

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY
DATE: 15TH FEBRUARY 2023
REPORT OF: DIRECTOR OF GOVERNANCE
AUTHOR: ANDREW LEADBETTER

SUBJECT: 2023-24 BUDGET (PRECEPT) CONSULTATION

Purpose of Report

1. This report provides details about the Budget (Precept) Consultation.

Recommended: That

- [1] Members consider the responses to the Consultation when determining the Council Tax Precept for 2023-24

Background

2. The Government announced a £5 referendum principle on Band D bills for all fire and rescue authorities in the Local Government Finance Settlement. This happened after the Fire Authority had met in December. However, Members had authorised officers to consult on a £5 increase on a Band D property

Information

3. The Consultation was carried out online and ran from 22nd December 2022 to 23rd January 2023. Appendix 1 to this report shows the information that was published on the Service's website. The consultation was featured prominently on the Service's website, intranet and social media channels. In addition, a press release was issued to mark the launch of the Consultation and two reminders were sent via the Neighbourhood Alert System, encouraging responses from the 18,000 subscribers to the platform.
4. A total of 627 respondents completed the online survey, which asked to what extent respondents supported the proposed increase. Overall, 60.5% of respondents stated they either strongly support or support the proposal (strongly support 35.41%; support 25.04%), compared to 30.5% who said that they either opposed or strongly opposed (opposed 10.85%; strongly opposed 19.62%) an increase of £5.00. A further 9% stated that they neither supported nor opposed the increase, or did not know.
5. The survey also asked respondents to provide any additional comments if they wished to. A total of 339 free text comments were provided. These are attached to this report as Appendix 2.

6. A summary of comments is provided below:

59 comments stated support for the proposed increase.

20 comments suggested that the respondent felt that the proposed increase was relatively small or that the fire and rescue service is an important service that requires to be fully funded.

18 respondents commented that central government should provide more funding to the Authority.

26 respondents commented on their opposition to the proposed increase.

55 comments from respondents highlighted the cost-of-living crisis and questioned whether an increase would be affordable for them.

34 respondents commented that before seeking an increase in the precept, the Authority should first consider further savings.

24 comments indicated that the Authority should focus its funding on its core statutory duties.

11 comments related to support for fair pay amongst firefighters or fire staff.

37 comments were made that were general in nature and a further 47 respondents said that they had no further comments to make.

Financial Implications

7. The financial implications associated with any council tax precept increase are considered in the budget report that appears later on the agenda. A £5 increase in the council tax precept represents a 6.06% uplift from the council tax precept for 2022-23.

Legal Implications

8. The Authority must determine its precept by the middle of February. It should consult and must take the responses to any consultation into account in reaching its decision on the council tax precept.

Equality and Diversity Implications

9. There are no equality and diversity implications.

Environmental Implications

10. There are no environmental implications.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS: NONE