

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY
DATE: 10 FEBRUARY 2021
REPORT OF: CHIEF FIRE OFFICER AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE
AUTHOR: GRAEME WORRALL

SUBJECT: 2021-2022 PRECEPT SURVEY

Purpose of Report

1. To provide Members with feedback from the survey regarding the proposed increase in the Authority's precept for the 2021/2022 financial year.

Recommended: That Members

- [1] Note the contents of the report in determining the Council Tax precept during consideration of Item 6 on the Agenda.

Background

2. The Authority is required to consult on its precept for the forthcoming financial year. Traditionally this activity has been undertaken in conjunction with a consultation on the draft Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP).
3. Given the recent approval and publication of the latest IRMP, covering the period to 2024, there was no requirement to consult on the IRMP this year. As a result of this it was decided to undertake a survey that focused exclusively on a proposal to increase the Council Tax precept for 2021/2022.

Information

4. The survey was launched on Monday 21 December 2020 and ran for just under five weeks until Thursday 28 January 2021. This was the period between the announcement of the Local Government Finance Settlement and preparation of the budget papers.
5. Given the restrictions in place regarding the Covid-19 pandemic, engagement around the 2021/2022 precept was undertaken using online methods only. Information on the precept, an explanation of the proposal and an overview of the way the Authority is funded were provided on the homepage of the Service's website and the intranet throughout the duration of the survey.

6. To raise awareness of the survey, a press release was issued to mark the launch and there were regular posts on the Service's social media platforms. In addition, a paid-for advertisement ran on the Service's Facebook account for the duration of the survey. The survey was also promoted on the Service's electronic Firelink newsletter, which is circulated to 18,478 readers across Cheshire.

Survey Results

7. The survey received a total of 484 responses. Of these, 475 were from residents of Cheshire.
8. The survey asked respondents to what extent they would support the Authority's proposed increase in its precept of 1.99% for 2021/2022. A total of 63.6% of respondents stated that they supported or strongly supported this, compared to 28.7% who opposed or strongly opposed an increase. A further 7.6% of respondents stated they neither supported nor opposed this increase.
9. The survey also asked for any additional comments, where respondents were able to provide free text responses. A total of 230 comments were received. Of these, 80 comments expressed support for an increase in the precept. Common themes within these responses were that the Service is a vital service that should be properly funded and that the increase of 1.99% is a small increase in monetary terms.
10. There were 92 comments which expressed opposition to increasing the precept. Common themes within these responses included the desire to increase the efficiency of the Service before considering an increase to the precept; the cumulative effect on bill payers of precept increases by several local authorities and the financial impact of Covid-19 on households.
11. The feedback report is attached to this report as Appendix 1 and gives a demographic profile of respondents and lists all the comments received via the survey.

Financial Implications

12. The survey concerns the precept, which is financial in nature. There was a small cost of £100 to deliver paid-for advertising on social media to raise awareness of the survey and encourage responses.

Legal Implications

13. Consulting on the proposed precept for the forthcoming financial year fulfils the Authority's legal requirements.

Equality and Diversity Implications

14. Officers aimed to encourage as diverse a response as possible. While the survey was held online, other methods of responding were available to use if required. Officers provided details of the survey to a wide range of community groups and encouraged them and their members to respond.

Environmental Implications

15. None.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS: NONE