



Reply to: Heather Shearer  
Email: [heather.shearer@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:heather.shearer@somerset.gov.uk)  
Date: 10<sup>th</sup> March 2026

Dear Commissioner,

This report responds to the special function conferred by [Schedule 5 Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011](#) and the [Panel Precept Regulations 2012](#) and follows my letter of 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2026 confirming the Panel's approval of your precept proposal. It includes recommendations and a request for information.

Thank you for attending our meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2026 with Chief Constable Sarah Crew and your Chief Financial Officer, Paul Butler. The information you provided to the Panel for the meeting outlined the Constabulary's budget position and operational requirements for 2026/27 in support of your proposal to raise the Policing element of household council tax by an average of £15 in the band D equivalent for the same period.

Panel Members in attendance:

Councillor Heather Shearer (Chair, Somerset Council)  
Julie Knight (Independent Member and Vice Chair)  
Councillor Brian Bolt (Somerset Council)  
Councillor Jon Bradbury (South Gloucestershire Council)  
Councillor Nicola Clark (Somerset Council)  
Councillor Ash Cartman (North Somerset Council)  
Gary Davies (Independent Member)  
Councillor Cara Lavan (Bristol City Council)  
Councillor Simon McCombe (Bath and North East Somerset Council)  
Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts (Somerset Council)  
Councillor Sibs Tshabalala (Bristol City Council)  
Councillor Andy Wait ((Bath and North-East Somerset Council)  
Councillor Martin Wale (Somerset Council)

Apologies were received from Richard Brown, Peter Crew (North Somerset Council) and Raj Sood (South Gloucestershire Council), Lisa Durston (Bristol City Council)

## **Budget Task Group**

In 2023, the Panel decided that transparency was a key factor in the ability of members to assess the effectiveness of the Budget strategy in the longer term. A Budget Task Group was formed and continued to operate throughout 2025/26.

This has provided a regular mechanism to enable a small group of Panel members to evaluate the effectiveness of the additional precept investment by reviewing quarterly budget outturn reports. The purpose of the group is to scrutinise this information and draw out headlines and key lines of enquiry to assist the wider Panel before the Precept decision is taken.

This year, the work was undertaken by Councillors Shearer, Crew, Wait and Cartman. The Budget Task Group met on 4 occasions and held its last meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2026, following the circulation of the final Budget report and Medium-Term Financial Plan.

The Panel extends its sincere thanks to Paul Butler who freed up time to attend meetings and provided clarification to members on a range of budgetary issues. As in previous years, the two-way communication this facilitates has proved invaluable.

## **Chief Constable's Presentation**

The presentation from the Chief Constable covered the strategic context for the 2026/27 budget, the pressures faced and the challenges that lie ahead.

We heard that the Constabulary's renewed focus on leadership will be framed by the themes of pride, performance, and accountability.

A combination of challenges exists, including service demand, the public's expectation of a visible and trustworthy service, and the embedding of the new geographical policing model that aligns neighbourhood, response, and investigation teams more closely to local areas.

It was reported that performance against the Police and Crime Plan will be measured using four strategic outcomes: high victim satisfaction levels; reductions in crime and improved offender management; improvements in police culture; and increased public trust and confidence in the police.

Improved performance in a number of key areas was highlighted and progress against the Areas for Improvement identified in the last PEEL inspection was described as steady. A marginal improvement in victim outcomes was also reported.

We noted that the disparity created by the funding formula unfortunately remains, and notwithstanding the £100 million in savings made since 2010, inflationary and pay pressures have outstripped the core grant.

In summary, it was apparent to the Panel that the Chief Constable regarded the precept increase as a necessity to protect and maintain resilience around essential services and to enable investment in new technologies.

### Panel Review of the Precept

Building on your previous consultation with the Panel, the report of the Chief Financial Officer set out specific service and funding issues over a 5-year period and how you will fund priorities and ensure financial sustainability and resilience.

The minutes of the meeting provide a detailed summary of this discussion. *Link to be inserted when final.*

### Panel Decision

The Panel has a statutory duty to scrutinise the value for money element of the Police and Crime Plan and to ensure that public investment is demonstrably improving policing services.

The Panel recognises the financial pressures facing policing and your responsibility to secure adequate resources for the Chief Constable. Members therefore unanimously accepted that the proposed increase is necessary to support the sustainability of policing services across Avon and Somerset.

### Requests for information, observations and recommendations:

The Panel will always support the Police and Crime Commissioner where the principle of investment is linked to clear and measurable improvements. Over the last decade, we have reviewed the evidence available, and the outcomes anticipated from these investments have not always been fully realised. At the same time, public confidence in policing has continued to decline, raising questions about the effectiveness of current strategies.

To support effective scrutiny and ensure that future investment delivers the intended benefits, we make the following requests, observations and recommendations:

1. We welcome the assurances that the new Communications and Engagement Strategy will be finalised by the end of February 2026. Our concerns regarding

the lack of a public force-wide strategy are long-standing and it has been a frustrating wait to see how this aligns with the Police and Crime Plan.

The Panel requests a copy of the strategy when it becomes available.

2. The number and persistence of the Areas for Improvement emerging from HMICFRS inspections had been a concerning trend. The Panel acknowledges the work that has taken place to address the findings and that these have been prioritised in your monthly Governance and Scrutiny Board meetings.

The Panel appreciates the HMICFRS inspection updates in the PCC's standing reports, including upcoming inspections, published reports, and PCC responses. The Panel requests the inclusion of a further paragraph that summarises the outcomes of the PCC's scrutiny, as conducted through her monthly Governance and Scrutiny Boards, in addition to providing a link to the Minutes in the report.

3. The quarterly performance information presented to the Panel is limited to performance against national priorities as prescribed by the Specified Information Order. Whilst this is useful, it does not enable the Panel to fully understand or monitor wider performance outcomes against the aims of Police and Crime Plan.

The consensus from members is that "Positive Outcomes" are potentially obscured by other factors like victim support, increasing officer deployment to crimes or reductions in 999 calls. The statistics set out in the papers only refer to "Better Criminal Justice Outcomes for Rape Cases".

This demonstrates an increase in positive outcomes from around 4% to 8% in four years. It could be argued that the positive outcomes for rape have doubled in 4 years, but at those levels and over that timeframe, this does not represent a significant achievement. Outcomes from any other area of crime in the statistics were not presented.

More transparency is needed when statistics and positive outcome rates are presented to our meetings to provide clarity around performance.

The Panel requests that relevant Positive Outcome rates are included in the quarterly reporting of performance in respect of crime types prioritised in the Police and Crime Plan. The Panel would welcome an early opportunity to work

with the OPCC Senior Performance and Governance Manager to develop a simple mechanism that presents substantive data alongside percentage rates, enabling clear identification of trends over time.

This data will give a much clearer picture of what is important for the people we serve.

Panels have been advised that they will have a role in monitoring the performance measures set to be introduced against each of the five pillars that form part of the Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee. It would be helpful to know if there have been any developments in these plans for a new Performance Framework since we touched on this at the September meeting.

4. The Panel is particularly concerned that public confidence continues to fall despite increased investment. This trend risks undermining the legitimacy of policing and the credibility of further precept increases.

In light of the continued concerns around public confidence since formally raising them in 2023, the Panel is keen to revisit your response and progress against the recommendations presented in the Public Confidence Sub-Committee's report. We anticipate that this will continue to be an area of focus in our forthcoming work programme.

5. The Panel has concerns relating to the Race Matters initiative and the pace of change. We would welcome any assurance you can provide that demonstrates that this remains an intentional programme and that the aspirations of the strategy remain focussed and on target.
6. The Panel questions whether continued reliance on precept increases is sustainable without demonstrable improvements in outcomes. The Panel is concerned that the public may lose confidence in the value of further investment if performance does not improve.

The funding formula directly affects all of our roles and specifically the decision the Panel is required to make in respect of the precept proposal.

We return to our comments made last year and ask if you can please set out what efforts have been extended to effect change over the last year and if there has been any progress in remedying the funding disparity.

7. Attendance of the Chief Constable or the Deputy Chief Constable.

While the Panel is clear that its role is to support and scrutinise you and not the operational aspects of the Constabulary, we have always appreciated the opportunity to invite the Chief Constable to the Panel, and this has typically happened at the Precept and Budget-setting meeting. We were concerned that an invitation to a second meeting that the Panel issued last year was readily accepted but subsequently not followed through as planned. The attendance of the Chief Constable should be discussed and confirmed at the annual planning meeting in May to avoid further difficulties. The standard practice of other Panels is not material as every Panel has their own way of doing things and my first consideration has to be the members of our Panel.

8. The HMICFRS inspection in March 2026 referred to by the Chief Constable will be an important checkpoint in the management of the Areas for Improvement.

The Panel understands that the geographic policing model has proved significant in the progress made to date and looks forward to receiving the outcome of the inspection at the appropriate time.

The Panel recognises the challenges facing policing and remains committed to constructive scrutiny. However, the Panel must also ensure that public investment is delivering the outcomes that communities expect and that the PCC is held to account for the effective use of resources and the delivery of the Police and Crime Plan.

The Panel looks forward to receiving your response and to working with you to strengthen performance, rebuild public confidence, and ensure that future precept increases are justified by demonstrable improvements in policing services.

Yours sincerely,



Heather Shearer,  
Chair