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Zoë Billingham BA Hons (Oxon)
HM Inspector of Constabulary, Eastern Region

28 September 2012

Mrs Joanna Spicer
Chair – Suffolk Police Authority

Mr Christopher Jackson
Chief Executive – Suffolk Police Authority

Dear Joanna and Chris

HMIC Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) Budget Preparedness Visits

Thank you for the time the police authority spent with the HMIC team on 18 September 2012. The meeting presented an opportunity for you to provide an overview of your budget development process for 2013/14, the funds identified for transition and the development of potential models of governance, decision making and accountability.

I am writing to provide you with a summary of our discussions and to highlight areas that emerged for further consideration.

Budget setting process

You are continuing to work with your existing budget setting process and you have undertaken detailed work to develop options for the 2013/14 budget for the PCC to consider. You are updating your medium term financial plan and progress regarding development of the financial plan will be taken to the Authority in October 2012.

You have taken a robust approach to vacancy management and your mature collaboration plans with Norfolk have resulted in savings in 2011/12 and further savings in 2012/13 ahead of what was predicted; this has enabled you to add to reserves which will provide a buffer against further budget pressures.

Together with Norfolk you are developing options for the PCCs to consider joint strategic change, such as capital programmes, should that be necessary.

Preparation of scenarios to support the PCC in setting the budget

You have considered drawing up options based upon the prospective candidates' manifestos; however none of the prospective candidates in Suffolk has made any clear statements on their intentions with regard to spending and priorities, therefore options have not yet been developed.

The medium term financial plan approved by the authority in February 2012 included an assumption that the precept would increase in 2013/14 and beyond in line with the Officer for Budgetary Responsibility (OBR) forecast of 2.6% per annum, although you have undertaken some work to consider the impact of a freeze on council tax. An overachievement of savings in the first two years of the spending review period has meant that your reserves could be used to minimise the impact of any potential reduction in council tax income.

Workforce and service impact

Workforce reductions have been achieved as planned and front line projections have been achieved. You have evaluated your workforce requirements rigorously and maintained a good level of service.

Suffolk is involved in mature collaborative working with Norfolk; both authorities are working with prospective PCC candidates to ensure they understand the benefits around cost effectiveness and the resilience this approach delivers.

Forward planning: governance and the Office of the PCC (OPCC)

Your approach to governance takes account of the embedded collaboration with Norfolk continuing. Together with Norfolk Police Authority you are preparing joint options for PCC governance arrangements.

You have drawn up a very detailed scheme of governance for the PCC to consider, which covers both decision making and accountability arrangements. You have also considered options for a range of engagement methods for the PCC to carry out their functions and hold the force to account. You fully understand that it will be a matter for the PCC which, if any, options they choose to adopt.

You have started to engage with prospective PCC candidates and are anticipating the creation of an interim Joint Audit Committee. You have considered the capacity and needs of the OPCC and have considered how you will provide additional skills and capacity in media and communications.

You consider that you are now well placed to provide the functions which the PCC will require from day one.

I hope that the above comments are beneficial as you continue to plan and prepare for transition to PCC.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the police authority for its continuing commitment to plan and prepare for the transition to a PCC.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Zoë Billingham". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large 'Z' and 'B'.

Zoë Billingham

HM Inspector of Constabulary, Eastern Region

Copied:

Mr Simon Ash

Chief Constable – Suffolk Constabulary

Mr Hugh Zabel

HMIC Liaison Officer - Suffolk Constabulary