

Budget Consultation 2021/22 Summary

Background

As a result of some uncertainty around precise timescales for a settlement announcement and the impact of COVID- 19 the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) held a two stage process for the budget consultation.

The 'Your Voice' survey ran from the 5th October until the 2nd November 2020. The purpose of this survey was to understand the views of the public on a number of policing issues and possible precept scenarios to inform the PCC prior to finalising his budget proposals for 2021/22.

The PCC followed this up by carrying out a second survey specifically on the precept and budget. The precept consultation launched on the 23rd December 2020 and ended at midnight on 20th January 2021. A precept proposal, the *Proposed Budget 2021/22 and Medium Term Financial Plan 2021/22 – 2024/25* were published as part of the consultation process, along with a short online survey to enable people to comment on the proposals being put forward.

In total, 1468 responses were received from both surveys with the majority supporting the PCC's proposal to increase council tax.

Publicity and media coverage

A range of communication tools were used to promote both consultations to communities across West Mercia. These included:

Public meeting: Holding a Facebook Live public meeting with the Chief Constable following the budget launch as part of the second consultation. This provided the PCC with a more general understanding of public concerns around the police budget.

Social media: Press releases and consultation links were shared via the West Mercia PCC Facebook and Twitter pages for both surveys on launch and throughout. Accompanying graphics were used to replace existing banners on both social media accounts. Ahead of the Facebook live session (held on 11th January), posts highlighted the link and the opportunity for people to get involved in the second consultation. It was mentioned again during the session. This video was watched approximately 650 times.

All social media platforms are monitored and where appropriate comments on the precept have been responded to, however the 'instant' nature of this media means it is not practical to include them in this report.

Press release/media: A number of press releases were issued for both consultations. PCC Newsletters issued regularly highlighted that the surveys were open and encouraged people to take part for the appropriate period each was open. Media coverage included: Redditch Advertiser, Redditch Standard, Shropshire Star, Worcester News and the Kidderminster Shuttle.

Survey Findings

Set out below are the findings from the two consultation exercises undertaken to inform the budget and precept setting.

1. Your Voice Survey

Ahead of developing the budget for 2021/22, the PCC ran a public survey to understand public priorities, what it's like in local areas from a policing perspective and which areas of policing respondents would choose to spend money on. An online survey was used to seek these views. The survey included a number of multiple choice answers and comments box's to allow respondents to provide further comments. In total there were 20 questions.

The majority of respondents, 58% were willing to pay more towards their council tax with the majority of them in support to pay the highest increase. The findings from this survey were used to inform the PCC's budget proposals.

Demographics

In total for this survey, 1,395 responses were received, however 399 survey responses had to be disqualified due to being only partially filled in. A breakdown of respondents by council tax area is shown below.

65% (654) Worcestershire

18% (176) Shropshire

8% (78) Telford and Wrekin

8% (76) Herefordshire

1% (12) Other (7 were from individuals outside of the West Mercia force area, in areas that border West Mercia)

Around 98% of respondents were responding as a member of the public with the remaining 2% responding as a business owner.

Consultation findings

The first section in the report focused on people's perceptions towards crime and antisocial behaviour in their local area. The headline findings were:

- 72% of respondents suggest they feel safe in their local area, however 67% also say they feel worried about the level of crime in their area.
- Around 58% of respondent's perceive an increase in the level of crime and ASB over the last 12 months whilst 32% think there has been no change.
- Around 54% of respondents don't agree that the local police are dealing with issues that matter to them with the remaining 46% saying they do.
- The majority of respondents (67%) agree that the police do a good job.
- Respondents are more confident they could access the police in an emergency than in a non-emergency
- Issues seen as being a problem in local areas include ASB, rural crime, criminal damage/vandalism, drugs and road safety whilst domestic burglary, violent crime and vehicle crime were seen as less of a problem.

- The majority of respondents (53%) felt that the level of policing had remained the same whilst 38% perceived a decrease and only 8% perceived an increase.
- ASB, burglary and theft were most commonly ranked as a high issue or priority whilst preventing re-offending and supporting victims was ranked as least.

The second section of the survey focussed on the council tax precept. The question highlighted the impact of COVID-19 on the economy and the likely affect it would have on funding streams for policing. The question asked, would you be prepared to pay more in council tax to maintain existing levels of service in policing.

The majority of respondents, 58% said that they would contribute more towards policing whilst the remaining 42% were opposed to doing so. The 58% of respondents that said they were willing to pay more council tax, were given 5 options (£2.50, £5, £10, £15 and £20) and asked how much extra they would be willing to pay. The majority answered that they would be prepared to pay an extra £20 a year, the highest amount.

To further support this a scenario was provided where respondents were given 100 tokens and asked to assign them to a number of key areas, to represent budget setting. The key areas were, visible policing, reforming police IT and improving technology for officers and staff, reducing re-offending, crime prevention initiatives, supporting victims, police infrastructure and estates, resources to tackle road safety and resources to tackle serious crimes.

The below list demonstrates the order they were placed in from most money spent to least.

1. Visible Policing (most tokens assigned)
2. Resources to tackle serious crimes (i.e domestic abuse, sexual violence and CSE)
3. Reforming police IT and improving technology for officers and staff
4. Resources to tackle road safety
5. Crime Prevention initiatives
6. Supporting victims
7. Police infrastructure and estates
8. Reducing re-offending (least tokens assigned)

When asked for any further comments, 782 respondents chose to comment. The word cloud below provides a visualisation of the predominant words from all the comments received.



A summary of all the comments is shown below, grouped by common theme or concern. It should be noted that a number of the comments referred to more than one theme and that there is a degree of subjectivity in the interpretation of each comment.

Main themes

The main themes arising from the comments were:

Police visibility / Police Response – A large majority of comments were generally from those who remain concerned about a perceived lack of police presence, engagement or action in their local area.

Road safety- A number of comments were made in relation to road safety, in particular, speeding traffic, anti-social use of vehicles and parking on the pavement.

Other Crime and community safety issues – Other specific issues raised included drugs, rural crime and ASB.

Miscellaneous comments - A number of respondents both for and against the proposals left a comment which does not directly fit into the above themes.

The PCC took these findings into account and used them in the development of the draft budget. The budget delivers another 91 police officers for communities and the resources they need to be as effective as possible. These additional officers will ensure an even greater focus on the community priorities reflected in the findings from this survey. This includes greater visibility, greater accessibility, and more resources to prevent and investigate the crimes that cause harm across West Mercia.

This extends to making sure funding is focussed on commissioning victim services and crime prevention. The funding will be targeted at initiatives that prevent crimes from happening in the first place. The themes identified in this survey are reflected in a number of ambitions and measures that the Commissioner will use to ensure resources are used effectively by the force.

2. Precept Consultation Survey

To further support the above findings, a short online survey was launched to enable people to comment on the firm budget proposal put forward by the Commissioner, informed by the first round of consultation. The online survey asked up to 5 questions specifically around the precept and included one open question enabling respondents to comment on their reasons for either supporting or opposing the proposals.

The majority of respondents, 52% were in support of the precept proposal put forward by the Commissioner with the remaining 48% not supporting the proposal. Of those who did not agree, 4% would support an increase of £15 in order to deliver the most possible funding for the police.

Demographics

A total of 73 responses were received. A breakdown of respondents by council tax area is shown below (for those that answered this question).

32% (23) Shropshire
23% (16) North Worcestershire
21% (15) South Worcestershire
16% (11) Telford and Wrekin
7% (5) Herefordshire
1% (1) Other (did not state where they lived)

Please note: not everyone answered every question and this is reflected in the results below.

Consultation findings

The second survey asked whether respondents supported the PCC's investment in community policing, and the subsequent proposed increase in the policing element of the council tax by £15 per year (6.6%, £1.25 per month). The majority of respondents, 52%, supported the Commissioner's proposals whilst the remaining 48% did not.

Of the 34 respondents that did not support the PCC's proposal they were asked why they didn't and were given two options. 28 out of the 34 of the respondents answered.

- 1 respondent answered by choosing *I support a £15 increase in order to deliver the most possible funding for policing.*
- 27 respondents answered by choosing *I think the increase in Council Tax is too much and would support the 2% cap.*

When asked if they had any further comments, 46 respondents chose to respond. A summary of all the comments are shown below, grouped by common theme or concern (please see appendix for complete list of comments). It should be noted that a number of the comments referred to more than one theme and that there is a degree of subjectivity in the interpretation of each comment.

Main themes

The main themes arising from the comments were:

Financial concerns/impact of COVID – 11 people made a finance related comment, many were concerned about the impact on household finances resulting from the current pandemic. How money was spent was also raised by a number of respondents.

Police visibility / Police Response –9 respondents made a comment on these issues. The comments were generally from those who remain concerned about a perceived lack of police presence or action.

Other Crime and community safety issues – other specific issues raised included road safety (3) and rural crime (2)

General support – a number of those supporting the proposals just left a positive comment which did not align with any of the main themes.

Miscellaneous comments – a number of respondents both for and against the proposals left a comment which does not directly fit into the above themes.

Commissioner's response to the comments received

Within both surveys a number of people chose to comment on the proposals. The comments have been grouped into themes, based on the predominant message in each comment. A response to each of the main themes is shown below.

Financial concerns/ Impact of COVID-19 – This year has been a challenging one for everyone, including within policing, and we know that these challenges will continue into the coming year. The government have announced greater investment to support forces fight crime and increase officer numbers.

To deliver this I have balanced the drive to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of West Mercia Police in tackling crime with the need to make savings where possible. Asking the public to pay more is not a decision that is taken lightly.

This year's budget reflects that as I wanted to make sure that it delivers on the priorities that matter most to the public. This includes ensuring officers have the resources they need in order to carry out their role, whilst also focussing on areas of concern to communities.

Police visibility / Police response – This survey provided communities with the opportunity to voice their views and inform the budget setting process. I recognise that police visibility and accessibility continues to be a top priority for communities and further police officer recruitment in the coming year will provide further reassurance.

I will continue to hold the Chief Constable to account to ensure police visibility is improved and the positive benefits of additional officers are maximised to meet the needs of communities across West Mercia.

Other Crime and community safety issues - The comments received regarding road safety and rural crime are consistent with feedback from our communities previous to the precept consultation. I have taken this feedback on board and worked to ensure these views are represented in my budget proposals. These areas were key priorities in my plans to increase officer numbers, improve police visibility, and tackle crime.

Appendix to Budget Report

<i>Support Proposal</i>	<i>Respondent Comment</i>
Theme	Financial Concerns/Impact of COVID
No	This year has been extremely difficult financially. The Government is providing substantial funding yet you propose to ask the public for more again this year when many have lost jobs. We never see any officers where we live, I suppose theres an upside to that.
No	I understand HMG had allocated additional funds in 2020 for increased numbers of officers. Is crime really rising in this area to warrant such an increase. Officers are not highly visible in this area. Cost pressures will apply to businesses and residents in 2021 - indeed a lot will have lost business and livelihoods. Tax rises should be kept to a minimum not everyone is on a guaranteed income.
No	I feel with so many people losing their jobs as the result of covid-19 this is very poor timing.
No	The is not an option for a zero percent increase. The question is unfair in that if you do not support the 6% increase then you are assumed to be in support of a 2% increase. Inflation is around 2% because organisations such as yourself increase costs. I cannot readily find the financials associated with the budget that can justify an increase. What are the breakdown of costs; staff; buildings; vehicles IT etc; Where do yo get your income from other than the direct taxation of residents?
No	Why is it every year council tax (including police etc) is raised more than my pension? Year on year my disposable income shrinks more and more. I have no doubts the police are doing a fine job however just like me work within a diminishing budget.
No	I don't support the increase in council tax at all and certainly not at the £15 amount - I am sure that savings could be found from within the Force's existing budget by identifying areas of waste. I want to see more visible policing in the area before I could ever commit to an increase in funding especially at a time when people are losing their jobs and public sector workers have their salaries frozen. To increase now is unacceptable - can the Force draw upon reserves to balance their budget?
No	Whilst i understand a need for more officers, families are already struggling with bills as it is yet alone a further increase. My household has not had any pay increase for years yet every other cost increases. You can break the costs down as much as you like to make it sound like a small increase, but increases on top of increases on every bill, utility is significant. I also thought additional officers were being funded by the government.
No	As a Redditch citizen I feel we pay far too much in council tax for what service is provided by the council compared with other councils for householders
No	In the current economic climate, you cannot justify imposing such an outrageous increase of the local taxpayer. How much money do you have in force reserves? Why aren't you using the money in the force reserves? You have cost local tax payers £10 million pounds with the public split from Warwickshire Police. You cannot seriously expect the public to foot the bill by an increase in taxes. Your survey of a £15 or a 2% budget increase is a loaded question.
No	I sympathise with anyone who has to formulate a budget in public services, however the tax payers are always over a proverbial barrel. 6.6% this year could be 6.6% next year too, and the following year circumstances could require more. It becomes a slippery slope.
No	You would be better at sorting your force out before making us pay more of your wages! My partners car was broken into twice and not once did a officer come out! Just get given a stupid waste of time crime number! We are in a pandemic people are losing jobs people choosing between heating and food, yet you want more money! One word for you, joke
Theme	Police Visibility/police response
No	We never see local police in our area regularly so why pay for it. The only time is when a crime has been committed but could have been caught earlier my local policing.
Yes	This is a qualified yes as we are yet to see and benefit in community policing where I live, still have only seem police drive through area, not stop and not

Appendix to Budget Report

	engage with the community
Yes	We need a much greater presence on the streets, and quicker response to incidents People want to see the police patrolling the tough areas, and take control of drug areas it can be done, and justify the extra costs
Yes	The vast majority of this should be spent on visible policing.
No	I live near RSH and never see a police presence in our area. Have asked for a police presence to stop motor cyclist roaring down the by pass on holiday weekends between Dobbies and Churncote roundabout but No nevers happens. Police walk around town with their hands tucked inside their yellow vest, shows how relaxed and not alert. Lets get our coppers back to looking like Policemen and Women not like bearded SWAT teams.teams
No	I believe year on year cuts have made community policing a farce As a resident it is virtually impossible to get to know cso's as they keep moving around and delays in replacement
No	My council tax was raised from £1800 a year to £1866 in 2020/2021. We had to call the police once, it took them 20min to arrive!!! I live in Redditch for over 2 years now and I've seen the police only handful of times around our area even though we had attempted car thefts reports. I guess it's assumed if we live in a new build estate there's no need for police patrol- no matter how many crimes you report!!!
No	Think you having a laugh. Its spot the police in Telford.
No	Why would I pay more for a force that doesn't fight crime. When my livestock was attacked, the police officer sent didn't have a clue what she was doing with livestock and when they returned she could even be bothered to chase them in an attempt to arrest them. I was also promised I would be informed of further proceeding in the case, it's been a year and I've heard nothing back. Absolute waste of time, I should of just took the issue into my own hands and left you lot to play toy coppers.
Theme	Other Crime and community safety issues
Yes	Whilst recognising concentration of police effort in more urban areas is necessary, speeding vehicles through villages in the Pershore/Evesham area is a real problem. However there does need to be careful consideration of traffic calming measures, road humps can be counter productive
Yes	Only the Lack of Police Dealing with Blocked Footpaths One namely Lower Chase Road, this Road has No Footpath access for Disabled Scooters as seen with parking taking up nearly all of Both Footpaths, Laws are being Breached with NO body being dealt with so getting Worse. Also a Family over from I think No 60 are Breaking Virus Rules Daily with many people attending that property, believe people have reported it to NO avail which is bad.
Yes	I would like to see a more transparent and easier process in regards to improving road safety, particularly in regards to links with councils and help to navigate the processes required when requesting changes
No	1.the fundamental principle of policing by consent has been forgotten by heavy handed policy during the Covid crisis. 2.the needs of rural Shropshire have become subservient to urban areas.
No	Make those who live in the cities pay for the bobbies, in the rural areas we never see the police out here, the drunks, druggies & villians are mainly the blight of metropolian areas, so residents there should pay much more.
Theme	General support
Yes	I think the police great job and this has been an unprecedented year with lots of additional costs for the public sector. I would be happy to pay the full amount.
Yes	Whilst I do not support the constant above inflation council tax rises including policing precept etc, this is a necessary increase because of a lack of government funding for our police. Given the choice between not having enough police available and paying extra tax, this is a necessary evil, but one that

Appendix to Budget Report

	could and should be avoided by government actually supporting the police and not just claiming to when there are cameras around.
Yes	Proposed increase should be more!
Yes	I agree to the proposed precept but need to see a proper police presence
Yes	To be able to fund the police to be a crime busting force, together with essential back office staff, which I believe every citizen needs, the increase should be higher. I'm sure that the majority of citizens would agree to this.
Yes	The commissioner is doing an excellent job!
Yes	Whilst supporting this and willing to pay, I do understand that there are people (including elderly) who may find it difficult having to pay additional money. I also add that where we live, in Whitchurch, we once had a local operational police force and station with officers providing 24/7 cover and working predominantly in the local area. I do feel that we are still paying for this even though it was mostly taken away, however things move on and I can see you have listened and support you.
Yes	Love the police
Yes	This will help to make up for several years of underfunding. I just hope it means I see an officer occasionally!
Theme	Miscellaneous comments
Yes	Would like to see some proper value for money sadly not always the case
No	I selected the 2% option as there was no 3rd option to select no increase. There is no active police service in this part of the county - why should we pay more for this?
No	Would rather defecate in my own hands and clap than give your incompetent police force a single penny more.
No	I have seen no benefit from any of the recent annual increases imposed upon us.
No	We have been expected (compelled) to pay more and more each year for a rapid decrease in the quantity & quality of service provided. There is no justification for further increases until it can be credibly demonstrated that it is enhancing service delivery.
Yes	None
No	I don't support any increase in funding. If there was a positive change in police culture, I would support a £15 increase. However without this positive change, I think any increase funds, will have little affect.
Yes	None
No	Cut top salaries No income Outrageous increase
Yes	Police need more support.
Yes	You say you have overseen reduced back office costs but the inhibitors to better policing include insufficient investment in back office functions that directly or indirectly support operational policing.
No	Nothing you offer makes up for the cuts made by the conservative government. When you are honest about that we can talk about council tax. This increase is way above any pay rise I or the police have had.