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Shropshire police commissioner will use £10m reserves to help balance books

Shropshire's police tsar is raiding the reserves by £10 million in an attempt to balance the books, it has been revealed.



Bill Longmore

The office of police and crime commissioner Bill Longmore has published its budget report for next year

It reveals plans to take out £3.5 million from the reserves fund in April, followed £2.4 million next year and £4.3 million in 2015/16.

West Mercia Police currently has about £22 million in its reserves. Money will be taken out to keep 50 community support officers employed, increase recruitment of special constables and support community safety initiatives.

The budget report states the force may have to find further savings as the Government struggles to meet its scheduled cuts targets.

The report said it is recommended at least £12.75 million is kept in reserve in future years for potential emergencies.

It also warned that further budget cuts may be imposed on the police by Government in the next few years.

“The Chancellor’s Autumn Statement indicated that the coalition government’s deficit reduction strategy was not on target, and raised the prospect of further reductions in Government funding allocations, beyond those already announced and through into 2017/18,” it said.

“In addition, there will be a comprehensive review of the funding formula over the next few months, which could also lead to changes in future years’ allocations.

“At this stage it is prudent to assume that there will continue to be a need to aggressively drive savings throughout the police service over the whole life of the plan, in order for the financial position to remain sustainable.”

The budget has been backed by the West Mercia Police and Crime Panel.

Shropshire Councillor Malcolm Pate a member of the panel, said the move was preferable to charging residents extra council tax to maintain police services.

He added that a longer-term view is required with further potential cuts on their way.

“It wouldn’t really be appropriate to start precepting extra money off the people when we have good balances,” he said.

“Local government are expecting cuts in 2014/15 of anything up to 15 to 20 per cent.

“It is up to the commissioner, but I have to say that West Mercia is a very well run force and we are very lucky to have David Shaw as chief constable.”