

Budget Consultation 2020 – 21

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Introduction

This report details feedback obtained from employers of Gloucestershire Constabulary and homeowners in Gloucestershire regarding the 5.8% increase of the Police element in council tax.

Two surveys were conducted to gain this feedback. Firstly, one to Gloucestershire Constabulary employees which was advertised on the intranet between 5th January – 6th February. Secondly, a survey was distributed to Gloucestershire homeowners via social media outlets, radio channels and letters to every home in the County, with the survey open from 6th January – 8th February. Both contained the same questions, bar one:

- The first asked if the respondent was willing to pay more in council tax for policing services
- Secondly, is the respondent able to pay more, considering their current financial circumstances
- Thirdly was a free text box asking respondents to briefly explain the reasons for their answers
- For the public consultation form, respondents were additionally asked to tick whether they were providing their views as a member of the public or a business owner

Demographic questions were asked at the end of the survey too.

The Research Team within Analysis, Research & Planning has analysed the findings and produced this report. In total there were 1544 obtained responses, 1238 of these were from the public survey and 306 were from Gloucestershire Constabulary employees. There were also a number of letters sent into the Office of the Police and

Crime Commissioner, and comments left on a series of Facebook posts which have also been analysed and included within this report.

The report will now be broken into the following sections: overall survey findings, public consultation findings, staff consultation findings, social media feedback and letters to OPCC.

Overall Survey Findings

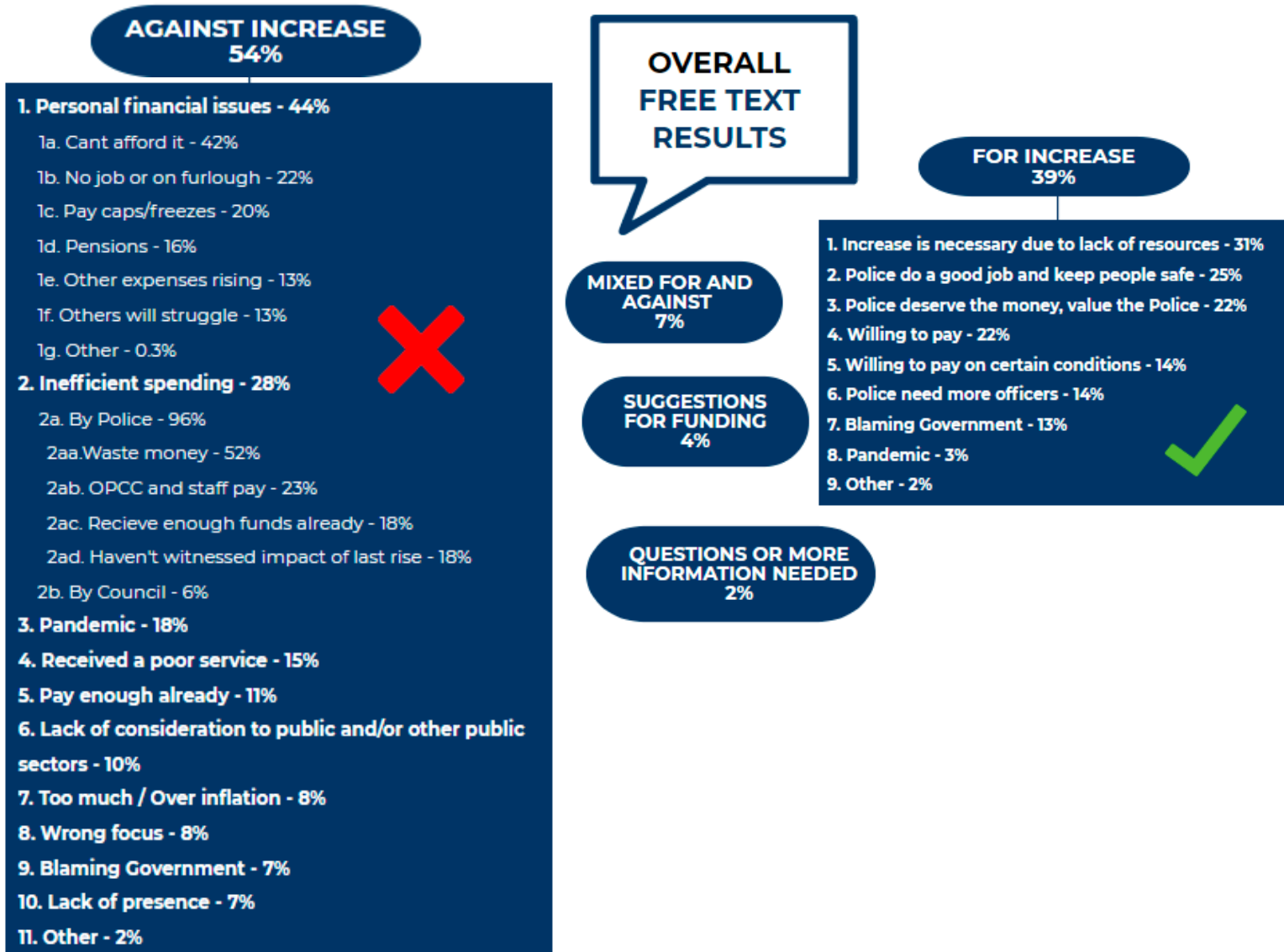
The below table show figures from both the staff survey and public consultation (labelled overall), staff only results and public only results.

Q1. Are you willing to pay more in Council tax for Policing services?			
	Overall	Public only	Staff only
No	48%	50%	40%
Yes	46%	44%	53%
Don't know	6%	6%	7%

For overall figures, where 'don't know' figures are removed from the dataset, these figures adjust to 51% saying 'no' and 49% saying 'yes'. This is shown in the table below.

Q2. Are you able to pay more considering your current financial circumstances?			
	Overall	Public only	Staff only
No	49%	51%	42%
Yes	51%	49%	58%

Respondents were asked to provide explanations for their ratings. Free text comments have been coded and themed and the results are shown in the infographic below. More respondents stated negative comments than positive and a small percentage gave mixed for and against arguments. Some provided alternative suggestions for funding, and some asked questions or wished for further information to help them make a decision. Out of the 1544 that completed the survey, 1248 left a comment.



‘Sub-themes’ were also created under the main themes which gives greater insight and understanding to the analysis. For example, sub-themes under ‘personal financial issues’ included the following: couldn’t afford the rise, they had no jobs or were/had been furloughed over the last year, subjected to pay freezes/pay caps, some mentioned that other expenses would rise meaning it would be very difficult to pay the rise, and others mentioned that other people would struggle to pay.

Lists of the comments regarding suggestions for funding, and questions or more information required can be provided. However, examples of comments from all themes are shown below:

“Quite simple - we need an active and well-equipped police force to handle the ever-increasing demands on their time and resources. We also need them to be able to respond promptly to serious situations without their hands tied behind their backs through a lack of resources”

‘At the Police and Crime Panel meeting held last February to discuss the precept increase, Martin Surl was quite clear in saying, “I will not come back to you next year asking for another increase in the precept”. Is he going to be a man of his word?’

“The PCC has increased the council tax every year for the past few years, this is not a sustainable option. Surely everytime we need to balance the books... we cannot keep raising council tax every year, this will just result in the public losing faith in the service especially with the pandemic when people's financial situations are becoming more difficult. Instead should we not be looking at how we more effectively make use of our current budget as I'm sure many of us can think of unnecessary/ wasted expenditure by the Constabulary”

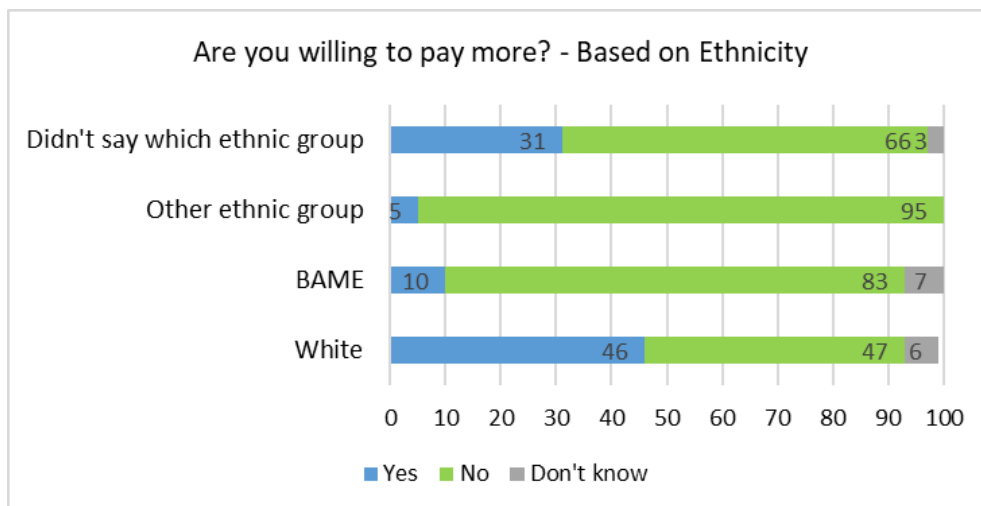
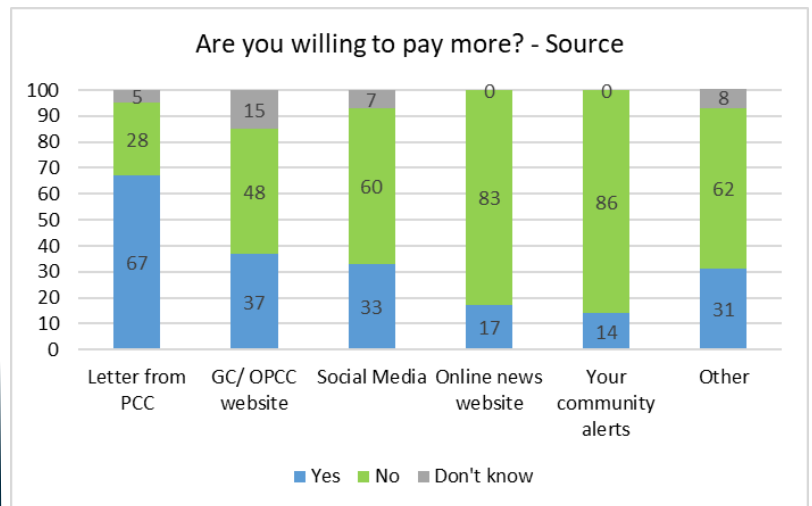
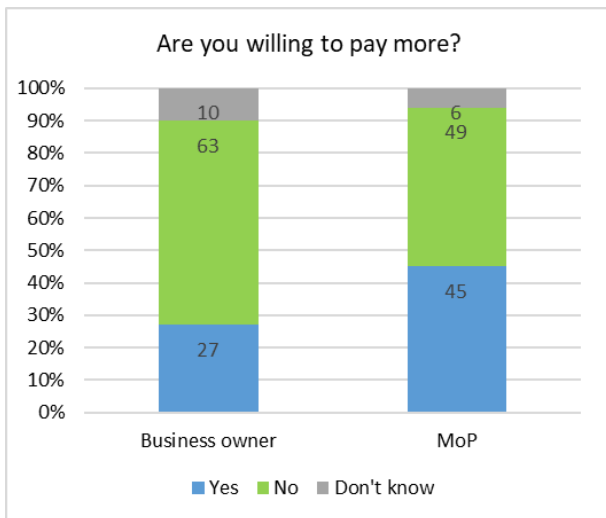
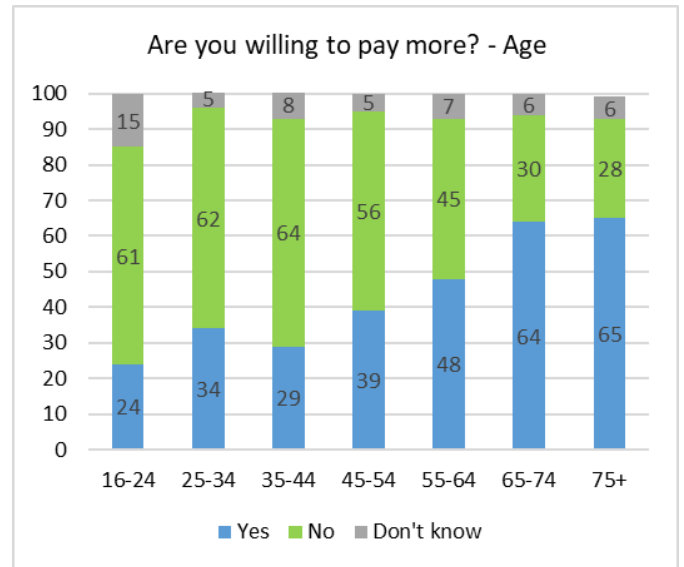
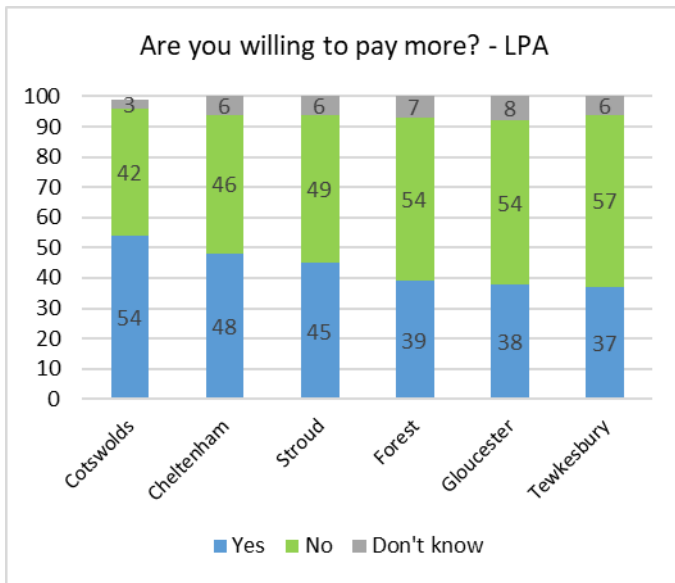
“I think the police deserve so much more for what they do. They make me feel safe so I would be petrified if the one day I need them urgently I cannot have them”

Public Consultation Results

Feedback from the public can be seen based on demographics for the following questions:

1. Are you willing to pay more in Council tax?
2. Are you able to pay more?

This data will firstly be shown in graphs and tables, with a detailed summary of comparisons and differences provided at the end of this section.



The tables below display results by demographics for Q2 – Are you able to pay more?

Are you able to pay more?		
Age	Yes %	No %
16-24	27	73
25-34	38	62
35-44	34	66
45-54	38	62
55-64	55	45
65-74	71	29
75+	70	30

Are you able to pay more? - LPA		
LPA	Yes %	No %
Stroud	57	43
Cotswolds	55	45
Cheltenham	52	48
Forest	45	55
Gloucester	45	55
Tewkesbury	39	61
LPA	Yes %	No %

Are you able to pay more?		
	Yes %	No %
Business owner	41	59
Member of public	49	51

Are you able to pay more? - Ethnicity		
Ethnicity	Yes %	No %
White	50	50
BAME	21	79
Other ethnic background	35	65
Didn't say	55	45

Overall Summary for Public Consultation

LPA

- Cotswolds and Cheltenham LPAs had the highest amount of people to say they are willing to pay more
 - Free text comments were all more negative than positive for all LPAs except Cotswold which had equal amounts of for and against
 - Reasons for their answers were quite similar
 - Gloucester had the biggest difference between for and against the increase, with a higher percentage leaning towards being negative
- Forest, Gloucester and Tewkesbury had the least amount to say they were willing

Age

- Older demographics were more likely to say they are **willing** to pay and **able** to pay compared to younger people
- For all age categories, the most frequent free text themes are personal financial issues (namely, they cannot afford to) followed by seeing inefficient spending by the police. The few comments where they would pay is they see increase is necessary

- For age groups 65 and over, there are more comments for the increase than against: They see that police do a good job and increase is necessary. The reasons against paying is due to their pensions

Ethnicity

- The BAME group in the graph includes Asian or Asian British, Black or Black British, Mixed and Chinese. There were only 30 respondents from this category, so figures are not representative.
- Therefore, analysis comparisons between ethnic groups is not possible as the sample is not representative enough.

Business/ MoP

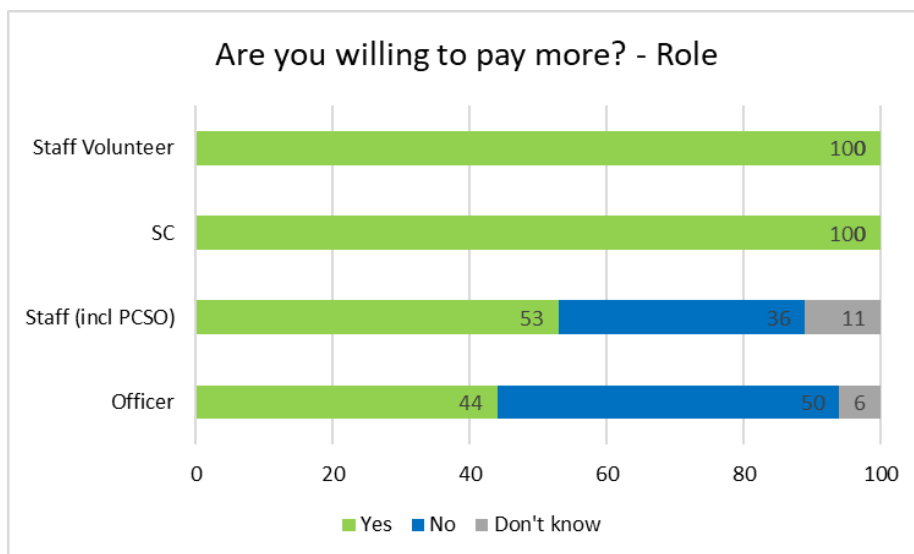
- Members of the public were more likely to be willing to pay and able to pay compared to business owners
- Even though not many from businesses provided a comment, twice as many had a reason against than for
 - Those who were against had a wider range of top issues that were quite the same as issues raised by MoP. Business owners mentioned that they have no job or their business has had to close, they think police are spending inefficiently and they have received a poor service in the past. When they were in favour this was on the basis of certain conditions (mainly on how the money is spent to improve the service).

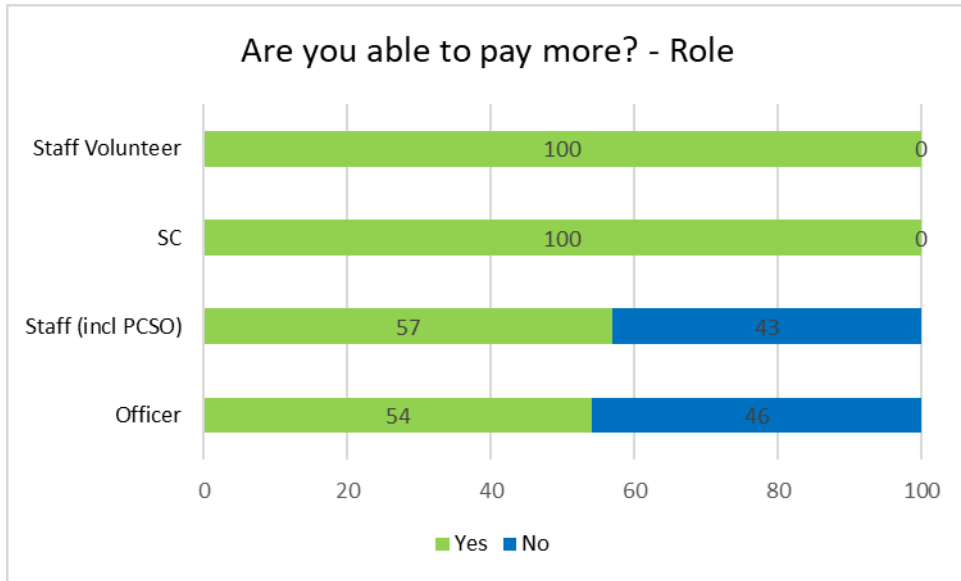
Source of survey

- People that received the letter from OPCC were more likely to be willing to pay compared to those that saw the survey on social media or other online outlets.

Staff Consultation Results

306 Gloucestershire Constabulary staff members completed the consultation survey. Out of those that stated their role: 43% were officers, 55% staff, 1% special Constables and 0.3% staff volunteers. The following graphs break down the responses by Role.





There were more differences between Staff and Officers around the question of 'are you willing to pay more' – with just over half of staff (53%) to say that they were willing, compared to 44% of officers that said they are willing to pay more.

Free Text Comments – Public and Staff

The third part of the survey asked for explanations for their ratings. These have been read and coded into themes. The infographic below shows the differences in comments left between members of the public and staff. 229 left free text comments.



OPCC
Office of the Police &
Crime Commissioner
for Gloucestershire



**Public vs
Staff
Comments**

Public

Staff



**53% AGAINST
budget increase**

**33% FOR
budget increase**

**6% MIXED
for and against**

**4% SUGGESTIONS
for funding**

**2% QUESTIONS or
more info needed**

1% OTHER

- 1. Personal financial issues - 42%**
 - 1a. Can't afford it - 43%
 - 1b. No job or furloughed - 25%
 - 1c. Pensions - 17%
- 2. Inefficient spending - 28%**
 - 2a. Police waste money - 48%
 - 2b. OPCC and staff pay - 24%
 - 2c. Get enough funds already - 19%
- 3. Pandemic - 18%**

- 1. Increase is necessary due to lack of resources - 33%**
- 2. Police do a good job and keep people safe - 28%**
- 3. Police deserve the money, value the Police - 20%**

**52% AGAINST
budget increase**

**44% FOR
budget increase**

**4% MIXED
for and against**

**5% SUGGESTIONS
for funding**

**1% QUESTIONS or
more info needed**

0.4% OTHER

- 1. Personal financial issues - 38%**
 - 1a. Pay caps/freezes - 46%
 - 1b. Can't afford it - 42%
 - 1c. Others will struggle - 38%
- 2. Inefficient spending - 28%**
 - 2a. Police waste money - 71%
 - 2b. Haven't witnessed impact of last rise - 17%
 - 2c. OPCC and staff pay - 17%
- 3. Pandemic - 13%**

- 1. Increase is necessary due to lack of resources - 26%**
- 2. Police deserve the money, value the Police - 26%**
- 3. Willing to pay - 21%**

The breakdown of staff and public answers shows that both categories of respondents mention the same top 3 themes against the increase. However, more staff note pay caps and/or freezes, whereas members of the public simply state they cannot afford it. Staff also highlighted their awareness that others will struggle to pay the rise in council tax.

When looking at the positive comments in relation to the increase, both categories highlighted most importantly that the increase is necessary due to lack of resources. Other top themes for the public focused around how valuable the Police are and that they provide a good service. Examples of quotes can be found in the boxes below:

Public	Staff
"I think we pay enough for the services we receive"	"Single parent, no pay increase expected coming in, money is very tight in this household."
"Police service, like other social services needs to be properly funded to do its job."	"Able to pay more but more policing required on the streets and much better traffic enforcing required."
"Any funding increase should come from central government. At this time everyone is stretched enough and lots are struggling to even keep their jobs."	"Pay freeze imposed by the government means that my bills will go up but no inflation increase to cover it. As increases are likely to happen across all household bills this is just another burden"
"I welcome more police looking after my area and knowing I can call and ask for advice or help if needed."	"Working for Glos Pol I have seen how stressed and tired our officers are and if a little extra on my council tax will increase numbers that has to be a good thing."
"We are in a pandemic already struggling to keep a roof over our heads and be able to eat and we can't afford all the extra costs the council is enforcing on us. Also the police don't really do much for our village/ area- there are travellers and constant people visiting the area despite lockdown so why pay extra when they don't do much as it is!"	"I work for the Police and I am horrified at the amount of money which is wasted which could be spent paying for additional Police - we should get our own house in order before asking the public to pay more"

Social Media Analysis

The Team analysed all Facebook and Twitter comments relating to any posts containing information about the budget consultation. These have been read, coded and themed similarly to the free text comments left on the survey as an additional resource. These

are contained in another detailed report, however below provides a summary of the findings:

- The majority were against the budget increase
 - Main reasons due to receiving a poor service, feeling that the focus is wrong (such as concentration on speeding drivers or COVID related offences), and that Police spending is insufficient
- Many comments captured in 'other' encapsulated the notion that in general, council tax isn't worth its value in money, regardless of what departments and/or organisations it goes to. Some mentioned that they didn't fill in the survey or believe it to be of any use as they felt the negative comments will be ignored or swept under the carpet and the increase will go ahead regardless of the public's views.
- A handful of people questioned the role of the PCC, his purpose and the wage he earns, and whether this was beneficial to have, or if the money could be utilised elsewhere. Therefore not seeing the value in this role.

Analysis of Letters to OPCC

The Research team analysed 97 letters sent to the OPCC. Analysis followed the same framework used for the free text comments in the surveys. A summary of the findings is listed below:

- 44 letters mentioned comments for the increase (mostly explained they are willing to pay, the increase is necessary due to lack of resources, or will pay on certain conditions)
- 22 were against the increase (mostly concern that others will struggle, the Police's focus is wrong, and lack of consideration to what the public are currently facing)
- 6 mentioned mixed views for and against the increase
- 16 requested more information, or had questions about particular topics

Summary

- Combining all results (public and staff), 48% said they are **not willing to pay more** in Council tax.
 - Only 44% of the public stated they would be willing to pay more, with 50% saying no, and the remaining 6% not sure. Staff had a slightly different view in that more were willing to pay more in council tax (53%) compared to those who aren't.
- However, overall a higher percentage of 51% stated they are **able to pay more**
 - Similarly though, 51% of the public indicated they cannot pay more compared to 42% of staff. Illustrating that the public may struggle more with this than staff.
- Cheltenham and Cotswold LPA, and older people were more willing to pay compared to other LPA's and age groups.
- Free text comments show more negative comments towards the proposed increase than positive, mainly that they cannot afford it and they see inefficient spending by police, resulting in frustration when asked to pay more. On the other hand people feel the increase is necessary due to lack of resources, the Police do a good job and need the money to ensure people are safe.
- Those that either left social media comments on posts or saw the survey through social media had more opinions against the increase than in favour.

Recommendations

Consider messaging on social media

People who saw the survey on social media or left comments on social media were more negative towards the proposed increase. They felt they receive poor service, the Polices' focus is wrong (priorities shouldn't be about speeding or Covid-related offences) and that money is spent inefficiently

The right messaging on social media could help dispel these criticisms: For example being transparent about how the money will be spent, the need for the money, and the benefits of the increased budget. Also being transparent and understanding about the financial difficulties people have faced this year due to Covid, and reassuring the public that the money will be effectively used.