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2020/21 Police Precept Consultation Summary

Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Warwickshire

Published: 27 January 2020

Precept Consultation 2019/20 Summary

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Introduction

The Police and Crime Commissioner launched his precept consultation on Tuesday 30 December 2019 and it ran until Friday 17 January 2020, a total time of four working weeks. This was a more compressed timetable than was desirable but one which could not be avoided, following on from the purdah period imposed ahead of the December general election.

The timing of the general election also meant the usual pre-Christmas announcement of the national police funding settlement was not achieved. Commencement of the consultation was accordingly delayed compared with previous years in the hope that the settlement may be received in a timely enough fashion to allow definitive precept options to be formulated. However, with this not materialising and, cognisant of the requirement to consult prior to setting a budget on February 3, 2020, the survey was launched with a simpler and more generic proposition to try and understand the public's general sentiment towards changes in precept levels.

In the event, the funding settlement was finally announced in Parliament on January 22, which would have been too late to conduct more detailed consultation ahead of the Police and Crime Panel's Budget Meeting on February 3, had we decided to wait for confirmation of the precept cap levels or core grants.

The consultation therefore sought feedback on three potential options:

- Option 1 – a freeze of the precept
- Option 2 – a rise of 4.99%
- Option 3 – a rise more than 4.99%

The 4.99% figure was calculated as being the level at which (with use of reserves and some efficiency savings) current levels of service position could be maintained, once factors such as inflation, officer training and recruitment costs and nationally set rises in police pay and employer pension liabilities were taken into account.

Consultation meetings were also held with key partners, local authorities, Members of Parliament and the business community, while comments and feedback were also received via email and through social media.

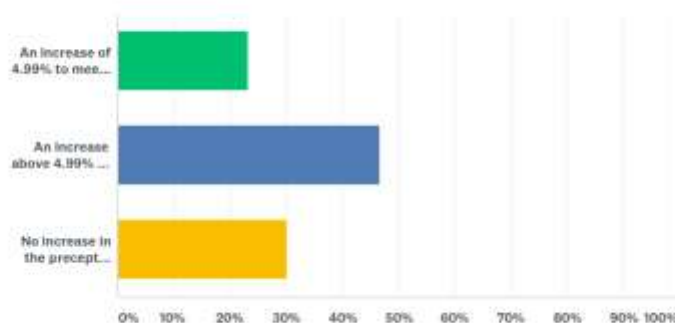
Despite the limitations in the information that could be presented to the public, the consultation still received good feedback, with just under 2,000 people taking the survey and opinions on preferred options being registered by more than 1,700.

1.0 Headline result

At its close on Thursday 17 January, the online survey had received 1,978 responses, with 1,817 of those responding identifying as being residents of Warwickshire.

216 people began the survey but did not complete it, meaning that views on the precept options were obtained from 1,762 individuals. Of those responding, 96.64% indicated they were council tax payers.

Q6 What option for changing the precept would you be willing to support in 2020/21?



Answer choice	Results	
An increase of 4.99%	23.27%	410
An increase of more than 4.99%	46.71%	823
No increase	30.02%	529
		Total: 1,762

Figures are broken down separately by area, police employee vs general public and by Warwickshire vs non-Warwickshire resident in Appendix A. All data sets show a general support of around 26-36% for a freeze, with the remainder supporting a raise of at least 4.99%. In all data sets, the highest support was for an above 4.99% increase

2.0 Summary of publicity

The survey was published on the OPCC website and featured prominently on the front page, public consultation and new pages. The following promotional activities were undertaken:

2.1 Media coverage

A launch press release was issued on December 30 and this was promoted on the website and OPCC social media channels. Coverage was received in:-

- Leamington/Warwick Courier, Rugby Advertiser, Kenilworth Weekly News, online, December 30;
- Police Oracle, online, December 30;
- Stratford/Leamington/Rugby Observer, online, January 2;

- Redditch & Alcester Standard, online, January 5;
- Stratford Herald, print, January 9;
- Rugby/Leamington Observer, print, January 9;
- Atherstone & Coleshill Herald, print, January 9;
- Stratford Observer, print, January 10;
- Leamington/Warwick Courier, print January 10;

A follow up media release, targeting Rugby and Nuneaton-based media to boost responses from these areas, was also sent on January 13, though no further online coverage was received. Difficulties in obtaining print copies of the Nuneaton News and Rugby Advertiser during the relevant time period mean that any articles included in hard copy but not online have been unable to be counted.

One further piece of online coverage was received regionally among Newsquest-owned titles, including the Worcester News, Redditch and Bromsgrove Advertisers and Hereford Times.

2.2 Social Media Promotion

Posts were placed on OPCC Twitter and Facebook accounts and a promotional campaign was paid for on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, encouraging people to complete the online survey. The following example from Facebook is an example of one of the paid promotions, which was also served up to Instagram:

The image shows a Facebook post from the Warwickshire PCC. The post header includes the Warwickshire PCC logo and the text "Warwickshire PCC" and "December 31, 2019 at 9:28 AM". The main text of the post reads: "Tell us your views on options for police funding in Warwickshire and the Police Precept." Below the text is a photograph of a man in a blue suit talking to a police officer in a black uniform with a checkered hat. At the bottom of the post, there is a "SURVEYMONKEY.CO.UK" logo, the text "Police Funding Survey", and a "Learn More" button.

The following results were achieved :

2.2.1 Facebook/Instagram

Paid ads ran for 17 days from December 30, targeted at audiences in Warwickshire aged 17 and over, with results paid on click through to the survey.

An audience of 29,527 users was reached, resulting in 698 click-throughs to the survey, 81 comments and 15 shares.

In addition, organic posts (i.e. not paid promotions) reached a further 9,696 Facebook users, 68 link clicks and 17 comments. A further 48 comments were made on sharings on these posts by users.

2.2.2 Twitter

A promoted tweet ran from January 9 to January 17 targeted at audiences in Warwickshire postcodes.

An audience of 17,820 was reached, generating 326 click-throughs to the survey and 13 likes:



A further organic tweet towards the end of the consultation period reached a further 1,016 users, but only generated a further 12 click-throughs to the survey and 1 like.

2.3 External promotion

A letter explaining the launch of the consultation and encouraging participation and requesting help in promoting the survey was shared with the Police and Crime Panel and elected members at County, District and Borough levels.

A similar circulation was made via WALC (Warwickshire & West Midlands Association of Local Councils) at parish and town council levels.

The offices of all five county MPs were similarly written to and encouraged to help with publicity of the survey.

Specific additional face-to-face briefings were held by the Commissioner and Chief Finance Officer for:

- County Members of Parliament – all six were invited to either attend in person or send a representative from their office. All did so, with the exception of the MP for Warwick & Leamington.
- Business and Agricultural sector representatives
- Local authority partners at county, district and borough level
- Police staff associations

2.4 Warwickshire Police

Internal messages encouraging staff to participate in the consultation were circulated on the intranet and from the Chief Constable.

A number of the force social media accounts re-posted the OPCC's tweets/posts.

2.5 Commissioner's Monthly Newsletter

Due to the timings of the consultation, it was not possible to include a promotion for the consultation within the newsletter, as it fell between editions. However, the consultation did receive 510 requests to be added to the newsletters distribution list, boosting the numbers that can now be engaged with on future consultations.

We are grateful to all those who helped to publicise the precept consultation and encourage people to respond.

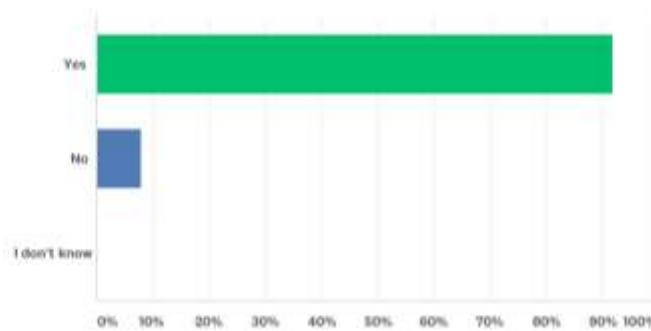
3.0 Online consultation survey results in detail

Data below is for all responses – figures broken down by district area, resident vs non-resident etc can be found in Appendix B.

3.1 Survey responses

Q1 – Are you a resident of Warwickshire?

Answered: 1,978 Skipped: 0

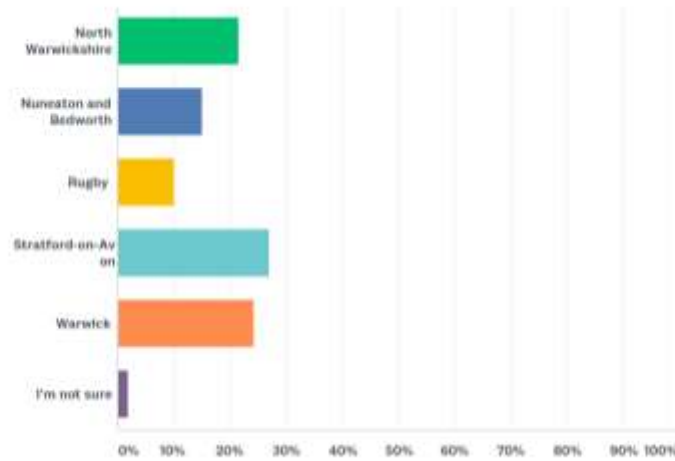


Answer choice	Result	
Yes	91.86%	1817
No	7.99%	158
I don't know	0.15%	3
		Total : 2,693

Those answering 'yes' proceeded to Q2, those answering 'no' skipped to Q3.

Q2 – Which district do you live in?

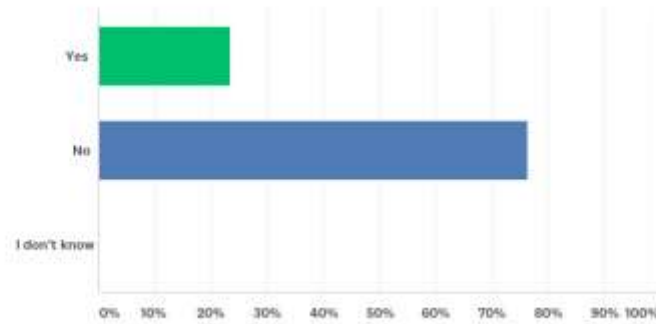
Answered: 1,815 Skipped: 163



Answer	Result	
North Warwickshire	21.60%	392
Nuneaton and Bedworth	15.10%	274
Rugby	10.08%	183
Stratford-on-Avon	26.94%	489
Warwick	24.30%	441
I'm not sure	1.98%	36
		Total: 1,815

Q3 - Do you work for Warwickshire Police?

Answered: 1,970 Skipped: 8

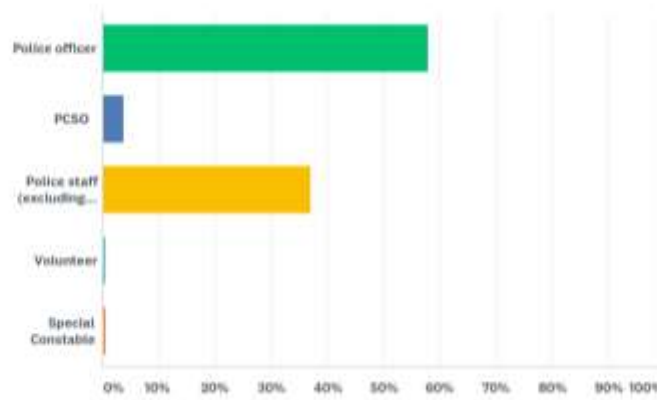


Answer choice	Percentage	Count
Yes	23.4%	461
No	76.45%	1,506
I don't know	0%	3
		Total : 1,970

Those answering 'yes' proceeded to Q4, those answering 'no' skipped to Q5.

Q4 – What role do you have?

Answered: 459 Skipped: 1,519

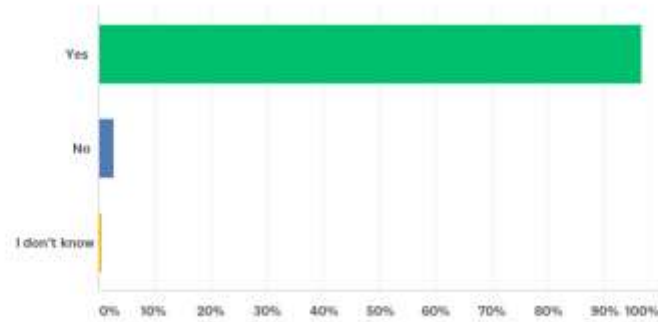


Answer	Result	
Police officer	57.95%	266
PCSO	3.70%	17
Member of police staff (excluding PCSO)	37.04%	170
Volunteer	0.65%	3
Special Constable	0.65%	3
		Total: 459

A comments field was also provided in this question, allowing people to provide additional information to describe their role. The majority were people who had answered as police staff indicating that they were also Special Constables (or vice versa), though one respondent indicated they were a scenes of crime officer, another was a healthcare professional and another clarified they were a police sergeant.

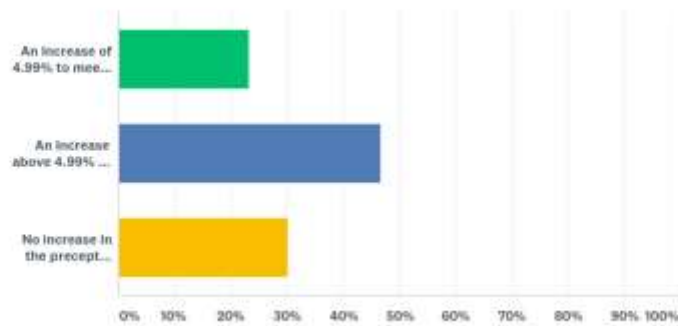
Q5 - Are you a Council Tax payer?

Answered: 1,963 Skipped: 15



Answer choice	Result	
Yes	96.64%	1,897
No	2.70%	53
I don't know	0.66%	13
		Total : 1,963

Q6 - What option for changing the precept would you be willing to support in 2020/21?



Answer choice	Results	
An increase of 4.99%	23.27%	410
An increase of more than 4.99%	46.71%	823
No increase	30.02%	529
		Total: 1,762

Q7 - Would you like to provide more information about your answer?

Answered: 686 Skipped: 1,293

A total of 1,202 individual comments were made, which can broadly be broken down into the following categories:

Can't afford a raise		7.45%	51
Comment regarding survey		4.53%	31
Confuses council role		3.21%	22
Get rid of PCCs		4.09%	28
Govt should pay		14.16%	97
Opposes raise		28.61%	196
Other issue		7.88%	54
Supportive of raise		30.36%	208
Supports tech investment		3.65%	25
Unclear		11.97%	82
Wants freeze		0.44%	3
Wants visible policing		14.16%	97

Note: comments could fit more than one category each and totals will not sum to 686

There were a total of 208 comments (30.36%) which showed favouritism towards a precept rise, albeit many were also conditional that this should relate to increases in visible policing and show improvements in policing in their local area. There were also many that were supportive of a raise in line with inflation or for some figure less than 4.99%.

There were 196 comments (28.61%) which indicated opposition to a rise, with 31 comments (7.45%) expressing a concern that any rise would be unaffordable, especially in light of other potential increases from the other precepting authorities - particular reference being made to charges levied on green bin collections on a number of occasions.

A total of 97 comments or 14.16% expressed views that an required increase should come from central government funding rather than local taxpayers. Of these, there were a number that made references to Conservative manifesto promises from the general election to increase funding for policing while also lowering taxes.

Another viewpoint expressed on a number of occasions was the perceived need for the police to make greater efficiency savings before asking taxpayers for more money.

The vast majority of those supporting a rise in the precept to pay for additional officers expressed the desire to see a subsequent uplift in visible policing, particularly in rural areas, though this sentiment was also true of a number of respondents opting for a freeze or no increase. Some also expressed the view that they would be prepared to change their mind and increase funding if they perceived there was a demonstrable improvement in the policing services they received.

A small number of the comments (54 or 7.88%) raised issues relating to other crime or policing matters which were not the subject of the consultation, while it was not possible to determine whether comments were expressing support or opposition for a precept rise on 82 occasions.

There was also a notable minority (3.21%) which either showed a misunderstanding of how council tax is determined and assumed it was a council responsibility, or expressed a desire that some of the funding currently allocated for local authorities should be reallocated to the police, though this is obviously beyond the scope of the PCCs powers or responsibilities.

A small number also expressed the view that the role of Police and Crime Commissioner should be abolished and funding spent on frontline policing instead (4.09%), though there was considerable misunderstanding of the funding that this would equate to, the various functions that would still require to be carried out regardless and a false equivalency with the Commissioner's salary, which was also frequently misunderstood and over-exaggerated. Equally, there was an oft-stated misconception that precept increases would be used to boost the pay of senior police officers or councillors.

4.0 Additional responses

A number of additional comments were received by email, telephone and by social media.

Not all comments received via social media were directly relevant to the consultation. Some related to other matters, were more general opinions about policing or were in response to other people's comments. These have been excluded from this report, although all social media platforms are monitored and, where appropriate, comments are responded to.

Through Facebook and Instagram, a total of 81 comments were received across the various postings, though some of these were duplicates for the same user. Due to privacy settings and the nature of promoted posts, it was not possible to directly assess each of these comments. Of those that could be found and viewed, four expressed a view that the Government should fund any increase rather than local taxpayers, two felt there should be no increase and one was in favour of an increase.

On Twitter, there were fewer comments – a total of five being received which were providing clearly relevant feedback in response to the various tweets issued. Of these, one was positive towards a raise, one supported a freeze, while the remainder wanted more visible policing. One further comment was seeking additional information before completing the survey or expressing views on the validity of the consultation.

In the case of social media posts, it is not possible to determine whether commenters went on to complete the online consultation.

The office also received a small number of items of correspondence by email, with one person expressing support for a raise above 4.99%, two opposing any raise. One further member of the public telephoned the office to express support for a rise in the precept, provided it was spent on the "right" people for the job, "not just young university leavers".

5.0 Conclusions

This year's consultation was conducted over a more compressed timescale than was ideal and with less background information available to help support respondents in their decision making, so conclusions need to be fairly heavily caveated and taken only as a very broad indication of public opinion.

It is possible however to say that the consultation results show that there is a majority of opinion in support of a raise of some kind, with those opting for either a raise of 4.99% or an increase beyond this amounting to between around two thirds and three quarters of all the total poll responses, regardless of where they lived.

Nevertheless, the numbers of people who voted to have no increase, accepting the consequences this could bring, was notable, at around 26-36% of all responses (excluding responses from police employees, which were slightly lower). Equally, the comments received within the consultation show there is concern about the affordability of large raises for some sections of society.

A recurring comment both in the online survey and through social media was a feeling that central government should be providing the funding for additional police officers/increased police budgets centrally, rather than relying on local taxation to make up the difference.

Perhaps understandably, a common desire among those expressing support for a raise was the wish to see funding prioritised for areas in which they live. This was especially true of respondents in rural areas and in the north of the county.

The online survey and the general comments also suggest there is still much confusion surrounding Council Tax generally, and its role in funding local services. A frequent, if not common, opinion expressed was that local authorities should prioritise funding to policing over other services, reflecting the fact that some people do not understand the complete separation of these budgets and the different precepting authorities concerned.

Taking a very broad view, therefore, the results of the consultation when combined with the individual comments received suggest that, while there is majority of support for a raise, the balance of opinion probably lies somewhere between 0% and 4.99%, rather than above it, despite a larger increase receiving the most votes.

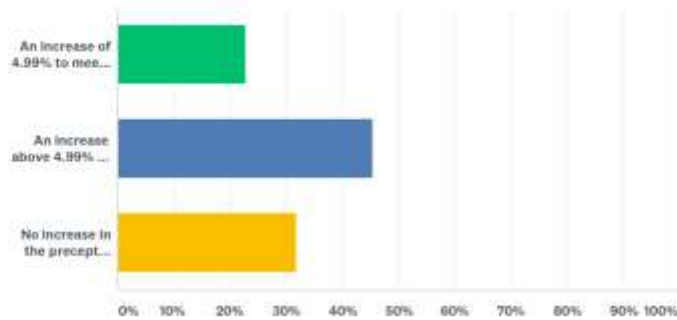
Appendix A: Statistical breakdown by district / interest area

Top level results are presented below for each of the categories of interest.

Warwickshire residents

Answered: 1,624 Skipped: 196

Q6 What option for changing the precept would you be willing to support in 2020/21?

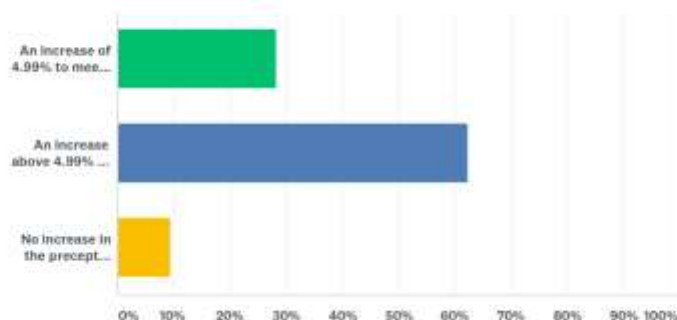


Answer choice	Results	
An increase of 4.99%	22.84%	371
An increase of more than 4.99%	45.38%	737
No increase	31.77%	516
		Total: 1,624

Non-Warwickshire residents

Answered: 138 Skipped: 20

Q6 What option for changing the precept would you be willing to support in 2020/21?

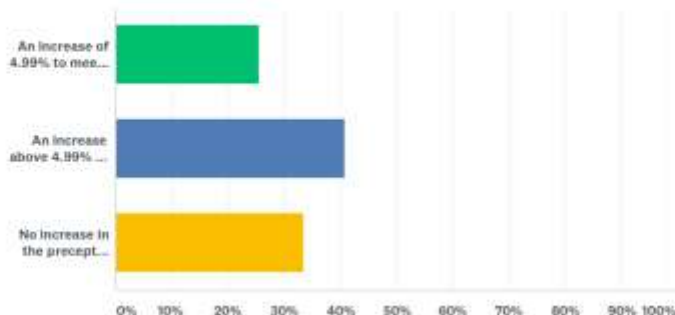


Answer choice	Results	
An increase of 4.99%	28.26%	39
An increase of more than 4.99%	62.32%	86
No increase	9.42%	13
		Total: 138

North Warwickshire Borough residents

Answered: 340 Skipped: 52

Q6 What option for changing the precept would you be willing to support in 2020/21?

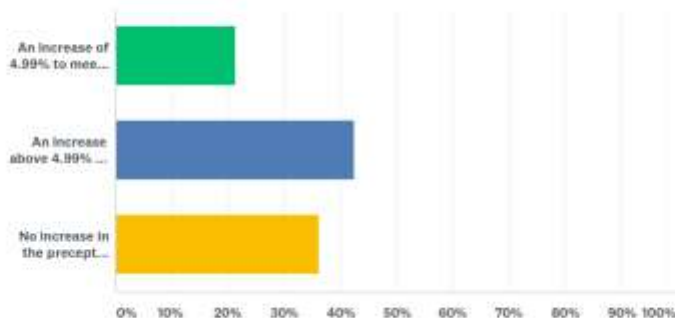


Answer choice	Results	
An increase of 4.99%	25.59%	87
An increase of more than 4.99%	40.88%	139
No increase	33.53%	114
		Total: 340

Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough residents

Answered: 252 Skipped: 22

Q6 What option for changing the precept would you be willing to support in 2020/21?

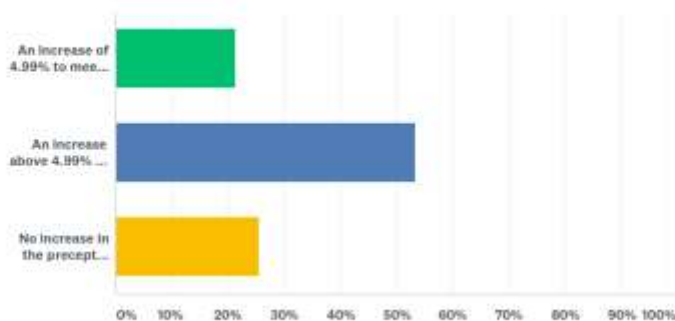


Answer choice	Results	
An increase of 4.99%	21.43%	54
An increase of more than 4.99%	42.46%	107
No increase	36.11%	91
		Total: 252

Rugby Borough residents

Answered: 169 Skipped: 14

Q6 What option for changing the precept would you be willing to support in 2020/21?

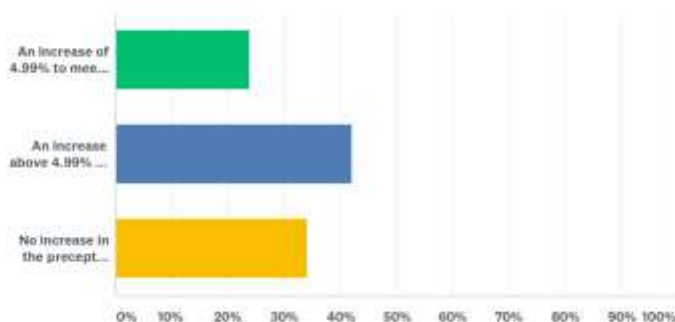


Answer choice	Results	
An increase of 4.99%	21.30%	36
An increase of more than 4.99%	53.25%	90
No increase	25.44%	43
		Total: 169

Stratford-on-Avon District residents

Answered: 442 Skipped: 47

Q6 What option for changing the precept would you be willing to support in 2020/21?

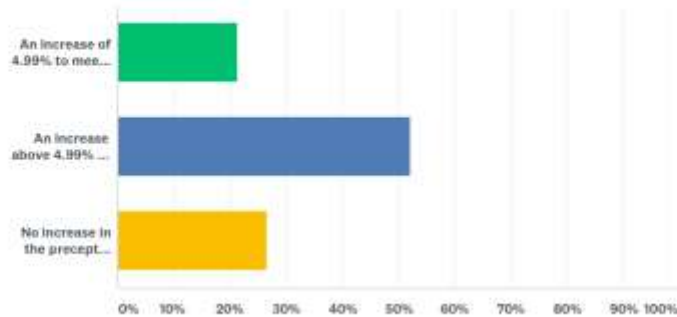


Answer choice	Results	
An increase of 4.99%	23.76%	105
An increase of more than 4.99%	42.08%	186
No increase	34.16%	151
		Total: 447

Warwick District residents

Answered: 392 Skipped: 49

Q6 What option for changing the precept would you be willing to support in 2020/21?

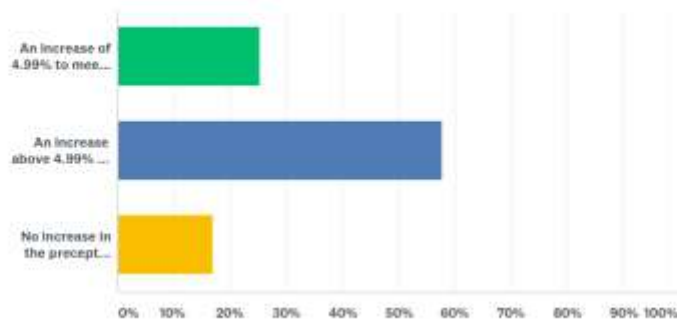


Answer choice	Results	
An increase of 4.99%	21.43%	84
An increase of more than 4.99%	52.04%	204
No increase	26.53%	104
		Total: 392

Police employees/volunteers

Answered: 435 Skipped: 26

Q6 What option for changing the precept would you be willing to support in 2020/21?



Answer choice	Results	
An increase of 4.99%	25.29%	110
An increase of more than 4.99%	57.70%	251
No increase	17.01%	74
		Total: 435