

POLICING OBJECTIVES AND RESOURCES

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS ARISING FROM 'OPINION' CITIZENS PANEL AND PUBLIC CONSULTATION MEETINGS NOVEMBER 2003 – DECEMBER 2008

Background:

Public consultation has been regularly undertaken to gather opinion and gauge public reaction to any proposed increases in council tax.

LPA have used a variety of consultation methods over the last 4 years inclusive of:

- The Opinion citizen's panel
- Website surveys
- Questionnaires given out at our PAC meetings
- Holding specific public meetings on budget options in each of our 6 divisions
- Use of interactive technology in public meetings
- Group discussions.

This document summarises the main findings from each year's consultation relating to willingness to pay increases in council tax for policing.

Resources for Policing 2004-05:

Both Respondents from our Opinion citizens panel and members of the public who attending divisional meetings were informed of the details of the Chief Constables' Blueprint for an extra 500 officers. They were presented with 2 resource options for achieving the Blueprint (based on Band D council tax rates), these being:

Option 1: an average increase of 43p per week (£22 per year) over 3 years (equivalent to 25% increase per annum)

Option 2: an average increase of 57p per week (£30 per year) over 2 years (equivalent to 34% increase per annum)

Respondents were given the opportunity to suggest an alternative if the above options were unacceptable.

Understanding of increase requirement

The majority of Opinion respondents 79% either fully or partly understood the need for an increase in council tax.

Reasonableness of increase

76% of Opinion respondents considered the 43p per week option to be reasonable
61% considered the 57p per week to be reasonable.

Willingness to pay increases

69% of Opinion respondents and 60% of divisional attendees were willing to pay the increase of 43p per week over 3 years.

58% of Opinion respondents and 60% of divisional attendees were willing to pay the 57p per week over 2 years option.

Budget decision:

25p extra a week (£13.17 per year) or 14.99% Increase resulting in 100 extra police officers.

Band D council tax - £100.70

Policing Resources for 2005/06:

Opinion respondents were provided with a written explanation of the resource proposals for the coming year and those attending Divisional meetings were given an oral presentation. All were informed that anything less than a £15/15% increase would probably result in cuts in service. A scale of increase options was given ranging in £5 increments starting at £0 up to £30. (Please note: this was prior to the settlement figures being announced, which reduced the required increase to 13.6% if the deficit were to be met fully by council tax).

Understanding of increase requirement

Understanding was higher at the divisional meetings than by Opinion respondents (84% compared to only 58%) where full explanations of the resources were given and questions answered.

Willingness to pay increases

53% of Opinion and 60% of Divisional respondents opted to pay above the required £15/15% to see improvements to the service.

23% of Opinion respondents and 18% Divisional respondents felt it would be acceptable to pay the required £15/15% to standstill.

Government capping

Consultation for the 2004-05 budget had indicated that the residents of Lancashire were willing to pay the required level in council tax for policing resources to achieve the levels of policing outlined in the Chief Constables' Blueprint. Due to capping regulations this increase was not achieved resulting in a 14.99% increase.

Respondents were therefore asked to consider whether they thought the government should intervene to cap the council tax increases for the 2005/06 budget.

The majority view was that the government should not intervene with 42% of Opinion and 53% of divisional attendees stating this.

26% of Opinion respondents and 39% of divisional attendees believed the government should intervene the rest stating don't know.

Budget decision

13p extra a week (£7.02 per year) or 6.97%.

Band D council tax - £107.72

Policing Resources for 2006/07:

This year consultation was undertaken via Opinion and an online survey on the LPA website. The divisional meetings were not pursued, partly because the authority felt they were losing credibility since it could not respond to the willingness of those attending to pay significantly more in their council tax for improved policing. All respondents received a written explanation of the resource proposals for the coming year and respondents were informed that anything less than a £15/14% increase could result in cuts in service. A scale of increase options was given ranging in £5 increments starting at £0 up to £30.

Willingness to pay increases

26% of Opinion and 28% of Website respondents opted to pay the required £15/14% to achieve a standstill.

54% of Opinion respondents and 36% website respondents opted to pay above the required £15/14% for standstill to see improvements to the service.

Government capping

Respondents were informed that for the previous two years the government has intervened in the council tax increases and capped the levels. In 2004/05 they capped increases in Lancashire at 14.99% and last year they capped increases at 5% per average council taxpayer. Respondents were asked whether they thought that the government should intervene to cap increases or not.

66% of opinion respondents and 64% of website respondents believed that the government should not intervene or did not know whether or not they should intervene, rather than think that they should definitely cap increases.

Budget decision

11p extra per week (£5.37per year) or 4.99%.

Band D council tax - £113.09

Policing Resources for 2007/08:

This year's consultation was undertaken via Opinion citizens' panel. A written explanation of the issues surrounding the police budget, including implications for Council Tax, the government 'cap' and the gap between what the resources required in the opinion of the Constabulary and what is currently available was provided to respondents. Respondents were informed that anything less than £8.50/7.5% increase could result in cuts in service. A scale of increase options were given inclusive of £0, £5, £8.50, £10, £15.

Willingness to pay increases

25.6% were willing to pay standstill at £8.50/7.5%

57% were willing to pay £10/9% or above to see improvements to the service.

Budget decision

Extra 19p per week (£10.00per year) or 11.00%.

Band D council tax - £125.95

(NB the authority took the view that the absolute levels of increase preferred for 2007/08 were better expressed in terms of Band B, the typical property in Lancashire, rather than Band D, which is how conventionally the percentages have been calculated in this note. Of course if they were calculated at Band B, they would be higher)

Policing Resources for 2008/09:

This year in addition to undertaking consultation via or 4000 strong residents panel 'Opinion', we also engaged directly with the public through the delivery of 6 divisional road shows (one in each police division in Lancashire) which enabled members of the public to indicate what increase they would be willing to pay on their council tax towards policing and where they would like to see that resource allocated.

A written explanation of the resource proposals for 2008/09 was included at the beginning of the opinion questionnaire and road show participants were given verbal information. Both sets of respondents were informed that anything less than a £10.00 standstill increase could result in resources being taken away from policing services. Respondents were given the option to increase between £5 and £30 extra per year or opt for no increase.

Willingness to pay increases

Over three-quarter of opinion respondents and just over half of road show respondents were willing to pay an increase at the standstill figure or above.

- Opinion – 76.1%
- Road shows – 61%

The most popular response in respect of an increase for opinion respondents was £10 (27.2%)

Most popular response in respect of an increase for road show respondents was £30

Government capping

Opinion Respondents only were asked whether they thought that the government should intervene to cap council tax increases which the Authority levy.

Just below half (49.1%) of opinion respondents believe that the government should not intervene- and cap increases.

32.4% agreeing that the Government should and 18.5% said don't know.

Budget decision

An increase of 7.95% or £10.01.

Equates to:

Band B an extra £7.79 a year, less than 15p per week

Band D an extra £10.00 a year less than 19p per week

Policing Resources for 2009/10:

The latest budget consultation exercise sought to gain a view from the public about their willingness to pay an increase in their council tax to improve policing. At the time of consultation, respondents were informed that just over £6 was the 'standstill' position. Respondents were given options for increases between £3.40 and £10.20 extra per year or could opt for no increase.

Willingness to pay increases

79% of respondents surveyed were willing to pay an increase at the then £6 standstill figure or above. The consultation also indicated that amongst those surveyed there was a willingness to pay for improvements to services for 2009-10.

Budget decision

An increase of 3.1% on last year.

Equates:

Band D property will be £142.08 a year, an increase of 4.5% (£6.12 a year) - slightly under 12p a week. Therefore the total amount a Band D household will pay for policing is just £2.73 per week.