

COUNCIL TAX INFORMATION 2014-15



Building a Safer Bedfordshire

Safeguarding our frontline

My overriding priority is to build a police force for Bedfordshire that is visible and responsive to the public, which is what local people tell me they want to see.

Of course this objective is made more challenging by the fact that we are living at a time of austerity. Since 2010 we have had to take £15m out of our budget to cope with government cuts. Then, over the next three years, we need to find a further £14m of savings. As a direct consequence police strength in the future will be less than it was in 2010.

Nevertheless, by looking carefully at how we use our resources and by doing things differently I am confident that we can meet the needs of the public and keep our county safe.

We have recently been able to recruit 80 new officers to frontline roles. In addition I expect our plans for joint working with the neighbouring police forces in Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire, together with forthcoming investment in IT and our organisation-wide programme of continuous improvement, to transform Bedfordshire Police over the next few years making officers and staff much more visible and accessible to local people.

Last year I increased the amount of council tax people pay towards policing to help fund my decision to reverse the previous Police Authority's planned 33% cut to the number of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs). The current review of our PCSOs role will help make all of them more visible in their communities.



I have also provided additional funding to support the excellent work that Neighbourhood Watch, Street Watch and Speed Watch carry out in our communities to help them work more closely with each other and with other community partners. As part of my plans for Confident Communities I intend to continue funding initiatives that build on strengths and resilience, where groups work together as part of a concerted effort, in support of local and force-wide issues.

This year I recommended an increase in the police precept, which has been agreed by the Police and Crime Panel (made up of councillors from each local authority plus two independent members), to help fund our plans to double the size of our Special Constabulary. Specials are volunteers who nonetheless have the same uniform, powers and equipment as their regular full-time counterparts but who do policing in their spare time.

They have been around for over a century and now

they will help augment the local policing presence of Bedfordshire Police across the whole county.

I do not relish increasing the council tax people pay at a time when I know many households have been feeling the effects of austerity. However, the increase in the police precept is modest (6p a week for a band D household on average), it helps maximise the resources we have for policing the county, and thereby helps protect the frontline.



Bedfordshire residents also pay less relatively compared to people in most other police force areas. Given the argument I am making to central government for us to get a fairer share of the government's police grant, it clearly strengthens our case if we are paying what we should locally.

I am also mindful of the budget gaps we still face in two and three years' time. If I forgo a rise in the police precept this is money lost from the police budget not just this year but every year hereafter.

Finances

Bedfordshire's budget for policing in 2014-15 is £101.691m (the previous year's agreed budget was £102.877m) of which £72.1 comes from the government and the remainder (£29.6m) from

the contribution you pay towards policing through council tax. The government offered a grant worth 1% of the budget to freeze council tax at the current rate however this would have left the police force desperately short of the funds needed to maintain police officer strength.

The 1.99% increase in the council tax precept will mean a rise of about 6p a week (£3.06 per annum) for a Band D household.

The amount you will pay for the year 2014-15 depends on your council tax band:

I'm always keen to hear your views, good or otherwise, so that we can improve the service we offer and ensure that it meets your expectations.



PHOTO CREDIT: Leighton Buzzard Observer

You can get in touch with me in the following ways:

Write to:

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Valuation Band	Council tax for Band £
A	104.37
B	121.76
C	139.16
D	156.55
E	191.34
F	226.13
G	260.92
H	313.10



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