

Report on Police Precept Consultation 2019/20

Introduction

Every year, as your Police and Crime Commissioner, I have issued an Open Letter ahead of setting the police element of Council Tax precept. This sets out my principles and thoughts on the level of the precept and seeks to gather feedback from the public on what they think about my proposals. In the Open Letter issued in December 2018, I outlined my guiding principles, which have always been to deliver an effective and efficient police force, one that meets the growing demands of reported crime, retains and grows local policing and spends public money wisely. I have always maintained that I should only take from the public what is required for policing in order to provide the level of service needed to protect local policing, to meet on-going demands and to invest in new and emerging areas of crime.

In my Open Letter, I outlined the new challenges presented this year. This includes the growing threats from serious violence, county lines and travelling criminality, and the increases in reported fraud, cybercrime and other emerging crime types. I highlighted the need to build additional capacity and develop the capability of some specialist units, including our Scorpion Teams, to tackle the growing threats, investigate complex crimes and safeguard vulnerable people and businesses. It is vital that we further invest to build on the increases in officer numbers achieved this year and undertake early intervention and preventative work, particularly with schools and young people. We must also continue to invest and expand the services that victims receive and improve the support they require through the criminal justice system.

In the Open Letter, I also outlined how over the last couple of years I have used reserves that had built up to protect our local policing model and provide additional funding for the Chief Constable to respond to spikes in demand. These levels have now reduced and I need to find alternate funding to replace them in order to fund new investments to meet the new priorities outlined above. I am proposing to increase the police element of the Council Tax for a Band D property equivalent, by £24.00, a 14.6 per cent increase, to a figure of £188.00 per annum (see Table 1). An increase in the precept would mean that the vast majority of households would pay between 0.42 and 0.92 pence week. This increase would generate an income of £10.7million, representing a five percent increase in the total police budget.

Table 1: Proposed Precept increase by Household Bands A-H

Band	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
18/19 Precept	£109.33	£127.56	£145.78	£164.00	£200.44	£236.89	£273.33	£328.00
19/20 Precept	£125.33	£146.23	£167.11	£188.00	£229.77	£271.56	£313.33	£376.00

Annual Increase	£16.00	£18.67	£21.33	£24.00	£29.33	£34.67	£40.00	£48.00
Weekly Increase	£0.31	£0.36	£0.41	£0.46	£0.56	£0.67	£0.77	£0.92

Methodology

On 18th December 2018, the Open Letter was posted on my Hertfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner website and circulated on the On-line Watch Link (OWL) network to over 144,000 households across Hertfordshire. It also received significant coverage in the following local media across the county:

- The Herts Advertiser (St Albans) 20 December 2018:
<https://www.hertsad.co.uk/news/herts-pcc-considering-council-tax-increase-1-5826851>
- Watford Observer, 21st December 2018 and 28th December 2018 (Letters to the editor)
- Stevenage Comet, 27th December 2018
- Welwyn Hatfield Times, 2nd January 2019 (Open Letter in full – Your Opinions)
- Royston Crow, 3rd January 2019

A dedicated webpage was also set up (<http://hertscommissioner.org/precept-2019-20>) which contained the Open Letter, an FAQ guide, press release and details of how to contact the OPCC. A specific email account was also used for the precept (your.views@herts.pcc.pnn.gov.uk). Throughout the 21 day consultation period to 7th January 2019, the precept proposal was shared widely using all available social media channels. This included Facebook (hertspcc and hertspolice) and Twitter (@hertspc and @hertspolice), which have a combined reach of 175,000 people.

Prior to publishing the Open Letter, I also mentioned my intention to raise the police precept of the council tax at a number of public engagements, including the Police and Crime Panel meeting (15th November 2018), Barn meetings and was mentioned on BBC Three Counties Radio.

In total, I received 827 detailed responses to my proposal from members of the public and Parish / District Councillors. The Chief Constable, Charlie Hall, and his Chief Officers have also been consulted on my proposals and are in agreement that an increase in the precept is required in order to maintain local policing, build the necessary capacity and capability to meet new and growing threats, supports efforts around early intervention and prevention, and provide increased support for victims throughout the criminal justice system.

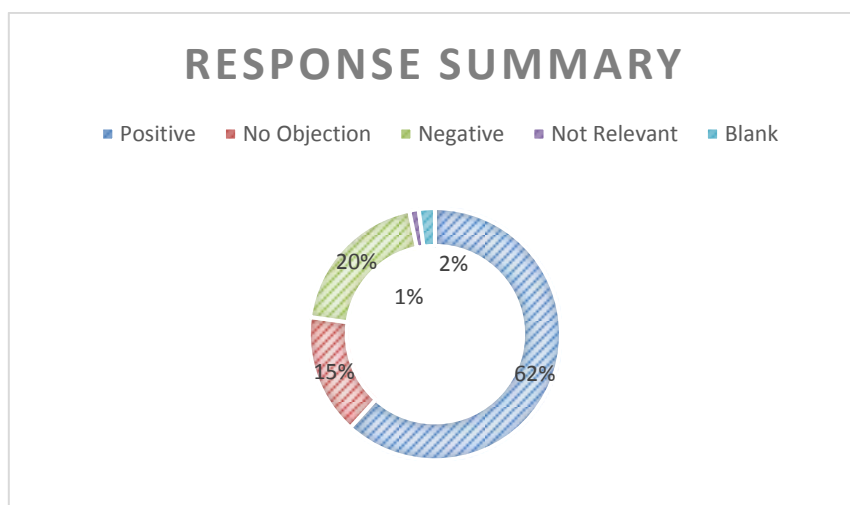
Summary of the Feedback

Approximately three quarters (77 per cent) of those who responded (638)¹ would be willing to pay the increased precept, equivalent for a Band D household by £24.00 per annum, to ensure that local policing is maintained across the county and tackle the growing demand in serious violence and reported cybercrime and fraud. 19% of respondents were against an increase (162).

¹ This includes 511 positive responses and 128 No Objection responses.

The remaining 3% (27 responses) either requested further information before making a decision (labelled blank) or were queries not relevant to this consultation (Table 1).

Table 1: Summary of responses



Many of the respondents were in favour of the precept increase, citing policing being value for money, that the increase was considered to be very small and in-line with everyday living expenses. A number of respondents expressed the view that they value having frontline officers who have local knowledge about crimes in specific localities and tackle neighbourhood issues relating to drug dealing, professional begging and anti-social behaviour. Many felt that the absence of adequate local policing teams would result in disengagement between the police and public, which respondents felt was vital, particularly in remote and rural locations across the county. The following viewpoints articulate the basis for this support:

- “£2 on Council Tax? Worth every penny for our Police Service. Probably one of the best in the country”.
- “The rise is very small and is in line with everyday living expenses”.

There was also support for an increase in the precept to tackle issues relating to fraud including identity theft, card fraud and telephone scams and work to protect the most vulnerable in society including the elderly.

Respondents also showed a genuine desire to pay more for policing than what was being proposed in the consultation with some requesting the opportunity to enter into a voluntary agreement:

- “I would pay double that myself. I think it’s a good idea and one that benefits us all. “Seriously, I would pay more than that - can it be done, like a donation or something?”
- “I would willingly pay extra if it meant more bobbies on the beat”
- “I am in favour of this and wish the figure was £4 or greater. You officers in my area do a sterling job in protecting the community from crime.”

- “I would have said £5 a month would be better”

A common thread throughout respondents’ comments was a desire for the increased income generated to be spent on increasing police numbers, for some it was a prerequisite of their support:

- “I would willingly pay extra if it meant more Bobbies on the beat.”
- “We are happy with this proposal PROVIDING it is used for the specified purpose of more police officers. If it is to be used elsewhere, then no!”
- “You have my support for this increase. The only proviso is that ALL of the monies raised MUST go on additional 'Bobbies on the beat'.”
- “I would be happy for you to add £24 pound to my council tax providing all the money went to strengthen the police presence in Hertfordshire”

162 respondents (20 per cent) were not in favour of the police element of the council tax precept increasing by the proposed amount. Their reasons can be broadly categorised into the following headings:

- Alternate Source of funding (36%)
- Current Council Tax levels (36%)
- Police Performance (23%)
- Misc. (17%)

36 percent of those who were opposed to the increase expressed concerns about the shortfall in central government funding and the move to using local taxation to ‘prop up services’. The same number of respondents raised concerns regarding the current rate of police precept being unaffordable for those on lower incomes and specifically for pensioners referencing the increase not being in-line with inflation.

23 per cent of the negative responses related to a perception around a lack of a visible police presence and a decline in the accessibility and contact with police because of front enquiry office closures at police stations and the move to online digital public contact. Tring, Berkhamstead, St Albans, South Oxhey and Borehamwood were highlighted as areas that ‘no longer’ had a police station or a dedicated private space that members of the public could discuss sensitive matters. You will have seen in my Community Safety and Criminal Justice Plan: Everybody’s Business (2017-2022) that I remain committed to ensuring that Hertfordshire’s 10 districts and boroughs continue to have at least one major police station where their core local police team are based – and this will be supplemented by smaller local stations where required. You can find your closest operational and front counter service police stations [here](#)².

I will continue to ensure the efficient use of buildings that will save money and provide a more coherent services through the co-location of premises between police and district/borough councils. Across Hertfordshire I have already supported the development of public sector hubs in St Albans, Hertsmere and Three Rivers, with police and councils sharing premises, and I have made it my policy to seek out opportunities elsewhere across the county to achieve this.

² <https://www.herts.police.uk/your-area/D01>

I recognise however that many people still want to contact the police by traditional means and, therefore, must ensure the opportunity to do so continues to be made fully available. One of the actions in my Community Safety and Criminal Justice Plan asks the Chief Constable to review the impact of the front enquiry office closure programme implemented under the auspices of the former police authority and to propose new measures to improve the situation and, where necessary, increase access to our existing stations. I remain firmly of the belief that the public should be able to attend a police station and speak to a police officer as long as they have made a prior appointment.

General Observations

Throughout the consultation, respondents also took the opportunity to suggest improvements in the way in which my office consults with residents on the police precept and the information given to the public to help them make informed decisions. Many were keen in future years for the Open Letter to include Table 1 (as above) that shows the change across the household bands A-H and the proposed new precept.

There was also an appetite for a greater level of detail in relation to what the increased income raised by the precept would generate and the impact on resources, demand and crime if the proposal was not approved and additional funds were not raised. The following quote reflect this:

- "Protecting investments" is meaningless, it would be better to explain what will happen with the extra £10.7mm that wouldn't happen without it. E.g. will there be 100 extra police (£107,000 per officer) compared to no extra money? Or 50 extra police and 50 extra victim support officers? Or how many fewer police will there be if the money isn't forthcoming? That would put it in context. And folk might then say "actually, I'll pay £48 to get twice that benefit".

These are all helpful points which I intend to reflect on over the coming months. I would like to thank all those who took the time and trouble to feedback their thoughts on my proposal for the 2019/20 police precept.