

Budget Consultation 2022/23 - Summary

1. Background

- 1.1. The budget consultation ran in a two stage process.
- 1.2. The first survey ran from the 3rd December 2021 until the 3rd January 2022. 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 firming up his draft budget proposals for 2022/23.
- 1.3. The PCC followed this up by carrying out a second survey, specifically on the draft precept and budget proposals. This consultation launched on the 7th January 2022 and ended at 9am on the 24th January 2022. A precept proposal, the Proposed Budget 2022/23 and Medium Term Financial Plan 2022/23 – 2025/26 was published as part of the consultation process, along with a short online survey to enable people to comment on the proposals being put forward.
- 1.4. In total, 1,659 responses were received from both surveys. 1,413 of these were in response to the first survey. 246 were in response to the second.

2. Publicity and media coverage

- 2.1. A range of communication tools were used to promote both consultations to communities across West Mercia. These included:
- 2.2. *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.
- 2.3. *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 12th 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 350 times.
- 2.4. 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.
- 2.5. *Press release/media:* A number of press releases were issued for both consultations. Regularly issued PCC Newsletters highlighted that the surveys were open, and encouraged people to take part during the period each was open. This was covered by a number of different media outlets.

3. Survey Findings

- 3.1. Set out below are the findings from the two consultation exercises undertaken to inform the budget and precept setting.
- 3.2. Table 1 below shows the % of respondents for surveys 1 and 2 within each area against the population estimates in West Mercia.

Area	% of respondents from survey 1	% of respondents from survey 2	% of population in West Mercia ¹
Worcestershire	53%	25%	46%
Shropshire	20%	22%	25%
Telford and Wrekin	20%	49%	14%
Herefordshire	8%	4%	15%

- 3.3. Table 2 below shows how supportive respondents in each area were in both surveys 1 and 2, to a council tax increase.

Area	% of respondents in support from survey 1	% of respondents in support from survey 2
Worcestershire	70%	84%
Shropshire	69%	21%
Telford and Wrekin	70%	6%
Herefordshire	67%	40%

1. Budget Survey

- 3.4. Ahead of developing the budget for 2022/23, the PCC ran a public survey to understand public priorities, which areas of policing respondents would choose to spend money on and whether they supported an increase in the policing portion of council tax. An online survey was used to seek these views. The survey included a number of multiple choice answers and a comments box to allow respondents to provide further comments. In total there were up to 12 questions.
- 3.5. The majority of respondents (69%) were willing to pay more towards their council tax. The majority of those respondents supported the highest possible increase (£8-10). The findings from this survey were used to inform the PCC’s draft budget proposals.

Demographics

¹ Office for National Statistics, Population estimates: mid 2020 - local authority based by single year of age, (June 2021)

- 3.6. In total for this survey, 1,413 responses were received. This sample size allows for a 95% confidence level, with a 3% margin of error.
- 3.7. A breakdown of respondents by council tax area is shown below.
- 53% (615) Worcestershire
 - 20% (228) Shropshire
 - 20% (232) Telford and Wrekin
 - 8% (93) Herefordshire
- 3.8. Of those that responded, 98% were a resident of West Mercia with the remaining 2% not. Reasons given by non-residents responding included working in the force area or having family in the area.
- 3.9. Around 98% of respondents were responding as a member of the public with the remaining 2% responding as a business owner.

Consultation findings

- 3.10. The first section in the report focused on people's perceptions towards crime and antisocial behaviour in their local area. The headline findings were:
- Anti-social behaviour, visibility and accessibility of police officers and road safety (including speeding) were identified as the top three issues or priorities for respondents. Areas least identified as a priority or issue include hate crime and preventing re-offending.
 - If asked to pay more for policing as part of their council tax, 62% of respondents would choose to direct additional police officers to the frontline and 52% chose a greater focus on investigating and resolving crime. The least common areas chosen included support for victims to cope and recover, more resources focussed on women and girls and easier access to the police service.
 - When asked how visible West Mercia Police are, 45% of respondents said that the police are 'rarely visible', 37% said 'somewhat visible', 13% said 'not at all visible' whilst the remaining 5% saying they are 'very visible'.
 - When asked how accessible West Mercia Police are, 50% of respondents said that the police are 'somewhat accessible', 30% said 'not very accessible', 12% said 'very accessible' with the remaining 8% saying they are 'not at all accessible'.
 - Around 95% of respondents agreed that they would like to see an increase in resources dedicated to investigating crime to bring more offenders to justice and ensure the best and most timely outcomes for victims, with the remaining 5% not.

- 3.11. The second section of the survey focussed on the council tax precept. The majority of respondents, 69%, said that they would contribute more towards policing whilst the remaining 31% were opposed to doing so.
- 3.12. The 69% of respondents that said they were willing to pay more council tax were given 3 options (£1-3, £4-7, £8-10), and asked how much extra they would be willing to pay per year. The majority answered that they would be prepared to pay an extra £8-10 per year, the highest amount.
- 3.13. When asked for any further comments, 490 respondents chose to comment. The word cloud below provides a visualisation of the predominant words from all the comments received.



- 3.14. 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

- 3.15. The main themes arising from the comments were:
- 3.16. Police visibility / Police Response – A large majority of comments were generally from those who remain concerned about a perceived lack of police presence, resources available to officers and officer numbers.
- 3.17. 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.
- 3.18. Other Crime and community safety issues – Other specific issues raised including drugs, rural crime, ASB and CCTV.
- 3.19. Miscellaneous comments - A number of respondents both for and against the proposals left a comment which does not directly fit into the above themes.

- 3.20. The PCC took these findings into account and used them in the development of the draft budget. The budget delivers another 125 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.
- 3.21. This extends to making sure funding is also 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

- 3.22. To further support the above findings, a short online survey was launched to enable people to comment on the draft budget proposals put forward by the Commissioner, informed by the first round of consultation. The online survey asked 4 questions specifically around the precept and included one open question enabling respondents to comment on their reasons for either supporting or opposing the proposals.

Demographics

- 3.23. A total of 246 responses were received. This does not provide a statistically significant sample for West Mercia, nor any of its constituent areas. A breakdown of respondents by council tax area is shown below (for those that answered this question).

48% (119) Telford and Wrekin
22% (53) Shropshire
14% (35) North Worcestershire
12% (29) South Worcestershire
4% (10) Herefordshire

Consultation findings

- 3.24. 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 £9.47 per year (3.94%, £0.70p per month). The majority of respondents, 69%, did not support the proposals whilst the remaining 31% did.
- 3.25. When asked if they had any further comments, 109 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

- 3.26. The main themes arising from the comments were:
- 3.27. Financial concerns/increase in cost of living – a number of people made a finance related comment, many were concerned about other household price increases. How money was spent was also raised by a number of respondents.
- 3.28. Police visibility / Police Response –The comments were generally from those who remain concerned about a perceived lack of police presence or action.
- 3.29. General support – a number of those supporting the proposals just left a positive comment which did not align with any of the main themes.
- 3.30. Miscellaneous comments – a number of respondents both for and against the proposals left a comment which does not directly fit into the above themes.

4. Commissioner's response to the comments received

- 4.1. 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.
- 4.2. Financial concerns/ increase in cost of living – I am dedicated to delivering the best service and have heard loud and clear from the communities of Herefordshire, Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin and Worcestershire about where their concerns lie.
- 4.3. The impact of Covid-19 continues to be a key economic consideration, alongside rising inflation, the need to provide infrastructure for our new police recruits, and the costs associated with a major investigation in West Mercia. We must also make sure we live within our means and that the progress we make is sustainable.
- 4.4. Whilst communities will be asked to contribute a little more for policing, I believe it is very clear where that resource is going, the difference it will make, and that the return on investment is very evident. I will continue to work tirelessly to ensure the improvements our communities need and deserve are delivered through this year's budget.
- 4.5. Police visibility / Police response – This survey provided communities with the opportunity to voice their views and inform the budget setting process. I have, as I promised, taken these views to shape this budget proposal. I understand people want a police force they can access and rely on, which is why 125 additional police officers will ensure the benefit is felt in communities across West Mercia.

- 4.6. This is the highest establishment the force has seen since 2009 and is close to the highest level on record, enabled by what is by far the highest budget our area has seen for policing and crime. 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.

Appendix to Budget Report

Support proposal?	Respondent Comment
Yes	:-)
No	Stop raising the council tax
No	Tighten your belt and stick to your remit.
No	Stop raising council tax!
No	You should start with getting your own house in order before skiing the public for extra funding. If you were to be performing at a decent level a rise may be justified but the force isn't,
No	There is no evidence making us pay more here will do anything you say.
No	In the current financial climate, I'm unable to support any increase in taxes and contributions. This government has in effect reduced my wage year on year.
No	Funding should be provided by the government who decide on Police numbers
No	We are already absolutely hammered by price rises..I simply can't afford more The biggest crime is our Govt robbing us and you can't address that
No	Spend better with what you have and start responding to crimes rather than easy wins. Then when you start to tackle crime I'd be more than happy to pay more tax
No	Why don't you get your post scrapped? Your wages would go a large way toward funding more police and investment
Yes	The extra officers should be deployed on active police work and not administrative desk/paperwork. Extra officers on the ground
No	Never see a police officer where i live only ehen they raid a house,
Yes	More visible policing needed.
No	We already pay through income tax. Conservative government should pay more so we can have pre 2010 levels of policing.
No	With the cost of living increasing, this isn't what We should be accepting. They'll be zero changes and paying more. As long as the top brass are happy as we really have no clue to what the 'commissioner' actually does, who he is and what they stand for. Farcical
No	Our police force is unfit for purpose under Conservative rule. We are merely throwing good money after bad and will not see any change from this latest Stealth tax. This needs to stop now. Particularly at a time when people are struggling.
No	Funding should be re-routed from other areas to tackle policing priorities and not from council tax increases. Policing is a very dynamic and ever changing service, however funding needs to be dynamic to match the needs of the service
No	Despite constant year on year rises there has been a decline in policing during the tenure of the PCC. Concentrating more on conservative council lead areas then the whole region
No	At a time when households are being squeezed an increase is the last thing that should be proposed.
No	Please ensure that the extra money you are taking will be used to allow west Mercia to upgrade its supporting services as a priority... if the supporting services are more efficient then it will allow police officers to spend more time policing instead of doing admin due to the admin staff being reduced over the last 10 years
No	Totally disagree with any suggestion that I can absorb any further increases in living costs. Every single element of living cost has gone up as you know yet my take home pay is still 30% below pre covid. My customers are either working from home or spending less. Ofcourse they too have an increased burden of cost of living. The council have committed to freeze the council tax which they have done in the past only to have to pass on the portion that goes to police, fire, social care etc.

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No	Police give more help when asked to visit
No	Place more CCTV to catch people in the act.
No	Yes I have met the Commissioner he does not fill me with any confidence.
No	No..
No	People are struggling with coat of living increases
No	There is zero police in Market Drayton, its full of burglaries, drugs and it needs fixing. I pay into the budget but get nothing in return to feel safe where I live.
No	Perhaps if the govt had not cut budgets centrally we wouldn't have to pay more locally to make up the difference.
No	The PCC Council tax precept in 2021 increased by 6.7% and it made no difference to my local community. We have less PCs and PCSOs in, around and available to our local community than we had the year before. The response time from the police has increased and on several occasions I have had to ring multiple times and waited all day for police assistance. To increase council tax precept would be unacceptable when the service paid for already is not acceptable.
No	Not acceptable!!
No	People cannot afford it with rising costs. Do we see the police out and about.. no we don't while there drinking tea and coffee an the station. I am absolutely against this rise
No	Will it improve the police response to crime?
No	How many additional officers for Telford and Wrekin. What percentage of the 1 million pound in crime prevention would Telford and Wrekin get. Your figures are very vague?
No	Police services have had significant rises in recent years. There should be a much greater emphasis on efficiency savings. It looks like a poorly managed service.
No	Need to look at reducing waste, using resources to protect community less historic investigation 20 years ago is less important than now
No	Cost of living crisis. Conservative PCC should be looking at efficiency savings rather than tax increases
No	There need to be more police on the streets not in offices or using computers. There need to be proper phone lines to report crimes not just computers, which prevent many people from reporting crimes.
No	There seems to be plenty of police persecuting motorists with speed traps in Shrewsbury, London Rd, Wenlock Rd , Sutton Rd etc. But nothing done about cyclists riding dangerously on pedestrian walkways, no hands , on one wheel , using a mobile phone etc. Or the illegal use of electric scooters on pavements and roads. If the existing police officers got out of their cars and walked around they would notice these things, oh and also be able to spot people openly smoking Cannabis on the streets.
No	Review the judicial system, enforce tougher sentencing of offenders and channel proceeds from crime to pay for more officers. This is something higher earners will be paying for when those on low income will contribute nothing and invariably, they are the ones committing crime - either to make ends meet or escape reality by taking drugs and feeding their habit. I work hard to support my family, not to be penalised to pay more for a corrupt police service.
No	Get police officers back on the beat , never see any always in cars Use all the drug money to foot your bill - I feel we are paying for a service which consists of a phone call and crime number
No	You need to provide evidence that truce is 100% efficient before asking for increased contributions. I sadly expect this increase to be used for payrises I too haven't had one for 10 years

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No	I am a pensioner, council tax is already far too high in relation to the pension I receive. You should ask the government for more funds.
No	save money by getting rid of the police commissioners role, no need for them or their entourage of staff, use their massive salary to pay for bobbies. i can't afford another 4% rise, where is that money coming from on top of everything else that is going up. absolutely ridiculous
No	Police have enough funding from the government ect. Why should we the people pay when police are breaking laws and acting wholly unprofessional. For example recent reports of police being dismissed for their online behaviour or those officers taking Pictures of dead bodies. Maybe concentrate on properly background checking current staff instead of asking tax payers to substitute more police officers.
No	I have no more money to gift you
No	Increase after Increase but never any improvements in the service given!
No	Your financial plan for increased funding should be directed to Central Government. This Conservative Government has slashed public services since 2010 & must now provide the financial support to enable fit for purpose services.
No	Not enough policemen in any area. Great shortage of police and not enough funding given for police recruitment. The public are being ignored and forgotten. You have no idea of how ordinary people live and what their needs are. We deserve better than what you are giving us.
No	Complete lack of Policing in Rural areas so why pay more for nothing?
No	I live in a village....there is no crime. The money will only go to bigger towns in west mercia to cover the cost of their policing.
No	At a time when households are already feeling the squeeze on fund due to rising energy prices, high levels of inflation and with a national insurance tax rise looming in the near future, a rise to council tax is going to be even more punishing whilst many are already struggling.
No	Cost of living for residents mean we have to all budget
No	We are already facing a hefty rise in local tax as well as in etc. So no I am not in favour of having to pay even more when local authority social care is being squeezed along with other services and a council using up its last of reserves. My wage is not increasing that much, more like a wage cut in real terms yet again.
No	Police are doing nothing about crime pcsos are useless in South Shropshire crime is at it highest and nothings done about it. But you can sit people in vans and do them for speeding. I don't agree with speeding at all but surely crime comes first
No	No increase untill the ppolice hes got do there job.
No	Reduce time police spend tackling non crime.
No	Rather than serve the community, West Mercia Police is self serving. It needs root and branch reform. Just adding a few more officers will achieve nothing until you change, fundamentally, your approach. The public perception is poor, officers sat in big cars, slurping coffee and eating McDonalds. And, perception is reality. Totally opposed to more money on a non-performing service.
No	More police is a good thing!
Yes	Tiny increase. I would have supported a greater council tax increase 9n order to mitigate the increase in anti-social behaviour issues in Worcester area.
Yes	Exactly what the public are asking for.
Yes	Carry on with the excellent work
Yes	Community policing is essential to dealing with antisocial behaviour and this investment proposal makes excellent sense.
No	The increase of 125 officers needs to be put into context of number of officers exiting or expected to exit the force over the proposed budget timeframe.
Yes	Carry on keeping us informed
No	I don't believe that increasing the amount from citizens in the area will deliver a better service
Yes	More police ... more visible in our community

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No	They should reduce other areas of tax,where as the council has said itself we will soon be paying for even less services than we are now ,which is bad enough ,i can not understand how people can be expected to be charged more and more for which will soon be nothing in return ,the way this country is heading at the moment .
Yes	It's a fantastic initiative. Thankyou
No	we have not had a payrise - inflation is rising, so food is more expensive, a national insurance rise and energy bills are soaring. For god sake help us a little! freeze council tax!!
Yes	We need to ensure the police have the technology they need to deal with a changing world
Yes	It's important police have the resources they need. I want to see more collaboration with other agencies to solve the difficult problems. More data driven.
No	Record and energy prices, an increase in National Insurance, and now increasing Council Tax. Perhaps, we should all turn to crime as it seem that it will be the only way for a working person to finance it all?!
No	Reduce your footprint - too many under-utilised buildings - make some capital and revenue savings.
No	Manage your money better.
No	I support the investment in community policing but do not agree with increasing the policing element of council tax for the forthcoming financial year when it is going to be a struggle for many households to make ends meet.
No	Perhaps you and your deputy should take a pay cut like every other public sector worker. I honestly don't know what you do but it seems to be a lot of nothing for quite a lot of money!!
No	The increases you have had over the past few years are astronomically high when compared to earnings increases.
No	We pay enough as it is
No	When the cost of living is spiralling dramatically as a family with young children, one of whom is disabled, our household budget is squeezed despite both of us being employed as degree educated key workers (one NHS and one children's social care) we need to count the pennies. Look for efficiency savings instead of increasing the costs to families like ours please. We do appreciate the work of the police but cannot afford to pay more.
Yes	Seems reasonable.
No	Looking at how many times you have increased your share of council tax in this year of great hardship it is time to stop. Perhaps you and your deputy may wish to reflect on annual wages whilst others struggle to choose between eating or heating.
No	It's abhorrent to increase the police part of the council tax yet again when there are very real reductions in the number of police and the crimes that they even respond to. Prove to us that our money is well managed as your salary alone is unacceptable.
No	No evidence that you will actually do anything about crime.
No	The 125 extra police officer is a false representation as these are students are not on shift regularly and cannot commit to their investigations as regular, standard police officers who are in permanent roles. WMP get paid for these extra student officers so cannot understand why the council tax is increasing either. Honesty and integrity please PCC.
Yes	I welcome the introduction of additional police. In order to increase "visible" policing, has consideration been made to an uplift in staff for back office functions and civilian roles to support frontline officers? Providing new support staff roles will enable officers to cut admin time and increase visibility/proactive / preventative functions
Yes	Normally I would not support an increase in taxes, but I have been impressed with the developments in the police in recent years with body cameras, help with speeding, and much better communications so residents are updated when criminals have been caught. So happy to support this increase this year but please aim to have zero increase next year.

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Yes	I now live outside John's area but agree with his principles, especially as they apply to rural areas.
Yes	He's doing an excellent job and I'm pleased to support.
Yes	The more police we have the better as it will be a more safer area to live in
Yes	Keep the good work
No	1400 people responding out a population of over 1 million people is not representative.
Yes	Great Work from PCC Would like to easier ways to contact Local Police Offers on a 1-1 basis
Yes	As long it is put into frontline policing, with updating kit, vehicles and providing officers with further training.
No	Cost of living is High, I'll refuse to pay the increase
No	The police get enough money as it is.
No	Let's see an independent review if west Mercia police efficiency before giving them more money
Yes	Would be great to see an increased presence in Worcester City Centre.
No	It would be interesting to know when you want the 'extra' officers to be in role by and how many officers have retired/left by this time - will it actually equate to 'extra' officers or just covering the leavers/retirees
No	Along with all of the other increases we are facing at the moment which are going to make life very difficult for many of us over the coming months you are asking too much. I am a reliant on the state pension alone although I was a nurse for thirty years my house needs a lot of work doing to it and I am struggling to manage that. I am 78 and have never been so poor. There are many with young children too who are even worse off I ask you to cut it to 2% as the fire service have done. Please.
No	We need more officers on the front line available to respond to incoming reports.
No	We pay enough already and the officers should receive more pay if anything rather than more people.
No	We require more investment in our "back office" services especially IT infrastructure within West Mercia. Officers have their time wasted by poor and outdated systems - you could hire additional officers who will all struggle with the systems we have, or spend some money sorting problem systems like SAAB and Athena that will make everyone more productive (and help stop more crime through greater understanding of the problem, rather than just more boots on the ground)
No	The cost of living and inflation at a record highs, and now an increase in council tax. Shame we can't go back to the days of the Police Authority which was ran by unpaid volunteers, or perhaps, the Commissioner could take a pay cut to help fund his ideas?
No	I believe that West Mercia Police are in breach of many data regulations including GDPR and certainly are failing MoPI regulations in terms of retention of data - My sources tell me that WMP currently is unable to guarantee that it is not storing personal data that it should not be holding on individuals and has not invested in resource and systems in order to resolve this. A 2020 audit by the ICO highlighted many failings with the forces data management which is not being resolved. Dangerous!
Yes	Great to see further investment into the police.
No	We already pay enough for policing. I cannot justify the rise when all they do is sit in the police station. All you are is a reactive force and not proactive
No	Absolutely no need to increase this levy. Work with what you have, like everyone has done...