



## **Open Letter on the Council Tax Precept for 2020-21**

One of my most important responsibilities as your Police and Crime Commissioner is setting the police budget for the year ahead. My priority is maintaining an effective force that keeps people safe whilst ensuring an efficient use of tax-payers' money.

It is paramount to continue to protect frontline police officer numbers, and that the Chief Constable has sufficient resources to tackle crime and prevent people becoming victims. Running Hertfordshire Constabulary costs just over £200m a year, with almost 60 per cent of this coming from Central Government funding, and the remainder being raised by the Policing Precept part of your Council Tax bill.

I have discretion to lower the Precept, keep it the same or increase it. This decision is made by balancing what you, the public, want your police service to look like against how much you want to pay for it. The budget must also take into account national operational policing demands put on the service and fulfilling the priorities of my [Community Safety and Criminal Justice Plan 'Everybody's Business' 2019-2024](#).

Earlier this year I increased the precept by £2-a-month for the average (Band D) property, promising it would pay for an extra 75 frontline police officers. This successful recruitment drive is on schedule to be delivered. I am pleased that Hertfordshire residents are already seeing the benefits of increased officer numbers which went over 2,000 for the first time since 2011. In addition to this, Hertfordshire will also benefit from an additional 91 officers coming in the year ahead as the first part of central government's uplift of 20,000 police officers nationally.

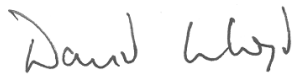
Prudent financial management means that as a Hertfordshire resident, you pay the fourth lowest Council Tax Precept out of the 42 police forces in England and Wales. We have maintained this while also keeping crime levels amongst the lowest when compared to our most similar forces. Low crime rates and low tax are a major reason why Hertfordshire Constabulary is one of the most efficient and effective forces in the country. According to the Crime Survey for England and Wales (2019) 83.9 per cent of residents think Hertfordshire police are doing "a good or excellent job" and the recent formal inspection rated the force as "good" in all areas.

Due to the General Election there is a delay in the confirmation of the level of central government funding for 2020/2021, the uplift to the funding for new officers, and the flexibility to raise the precept until January 2020. Therefore at this stage I am not able to give you the usual full information on my proposed budget, but I am giving you as much as I can.

Should I be given the flexibility to raise the Council Tax Precept, I am minded to do so in such a way that provides certainty to the Constabulary and avoids cuts when we are working to expand the force. I expect I will be able to do this whilst remaining within the referendum limits set by the government.

It's a positive year, as we know that there is an increase in funding for additional officers, but that does also come with additional costs. Hertfordshire is getting a significantly larger police force and the costs of running it will go up proportionately. There are also the standstill pressures, including inflation and statutory pay rises that need to be budgeted for.

So my plan this year is to increase the precept to meet the pressures that are coming through rather than to seek cuts, but I want to hear what you have to say. When we get the final figures from the Government I will give more detail on my proposals. In the meantime I want to hear your views and comments to help me determine whether this is the right strategy for Hertfordshire.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Lloyd". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'D'.

**David Lloyd**  
**Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire**

### Report on Police Precept Consultation 2020/21

#### Introduction

Every year, as your Police and Crime Commissioner, I have issued an Open Letter ahead of setting the police element of Council Tax precept. This sets out my principles and thoughts on the level of the precept and seeks to gather feedback from the public on what they think about my proposal. This year presented a series of challenges. Due to the timings of the General Election in December 2019, there has not been the usual notification from the Home Secretary confirming the level of Central Government funding for 2020/2021 (including the level of funding to support the uplift of new police officers) and the degree of flexibility around setting the precept. Confirmation of these was not received at the point at which it was necessary for me to consult with constituents given the statutory budget setting timetable. Therefore, I have been unable to supply constituents with the usual full information on the proposed budget as has been in previous years.

In the Open Letter I outlined my proposal to raise the police element of council tax precept should I be given the flexibility to do so whilst remaining with the referendum limits stipulated by the government. I stated my desire to increase the precept to meet the pressures that are coming rather than to seek cuts at a time when Hertfordshire is getting a significantly larger police force and the costs of running it will go up proportionately. There are also standstill pressures including inflation and statutory pay rises that need to be budgeted for. In the Open Letter I notified constituents that once I received the necessary information from the Government that I would share more details on my proposals.

#### Methodology

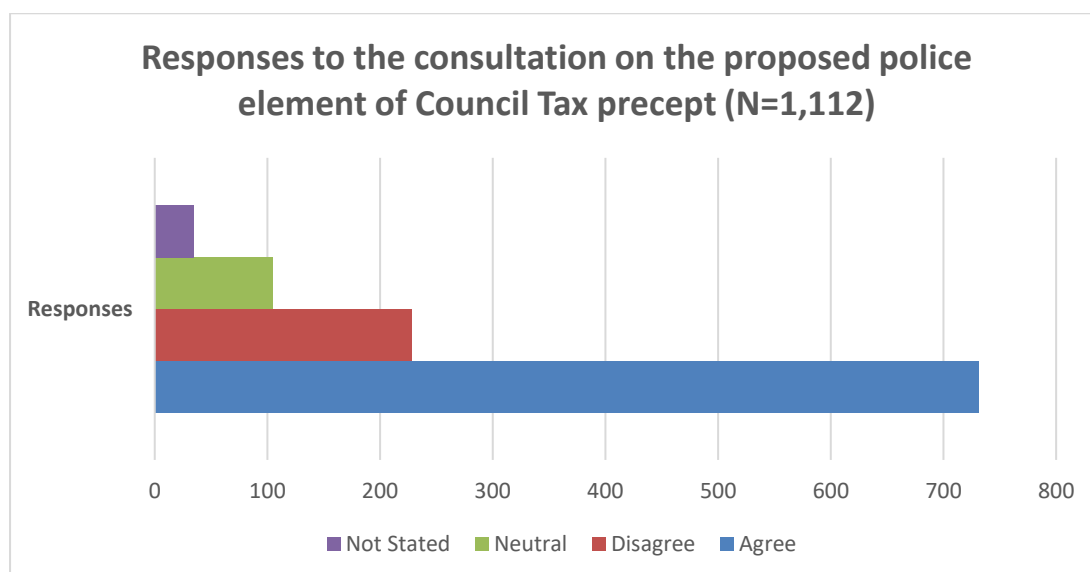
On 19<sup>th</sup> December 2019, my Open Letter was circulated through the following channels:

- Hertfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner's website:  
<https://www.hertscommissioner.org/public-consultation>
- On-line Watch Link (OWL) network to 137,500 residents and businesses across the county
- Partners websites:
  - The Hertfordshire Association of Parish and Town Councils website (700 Parish and Town Councillors): <https://www.haptc.org.uk/news/2019/12/what-do-parish-town-and-community-councillors-and-residents-think-about-the-policing-budget>
  - Wheathampstead Council - <http://wheathampstead-pc.gov.uk/what-do-you-think-about-the-policing-budget/>
- Press Releases to local newspapers
- Social media (Twitter and Facebook) on Hertfordshire Constabulary and Hertfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner.

Throughout the 21 day consultation period to 9<sup>th</sup> January 2020, the precept consultation on Twitter had 10,088 impressions and 311 engagements. My Facebook post on the precept reached 15,695 and had 727 engagements. The Open Letter was viewed on my website 6,526 times and its associated press release has 1,053 page views. The Open Letter also received relatively good coverage across the county given that I was unable to give a definitive figure or costs specified on the proposed raise:

- **Bishop Stortford Independent Online:** (23rd December 2019) <https://www.bishopstortfordindependent.co.uk/news/herts-police-chief-ponders-another-council-tax-rise-to-fund-yet-more-officers-9094614/>
- **Ware Online:** <https://www.wareonline.co.uk/?id=44> (27<sup>th</sup> December 2019)
- **Welwyn Hatfield Times** - <https://www.whtimes.co.uk/news/david-lloyds-plans-for-new-police-budget-for-2020-2021-1-6458597> (9th January 2020)
- **St Albans Herts Advertise** - <https://www.hertsad.co.uk/news/david-lloyds-plans-for-new-police-budget-for-2020-2021-1-6458597> (9th January 2020)
- **Stevenage Comet:** <https://www.thecomet.net/news/david-lloyds-plans-for-new-police-budget-for-2020-2021-1-6458597> (9th January 2020)
- **Watford Observer:** Police and Crime Commissioner could ask for council tax rise (24<sup>th</sup> January 2020)
- **St Albans & Harpenden Review-** <http://edition.pagesuite-professional.co.uk/html5/reader/production/default.aspx?pubname=&pubid=684d3920-eb54-44d3-8f56-56cc53a1d03d> (29<sup>th</sup> January 2020)

For the first year I utilised an online short survey to help the public to provide a quick response as to whether they supported my proposal, were opposed to it or remained neutral with the option of providing a short comment. This proved very popular and was responded to by 1,023 constituents. This was in addition to the normal dedicated “My Views” email address or postal option which received 89 responses. In total from both survey channels, I received 1,112 responses from constituents and councillors. The Chief Constable, Charlie Hall and his Chief Officers were also consulted on my outline proposals subject to confirmation, and are in agreement that an increase in the precept is required to meet the necessary costs.



## **Summary of the Feedback**

### **In favour of an increased precept**

Approximately two thirds (65 per cent) of those who responded (731) said they were in favour of an increase in the police element of council tax precept. Of those who left comments the majority showed general contentment with policing across the county and valued local policing, but argued strongly for police officer visibility to be strengthened. There was a feeling from those responding from smaller villages and rural areas that local policing had taken a downturn and that there has been a withdrawal from the streets. Many reported feeling pleased that the Government had pledged to bring in 20,000 police officers across the country, but felt that using a proportion of the precept to help pay for the necessary support in new officers was not something they had understood would need to be found locally.

The second most common theme amongst the group who agreed was a demand for a greater focus on low-level, localised and petty crime. More than 10 respondents highlighted this issue and gave examples of crimes including parking offences, fly-tipping, littering and shoplifting. There seemed to be an acceptance that high-level crime carries significant importance but that local communities were being overlooked and the crimes which affect everyday life were going unpunished. A number of respondents also stated their support for the increase due to the work that had been achieved around cybercrime and fraud. Five respondents stated that future funding should focus on tackling fraud, whilst acknowledging the good work that has already been done to tackle and deal with the issue.

A smaller, but not insignificant number of respondents in support of an increase in the policing element of council tax precept related this to the need to build resilience and staff retention levels. There was a recognition that police officers are not expendable resources and that there is a need to look after the welfare of officers given the increasing demands. One respondent was keen for any increase in the precept to be spent on building capacity in the workforce particularly with Detectives who have a high level of responsibility dealing with major offences.

There was also a number of respondents who felt that every police force should have the ability to raise their own funds to help pay their bills and supplement what the police and Government pay. Respondents felt that police forces should be able to charge all offenders who are taken into a police station in a police vehicle after being drunk or violent to police officers in the course of their duty the sum of £100 payable at the police station for the use of the transport. In doing so, police forces would be able to make up the shortfall in funding. Similarly, some residents were in favour of villagers pooling contributions to pay for overall better security like CCTV to help prevent crime.

### **Opposed the precept increase**

Of the 228 respondents who expressed their disagreement with my proposal to raise the precept related to the perception that there was too few police officers on the street and the lack of open police stations across the county. Many reported not having seen police officers walking around their local neighbourhood for a long time and therefore argued that an increase could not be justified. Moreover, around 20 respondents noted that it was difficult for them to accept another precept rise as it comes following two consecutive year rises and felt that it should be central

Government that provides the increased funding. Some respondents noted that previous years increases had gone above any inflationary increase and they were aware that there had been an increase in the council tax base following the increase of new houses across the county and therefore felt that it was hard to justify an increase this year. There was also a feeling from five respondents that seeking an increase from residents creates a view from Central Government of increased self-sufficiency. That proportionately, central funding will reduce, or at the very least Hertfordshire Constabulary would receive a reduced proportion of the investment promised than might otherwise have been afforded.

### **Remaining neutral**

105 respondents stated they remained neutral on the position of the proposed increase. Of those who left comments, some respondents stated that they were unable to give an opinion on whether they were in favour of a rise to the council tax precept as they sought clarification as to what I was proposing. Many were unclear on the benefits of any proposed increase and said that they required further information on how and where the money would be spent.

### **General observations and other priorities**

Throughout the consultation, a high number of respondents also took the opportunity to share their views, concerns and ideas with me, some relating to crime and policing, but others very broad. These included:

- How County Councillors spend their locality budget.
- The introduction of a mobile camera van to detect traffic violations around Watford.
- That police facilities in Hoddesdon, Berkhamsted and Hitchin were no longer as accessible to the public as they would like.
- The perception of a reduced police presence in Abbots Langley and the need for CCTV.

These are all helpful points to note which I intend to raise with the relevant authorities and responsible officers so they are aware of them and your concerns are listened to. Thank you to those respondents who took the time to feedback their thoughts on my proposal for the 2020/21 police precept.

Following the end of the consultation, I received confirmation on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2020 from government on Hertfordshire's policing settlement. It represented a very positive settlement for Hertfordshire, what many might term 'transformational'. It is the biggest funding increase in a decade. The government also granted PCCs flexibility to make a small increase in the precept - £10.00 a year for the average (Band D) household. The government has urged PCCs to make use of that flexibility to maximise the additional investment in policing and I believe it is right to do so and that it is supported by the public. It is vital in three years' time with a substantially bigger force that it is properly resourced.

In response to the financial situation and what respondents told me through the consultation process, I am proposing to increase the police precept by the maximum amount of £10.00 per annum for the average (Band D) household. This equates to 83p per month and will generate £4.531m in additional income.