

Fire service plans to increase council tax to keep pace with growing county

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Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service plans a small increase in its share of council tax for the next financial year to help improve its operational response and meet budget challenges.

The Service is planning to increase its portion of council tax by £4.95 a year for those living in a Band D property. This means a total of £92.16 for the year, which is £7.68 per month or £1.77 a week.

With the populations of Cambridge and Peterborough increasing significantly over the last decade, as well as significant housing growth in towns and villages across the county, the Service is looking to keep up with the increased risk of a higher population by investing in its operational response. The increase is also needed to fill a funding gap now that Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service has ended the Combined Fire Control collaboration.

Chief Fire Officer Matthew Warren explained: "It is always a difficult decision to ask residents to contribute more council tax. It's not something that we take lightly. However, we have some significant challenges in terms of budget pressures and increased risks with a growing population that we need to ensure we manage. The number of incidents we attend is increasing in line with the growth rate of the county. We still struggle with the number of on-call fire engines that are available in daytime hours and our plan therefore, if we are able to within budget, is to gradually increase the number of wholetime firefighters over the next two or three years to enable us to have additional roaming fire engines available to cover areas of the county where our on-call crews are unavailable."

Over the last year the Service has seen demand increase, with crews attending around 20 per cent more fires than last year. Of the 8,600 incidents in 2025, there were 2,133 fires, compared with 1,721 in 2024. Crews also attended around 430 road traffic collisions, 160 animal rescues and more than 90 flooding incidents. They also attended 78 co-responding incidents with ambulance partners.

Matthew continued: "We are currently one of the lowest cost fire and rescue services in the country and we have the lowest number of firefighters per head of population. In a county that is one of the fastest growing, this is now beginning to cause us some challenges as we look to the future in terms of ensuring we have sufficient resources to respond to risk and demand. We have an excellent track record of making efficiencies year after year and will continue to do this where we can to help fund future plans for growth. However, the reality is, as a result of years of making efficiencies, there is little opportunity now to make significant savings internally, which is why asking for an additional £4.95 a year for a band D property, about the cost of one take away coffee a year, we can better ensure we continue to meet our operational response times across the whole of the county. We won't be able to do everything with this and will still have some tough decisions to make about how we use our resources, to ensure we are using what we have in the most effective way, but it will give us more options."

Chair of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority, Councillor Chris Morris, added: "As a Fire Authority we see the hard work and meticulous detail that goes on behind the scenes to ensure the fire service is managed as efficiently and effectively as possible. Running a fire and

rescue service is incredibly complex, made more so with the many additional challenges the service now faces, such as changes in society and how we live our lives, huge technological advances that bring new risks and a need to be sustainable and environmentally conscious. It is a continual balancing act to ensure its funding is used in the best way to make the biggest difference.

At its core will always be a need to respond to an emergency 999 call with the right resources and skilled firefighters as quickly as possible, and a small increase in council tax will ensure this can continue to be achieved as our county and infrastructures grows.”

The Fire Authority will decide the final budget at its meeting on February 12.



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