

# Northumbria Police Chief's plea helps secure commissioner's tax rise

by Adrian Pearson, The Journal | Feb 7 2013



Vera Baird and Chief Constable Sue Sim

NORTHUMBRIA'S police commissioner will push through an above-inflation tax rise after her chief constable said she could not hire 50 new constables without it.

In a confrontational three-hour meeting with council leaders commissioner Vera Baird said she had no option but to impose a 3.5% council tax rise.

The commissioner was repeatedly told by members of her police and crime panel that her budget did not stand up to scrutiny, with many questioning why other savings were not made before bills were hiked up.

At one point Newcastle Council leader Nick Forbes said it was clear there needed to be "serious and urgent talks" with the commissioner over the coming months to prevent a "budget black hole" undermining police funding.

Ms Baird's rise will see bills at some households go up by around £3 a year, with higher end properties paying several times more.

The tax will raise just over £1m. A Government grant which would have handed over more than £300,000 in exchange for a tax freeze and leave just £700,000 extra to find will now have to be turned down.

The majority of members of the panel eventually voted to accept the budget, despite repeatedly expressed concerns, after chief constable Sue Sim set out the difficult future facing her force.

She said that already cuts and savings had stripped £67m from the force budget, with 20% of her non-frontline officer posts been axed, and more jobs would go without the extra cash. Ms Sim said: "I'm aware that the challenges facing Northumbria are the same as those facing the local authorities, but my role and my concern is in delivering your policing.

"We have lost £67m while desperately trying to maintain levels of visible policing in your communities. It has not been easy, we have restructured everything else to do this.

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