

Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner for Durham
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9th June 2016

Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner:
Chief of Staff:

Ron Hogg
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Dear Bill,

Consultation on Darlington Borough Council Medium Term Financial Plan

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the proposals for Darlington Borough Council's Medium Term Financial Plan.

All public services and councils around the country are facing challenges imposed by austerity. The budget of the Department for Communities and Local Government has halved in real terms since 2010. Darlington Borough Council has already made savings of around £30m, and has to make another £10.2m on top by 2020. The Council has worked with the Constabulary and me through this period, continuing to promote the Community Safety agenda with a great deal of success, and leading the way in a number of areas like Restorative Justice and Youth Offending.

No one should underestimate the scale of this challenge. The Council is facing some very difficult decisions that could affect the very fabric of Darlington. The impending problem stems from decisions by central Government, including the decision at the last Comprehensive Spending Review to award additional funding to wealthier authorities in the south of the country, at the expense of those in the north.

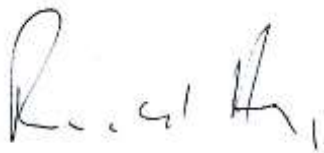
The Constabulary and I recognise that these decisions have placed Darlington Borough Council in an incredibly difficult position, in which they have little choice. We also recognise that the Council has made considerable efforts to invest in a range of services and infrastructure which support local policing and community safety objectives.

There are however a number of proposals in the budget which I fear are likely to have an impact on crime and anti-social behaviour. The imposed necessity of focusing resources on services required by statute means that money will be taken out of services which are both more effective and efficient in the longer term. I know that the Council is aware of this risk and committed to working with me to mitigate it. Attached is the formal response from Durham Constabulary which provides more specific details.

The Constabulary will of course need to work out its operational response, but there are a number of other steps that we should take together. I look forward to discussing ideas in due course, including the application of the Futures Fund to support vulnerable people, and whether there are additional opportunities for co-commissioning of services across the whole of the Durham Constabulary area.

I intend to write to the Home Secretary to express my disappointment at the impact that the Government's decisions are having on local communities and community safety in Darlington.

I am grateful for the continued excellent working between our organisations, and am confident that together we can find solutions which continue to maintain Darlington as a great place to live, work and do business.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ron Hogg', written in a cursive style.

Ron Hogg
Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner

Response from Durham Constabulary to Darlington Borough Council re: Medium Term Financial Plan

Date: 9th June 2016

This is the formal response from Durham Constabulary to Darlington Borough Council regarding their proposed Medium Term Financial Plan which was published in February 2016. It has been prepared by officers and staff within the Constabulary and agreed by the Office of the Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner.

We are grateful to officials within Darlington Borough Council for their engagement with us during this process, continuing our long tradition of working closely in partnership. This has enabled us to understand and to be kept informed of alterations to the proposals, and we are grateful for the additional time afforded us to respond formally.

Background

Increasingly the Constabulary has invested in problem solving and early intervention at all levels, and has currently been recognised as delivering good practice in this area. We would wish to continue to focus on this as a way to attempt to mitigate some of the impact of these proposals.

Durham Constabulary is the police force which serves the area covered by Darlington Borough Council and Durham County Council. Durham Constabulary have a number of officers, PCSOs and staff who are specifically deployed to Darlington in a range of roles, led by a Chief Inspector, and supported by a number of superintending roles. Of course, the constabulary deploys additional resources as and when required. Darlington Police Station contains one of the Constabulary's four custody suites.

Whilst the Durham Constabulary area, including Darlington, remains a safe place to live and work, Darlington is currently the locality within the force area with one of the highest crime rate per capita. There were 8,188 crimes in the 12 months to the end of May 2016, up from 7,193 in the 12 months to the end of May 2015.

The Challenge

Local Government budgets in England have been reducing every year since 2010, as part of the Government's austerity programme. Darlington Borough Council (DBC) has to save a further £10.2m by 2020 on top of savings of around £30m already made, and ran a public consultation on its proposals until **31 May 2016**.

On 22 June a special cabinet will consider the feedback from the consultation and agree the proposals that will be put forward to a full council (attended by all councillors) for approval and implementation. The special council meeting will take place on 29 June and will approve the budget by deciding which proposals to implement.

The budget going forward is £90.0m per annum. The council has estimated the cost of delivering the 1,300 legal duties and obligations that sit in law is £87.5m. This leaves only £2.5m to invest in services that are non-statutory, and therefore if the proposals are implemented all non-statutory services will be scaled back.

The constabulary clearly acknowledges the difficult choices faced by the council and will continue to work closely with Darlington Borough Council as a key strategic partner to ensure any impact is mitigated where possible.

Commentary

Durham Constabulary has reviewed the proposals and identified several areas likely to impact on the Constabulary in terms of increased demand for the Constabulary in terms of crime, anti-social behaviour and possibly reduced support to some members of the public.

It is clear to the Constabulary and to the PCVC that the proposed cuts could have the potential, either independently or in conjunction with each other, to have an impact on the Constabulary and the community safety experienced by residents of Darlington. However, the Constabulary fully recognises that the Council is cognisant of this, and is committed to minimising this impact.

In particular, the cuts which cause us the greatest concern are:

- 1) **Cuts to the anti-social behaviour team, combined with the proposals to reduce services which contribute towards a positive environment¹**: could lead to a) a potential reduction in preventative activity, b) a reduced ability to react to community triggers and utilise available legislation c) a potential increase in anti-social behaviour and environmental crime and a reduced ability to tackle it, and d) could lead to longer term impacts what are not yet understood;
- 2) **Cuts to the Youth Offending Service**: these could jeopardise Darlington's current position as a leader for good practice in these areas. The proposals will result in non-statutory provision including out of court disposals being cut, which may result in an increase in the number of young first time entrants into the criminal justice system, potentially increase longer term public service costs and possibly reduced life chances.

Our further concerns are:

- 3) Removal of voluntary sector contributions to a number of valued partners which provide support for vulnerable groups, without which support there could be an increase in crime;
- 4) Potential cuts to services for victims of domestic abuse, including the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) service, which may increase the demand on the Constabulary and potential increase the risk of harm to these vulnerable victims;
- 5) Cuts to some services to reduce harm caused by drugs and alcohol, which is likely to lead to increased demand on partner organisations.

Conclusion

We firmly recognise that the problem facing the council is one of resources brought about by Government funding cuts, against a backdrop of limitations in raising council tax.

¹ Environmental crime enforcement, street cleaning, parks, grass cutting

We also recognise the efforts expended by the council to date in maintaining the quality and quantity of service delivery.

Finally we also acknowledge the positive steps being taken to maintain service delivery and local investment such as CCTV, environmental enforcement and contributions to the voluntary sector which also supports the Constabulary.

That said, we believe the impact of the collective proposals could well be increased crime, anti-social behaviour and increased demand.

However, the Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner and Durham Constabulary are committed to working with the Council and other partners to mitigate these issues and to find creative solutions:

- Both the OPCVC and the Constabulary are fully committed to the Darlington Community Safety Partnership, which is currently chaired by the Constabulary. We expect to use that partnership to work together to mitigate against the problems identified in this response;
- Both the OPCVC and Durham Constabulary are keen to explore whether there are any further opportunities for collaboration with Darlington Borough Council;
- The OPCVC is keen to explore with Darlington Borough Council and Durham County Council what opportunities there may be for joint commissioning of services, particularly for victims, so that we can make efficient decisions and enable victims to experience the same level of high quality service across the whole force area;
- The OPCVC has proposed that, where the Darlington Community Safety Partnership, the Safe Durham Partnership and the Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner have shared objectives, then as far as possible and where it makes sense, we should not duplicate partnership arrangements – including for Reducing Reoffending, Road Safety, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence, and Victims.

We look forward to discussing these issues with the Council and other partners in the coming weeks and months.

Durham Constabulary

9th June 2016