

Annex A: Report on Police Precept Consultation 2017/18

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 2016, I outlined my guiding principles, which have always been to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of policing, the protection of local policing, and the spending of public money wisely. I have always maintained that the precept should only be raised if I am confident that the style of policing in Hertfordshire cannot be delivered without doing so. I firmly believe 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 a reduction in the amount of money received from government of £1.5 million and a delay in the savings being delivered through our regional IT collaboration programme. As a result of a delay to those savings the Chief Constable informed me that unless alternative income could be found, the budget could only be balanced by reducing local policing teams. You will know that local policing lies at the heart of my Community Safety and Criminal Justice Plan and provides the very bedrock of effective policing in Hertfordshire, which the public tell me they wish to preserve.

In the Open Letter, I proposed making up the shortfall through an increase in the police element of the Council Tax for a Band D property equivalent, by £5.00 per annum, a 3.4 per cent increase, to a figure of £152.00 per annum (see Table 1). An increase in the precept would mean that the vast majority of households would pay between 6 and 10 pence per week more than in 2016/17. This increase would generate an income of £2.182m¹ per annum, enabling the protection of strong local policing teams whilst delivering an improvement in our capacity and capability to meet new demands.

Table 1: Proposed Precept increase by Bands A-H

	Band							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Precept 2016/17	£98.00	£114.33	£130.67	£147.00	£179.67	£212.33	£245.00	£294.00
Proposed Precept 2017/18	£101.33	£118.22	£135.11	£152.00	£185.78	£219.56	£253.33	£304.00
Annual Increase	£3.33	£3.89	£4.44	£5.00	£6.11	£7.23	£8.33	£10.00
Weekly Increase	£0.06	£0.07	£0.09	£0.10	£0.12	£0.14	£0.16	£0.19

¹ NB: The figure of £2.182 million is amended from the original £2.175 million outlined in the Open Letter to reflect the increase in the Council Tax base following updates from district and borough councils.

Methodology

On 19th December 2016, the Open Letter was posted on my website, circulated on the On-line Watch Link (OWL) network to over 118,000 households across Hertfordshire and received significant coverage in the following local media across the county:

- Hemel Gazette, 21st December 2016
- Herts Advertiser, 22nd December 2016
- Watford Observer, 23rd December 2016
- St Albans and Harpenden Review, 28th December 2016
- Watford Observer, 30th December 2016
- Welwyn Hatfield Times, 4th January 2017

Throughout the course of the 26 day consultation period to 13th January 2017, my proposal was highlighted widely using social media (Facebook (hertspcc) and Twitter (@hertspcc)) and I was interviewed on the BBC Three Counties morning show and bulletins were repeated throughout the day to ask the public for their thoughts and comments. A radio clip also featured on Bob FM and Heart Four Counties radio the same day.

In total, I received 261 detailed responses to my proposal from members of the public and 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 a first class policing service that protects the public from harm whilst ensuring it remains value for money.

Summary of the Feedback

Approximately three quarters (75 per cent) of those who responded (196) would be willing to pay the increased precept, equivalent for a Band D household to £5.00 per annum to ensure that local policing is adequately resourced across the county. A number of respondents expressed the view that they value local policing, having teams of officers who have local knowledge about crime trends and engaging with the public, to identify and solve local issues. 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.

Financial Planning

Many respondents were complimentary about my approach to financial management and welcomed the prudent and responsible financial plans I had made over the last six years, taking a considered approach to taxation. Many used this as part of their rationale for endorsing the proposed rise, due to Hertfordshire having one of the lowest council tax bands across the country. The following viewpoints articulate the basis for this support:

- I strongly support the proposed increase. Cutting back on local police teams would be a false economy and, in a prosperous area like ours, the increased Council Tax is easily affordable
- Since you haven't increased the precept for six years and since Hertfordshire is very low by national standards, I think it is quite reasonable that you should implement an increase this year.

- I read with interest your letter regarding increasing the Council Tax (Band d example) by £5. Since there has been no increase in the Police section of the Council budget for 6 years, I feel everyone has done well out of it.

Some people were in favour of the increase but queried how the additional income generated by the rise in the precept would be used beyond supporting local policing. A number linked the increase in the precept to a shortfall in government funding of £1.5million. One of the primary reasons why I have proposed an increase is because the savings have been delayed from implementing a regional ICT system. Our Medium Term Financial Plan had been predicated on using some of our reserves as well as finding savings to fund increasing demand. With delays in the savings achieved, it is not possible to meet the shortfall without having an impact on local policing. I will continue to push hard to ensure that savings are made in a timely fashion, including those relating to ICT.

Many respondents who were in support of the proposal also made reference to how they would be happy to pay more than an £5.00 increase in future years, as noted by the following comments:

- Re the proposed increase of £5 I personally think it's way too low, I and I'm sure many other people in Herts would much rather pay more in return for an increased number of police resources, particularly officers on the beat. Even £12 would be less than £1 per month which still seems ridiculously low versus say the price of a cup of coffee!
- I am more than happy to support this in fact I would go one step further and say I am happy to see further increases to expand the excellent police team we have in Chorleywood.

34 residents felt they were unable to give an opinion on whether they were in favour of a rise to the Council Tax precept as they sought clarification as to what I was proposing. Some people were unclear from the Open Letter as to whether I was only proposing an £5.00 increase to Band D households, rather than the equivalent across all bandings. The reference to a 'Band D household' is required by government so that meaningful comparisons can be made between local authorities on a national basis for Council Tax calculations. You will see from Table 1 (see above) that the lowest Band A household will increase by £3.33 a month, or 6p and day, and a Band H household will pay an additional £10.00 a year, or 19p a week. I will ensure that in future years that a Table is included in the Open Letter outlining the implications of the proposed decision on each of the household bandings to make clearer my intentions.

31 respondents were not in favour of the police element of the Council Tax precept increasing. Respondents cited the closing of police stations in Watford and Hoddesdon and an increase in the level of recorded crime as reasons. The forthcoming publication of my Community Safety and Criminal Justice Plan (2017- 2022) makes clear that I remain committed to ensuring that Hertfordshire's ten districts and boroughs 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 (See Appendix A for a map showing the location of police stations across the county or click [here](#)) There are also a number of public buildings such as Parish Council offices and libraries where the public can make an appointment to speak to a police officer. I will continue to ensure that we make efficient use of our buildings that will save money and provide a better and more coherent service through the co-location of premises between the 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 local councils sharing premises, and have made it a policy to seek out opportunities elsewhere across the county to achieve this.

General observations and other priorities

Throughout the consultation, respondents also took the opportunity to raise other concerns, some of which were very broad, with many relating to issues outside of the scope of the consultation and my role as a Police and Crime Commissioner. These included:

- Street lights being turned off at night
- Parking on pavements and verges

These are all helpful points to note which I intend to raise with the relevant authorities and organisations so they are aware of them and your concerns are listened to. Thank you to those respondents who took the time to feedback their thoughts on my proposal for the 2017/18 police precept.

Appendix A: Police Stations located across the County

