilst local government has benefited from a markedly-more generous settlement (over 4%) which, given the high priority which the public to whom Police Authorities are accountable tell us they place on crime, disorder and reassurance, seems an unfortunate disparity.

Where there's gratitude over the settlement is when Cumbria Police Authority admits to relief at the relatively-high protection afforded those police authorities, like Cumbria's, left dependent on the grant 'floor'. As in previous years, Cumbria is concerned that the formula itself can create the need for such protection and, once given, its true cost is met by scaling back grant increases given to other authorities above the 'floor', rather than any additional funding from central Government; the rest increasingly coming from local people.

Despite the spectre of capping for police authorities being evoked once again by the Minister for Local Government, in his covering letter of 17<sup>th</sup> December 2007 presenting the settlement, Cumbria Police Authority has added its voice to calls to end DCLG's use of such powers on Police Authorities, stating such centralised control both undoes the flexibility for Authorities government claimed from removing 'ring-fenced' specific grant and conflicts with its centrally-directed inspections of service or performance standards.

Chairman of Cumbria Police Authority, Reg Watson, said: "This is the first time there's been a settlement to set the pattern for the next three years and Police Authorities are in a real cleft stick as we try to meet both Home Office demands for better Protective Services and public expectations for improved Neighbourhood Policing. We're balancing both ends of the policing scales with reducing financial contributions from the centre and a threat of capping if we ask local taxpayers to help us close that gap. We're also doing this in a world where policing needs to work ever more closely and smarter with our other public sector partners, all of us scored by government on performance indicators whose final form is not even finalised yet.

Yesterday, in the first of a series of three Police Authority meetings held between December and February to finalise the budget and its effect on the precept, we've had the Chief Constable's first thoughts on the settlement and what resources he's telling us are needed over the next three years. This is a listening and learning process, so we're going to hold extra workshops for Authority members to get right behind these proposals and understand their implications, so that when they debate the Chief's ideas in public they really understand the detail.

The one thing I want the public to understand is that our overriding priority as their Police Authority is to get the very best for Cumbria and the policing of this county that we can possibly manage, which is why the Authority is going to be getting out and about, consulting not just with our public service partners but with the public who pay for this, whose protection and reassurance is the whole point of the job."

#### **NOTE TO NEWS EDITORS/REPORTERS:**

For further information, contact the Police Authority's Chief Executive, Clive Alcock, or its Treasurer, Doug Thomas, on 01768 217734 - email: [policeauthority@cumbria.police.uk](mailto:policeauthority@cumbria.police.uk)

*Cumbria Police Authority is made up of local people - a mixture of councillors, magistrates and independent members - and acts as the bridge between Cumbria Constabulary and all communities across the county in policing matters. Legally, it owns all the buildings and land in the police property portfolio and, as a strategic oversight body, is responsible for:*

- *setting the budget for Cumbria Constabulary, including raising local council taxes for policing as the police precept;*
- *consulting and engaging with local communities in Cumbria to find out what they want the local police to tackle;*
- *setting the strategic direction for policing in Cumbria; deciding local priorities for policing and setting the Constabulary challenging targets to drive performance higher*
- *appointing the Chief Constable; Deputy Chief Constable, and Assistant Chief Constables;*
- *monitoring and managing local police performance.*

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