

Budget Consultation 2024/25 - Summary

1. Background

- 1.1. The budget consultation ran in a two-stage process.
- 1.2. To understand the priorities of residents and help inform the PCC prior to firming up his draft budget proposals for 2024/25, public consultation was undertaken through community engagement events. The events took place during six months throughout the summer period.
- 1.3. The PCC followed this up by carrying out a survey, specifically on the draft precept and budget proposals. This consultation launched on the 7th December 2023 and ended at 12am on the 7th January 2024. A precept proposal, the Proposed Budget 2024/25 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024/25–2028/29 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, views from over 1900 residents were received. Approximately 1000 people were spoken to as part of the community engagement event and 915 were in response to the survey.

2. Publicity and media coverage

- 2.1. A range of communication tools were used to promote both the events and the survey consultation to communities across West Mercia. These included:
- 2.2. *Social media:* Press releases and consultation links were shared via the West Mercia PCC Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn pages for events and the survey on launch and throughout. Accompanying graphics were used to replace existing banners on both social media accounts.
- 2.3. 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.
- 2.4. *Press release/media:* A number of press releases were issued for the survey. Regularly issued PCC Newsletters highlighted that the survey was open, and encouraged people to take part during the period each was open. This was covered by a number of different media outlets.
- 2.5. The Neighbourhood Matters platform also saw the events and consultation promoted directly to thousands of residents.
- 2.6. Community engagement across all of West Mercia was undertaken to encourage more people to complete the survey with visits to each of the local policing areas.

3. Findings

- 3.1. Set out below are the findings from both stages of engagement activity to inform the budget and precept setting.

4. Community Engagement Events

- 4.1. Ahead of developing the budget for 2024/25, the PCC attended a number of community events across West Mercia including freshers' fairs attended by students to engage with communities and understand public priorities/concerns. These events were attended by the PCC, Deputy PCC or Assistant PCC and supported by staff from the PCC's Office.
- 4.2. Residents were asked to identify their top three priorities from a list.

Demographics

- 4.3. In total, over 1000 people took part.
- 4.4. The summer events attended took place across Worcestershire, Shropshire and Herefordshire.

Engagement findings

- 4.5. People visiting the PCC's stall at events were asked to identify their top three policing priorities.
- Road Safety, Violence against women and girls (VAWG) and accessibility and visibility of police officer were ranked as the top three priorities.
- 4.6. The PCC took these findings into account and used them in the development of the draft budget. This budget delivers a further 10 officers, taking West Mercia's establishment to 2,506, the highest establishment number on record in the force. Safer Neighbourhood teams will be protected through fewer abstractions to be focused on neighbourhood policing and addressing key community concerns.
- 4.7. This extends to making sure funding is also focussed on commissioning victim services and crime prevention. This budget includes provision to ensure victim services in West Mercia can cope with demand and provide the right support at the right times, to enable people to cope and recover. Working with partners funding will also be targeted at initiatives that deliver effective prevention and community problem solving. 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. Budget Consultation Survey

- 4.8. To 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 up to 3 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

- 4.9. A total of 915 responses were received. A breakdown of respondents by council tax area is shown below.

31% (283) South Worcestershire
25% (228) Shropshire
23% (212) North Worcestershire
11% (96) Herefordshire
10% (95) Telford and Wrekin

- 4.10. A number of additional demographic questions were asked as part of this survey to further understand those who are engaging with PCC media.

- Around 50% of respondents were male, 40% were female, 9% preferred not to say and 1% said other.
- Almost 36% of respondents were aged 61 to 80, 26%, aged 46 to 60, 20% between 31 and 45, 7% between 18 and 30, 8% preferred not to say and the remaining 3% were aged 80+.
- The majority (88%) of respondents were White/English/British/Other, 10% preferred not to say with the remaining 2% split between Mixed Ethnic Background, Asian/Asian British, Black/African/Caribbean/Black British and Other Ethnic Group.

Consultation findings

- 4.11. The second survey asked whether respondents would be willing to pay, on average, £5.26* (1.99%) more for policing per year based on a band D property. The majority of respondents, 75%, supported this proposed increase, whilst the remaining 25% did not.
- 4.12. Those that showed support to the first question were asked if they were willing to pay £13 (4.91%) more for policing per year based on a band D property. Again, around 75% responded yes whilst the remaining 25% said no.

- 4.13. Those that agreed to the maximum increase of 4.91% account for 56% of total respondents.
- 4.14. When asked if they had any further comments, 464 respondents chose to respond. A summary of all the comments are 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

- 4.15. The main themes arising from the comments were:
- 4.16. Financial concerns/increase in cost of living – a number of people made a finance related comment, many were concerned about other household price increases, the perception that additional funding should come from government and how effectively the budget was spent. The size and cost of the PCC team was also raised by some.
- 4.17. Officer numbers/Police visibility – The comments were generally from those who remain concerned about a perceived lack of police presence. There was some reference to the need for police staff in roles to support operational policing.
- 4.18. Police response/action- Comments were generally from those who remained concerned about a perceived lack of police action to incidents. Some reference to specific issues, namely rural crime, road safety, drugs and ASB.
- 4.19. General support – a number of those supporting the proposals just left a positive comment which did not align with any of the main themes.
- 4.20. Miscellaneous comments – a number of respondents both for and against the proposals left a comment which does not directly fit into the above themes.

5. Commissioner's response to the comments received

- 5.1. Within the 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.
- 5.2. Financial concerns/ increase in cost of living – My mission for the communities of West Mercia remains unchanged, despite the financial challenges the nation continues to face.
- 5.3. I am committed to ensuring that crime falls, offenders are brought swiftly to justice and victims get the support they need. I will ensure that every penny of your money is spent wisely.

- 5.4. As set out in my budget proposals, I will use all the powers available to me to support and challenge the Chief Constable to ensure you feel and see the full benefits of my investment.
- 5.5. Understanding the experience, you receive from the force impacts your confidence in the police, I am putting more investment into police contact so 999 and 101 calls are answered more quickly. I also want to see officers being evermore visible and accessible, with numbers reaching a record-breaking 2,506 and improvements to investigation quality to ensure victims of crime get the justice they deserve.
- 5.6. Officer numbers/Police visibility – I have, as I promised, taken the views of the public to shape this budget proposal.
- 5.7. I am committed to building a Safer West Mercia and I am committed to delivering on the public's priorities to increase police visibility and accessibility in their communities. Therefore, through my budget, I am increasing officer numbers by a further 10. This will take West Mercia's establishment to a total of 2,506 officers. I have delivered record levels of officers and it's now about maintaining those numbers and ensuring they're tackling your priorities.
- 5.8. Examples of the incredible work being done in the community to tackle crime with an increase in officer numbers has been seen through the Neighbourhood Crime Fighting Teams. These bespoke units were created through the uplift I provided in my previous budget and they have been working hard to tackle matters such as ASB and retail crime at the heart of the community.
- 5.9. Through this uplift, I can also protect SNT numbers, which will reduce the levels of abstractions so local officers can stay in the heart of the community.
- 5.10. I want the public to benefit from my investment and I will ensure these officers are providing the security that residents need in order to build a safer West Mercia.
- 5.11. Although I am reassured by the work West Mercia Police is already doing to improve their service, I acknowledge that more can always be done to improve. I want to ensure that through my budget, public confidence and trust in the police force continues to increase.
- 5.12. Police response/action - As your voice in policing, I am confident that through my budget I will continue on my journey to build a safer West Mercia.
- 5.13. Understanding the service you receive impacts your confidence in the police and I am therefore investing in the 101 and 999 service to ensure your calls are answered as quickly as possible.
- 5.14. The face-to-face contact you have with your local policing team is also vitally important. Although progress on this has been made, with my investment in the Neighbourhood Crime Fighting Teams who have been working at the heart of

communities to tackle and prevent crime, I believe more can be done to make officers more visible and accessible to you.

- 5.15. Victims of crime should always be given the support they need and deserve when they contact the police to ensure they have access to the resources they need to recover from the trauma inflicted upon them. I will continue to invest and commission these services to ensure they are available for everyone who needs to access them.
- 5.16. Through this work and more that will be done, I will continue to support the force prioritising the greatest possible proportion of resource towards frontline policing and ultimately, delivering the best for communities.