

Dear Chief Fire Officer

Delivering Value for Money in All That We Do

As part of the public consultation on the precept increases for the fire and rescue service which closed yesterday, the Mayor David Skaith asked the public for feedback on the core principles he proposes to use in making his final decision about precept levels. These are:

- The minimum possible burden on local taxpayers
- Having effective, well managed public services that keep people safe and deliver value for money
- Delivering on local public priorities for both services, including improving the safety of our roads

The principle of every penny of public money being spent wisely and transparently is already a core principle of our governance but is also a critical responsibility of all public services where the public rightly expects that we demonstrate clear value for money in every decision we make.

Given the Mayor and I play a pivotal role in holding North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service to account and are ultimately responsible for the overall budget, it's important for us to ensure every decision we take reflects back the Mayor's fire and rescue plan priorities and desire to demonstrate fiscal responsibility to the public. We must therefore ensure that our approach to financial management is rigorous, evidence-based, and aligned with strategic priorities.

- Could you provide an assessment of the impact last year's fire and rescue precept increase had on sustaining or improving service delivery for the people of York and North Yorkshire?
- The consultation asked the public for their views on a precept increase of £6, £8, £10 and £12. As you know there is flexibility around the Mayoral Precept in York and North Yorkshire. Could you indicate what difference (opportunities and risks) increases of £6, £8 and £10 would make respectively to the service in light of both the Community Risk Management Plan and the Fire and Rescue Plan?
- Guidance from Government is that all other fire and rescue services will increase their precept by just £5 (with a pledge for those authorities that they will also receive real terms funding increases) – what impact would a £5 precept have on the service this year in York and North Yorkshire?
- Given we now have a three year funding settlement, how does this impact on assumptions for service delivery for that period and notably the delivery of the Community Risk Management Plan and the priorities in the Fire and Rescue plan?
- Can you confirm how you will ensure that the principle of achieving best value for taxpayers is embedded within your decision-making processes?
- What assurances can you give the Mayor and I that this approach will continue to underpin your revenue and capital budget recommendations as part of the decision making processes at Strategic Oversight Board?

Given our need for large-scale capital projects to be considered in the coming months and years, as well as the ongoing management of fleet, all projects will need careful and effective scrutiny to maximise public benefit and opportunities for collaboration as well as the mitigation of risks.

Appropriate scrutiny of revenue and capital spend is essential to building and retaining public trust and in order to justify future investment. Without it organisational reputation and future investment are put at risk, regardless of how pressing the need for investment might be. This is particularly pertinent against a backdrop of the public being asked to contribute more.

I would be grateful if North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service could acknowledge the Mayor's principles in their budget proposals and look at what else could be considered to strengthen existing accountability processes to improve transparency, and delivery of value for money for the York and North Yorkshire council taxpayers.

Given final decisions around Precept need to be made in the coming days, I'd be grateful for your assurances and guidance on the risks and opportunities facing the service.

Thank you for your continued commitment to these principles and ensuring we build and maintain the confidence of the public.

Best wishes



Jo Coles

Deputy Mayor of York and North Yorkshire for Policing, Fire and Crime