

Nottinghamshire PCC Budget Consultation 2023

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The Nottinghamshire Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) has a statutory duty under the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 to obtain the views of local people and ratepayers' on budget and precept proposals and to consult and engage with local people on policing and in setting police and crime objectives.
- 1.2. In fulfilling these requirements, the OPCC maintains a rolling programme social research which obtains a robust and representative sample of views from Nottinghamshire residents on attitudes towards the precept for policing. In addition, the OPCC also commissioned independently facilitated focus groups in 2022 to obtain more detailed and informed qualitative insight from a diverse sample of residents in each Community Safety Partnership area and launched an open online poll to further canvas public opinion.
- 1.3. This paper presents headline findings from these respective sources and based on independent research undertaken between January 2022 and January 2023.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

- 2.1 Quantitative findings are primarily drawn from the Nottinghamshire Police and Crime Survey which obtained a robust and representative sample of views from 4,311 residents across Nottinghamshire over four quarterly waves of fieldwork in 2022. Sampling points for the survey are set at Lower Super Output Area level to ensure good geographical coverage, and was representative of the local population by age, gender, ethnicity, employment status and deprivation. The survey provided a margin of error of +/-3% at the 95% confidence level.
- 2.2 Qualitative findings are drawn from four independently facilitated focus groups held during the week commencing 15th and 20th December 2022. The focus groups covered each of Nottinghamshire's four Community Safety Partnership areas: Nottingham City; South Nottinghamshire; Bassetlaw, Newark and Sherwood; and Mansfield and Ashfield, and involved a combined total of 39 participants from a diverse range of backgrounds. The focus groups provided an opportunity to provide more technical details of the force's current financial position and areas of proposed spend in the event of an increase in the precept for policing.
- 2.3 To supplement these research methods and increase awareness of the precept proposals, the Commissioner also ran an online public poll between 13 January and 5 February 2023. The Commissioner will have regard to the feedback received within the online public poll as well as in the survey and focus groups. This will be incorporated into her ongoing accountability processes with the Chief Constable

3. RESIDENTS' PREPAREDNESS TO PAY MORE FOR POLICING

- 3.1. In 2022, the Police and Crime survey captured responses from 4,311 residents to the following question as part of a robust and representative consultation exercise:

Households in Nottinghamshire pay, on average, £254 a year towards policing as part of their Council Tax (Band D properties). The Police and Crime Commissioner can increase this amount by £10 this year, which would equate to an additional 83p per month per Band D household.

Please select one option only.

- Yes - I'm prepared to pay up to an additional £10 per year (£83p per month) for policing
- No - I'm not prepared to pay more for policing
- I Don't know - I need more information

Please explain your answer.

- 3.2. **In 2022, the Police and Crime Survey found that (46.2%) of respondents across Nottinghamshire supported an increase in the precept for policing compared to 30.7% that did not. This represents a statistically significant difference (95% CI). Around a fifth of respondents (23.1%), however, stated that they needed more information to decide.**
- 3.3. The overall proportion of respondents stating that they supported or did not support an increase in the precept saw no significant variation throughout the year (ranging from 44.9% to 47.4% and from 29.4% to 32.0% respectively). These results are not directly comparable to those obtained in 2021 due to practical revisions made to the question set in 2022 to take account of the government indicative precept threshold and an identified need to provide further information to residents to inform their decision-making¹.
- 3.4. Of those stating that they did not support an increase in the precept for policing, the most common reason was the cost of living crisis (27%), dissatisfaction with current levels of police visibility (14%) or dissatisfaction with a service they had received (13%).
- 3.5. In December 2022, the government confirmed its intention to increase the precept threshold to £15 per average (Band D) household. The Commissioner is committed to transparency in her consultation and engagement and she accordingly launched an online poll², which was undertaken between January 13th and 5 February 2023 to obtain views on proposals to increase the precept to the threshold level in 2023.

¹ Revisions were made to the question set in 2022 in order to take account of: the proposed precept threshold of £10 per average (Band D) household confirmed by central government for subsequent years in 2022 and; further information being provided on proposed areas of spend due to an increasing proportion of residents reporting that they required more information in order to answer the question (up from 21.7% in 2018 to 24.7% in 2022).

² <https://www.nottinghamshire.pcc.police.uk/Get-Involved/Consultations-and-Surveys/Police-Budget-202324-Consultation.aspx>

Figure 1: On average, households in Nottinghamshire pay £254 a year towards policing as part of their Council Tax. To what extent would you be prepared to pay more? Police and Crime Survey, 2022. Responses by Community Safety Partnership area

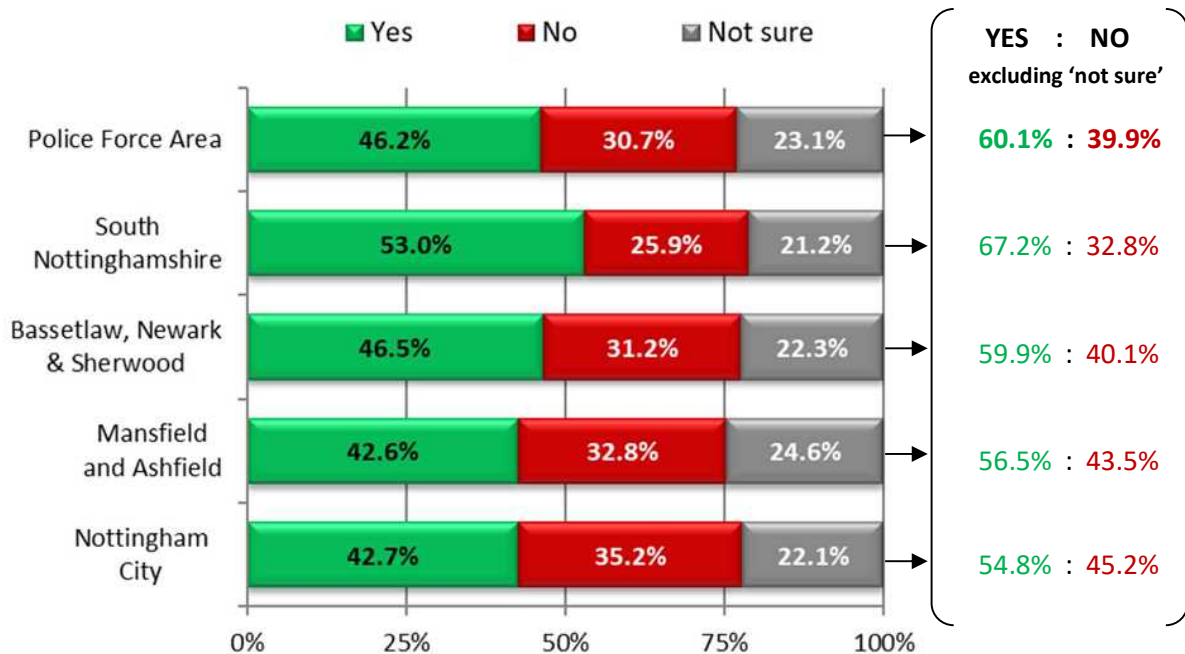


Figure 2: If you do not support an increase in the precept for policing, please explain your reason why. Police and Crime Survey, 2022

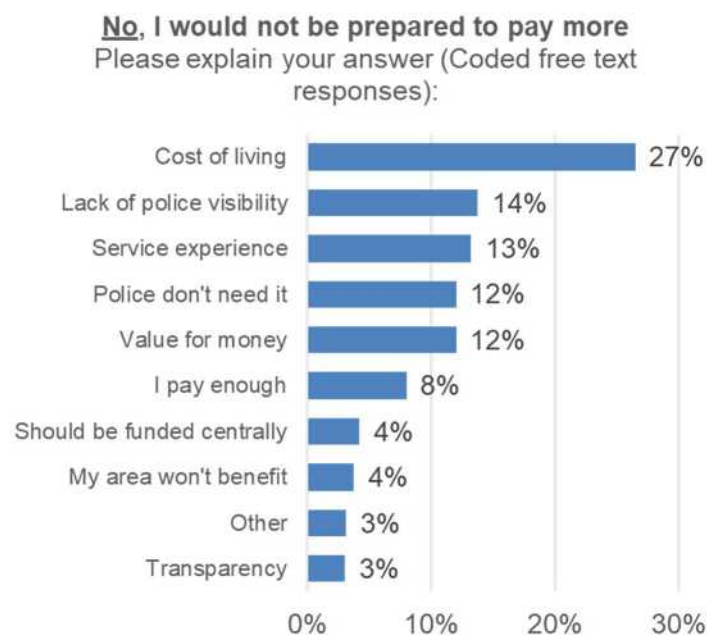
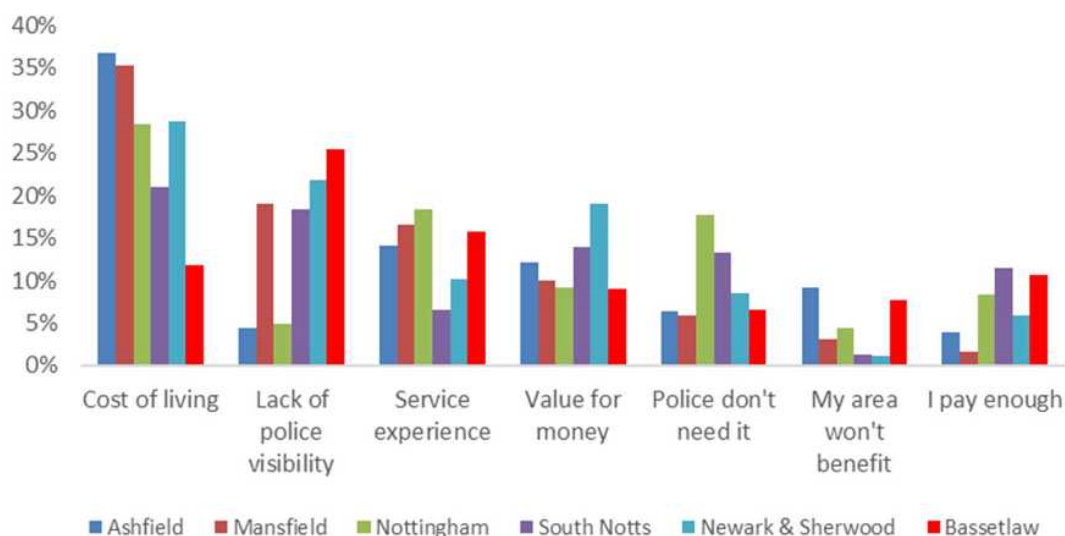


Figure 3: If you do not support an increase in the precept for policing, please explain your reason why. Results by local Authority area. Police and Crime Survey, 2022



5. NOTTINGHAMSHIRE PRECEPT FOCUS GROUPS 2022

- 5.1 Independently facilitated focus groups were also held in December 2022 with a view to providing a richer understanding of resident views on a proposed £15 increase in the precept per Band D household. Participants were recruited using a randomised telephone methodology in each of the four Community Safety Partnership areas. Quotas were set based on the local population including age, gender, and ethnicity. Twelve residents were recruited for each group to ensure a healthy attendance and account for the natural attrition. Each attendee was provided with a £35.00 payment to compensate them for any costs incurred and as a thank you for their participation. Incentives are distributed in line with the Market Research Society Code of Conduct to ensure an ethical and unbiased approach was being taken to engaging with them.
- 5.2 The sessions were informed by details of the force budget, efficiency savings and areas of anticipated spend. Participants considered the following precept scenarios and their implications for policing and delivery of the Nottinghamshire Police and Crime Plan:

- **Freeze in the Council Tax for policing:** The PCC would be unable to meet the costs of inflation and service demand cost pressures resulting in significant cuts in policing services, the loss of some frontline officers and staff and delays in the deployment of new technology to fight crime.
- **£5 increase per household in 2023/24:** Even with significant efficiency savings, this would require the force to make reductions in front line services to achieve a balanced budget. This would largely affect the number of PSCO and Staff Investigator roles employed across Nottinghamshire. Further front line reductions would also be required in subsequent years.
- **Increase to the threshold set by the government (expected to be £15 increase per household):** Combined with efficiency savings, this would enable the force to maintain current service standards in the short term. It is still likely that reductions in front line support staff would be required over the next 2 to 5 years to meet the costs of inflation and service demand pressures.
- **Increase of up to £24 per household in 2023/24:** An increase of up to £24 per household would off-set inflationary pressures and enable current service levels to be maintained in the short and medium term. To do this, however, the PCC would need to hold a referendum at an estimated cost of £1m.

5.3 All focus groups indicated strong support for an increase in the precept for policing, with 87% (34) participants supporting a £15 increase and 13% (5) stating that they did not. Among the respondents, many placed a high value on the police service and their local force and felt that it was an easy decision to make; some indicating that maintaining the current service levels at the very least, was a necessity.

“£15, £1.25 a month is less than a coffee each month, isn't it? I'd say go for the £15”

“I think going through a referendum is a waste of money. I don't think they'd even win that, especially with the current cost of crisis. I think £15 is a fair amount, I'd fall on that”

“Yes, to the £15; It's more important than the parish and the town council. The police are far more important and appreciated; definitely, yes to the £15 increase; I would pay more if it was needed”

“£15 a year more doesn't really bother me at all, not when you think about what they have to do and how hard it is getting these days; at the end of the day it's £1.25 a month”

5.4 In a number of cases, personal experience of the force and how they had been treated as a victim was an important driver to accepting the £15 increase.

“I'd say pay the £15, I think we've all clearly shared opinions that we've had to have some dealing with the police before, me personally I've had quite positive dealings with the police, they've been there when I've needed them and friends that have had quite bad things happen to them, and the police have always been there and dealt with it”

“I had a lot of dealing with them this year and they have been brilliant, if they need £15 more a year to maintain that service for victims, then it's an easy yes”

“Whenever I have needed them, they have been there for me and my family so any increase it worth it in my opinion”

“I would pay the £15 as they have been brilliant with me when I have needed them and the thought of losing that or what they can do for the sake of £15!”

- 5.1 The focus groups found genuine empathy for the police service alongside a recognition that financial challenges existed and a sense of resignation that the £15.00 increase was inevitable. Many recognised that the police, like all other organisations, faced challenges around inflation and increased costs of living and that the increase mirrored what was happening to all. The majority were concerned that the £15 option would only go as far as maintaining current standards:

“This is it. It’s really nerveing, it’s obvious we’re going to have cuts somewhere, reductions will be made but whichever option, £5 or £15, we’re still making reductions and even if you say fine then, I’ll push it to £15, you’ve still just said £15 isn’t going to get you much more so it’s very nerveing that neither option is going to stop cuts really.”

“It’s just sad to think that we pay £15 a month, which we will have to just to keep the service as it is, its sadly the world we live in now”

“Nobody in this room wants to pay it but we accept it for what it is; keeping the service as it is ”

“What’s the point of saying no, we have no choice”

“It’s going to happen because it has to happen, they need the money so what can you do”
 “It is good that there is a consultation, but I don’t know what influence it will have. I expect the £15 increase. I probably expect it year on year now and I will pay it, but I noted that it doesn’t prevent a reduction in frontline services, they are still expected”

“They have bills and wages like every other business and household in the UK, they are no different just because they are the police, £15 is probably a fair reflection on what we are all facing in terms of rising costs”

- 5.2 Whilst most agreed with the increase; there were several caveats and wider concerns expressed. One given that the precept had been raised in previous years, was the demand for accountability and transparency. This was considered lacking and most felt it was an area that needed improving through better communications and more easily available information.

“Obviously we’ve only got very little information here. They talk about efficiency savings - what efficiency savings? Why have the frontline staff got to go and not the backroom staff etc. If they’re going to ask for a higher bracket of money, I want more detailed information and specific targets they lay out and what if you don’t hit them? It gives me more questions than answers.”

“It’s a very short-term solution but if I had to pick and assuming it couldn’t just be found centrally, then I’d go for the £15...[but] If they’re asking people for that at a really difficult time at the moment, it would only be fair to be more transparent with how it’s spent and how they’re planning on using that.”

“Communication, I think that is critical because the only communication we get is when you get that brown envelope land at your door with what your council tax is going to be ...and they try and justify it. They could communicate throughout the year. The council does but the police don’t, it’s only once a year that has the slip in there that says what wonderful boys and girls they have, and this is why they need the money.”

“I’d like to see it in real terms how much is being spent on for example staff absence, how are they supporting their officers in real terms. It’s a demanding job, they must be losing people like that, a hat full. It would be interesting to see how that money’s been spent and how the recruitment is been done, how are they retaining staff? How they are getting value for money”

“I have a lot of sympathy with the police, increasingly more so with my experiences this year. If you look at these figures, 999 and 111 calls risen 21% [since 2019], I think that’s a lot in real terms. Staffing that is going to be difficult, I think if the crime commissioner published some kind of annual report - maybe if they did a bit more around the budget and how that’s spent. If we are paying £15, we need to know it is being spent well”

- 5.3 There were a minority of participants that outright disagreed with any increase, largely due to feeling that this would put more pressure on already struggling households. A smaller number of participants based their decision on negative perceptions of the police.

“Okay then, so we go and pay £15 for this bit, then later down the line we must pay for another pot. Foods going up, electrics going up, we’re just suffering from every which angle. Then the debts going to get higher”

“We’ve all been hammered; it has to stop somewhere”

“I simply cannot afford it; I have a family to look after”

“The problem is if we keep saying yes, where does it end, so I have to say no”

“This is Band D though, so what am I paying as band A? And how much is the rest of the parts of the council tax going to go up? So, it’s £15 more for the police, but how much more is the county council going to increase? How much is the fire, the parish council and the town council going to put it up?”

“...and this is just for the police. Can I expect the same request from the Council and then another request from the Fire Service. In reality, it is probably more like a £10 to £15 increase per month rather than per year, if you factor in all the services and all the increases”

“If something happens, the police are the last people I think about”

“What is the point when you don’t get a response from them, they don’t respond”

“I would have doubts as to whether they spend that in the most effective way for the policing that’s actually required?”

“If it helps them to be more efficient, then yes but if it doesn’t, it’s a two-edged sword really isn’t it, not sure they would spend it well enough”

“I would like to know that it is not simply investment on investment and that work is being undertaken to identify any waste in the system. Basically, that figure of £15 needs to be after they have eliminated any waste and saved money elsewhere. If there is no waste or money to saved, fine, great, but they should be able evidence that when asking for the money they are asking for”

- 5.4 For one group the point of difference within the narrative and that of other groups was an appetite to understand if work had been undertaken to identify any inefficiencies, both within the police and within other partner organisations which received precept funding. Again, this came back to a perceived lack of information to prove this either way. There was frustration and surprise from attendees in two of the four groups around the lack of funding Nottinghamshire police receive from central government:

“I just can’t believe central government cannot do more about this and just give the police more money. Like they found it for COVID so find it for the police”

“I don’t think it’s for us to pay. I think the services need to be kept up, but I don’t think the funding needs to come from council tax”

“I agree with you, it should come from central government”

- 5.5 There was also discussion which considered the sustainability of the current model and an acknowledgement that as demand on policing increases, there is a parallel requirement for increased investment, compounded by inflation and other market forces.

“...but simply increasing the tax on residents is not sustainable. What else is going on to make this work, there will come a point when people cannot afford to pay the additional money. For some people it is not there now, they aren’t choosing not to pay, the money just doesn’t exist in their accounts, so what is the plan b?”

“This cannot keep happening year on year, it’s not workable, someone needs to find a solution which has to come from the government”

“One thing that bothers me and it’s not just the council tax, pretty much everything in this country seems to be about short term, we are looking at what happens in the next year to 18 months where really we should be looking at what’s going to happen over the next 5-10 years and the other thing that bothers me is we’re really not very good at looking how we utilise the resources we have and actually use, improving the efficiency of them and actually making better use of the money we’ve got in a more modern way”

“What’s the short term? I’m giving you £15 more and it’s not even going to stretch a month? You know or half a year, what are we talking about here? It’s a little bit unnerving”

- 5.6 The Commissioner and OPCC will have regard to the feedback received via the online public poll as well as in the survey and focus groups. This will be incorporated into her ongoing accountability processes with the Chief Constable.

Focus Group Participants

Nottingham City (n=10)

Gender	Age	Ethnicity
Female	40	White British
Male	44	Black British
Male	30	White British
Female	19	White British
Female	32	Mixed – any other background
Male	73	White British
Female	58	White British
Female	30	White British
Male	57	White British
Transgender	37	Asian - Other

Bassetlaw, Newark, and Sherwood (n=10)

Gender	Age	Ethnicity
Male	29	White British
Female	25	White British
Female	32	White British
Male	40	White British
Female	41	Asian British - Pakistani
Male	47	White British
Female	55	White British
Male	54	Asian - Bangladeshi
Male	69	White British
Female	31	Black British

Mansfield and Ashfield (n=10)

Gender	Age	Ethnicity
Female	20	White British
Male	24	Asian British - Indian
Female	36	White British
Male	38	White British
Male	48	White British
Female	42	White British
Female	54	White British
Female	57	White British
Female	65	Asian – Pakistani
Male	71	White British

South Nottinghamshire conurbation (n=10)

Gender	Age	Ethnicity
Female	30	White British
Male	32	Black British
Male	29	Black British
Female	35	Black - Caribbean
Female	40	White British
Male	42	White British
Male	66	White British
Female	54	White British
Male	60	White British
Female	59	Middle Eastern