

PROTECTING THE FRONT LINE

The effects of the financial restraints being imposed on Cheshire Police and other police forces are receiving widespread media coverage, nationally and locally. In the Cheshire Police area the budget has to be reduced by £35.4 million over the next four years. The budget for the coming year has now been set by the Police Authority. Below is an up-to-date account of what it will mean.

The Chairman of the Cheshire Police Authority, Margaret Ollerenshaw says the newly approved budget for policing Cheshire in 2011/12 is designed to prevent any damage to frontline policing.

'Frontline' policing includes officers, police community support officers (PCSOs) and staff who are seen in the community, detectives, crime scene investigators, traffic and firearms officers and less visible aspects of policing such as officers and staff who are protecting vulnerable people and teams handling large scale incidents.

Eleven million pounds of savings have been identified by reducing costs, changing the way the Force works, looking at the equipment we buy and reviewing the estate. We will have to reduce the number of officers and staff we employ in each of the next four years, but are taking steps to prevent service reductions.

Changing shift patterns will mean more officers will be on patrol during the evenings and at weekends when anti-social behaviour occurs. The Area Support Group, which includes police dogs and officers especially trained in public order, search and critical incident techniques, is now based across the policing area and not at Headquarters. These officers will undertake day-to-day policing when their specialist skills are not required.

The Constabulary has also developed plans that will reduce senior management ranks (Inspector and above), and Police Staff equivalent, bringing a saving of more than £2million in 2011/2012. The way call handlers deal with calls is being reviewed to improve the quality of information taken during the first call. The aim is that,

whenever possible, the issue can be resolved there and then or the best deployment of policing skills be selected at the first decision point.

The Force is also creating a combined business centre, incorporating human resources, information technology, finance and estates management. This will necessitate a major restructuring and an estimated 150 police staff job cuts.

There have been various media reports suggesting that some police stations are to close. Margaret Ollerheshaw said, "The Authority gave the go ahead for more work to be done to review the police buildings we own. We will ensure that police services will not be withdrawn from any community location without ensuring that there is something else in its place. For example, this may mean that the police share premises with partners. That may actually be better for anyone who wishes to speak to the police, council, fire and rescue service or other service provider."

The estates strategy lists a number of proposals in relation to selling and relocating police buildings. These are, at this stage, only proposals. Each of them will be assessed following the production of a feasibility study and business case.

The feasibility study and business case will consider a cost benefit analysis whilst ensuring that local policing services are retained in the right places to serve the communities, through co-location with partner organisations such as councils and Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service.

Co-location opportunities are being explored for police stations at Great Sankey, Risley, Frodsham, Dragonhall, Poynton, Northwich, Congleton and Widnes.

Three police houses are currently for sale. Willaston and Holmes Chapel police buildings are due to be put on the market for sale. These are police offices, which are used as a base by some officers, and not police stations. They are not open to the public. We are committed to a local police presence in all of our 19 neighbourhood areas.

Crime and anti social behaviour has been consistently reduced in Cheshire over the past years. The Police Authority will continue to monitor Constabulary performance and will be asking the public for

their views throughout the year to check the effects of the changes.