

MEETING	Police and Crime Panel
DATE	02 February 2023
TITLE OF REPORT	Report on Police Precept Consultation 2023-2024
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 2023/24.
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 2023/24 to increase by 28p a week (£15.00 per annum) for an average Band D, equivalent to £238.00 per annum.
FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS	To discuss in conjunction with the 2023/24 Budget Report
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 pre-budget discussion on 21 December 2022, 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 £15 per annum or 6.73 per cent on the comparable figure for 2023/24, rising to £238.00 per annum.
- 1.2 The Open Letter outlined the Commissioner's strategy to increase the efficiency of the service and ensure the public get value for money. It noted the need to meet the cost increases of running a larger service, and the added pressure of rising wage and fuel costs, but acknowledged the current financial pressures on

households. It therefore proposed a rise of 6.73 per cent, significantly below the rate of inflation to recognise the impact on the cost-of-living crisis. It noted that raising the precept by the flexibility allowed by the government would generate £7 million in income, which, alongside core government funding, represents a 4 per cent increase in the total police budget. This would enable the Constabulary to consolidate the substantial officer growth, improve police legitimacy through investment in supervision and better management, and further deliver on the Prevention First programme ambitions.

- 1.3 Table 1 shows the calculation for the budget and precepting requirement for 2023/24 across all household bandings A - H. Under the proposal, each household would see a weekly increase of between 19p and 58p.

Table 1: Proposed Precept increase by Household Bands A - H (2023-24)

Band	Proportion of Band D charge	2022/23 Charge £	2023/24 Charge £	Precept increase £			
				per annum	per month	per week	per day
A	6/9ths	148.67	158.67	10.00	0.83	0.19	0.03
B	7/9ths	173.44	185.11	11.67	0.97	0.22	0.03
C	8/9ths	198.22	211.56	13.34	1.11	0.26	0.04
D	9/9ths	223.00	238.00	15.00	1.25	0.29	0.04
E	11/9ths	272.56	290.89	18.33	1.53	0.35	0.05
F	13/9ths	322.11	343.78	21.67	1.81	0.42	0.06
G	15/9ths	371.67	396.67	25.00	2.08	0.48	0.07
H	18/9ths	446.00	476.00	30.00	2.50	0.58	0.08

2) Table 2: Overall results of the precept consultation

Voting	Count	Percentage
Agree	1308	54%
Disagree	929	37%
Neutral	214	9%
Total	2451	100

- 2.1 The public survey was open for 25 days between 22 December 2022 to 15 January 2023. The survey was available to be completed online, via email or through a paper version. 2,460 people responded to the online survey with many others providing detailed views via email. The responses to the survey highlighted that people agreed with the PCC’s proposed precept increase and showed a relative strength of that opinion. Over 2,300 respondents provided an explanation as to their voting preference. A fuller summary of the survey results can be found in Appendix A.
- 2.2 For the first time this year, respondents were asked to specify which districts they lived enabling some analysis of voting patterns. The table below shows the spread of respondents from each of the 10 districts and boroughs against voting preference. Whilst the population of each of the 10 districts and boroughs varies, we can see that the lowest number of responses was received from residents living in Stevenage Borough (111) compared to East Herts (394)¹. Table 3 also shows that across the 10 districts, the voting preferences was broadly similar with on average 54 per cent in agreement, 37 per cent in disagreement and 9 per cent neutral.
- 2.3 Going forward, this information will enable future consultations to direct and target community engagement activity within specific districts. Analysis of the free text responses will also enable further analysis to identify if there is any correlation to opinions on police officer visibility with feelings of safety.

Table 3: Number of respondents by district and voting preference

District/Borough	Responses	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)
Broxbourne	210	52	38	10
Dacorum	295	54	36	10
East Herts	394	51	40	9
Hertsmere	236	61	30	9
North Herts	297	48	45	7
St Albans	316	60	32	8

¹ According to the recent 2021 Census, three districts in Hertfordshire have seen the biggest growth in population. This includes [East Hertfordshire](#) which increased by around 9.0%, [Welwyn Hatfield](#) by 8.5% and [North Hertfordshire](#) at 4.8%.

Stevenage	111	54	37	9
Three Rivers	258	54	38	8
Watford	131	55	37	8
Welwyn Hatfield	215	45	43	12

- 2.4 Of the 54 per cent (1308) in favour of the proposed increase, responses broadly fell into three categories. The highest number of respondents recognised that crime levels have increased, the remit and role of the police has widened, and the workforce needs to expand to support this demand. Several respondents were in favour of the increase due to their desire to see more visible policing in Hertfordshire and called for greater numbers patrolling their neighbourhoods, taking the view that 'you get the service you pay for'. There was also a small number of respondents who suggested that the PCC should give the public the opportunity to pay more for policing than the proposed £15.00 per annum.
- 2.5 37 per cent (929) of respondents were not in favour of the proposed increase to the police element of council tax precept. Their responses can be broadly categorised around some key themes. Firstly, the current financial climate with the cost-of-living crisis was pressing on some respondent's minds and felt that the Commissioner should not be asking for an increase at a time when people's household budgets are being squeezed. Secondly, respondents expressed concern around the proposed increase following successive increases in previous years, and thirdly that it should be the government bridging the budgetary gap, not the local taxpayer.
- 2.6 26 respondents not in favour of the proposed increase to the precept referred to the climate change protestors on the M25 and felt that the police had been too accommodating of their behaviour and should stop spending public money on 'tea and biscuits'. 52 respondents raised concerns regarding the lack of confidence in the police based on past negative experiences and felt that they do not provide the service to the public they believe they should and therefore do not warrant further investment. Several respondents felt there were still efficiencies and savings that could be driven out internally first in the Constabulary, and that these should be exhausted before an increase in precept is proposed.

- 2.7 9 per cent (214) of respondents expressed a neutral position, expressing neither support nor objection to the proposal. Some respondents stated that they were unable to agree as they did not believe that the changes and investment outlined would materialise. Other respondents noted that they would require more detailed budgetary information before they could decide. Many also took the opportunity to raise specific concerns about speeding around schools, drug offences, burglary, theft of vehicles and e-scooters in their local area.

3) BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendix A: Response to the Police Precept Consultation 2023-2024

In December 2022, I issued an Open Letter ahead of setting the police element of Council Tax precept for 2023/24 asking the public for their opinion on the proposal. The letter underlined my strategy for how we deliver an effective and efficient police force that meets the growing demands of reported crime, protects frontline policing, and spends public money wisely.

I acknowledged in the letter the challenging financial times for households due to the impact of inflation and outlined that policing is not immune from the pressures of wages and energy costs. That a balanced approach has been proposed in increasing the precept by 6.73 per cent, significantly below the rate of inflation, to recognise the cost-of-living crisis.

I set out the budgetary gap that is presented from the government settlement and the expectation that Police and Crime Commissioners will use the flexibility granted by government to raise the police element of the council tax precept by £15 (for an average Band D property²) for 2023/24. This would represent an increase of just less than 28p a week or £1.25 a month for the average household. Most Hertfordshire residents live in properties banded A to D. Increasing the precept would raise an additional £7 million in income which, alongside core government funding, represents a 4 per cent increase in the total police budget.

I outlined in the letter how the revenue generated will help the force to continue delivering the best possible service, and respond to what the public tell me they want: record numbers of police officers in our communities. By the end of March 2023, the Constabulary are on target to have 2,380³ officers in post, over 300 more officers than we had in 2019. This budget will consolidate the substantial officer growth and support our efforts to improve police legitimacy by embedding a culture of transparency,

² The annual figure depends on the banding of the property. The 2023/24 police council tax precept would rise to £238.00 per annum for an average Band D property.

³ Headcount.

accountability and ethical behaviour through investment in supervision, better management training and a focus on high standards. Raising the precept by this figure would still maintain Hertfordshire's position as having one of the lower council tax precepts in the country. Even after the planned increase, Hertfordshire's precept is likely to remain the fifth lowest in England and Wales.

The transformative 'Prevention First' programme is already demonstrating impact and reducing demand in the system by identifying the root cause of problems and working with partners to provide long term sustainable solutions. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire and Rescue Service (HMICFRS) forthcoming 'PEEL'⁴ assessment of Hertfordshire Constabulary will highlight the good progress that has been made to take an evidence based and data driven approach to preventing risk, harm and victimisation across the county. While recorded crime in Hertfordshire is down 9.4 per cent from 2019/20, the force faces rising complexity and challenges in the types and nature of crimes being committed, the investigation of those crimes and the impact on responding to calls resulting from partner's demand failure. Over the coming year new ways will need to be explored to reduce the calls for service coming into the system by working with our partners to identify vulnerability and intervene early.

Methodology

On 21 December 2022, the Open Letter was posted on my website, Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/hertspcc>) and a press release issued to the local media. It was also circulated widely on social media and retweeted by MPs and Councillors. The Open Letter received local, regional and national coverage:

- BBC: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-beds-bucks-herts-64063314>
- Police Oracle, UK independent Policing news service:
http://www.policeoracle.com/news/local_and_neighbourhood_policing/2022/Dec/2/pccs-proposing-increase-to-council-tax-precept_110299.html
- Hitchin Hub: <https://hitchin.nub.news/news/local-news/herts-police-and-crime-commissioner-david-lloyd-proposes-ps15-a-year-council-tax-increase-to-maintain-countys-biggest-ever-force-164256>

⁴ 'PEEL' stands for Police, Efficiency, Effectiveness and Legitimacy.

- Bishop Stortford Independent:
<https://www.bishopstortfordindependent.co.uk/news/crime-commissioner-bids-to-increase-household-bills-for-poli-9290789/>
- Hemel Today: <https://www.hemeltoday.co.uk/news/crime/police-and-crime-commissioner-proposes-ps15-a-year-council-tax-increase-to-maintain-hertfordshire-police-force-3963417>
- In Your Area: <https://www.inyourarea.co.uk/news/herts-police-chief-proposes-15-council-tax-rise-to-keep-officer-numbers/>
- Hertfordshire Mercury front page and full page.

In addition, the Open Letter was circulated via the On-line Watch Link (OWL) network during the consultation period reaching 154,000 households in Hertfordshire who had signed up to the email service. The consultation was also shared with all Hertfordshire MPs offices, county councillors, communication departments at all district and borough councils, and the Police and Crime Panel members.

MPs Oliver Heald and MP Gagan Mohindra publicised the consultation on their websites and tweeted out: <https://www.oliverheald.com/news/public-asked-have-their-say-funding-policing-hertfordshire>



Over the course of the 25-day consultation period to 15 January 2023, my proposal was highlighted widely using social media. On Twitter (@hertspcc) and Instagram, several messages went out over the consultation period resulting in 8,439 impressions, up from 5,942 impressions last year and 328 engagements. Using a paid Facebook promotion

this year we were able to reach a wider and more diverse audience resulting in an impressive 28,944 unique users (58% women and 42% men), far higher than the 3,360 Facebook user engagement during the 2021/22 consultation.



The Chief Constable, Charlie Hall and his Chief Officers have also been consulted on my proposal and made their officers and staff aware of the proposal through an article on the Constabulary's intranet. Chief Officers agree that an increase in the precept is needed to consolidate the substantial officer growth, improve police legitimacy through investment in supervision and better management, and further deliver on the Prevention First programme ambitions to drive efficiencies.

Summary of the Public Feedback

82 of the 1308 respondents who agreed to the proposed increase in the precept, welcomed the prospect of improved visibility and availability of frontline officers across the county, and the opportunity to target issues within communities. As some commented:

"I would like to see more visible rural policing but agree that due to inflation, the police will need extra funding."

"Visible police presence is vital to public safety."

Related to this was a theme in respondents' comments around the need to identify the benefits and impacts that improved visibility will have on the crime levels and community engagement. They noted the need to ensure that tracking, monitoring and reporting is in place to be able to quantify the benefits:

“In principle I agree this increase is necessary. A much greater police presence in our neighbourhoods is essential. However, the benefits and impact must be clearly seen and monitored. I believe that part of this funding should be used to better educate officers on the psychology of creating strong community relationships and mutual trust which seems to be very low.”

“As long as there is accountability and proper monitoring in place of the impact of this increase, to be reviewed annually then it is fine. the impact of spending should be communicated to all stakeholders including those paying the tax.”

Whilst in agreement of the increase, some respondents also suggested how the Constabulary could look to generate income through targeting a wider range of road safety issues including those using illegal number plates and tinted windows. Other respondents said they would agree to a higher precept increase:

“I would even agree to a £20 precept this year if would get more police on the streets.”

“Totally agree with increased police funding - I would agree with more than the proposed amounts.”

Cost of Living Crisis

For those 929 respondents (37 per cent) who disagreed with the proposed increase, many referred to the current cost of living squeeze on household budgets and how people are struggling to pay their bills:

“In this time of recession with numerous people struggling to feed themselves this proposal is extremely irresponsible. People will struggle to pay the higher bill - they are struggling now!!”

“Whilst I understand the need for this increase, how much more can you expect of people that are choosing whether to eat or warm their properties?”

“I do not believe this is the time to be making residents pay such an increase. The cost of everything is rising at an astronomical rate, this will just hit those struggling harder than ever!”

Lack of visibility and proactivity

There were also concerns raised regarding the lack of visibility of the police following the uplift programme, poor experiences of police contact, a lack of proactiveness and the need to improve the efficiency of the Constabulary in the first instance before further funding is sought from the public.

“There are break-ins, burglaries, car thefts etc, reported on a weekly basis and will continue unless you radically change the way you operate. At a time when many are struggling to pay utility and food bills, this new increase is unacceptable, and we never see police on the be a in Stortford”.

“In a cost-of-living crisis with salary increases fundamentally below inflation, all organisations need to look at cost efficiencies rather than raising taxes at this time?”

“I disagree because you don’t catch any burglars, ignore e bikes and scooters driving past you. Why pay more to be more ineffective”.

Policing Protests and ‘Woke Policing’

26 respondents also made comments about the Constabulary’s interaction with protestors on the M25 and felt that the police had been far too accommodating of their behaviour and should stop spending public money on ‘tea and biscuits’.

“All we get is “woke” policing for our extra money nothing of use in tackling real crime. Stop pandering to ‘minority protestors’ and tackle real crime if you want support for an increase in the precept”.

“I disagree with the increase because all the police forces in this country appear to have turned WOKE. Consequently, I am not willing to agree to extra money for the police force.”

“Going forward I'd like to see the focusing on important problems like burglaries and violent crimes and a lot less time on politically correct activities like Pride parades etc.”

Neutral

9 per cent (217) of respondents remained neutral or indifferent 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 locations that officers would be deployed to. There was also a high number of specific concerns raised by respondents which did not give voice an opinion on the precept increase. These included: speeding around school, drug offences, burglary, theft of vehicles and e-scooters.

General observations

As observed in last year's council tax precept consultation, several respondents took the opportunity to mention wider issues related to the precept process. This included a suggestion that we should seek to operate a system which rewards those who install security measures:

“In areas where properties are more expensive and have higher banding, people occupying those properties are more likely to already have security measures in place. If any increase is to take place (and I would want to see evidence of what they are going to fund), they should be charged at a flat rate per head of adult population, but reductions should be available when householders install police approved security measures (the carrot rather than the stick!!).”

All the comments provided by respondents through the precept consultation process provide helpful insights into public opinion which I will 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 2023/24 police element of the council tax precept.