

PCSOs to be protected in plans

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The future of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) is to be protected, it was revealed in plans outlined by Bedfordshire's new Police and Crime Commissioner.

The commissioner Olly Martins yesterday outlined his plans to protect the future of the county's PCSOs in the face of 20 per cent Government police funding cuts.

Revealing details of his first budget, Mr Martins said that Bedfordshire Police faces challenging financial times, but he was determined to save the PCSOs, some 40 per cent of whom faced the axe under the cost-cutting plans of the old police authority.

Mr Martins said: "In the short time that has passed since my election it has become abundantly clear to me just how valued Bedfordshire's PCSOs are in the communities they serve and how their presence contributes to feelings of safety and wellbeing for residents, particularly in rural areas.

"Public confidence is as important to policing as reducing offences and has a positive effect on quality of life. It is clear that PCSOs are playing a key role in reassurance and reducing the fear of crime.

"It is a difficult decision to increase the precept rate, especially at a time when so many people are struggling financially. However this small rise will help protect this highly respected element of local policing, both now and in the future, while helping to ensure that we continue to make residents feel safe.

"It is highly likely that funding from central Government will continue to fall in the future and this budget attempts to lessen these pressures to some degree and ensure we will not be forced to make further service cuts to fill the gap."

This announcement comes hot on the heels of the Commissioner's statement earlier this week that the controversial outsourcing contract with G4S had been stopped.

He is also planning to meet serving PCSOs in the coming weeks to talk to them first-hand about local policing needs and how their work is helping to combat crime and anti-social behaviour.

Bedfordshire Police faces a funding gap of about £7 million over the next three years, as a result of Government cuts to the main policing grant.

Mr Martins is also proposing to increase the police precept by two per cent. This equates to an increase of six pence a week for the average Band D householder.

He added: **"The 2013-14 police budget includes continuing financial support for the Integrated Offender Management (IOM) programme, which aims to target and reduce the criminal activities of the county's most prolific offenders.**

"The scheme, which has included electronic tagging of offenders, is at the heart of the commissioner's Police and Crime Plan that aims to tackle the cycle of re-offending - and has already proved highly successful.

The commissioner's budget will be discussed by members of the Police and Crime Panel at its meeting next week.

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