

MEETING	Police and Crime Panel (PCP)
DATE	8 February 2022
TITLE OF REPORT	Report on Police Precept Consultation 2022-2023
SUBMITTED BY	Dr Amie Birkhamshaw, Assistant Chief Executive, OPCC
PURPOSE OF REPORT	To inform the Panel of the results of the public consultation on the police element of the Council Tax Precept for 2022/23
DECISION(S) REQUIRED	To note the content of the report on the public's feedback on the proposed policing precept element of council tax precept for 2022/23 to increase by £10.00 per year for an average Band D equivalent to £223.00 per annum.
FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS	To discuss in conjunction with the 2022/23 Precept proposal
RISK IMPLICATIONS	None identified
LEGAL IMPLICATIONS	None noted at this time
EQUALITIES IMPACTS	None identified
FREEDOM OF INFORMATION EXEMPTION SECTION IF APPLICABLE	Not Exempt

1). INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Police and Crime Commissioners have a legal duty to consult with residents and those persons or organisations who appear to the PCC to be representative of those subject to non-domestic rates in their area on the police element of the Council Tax precept. Following the budget meeting on 20 December 2021, the Commissioner wrote an Open Letter to the

residents of Hertfordshire outlining his proposal to increase the policing element of the precept for an average (Band D) equivalent by £10 per annum or 4.69 per cent on the comparable figure for 2021/22 rising to £223.00 per annum.

1.2 The Open Letter outlined the Commissioner’s strategy to deliver an effective and efficient police force. It noted the ability to meet the public’s needs to grow frontline policing, embed the Prevention First model and ensuring the Constabulary are smarter through investing in their analytical and digital capability and being evidence-led. Not raising the precept would fail to deliver on what the public have consistently asked for and respond adequately to the growing challenges. Raising the precept by the flexibility allowed by the government would generate £4.59 million in income in 2022/23.

1.3 Table 1 shows the calculation for the budget and precepting requirement for 2022/23 across all household bandings A- H. Under the proposal, each household would see a weekly increase of between 13p and 38p on their 2021/22 precept.

Table 1: Proposed Precept increase by Household Bands A - H (2022-23)

Band	Ratio to Band D	21/22 Precept	22/23 Precept	Annual Increase	Weekly Increase
A	6/9 (67%)	£142.00	£148.67	£6.67	£0.13
B	7/9 (78%)	£165.67	£173.44	£7.78	£0.15
C	8/9 (89%)	£189.33	£198.22	£8.89	£0.17
D	9/9 (100%)	£213.00	£223.00	£10.00	£0.19
E	11/9 (122%)	£260.33	£272.56	£12.22	£0.24
F	13/9 (144%)	£307.67	£322.11	£14.44	£0.28
G	15/9 (167%)	£355.00	£371.67	£16.67	£0.32
H	18/9 (200%)	£426.00	£446.00	£20.00	£0.38

2) Results of the Public Consultation

Voting	Count	Percentage
Agree	1525	62%
Disagree	704	29%
Neutral	217	9%
Total	2446	100

- 2.1 The public survey was open for 25 days between 21 December 2021 to 14 January 2022. The survey was available to be completed online, via email or through a paper version. 2,387 people responded to the online survey together with 59 responses via email totalling 2,446. The responses to the survey highlighted that people agreed with the PCC's proposed precept increase and showed the strength of that opinion. Over 1,260 respondents provided an explanation as to their voting preferences. A fuller summary of the survey results can be found in Appendix A.
- 2.2 Of the 62 per cent in favour of the proposed increase, responses broadly fell into five categories. The highest number of responses related to respondents support and desire to see more police officers on the street and provide greater visibility. 215 (41%) respondents reported feeling that there was good justification in the Open Letter and felt a £10 increase per annum represented a good use of public money. Other respondents that expressed unequivocal support for the increase, stated their desire to make Hertfordshire safer and relayed the sentiment that 'you get the service you pay for'.
- 2.3 There was a proportion of respondents who whilst supportive of the proposed increase, gave some clear views on what they expected to see from the new investment with many referring to the need to see visible officers patrolling in their neighbourhood. Many of the respondents made it clear that the same support would not be given in future years if changes were not seen during 2022/23. A smaller number of residents (45) said they welcome the increase on condition that the funds are used 'wisely'.

- 2.4 29 per cent (704 respondents) were not in favour of the proposed increase to the police element of council tax precept. Those who did give an opinion can broadly be categorised around some key themes. This includes: 117 (21%) respondents who noted that there had not been any evidence of an increase in the visibility of police officers over the past year and were not convinced that further investment would change this. The financial impact of Covid-19 was still pressing on 93 respondent's minds and other respondents felt that the public have had to tighten their budgets due to Covid and inflation and that the Constabulary should do the same. There were 60 respondents who felt that the police should reorganise to create efficiencies instead of asking the taxpayer for more money. 72 respondents raised concerns regarding the lack of confidence in the police based on past experiences and felt that they do not provide the service to the public they believe they should and therefore do not warrant further investment.
- 2.5 9 per cent (217) of respondents were neutral, expressing neither support nor objection to the proposal. 28 respondents felt unable to vote because they needed more information to understand how the money would be spent. Other respondents just choose to raise specific concerns. This included: driving offences (41 mentions), drug offences (25 mentions), lack of police stations (19 mentions), anti-social behaviour (19 mentions), burglary/ theft (19 mentions), Violence against women and girls (14 mentions), Rural Crime (14 mentions), E-scooters (9 mentions), and domestic abuse (6 mentions).

3) BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendix A: Response to the Police Precept Consultation 2022-2023

In December 2021, I issued an Open Letter ahead of setting the police element of Council Tax precept for 2022/23. It set out my strategy and principles for setting the policing budget and asked the public for their opinion on the proposal. This included the need to deliver an effective and efficient police force, one that puts more frontline officers on our streets, meets our growing demands of reported crime, is evidence-led and improves our digital capability. It noted that as the first year of a three-year term, I will be looking at how we can continue to do this – for example, by looking at opportunities for joint ventures and outsourcing.

I set out the opportunity that the police funding settlement presents in unprecedented investment in policing with an additional £7.583m in core grant from the government and £2.060m to support the final year of the police uplift programme. Like last year, the government have suggested that Police and Crime Commissioners should use the flexibility to raise the police element of the council tax precept by £10 per annum (for an average Band D) for 2022/23 so that the benefits of this investment can be properly maximised.

In the Open Letter I acknowledged the support that the public have given in previous years which has enabled more police officers on the streets of Hertfordshire and has enabled me to deliver on what the public have told me matters. As a result, we now have 99 more police officers above establishment than we had in March 2021 and are on target to meet the year-end figure of 2,267 FTE¹ by March 2022. I outlined how increasing the precept would enable a consolidation of the current substantial officer growth in recent years, embedding the desired culture and behaviours across the Constabulary, and build in new growth in 2022/23.

The transformative 'Prevention First' model is embedding across the policing in Hertfordshire and has the potential to reach all parts of the organisation to help

¹ Full Time Equivalent (FTE).

reduce waste, inefficiencies, and demand across the force. I explained how the additional income raised would enable the recruitment of a further 90 police officers and 20 Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) enabling the proactive work in neighbourhoods that the public tell me they want to see, particularly in schools and with young people.

I was clear that whilst we have seen an increase in the range of crimes disproportionately affecting women and girls, Hertfordshire has the lowest number of serious offences including rape and sexual offences in our Most Similar Group (MSG) and the highest criminal justice outcomes. I am pleased that in Hertfordshire victims now have greater confidence to report these crimes and get the help they deserve through Beacon, our award-winning victim care centre. But we need to be smarter and evidence-led if we are to prevent and reduce the likelihood of these crimes occurring in the first place. To do this, I outlined that the precept would help to extend out analytical and digital capability to better target vulnerability thereby enabling the effective allocation of resources.

I outlined in the Open Letter that I wanted to use the flexibility granted by the government to raise the police element of the council tax precept by £10.00 per year (based on an average Band D property). This asks taxpayers on average to pay 80p a month extra on their tax bill. This would generate an additional £4.59m income for 2022/23 and enable us to expand frontline policing and deliver on the investments I have outlined.

Methodology

On 21 December 2021, the Open Letter was posted on my website and a press release sent out to the local media. It was also circulated to all Town and Parish Councillors via the Hertfordshire Association of Parish and Town Councils and featured in their online newsletter: <https://www.haptc.org.uk/news/2021/12/herts-police-and-crime-commissioner-annual-public-consultation>

The Open Letter also received the following coverage across the county:

- Watford Observer
<https://www.watfordobserver.co.uk/news/19799025.council-tax-rise-cards-pay-police-herts/>
- Bishop's Stortford Independent
<https://www.bishopsstortfordindependent.co.uk/news/10-rise-in-council-tax-for-police-set-to-pay-for-110-new-of-9231789/>
- Hemel Today <https://www.hemeltoday.co.uk/news/people/hertfordshire-pcc-proposes-ps10-a-year-council-tax-increase-to-boost-number-of-police-officers-3501998>
- Borehamwood Times
<https://www.borehamwoodtimes.co.uk/news/19800694.hertfordshire-council-tax-rise-proposed-police/>
- Living Magazine <https://www.livingmags.info/pcc-proposes-10-a-year-increase-for-police-service/>
- In Your Area <https://www.inyourarea.co.uk/news/commissioner-asks-for-public-feedback-on-proposed-council-tax-increase-for-more-responsive-police-service/>
- Absolutely Hertfordshire (PDF)

In addition, the Open Letter was also circulated via the On-line Watch Link (OWL) network twice during the consultation period to over 165,000 households in Hertfordshire. It was also shared by email with MPs offices, county councillors, communication departments at all district and borough councils, Police and Crime Panel members and the Independent Business Advisory Group members.

Over the course of the 25-day consultation period to 14 January 2022, my proposal was highlighted widely using social media. On Twitter (@hertspcc), six messages went out over the consultation period resulting in 5,942 impressions and 380 engagements. On Facebook it reached 3,360 people and had 198 engagements. The message was also tweeted by several partners including Hertfordshire Constabulary, Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce, Hertsmere Borough Council, North Herts District Council and St Albans Council.



The Chief Constable, Charlie Hall and his Chief Officers have also been consulted on my proposal and agree that an increase in the precept is required to maximise the opportunity of uplifting the number of police officers and PCSOs, embedding the Prevention First model, and moving the force to becoming evidence-led that uses analytical and digital capability to drive efficiencies and reduce demand.

Summary of the Public Feedback

Many of the 1525 respondents who were in favour of the increase in the council tax precept, welcomed the prospect of improved visibility and availability of frontline officers and supported increasing the capacity of officers to better manage demand:

“Totally agree that more ‘visible’ officers on the street act as a deterrent as well as increased confidence in feeling safer when walking home alone at night”.

“The importance of maintaining, improving and ensuring a ‘fit for purpose’ Hertfordshire Police Force is adequately funded is obviously essential and the proposed moderate increase would appear to be very reasonable”.

“If the public want to have a well-funded Police and Hospital Service then those who can afford to pay should pay. Why have Police Officers patrolling on their own i.e., on the beat or in their cars when they themselves are stressed dealing with dangerous people or situations. I don't want a cheap cost-efficient Police force who are over stretched and worn out after 7yrs service. It's a difficult job being a Police Officer. We've got to look after our First Line Service employees. Because you protect us we the nation should look after you”.

Several respondents who gave their support for the increase did so on a 'conditional' basis. This related to wanting to know what outcomes they will see because of the investment and asked for a level of reassurance that the money will be spent on the frontline and resolving specific crime issues:

“As long as the additional monies is used for community policing as our local police force badly needs reinforcing due to local crime”.

“I'm happy to pay extra money but in return for a better service. I've recently been involved in a hit and run incident on the M1 Motorway and am very puzzled how difficult is it to check the cameras (as the motorways are heavily monitored) and help an innocent victim of the accident”.

“In return for the increase, please ensure local issues are addresses. Unsocial behaviour, burglary, road abuse, electric scooters, litter”.

“As long as there is a much better visually presence on the streets especially in bad areas”

Of the 29 per cent (704 respondents) who were not in favour of the proposed increase, cited the financial impact of Covid-19 with regards to unemployment, insecure futures and affordability. There were also concerns regarding the lack of visibility of the police, poor experiences or a sense of feeling ignored or a lack of

proactiveness. Respondents also suggested that the Constabulary should reorganise to create efficiencies instead of asking the taxpayer for more money:

“It’s a very tough time with rises in many household bills. I would prefer to see a smaller increase”.

“At a time when inflation is predicted to hit +6%, fuel costs are at an all-time high and the BoE interest rates are increasing, it’s placing too much pressure for most households who have had to endure continued increases year after year despite the pay freeze you mention”.

“I am a pensioner and will find any increase in council tax extremely difficult. Also, I feel that pensioners are not being taken into account if we lack the know how to use the latest technology, that’s if we possess the equipment needed in the first instance”.

“When Buntingford receives some decent quantity and quality of policing I will agree to increased money for policing”.

Neutral

9 per cent (217) of respondents remained neutral with their response, with many expressing neither support nor objection to the proposal. This was for several reasons. 28 respondents felt unable to vote because they needed more information to understand how the money would be spent or more detail around officer numbers and investment plans. There was also a high number of specific concerns raised by respondents. This included: driving offences (41 mentions), drug offences (25 mentions), lack of police stations (19 mentions), anti-social behaviour (19 mentions), burglary/ theft (19 mentions), Violence against women and girls (14 mentions), Rural Crime (14 mentions), E-scooters (9 mentions), and domestic abuse (6 mentions):

"I have said I'm neutral because I don't mind paying, but I don't think it will make any difference, the police still will not be there policing the community. We need to see them on the streets".

"I'm not against this plan but I'd like to see the strategy behind it".

"My key concerns are e-scooters on pavements and roads, cyclists on pavements and the total lack of traffic speed control on Letchworth road".

"I am a bit wary about this increase. I hope that this increase will ensure that it is fairly distributed throughout Hertsmere. As a Potters Bar resident, it often feels that resources are focused in Borehamwood. We have had an increase in anti-social behaviour, car thefts, catalytic converters being stolen, and I would like to see an increased presence to support this, as well as 'hidden' crimes e.g. domestic violence. I would like to see more police walkabouts, as a parent of a young child, I have rarely seen police officers to introduce him to or to educate him about the positive influence of police officers".

General Observations

As observed in last year's council tax precept consultation, several respondents mentioned the closure of some police stations across the county and the inaccessibility of front counter services. I recognise that some people believe there are no longer operational police stations in places such as St Albans, Berkhamsted and Tring. This is not the case. The police stations in those areas have a full complement of officers and staff. They do not have front counters as those counters were not well utilised when they were operational, and they were not used to report crime. However, anyone can call ahead and book an appointment to visit their local police station to raise any issues or concerns they have. Over the coming year I plan to ensure that local stations are more visible and publicised and will use the findings from my recently commissioned public opinion survey to look at what more we can do to improve the public's contact and accessibility across the county.

“We have no community policing. Local policing does not exist. Local police stations are closing or closed.”

“We need improved accessibility/visibility of police (e.g. manned police stations with 24/7 front desks in all major towns), more routine patrols.”

“Anything that would see more police stations re-open and more police visible to the public. Whether perceived or not, since the station was closed in Berkhamsted the feeling of insecurity has increased!”

“My experiences with the Police have not been very good with the closures of Police Stations if we want to attend a police station we have to go to Hatfield a twenty mile journey for me.”

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 2022/23 police element of the council tax precept.