

MEETING	Strategic Executive Board
DATE	22 January 2021
TITLE OF REPORT	Report on Police Precept Consultation 2021-2022
SUBMITTED BY	Dr Amie Birkhamshaw, Director of Strategy, OPCC
PURPOSE OF REPORT	To discuss the results of the public consultation on the police element of the Council Tax Precept
DECISION(S) REQUIRED	To note the content of the report on resident’s feedback on the proposed policing precept element of council tax precept for 2021/22 to increase by £1.25 per month (£15.00 per year) for an average Band D equivalent to £213.00 per annum.
FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS	To discuss in conjunction with the 2021/22 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 budget meeting on 18th December 2020, the Commissioner wrote an Open Letter to the county of Hertfordshire outlining his proposal to increase the policing element of the precept for an average (Band D) equivalent by £15 or 7.58 per cent on the comparable figure for 2020/21 rising to £213.00 per annum.
- 1.2 In the letter, the Commissioner outlined the opportunity to transform our approach to policing, putting ‘Prevention’ first, growing our capacity to fight crime and putting more frontline officers on our streets. This includes investing in over 30 new Prevention First Officers who will continue to drive down demand, cut crime and create fewer victims. The letter outlined the challenges presented this year with increases in reported cybercrime, child exploitation and other emerging crime types. It noted the positivity in victims having the confidence to report the crimes and get help they require, but needing the right investigative capacity and support for victims. Raising the precept by the

flexibility allowed by the government would generate £6.796 million in income in 2021/22.

- 1.3 The Open Letter outlined the Commissioner’s strategy to deliver an effective and efficient police force, to ensure that the police are properly resourced and equipped, and grow frontline policing and preventative capacity. Not raising the precept would fail to deliver on what the public have consistently asked for and respond adequately to the growing challenges.
- 1.4 Table 1 shows the calculation for the budget and precepting requirement for 2021/22 across all household bandings A- H. Under the proposal, each household would pay between 83 pence to £2.50 per month.

Table 1: Proposed Precept increase by Household Bands A-H (2021-22)

Band	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
2020/21 Charge £	132.00	154.00	176.00	198.00	242.00	286.00	330.00	396.00
2021/22 Charge £	142.00	165.67	189.33	213.00	260.33	307.67	355.00	426.00
Increase per year £	10.00	11.67	13.33	15.00	18.33	21.67	25.00	30.00
Increase per month £	0.83	0.97	1.11	1.25	1.53	1.81	2.08	2.50

2) Results of the Public Consultation

- 2.1 Appendix A summarises the response to the public consultation. Between 18 December 2020 to 15 January 2021 4,242 responded to the online survey together with 240 responses via email totalling 4,464. This is four times as many as those who responded to the consultation in 2020/21 at 1,023, representing a significant increase in public interest in precept setting.
- 2.2 Of the 61 per cent in favour of the proposal, many cited their support for the improved visibility and availability of frontline officers. They felt it prudent for the force to increase the capacity of officers upfront in order to better manage demand.
- 2.3 Of the 29 per cent (1316 respondents) who were not in favour of the proposed increase to the police element of council tax precept, their reasons can broadly be categorised around some key themes. Firstly, because of the financial impact of Covid-19 with regards to unemployment, insecure futures and affordability. And secondly, there were concerns regarding the lack of visibility of the police, poor past experiences or a sense of feeling ignored or lack of proactiveness.
- 2.4 Around 10 per cent of respondents were indifferent with their response, expressing neither support or objection to the proposal. Many took the opportunity instead to ask a question, sometimes with regards to the budget, for instance on how it is calculated, a misunderstanding that it only relates to Band D properties or giving an opinion on the

relative merits of certain roles within the wider policing family such as PCSOs. There was also a high number of road safety concerns raised by residents.

- 2.5 The summary of the public consultation together with the full budget paper will be discussed at the Police and Crime Panel meeting on 4 February 2021 who will confirm whether they agree with the Commissioner's proposal.

3) RECOMMENDATION

3.1 It is recommended that SEB:

- a) Notes the consultation report in Appendix A
- b) Confirm the precept increase of £15 for Band D and commensurate increase for other household bands

4). BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendix A: Response to the Police Precept Consultation 2021-2022

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In December 2020, I issued an Open Letter ahead of setting the police element of Council Tax precept for 2021/22. It set out my principles and strategy for setting the budget and asked the public for their opinion on the proposal. In the letter I set out my guiding principles around the need to deliver an effective and efficient police force, one that puts prevention first, grows our local capacity to fight crime, and puts frontline officers on our streets. The Open Letter set out the opportunity that the police funding settlement represents in unprecedented investment in policing with an increase of £7.4m from the government to fund the police officer uplift programme. Like last year, the government suggested that local tax payers should also increase their contribution so that the benefits of investment can be properly maximised.

In my Open Letter I thanked the public for their support in previous years which has allowed us to expand the force even before the uplift programme began, bringing benefit to Hertfordshire well ahead of other parts of the country. The proposal this year would enable the recruitment of 167 officers, resulting in the largest force that Hertfordshire has ever seen, with 2,267 officers by March 2022. This is 77 more officers than the government target for the year, but I believe they will deliver more and faster benefits to our county. I set out that these record numbers will allow us to transform our approach to policing and achieve concrete results in terms of cutting crime and reducing victims. I have asked the Chief Constable to develop a new 'Prevention First' agenda and we have already started investing in this. Prevention First is a new and transformative model which focuses on preventing issues arising in the first place, working closely with you in our communities and with our partners to identify and tackle the root causes of crime. An increase in the precept would allow us to invest in over 30 new Prevention First officers who will continue to drive down demand, cut crime and create fewer victims.

The Open Letter also set out the challenges presented this year. Like many other forces, this includes increases in reported cybercrime, child exploitation and emerging crime types. I am pleased that victims now have the confidence to report crime and get the help they require, but it is vital that we have the right investigative capacity and support for victims. You will know that putting victims at the centre remains at the heart of my Community Safety and Criminal Justice Plan.

I outlined in the Open Letter that I wanted to use the flexibility granted by the government to raise the council tax precept by £15 per year for the equivalent of a Band D property. This asks taxpayers to pay between 83p and £2.50 per month extra on their tax bill. This would generate an additional £6.796m in income in 2021/22, enabling us to expand frontline policing and deliver the investments I have outlined.

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Methodology

On 18 December 2020, the Open Letter was posted on my website and a press release sent out to the local media and to all Town and Parish Councillors via the Hertfordshire Association of Parish and Town Councils. The Open Letter received the following coverage across the county:

- Watford Observer [Council tax rise will pay for Herts' biggest ever police force](#)
- Hemel Today [Commissioner plans for Hertfordshire's largest ever police force - funded by planned council tax](#)
- Bishop's Stortford Independent [Council tax bills set to rise to pay for more police in Hertfordshire](#)

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. This was also accompanied with an online Frequently Asked Question (FAQ) information sheet¹ to help provide additional information to the typically asked questions on the precept.

Throughout the course of the 28-day consultation period to 15 January 2021, my proposal was highlighted widely using social media including Facebook (hertspcc) which reached 3,041 people and had 397 engagements, and through Twitter (@hertspcc) which saw 5,241 impressions and had 538 engagements. In total, I received 4,682 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 proposal and agree that an increase in the precept is required in order to: maximise the opportunity to invest in Prevention First, manage growing demand, invest in frontline officers and support victims whilst providing a value for money service.

Summary of the Feedback

Three fifths (61 per cent or 2,762) of the 4,464 of residents that responded to the online survey or via email said they supported and increase in the precept, equivalent for a Band D household of £15 per annum to ensure the transformation of the force around prevention, an increase in frontline officers and increased support for victims of crime. This is more than double the number of respondents that disagreed with the proposed increase (29 per cent, 1316 respondents). 10 per cent (495 respondents) remaining neutral or did not state an opinion. Of those that completed the survey 2,212 left detailed comments.

Graph 1: Summary of responses from the online survey

¹ <https://www.hertscommissioner.org/public-consultation>

Q1 1. The Commissioner would like to hear your views on whether you agree with his proposal to raise the police element of the Council Tax precept by £15-a-year to fund Hertfordshire's largest ever force.

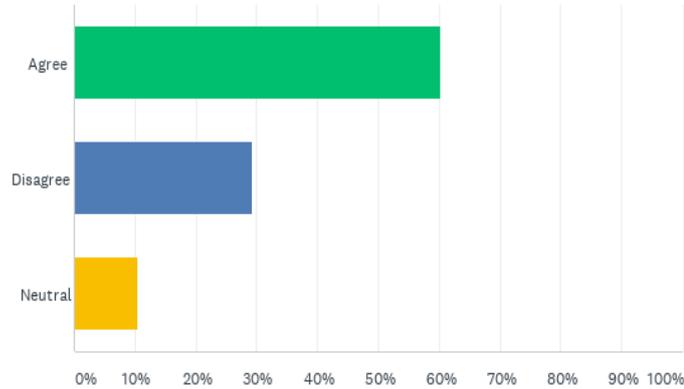


Table 2: Total responses from the online survey and emails

	Percentage	Number
Agree	61%	2,762
Disagree	29%	1,316
Neutral	10%	495
Total		4464

Summary of the Public Feedback

Many of the 2,762 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 upfront in order to better manage demand:

“More Police Officers make us safer. An extra £15.00 a year is a drop in the Ocean. People should cook and not get that "takeaway" for one week which would cover this.”

“Fortunately, Hertfordshire is generally a low crime county and the extra officers will help keep it that way. In my view it is far better to invest in more resources now rather than having to catch up later on should crime levels increase.”

There was also a high proportion of respondents who mentioned what the additional officers should be doing and where they should be deployed in support of dealing with everyday’ crimes including noise complaints, drugs, speeding and ASB:

“It will be worth it to have more police officers to catch/prevent crime & criminals, not to mention the huge number of obviously non-road legal vehicles in a poor state & being driven by maniacs!”

“I totally support the Commissioner’s plan and request to raise the precept. It is perhaps the most important responsibility of government to protect society. It is clear with the growing evidence of drug and violent related crimes as well as other domestic issues an increase in police officer numbers is urgently required.”

“A larger, more visible, police presence in the Three Rivers area would be very welcome, it would be nice to put some resource into 'low level' crime particularly traffic, speeding has become more of a problem and seems to be getting worse particularly in residential areas.”

There was also a proportion of respondents in favour who were giving their support on a ‘conditional’ basis. This related to wanting to know what the outcomes are that they will see as a result of the investment and reassurance that the money will be spent on the frontline and resolving cases:

“I am in agreement...we want to see the crime rate down as well as solved cases up by a considerable percentage”

“I am supportive of the £15 proposal but want to see what outcomes are expected as a result. Getting more police officers is a means, not an end in itself”.

“I have no problem paying any extra money, but I need to see that affecting my area. I don't want to pay extra money for them to be 20 miles away.”

There was also a number of respondents who favoured a larger increase in the council tax precept on the basis of wanting to better equip and reward frontline officers:

“I would prefer to see the Council Tax precept raised by £20 p.a., with the extra £5 used to provide the best available equipment for officers on the front line and /or a financial bonus for those officers. I look forward to seeing more officers on patrol in the near future”.

Of the 29 per cent (1316 respondents) who were not in favour of the proposed increase to the police element of council tax precept, their reasons can broadly be categorised around some key themes. Firstly, because of the financial impact of Covid-19 with regards to unemployment, insecure futures and affordability. Secondly, there were concerns regarding the lack of visibility of the police, past experiences or a sense of feeling ignored or lack of proactiveness. Some of the typical responses relate to:

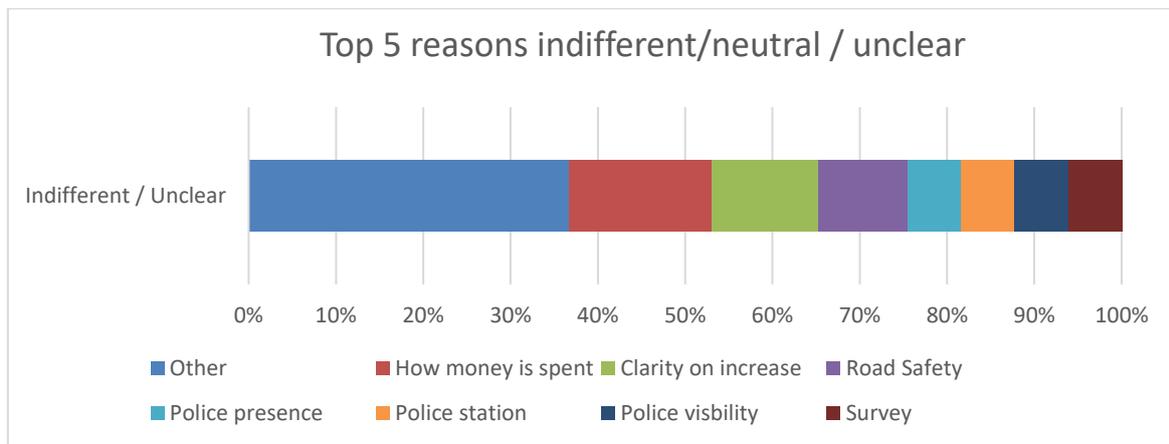
“Whilst I appreciate having more police would be useful and this would need to be paid for, is now the time to increase people’s outgoings - and certainly for me £15 on one element of the council tax, is incredibly worrying- when the country is in lockdown again and so many people have lost their jobs and all incomes have been and could still be affected in the coming months?”

“Every year the council tax rises and it's becoming too expensive and with the Covid19 pandemic and people been furloughed it will be out of reach for most people.”

Neural / indifferent

Around 10 per cent of respondents were indifferent with their response, expressing neither support nor objection to the proposal. Many took the opportunity instead to ask a question or sought clarification, for instance how the precept is calculated, a misunderstanding that it only relates to Band D or giving an opinion on the relative merits of certain roles within the wider policing family such as PCSOs. There was also a high number of road safety concerns raised by residents.

Table 3 outlines the top five reasons for respondents remaining neutral or expressed the need for further clarity.



As illustrated here through the following quotes:

“Thank you. It would have been far more useful to see how our resource is allocated via a scatter chart i.e. map the area of Hertfordshire where crime activity occurs then map on the allocation of police resources. This would be helpful rather than conveying that we have 2,200 police in Hertfordshire - keep the Hertfordshire people to be involved more. Thank you for all you’re doing to prevent crime!”

“You do not make it clear whether the officers you will be recruiting will be PCSO’s or Police Officers”.

General Observations

There were a number of residents who were in favour of the police publicising operationally what they have done to help promote confidence and improve public profile.

“...Also be more informative on what you do for the community and what you achieve to boost the police profile. In the Spanish papers you read all the time what the police have done and arrests they have made. Thank you for what you all do”.

Several respondents mentioned the closure of some police stations across the county and the accessibility to front counter services. I recognise that some people believe there are no longer operational police stations in places 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 police station to raise any issues or concerns they have. To complement this, every station now has a new noticeboard to share information with the public about the safer neighbourhood team which includes local policing priorities for their area.

“There is no Police Station as such in St Albans to go into and seek advice, and you never see a foot policeman patrolling the streets and talking to youngsters hanging around street intimidating others.”

“We need more police presence in St Albans. It is ridiculous that we no longer have a 'police station' in a district of this population”.

“In St Albans we have seen our police service decrease. No police station any more”.

“The police station in Berkhamsted was closed some while back and there is no longer a police presence in a town of over 20000 residents. There is no one to talk to about antisocial behaviour and other crimes.”

“I think that a town with a large (& expanding) population like Hemel Hempstead should have a front desk that is open to the public.”

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 2021/22 police element of the council tax precept.