

# CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

**MEETING OF:** CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY  
**DATE:** 14 FEBRUARY 2024  
**REPORT OF:** HEAD OF COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT  
**AUTHOR:** GRAEME WORRALL

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**SUBJECT:** 2024-2025 BUDGET (PRECEPT) CONSULTATION

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## Purpose of Report

1. This report provides details about the 2024-2025 Budget (Precept) Consultation.

## Recommended:

- [1] That Members consider the responses to the Consultation when determining the Council Tax Precept for 2024-2025.

## Background

2. Members approved a consultation on the proposed level of precept for 2024-2025 at the meeting of the Authority on 6 December 2023.

## Consultation Feedback

3. The consultation was held between 5 and 26 January 2024 and was in the form of an online survey which asked to what extent respondents supported the Authority's proposed increase in precept of 2.99% for 2024/2025. The survey outlined the 2.99% increase in monetary terms for each council tax band so consultees were able to relate the proposal to their own household.
4. The survey was promoted via a press release, on the Service's social media channels and through direct email using the Service's Neighbourhood Alert system.
5. A total of 448 respondents took part in the consultation. This comprised of 375 members of the public, 18 members of staff, 10 business owners and one partner organisation (the Cheshire Association of Local Councils).
6. 65.18% of respondents expressed support for the proposed increase, compared to 23.21% who opposed. A further 11.61% of respondents either stated they neither supported nor opposed the increase, or did not know.

7. Consultees were able to provide free text comments to express their opinion. 216 comments were provided. Of these, 73 stated support for the increase, with reasons including a view that the requested amount is small in monetary terms and that the Authority provides a vital service that needs to be properly funded. Other comments also called for more funding to be provided from central government.
8. Fifty comments stated opposition to the proposed increase. Most of these cited the impact of the cost of living on being able to afford higher levels of council tax, as well as the cumulative effect of year-on-year increases and proposed rises from other authorities. Other comments suggested that the Authority should instead look to make savings within its existing budget. Seven respondents called for a reduction in senior officers salaries and to concentrate spending on core functions instead of what they viewed as unnecessary spending.
9. There were 27 comments which referred to the fire cover proposals within the draft 2024-2028 Community Risk Management Plan. The majority of these comments state opposition to an increase in precept given the proposed removal of the second fire engine in Northwich.
10. A further 20 comments were provided which were more general in nature and not necessarily linked to the issue of the precept consultation.
11. Free text responses are provided in full in Appendix 1 to this report.

## **Financial Implications**

12. The financial implications associated with any council tax precept increase are considered in the budget report that appears later on the agenda.

## **Legal Implications**

13. 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**

14. There are no equalities implications.

## **Environmental Implications**

15. There are no environmental implications.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS: NONE**