

Police authority agrees to freeze council tax in tough economic climate

HOUSEHOLDERS in Leicestershire will not have to pay any more for policing next year after the police authority agreed to freeze its council tax share.

The decision was agreed at a meeting today (Friday, February 18) as a way of reducing the impact of current economic pressures on local residents. It means that the cost of a Band D property in the county will remain at £169.63 next year. Members also considered, but did not support, an increase of 3.49%.

The Police Authority agreed to set its budget at **£174.6m** for 2011/12, taking into account the severe funding shortage from the Government.

Over the next four years, the authority must operate with £34million less funding than in previous years. This is because Central Government funding will reduce by 5.1% in 2011/12 increasing to a 6.7% reduction in 2012/13.

Forward-planning and preparation work in the form of an efficiency programme has meant the authority has already achieved savings that has plugged the funding gap this year and will go some way to helping it balance the budget in 2012-13..

However, further work is ongoing to identify other areas of the force where costs can be reduced.

Barrie Roper, chairman of Leicestershire Police Authority, said: "Policing is about to undergo a period of significant change both in terms of structure and funding. There is no doubt the next four years are going to be extremely challenging as we grapple with major reform and a shortage of funding to deliver services to the high standards our residents deserve.

"However, our own extensive planning and foresight means we will remain in a position to deliver top-quality policing designed around the needs of our local communities.

"Over the past few months we have looked inwardly at our organisation to identify new ways of working which promote efficiency and provide better value for money. These include plans to reduce the number of buildings we own replacing them with shared facilities in the heart of our communities.

"Although our funding position has forced us to make difficult decisions about staff and officer levels, we have reorganised our resources sufficiently to limit the effect of these on services. By making savings in support functions such as human resources, financial services and administrative support, we have been able to protect the frontline services that matter to our residents including neighbourhood policing teams and incident response.

"Local policing remains our top priority and residents can be assured that all our

decisions - including plans to freeze council tax - are made in their best interests."