

South Yorkshire Police chief defends his plans to raise council tax

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Shaun Wright wants to raise South Yorkshire Police's share of council tax.

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SOUTH Yorkshire's police and crime commissioner has defended his decision to ask people to pay an extra 1p a day to fund new police officers.

Shaun Wright wants the extra cash in the police's share of council tax to fund new officers to replace 200 set to retire over the next year.

Mr Wright, also Rotherham Council Labour member for Rawmarsh, spoke out after Liberal Democrats in Sheffield questioned the need for the rise in council tax, claiming South Yorkshire Police under spent by £4.5 million last year.

The Lib Dems also point out crime across South Yorkshire fell by 7 per cent last year, despite the Government cuts.

The Lib Dems are also questioning Mr Wright's appointment of a Labour councillor, Coun Tracey Cheetham, Barnsley Council member for Royston, as his deputy.

Coun Penny Baker, Sheffield Lib Dem's spokesman for community safety, said: "Police officers across South Yorkshire have done an excellent job over the last year in difficult circumstances.

"Unfortunately, Labour's police chief has now been caught playing fast and loose with the facts.

"While savings need to be made, the police did not spend their whole budget last year and yet crime still fell.

"Mr Wright clearly knows the situation isn't as bad as he's making out, as he plans to waste thousands of pounds appointing a Labour crony."

However, Mr Wright has slammed the 'deliberate and inaccurate information' being circulated by the Lib Dems.

He said: "The main focus of my first budget is to keep police officers permanently in their jobs, making the streets of South Yorkshire safer."

Mr Wright believes the budget figures have been deliberately misquoted by certain members of Sheffield's Lib Dem Group.

He said: "At no point did I say I was 'forced to put council tax precept up'. I increased it purely to maintain police numbers on the streets of South Yorkshire, something the public have consistently told me they want.

"The budget figures are not 'faulty'. The council tax precept rise is by no means unique to South Yorkshire, and the £4.5m underspend in the Police Authority budget from last year is being allocated to keep community initiatives going, to deliver more support for victims of crime and to allow the Probation Service to do more to tackle re-offending.

"The £3.2m figure quoted by the Lib Dems is actually a cut in Government grant. The overall reduction to

the force budget is £6.1m this year.

“The Police and Crime Panel, which includes Lib Dem and Tory members, approved the budget unanimously.”

He also rejected claims that he had simply awarded the job as his deputy to a ‘Labour crony’, saying: “The process was open and transparent and fully endorsed by the police and crime panel.”

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