

West Mercia Police Budget Consultation

Key findings

**Research Study Conducted for
West Mercia Police Authority**

12 January 2005

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Introduction

This report presents the findings from quantitative research among council tax paying members of the general public within the West Mercia Police Authority area. The survey was conducted by the MORI Social Research Institute on behalf of the West Mercia Police Authority.

Background and objectives

Due to the impending general election, the issue of council tax is particularly prominent. The Government is keen that councils and police authorities consult local people before they make budget or council tax related decisions.

In general, the public wants to see more police officers on the beat in their local communities. The West Mercia Police Authority wants to understand how the public feels about the unavoidable impact of increasing police services on levels of council tax.

This report provides information to help inform budget development – and the trade off between police services and council tax.

Methodology and sampling

- MORI conducted a telephone survey among 1,009 council tax paying residents aged 18+ across the West Mercia Police Authority area.
- Fieldwork was conducted by telephone using CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) between 17 - 30 December 2004.
- The sample population in Worcestershire, Shropshire, Herefordshire and Telford and Wrekin were identified by postcode areas. On this basis, MORI created a residents' profile using the census 2001 output area data. This profile was used to set quotas on demographic factors (gender, age, and working status) to ensure representativeness of the overall sample. The sample was stratified to ensure that an equal number of respondents were surveyed in each of the four areas for comparison.
- Telephone numbers were then dialled at random within the area until the quotas for c1,000 respondents were appropriately filled.
- The final results are weighted back to ensure that data are representative of the residents profile across the four counties (for age, gender and working status), as well as of accurate proportions across the four areas.

Interpretation of Survey Data

It should be remembered that a sample and not the entire population of West Mercia council tax payers took part in the survey. In consequence, all results are subject to sampling tolerances which means that not all differences are statistically significant. A guide to statistical reliability is appended.

Where percentages for any particular question do not sum to 100 this may be due to computer rounding, the exclusion of 'don't know' categories, or multiple answers. Throughout the report an asterisk (*) denotes values above zero but less than half a percent.

Publication of Data

As West Mercia Police Authority has engaged MORI to provide an objective and representative survey it is important to protect the interests of both parties by ensuring that it is accurately reflected in any press release or publication of the findings. As part of our standard terms and conditions of contract the publication of the data in this report is therefore subject to the advance approval of MORI. This would only be refused on the grounds of inaccuracy or misinterpretation of findings.

Acknowledgements

MORI would like to thank Mike Weaver at the West Mercia Police Authority for his help and input in developing this survey. We are also grateful to the small number of respondents (in line with our usual experience) who took the trouble of contacting the Authority or MORI to verify the legitimacy of the survey. And, of course, we are indebted to all 1,009 residents who took part.

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Summary of Findings

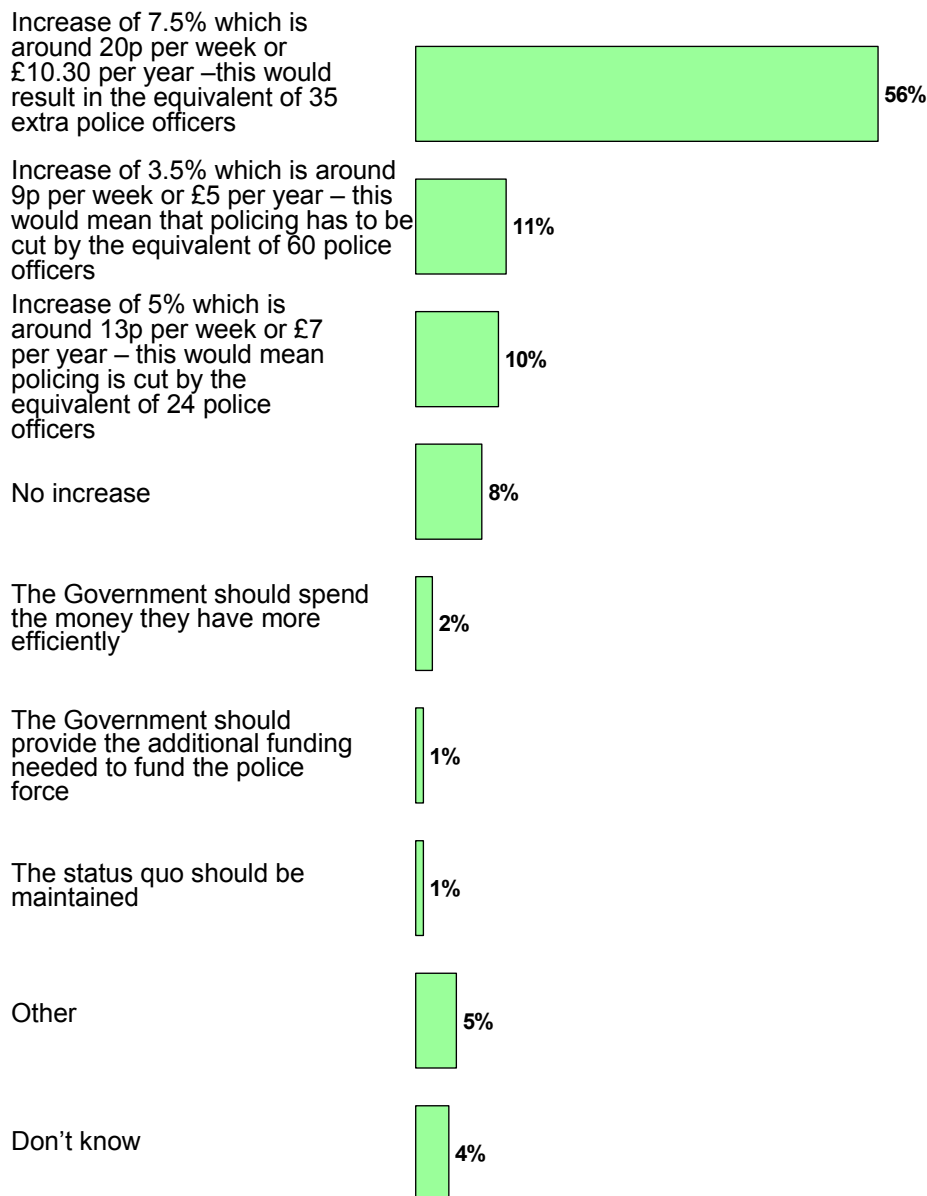
Attitudes to proposed increases in council tax

The majority of the public across West Mercia Police Authority area are in favour of paying more council tax to improve police services. When prompted with a list of options, over half (56%) of council tax payers in the area chose the option that would allow the Authority to increase the number of police officers on the beat – a council tax increase of 7.5%, which is around 20p per week or £10.30 per year, that would result in the equivalent of 35 additional police officers.

However, many are not prepared to fund additional police activity through council tax - around one in five participants opted to pay smaller increases in council tax that would result in a reduction in services – 10% chose an increase of 5%, which is around 13p per week or £7 per year, that would mean cutting the equivalent of 24 police officers and 11% chose an option of an increase of 3.5%, which is around 9p per week or £5 per year, that would mean cutting the equivalent of 60 police officers. One in twelve (8%) said there should be no increase.

Budget consultation

Q *The police in West Mercia need to decide whether or not to ask council tax payers to pay more to maintain or increase the number of police officers on the beat, as government funding does not match unavoidable cost increases. The average council tax payer pays around £138 per year on policing in West Mercia. There are three possible options to consider. Which of these would you prefer?*



Base: All respondents (1,009), December 2004

Source: MORI

Residents who are in favour of an additional 7.5% in the police element of their council tax, in order to secure service improvements, are more likely to live in Worcestershire (60% in favour) and Telford and Wrekin (60% in favour) than Shropshire (54% in favour) and Herefordshire (47% in favour), and to be employed (59% compared to 52% of those not working). Paying more council tax to increase police services is most popular in Worcester City (77%), Bromsgrove (70%), North Shropshire (61%) and Telford and Wrekin (60%). It is also more popular among those who say the police do a good job (62% compared to 44% who think the police do a poor job).

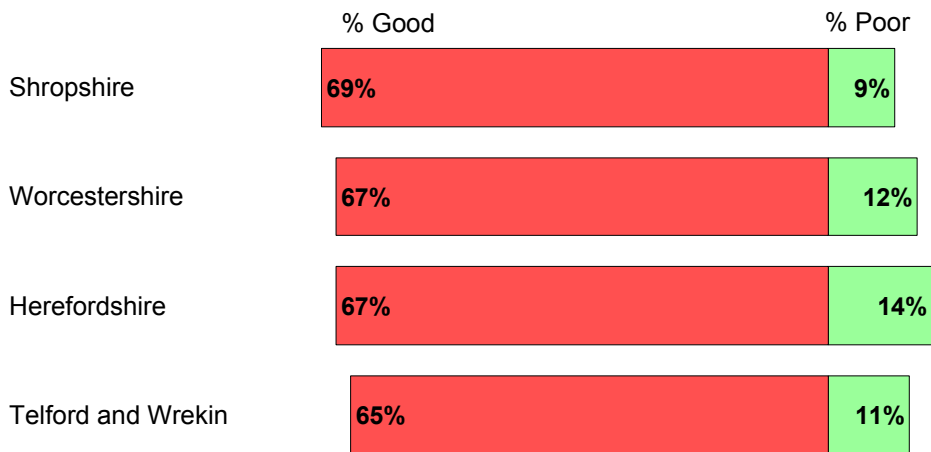
Residents who say that there should be no increase in council tax are more likely to be over 65 years old (13% compared to 8% overall) and not working (11%), suggesting that affordability is a key concern. Those living in Herefordshire (11%) and South Shropshire (13%) and those who say the police do a poor job (14%) are also more likely not to want council tax to increase.

Satisfaction with the police

Residents rate police performance in the area highly. Two thirds (67%) say they think the police in their area do a good job, with one in five (21%) saying they do a *very* good job.

Satisfaction with the police

Q Taking everything into account, would you say the police in your area do a good job or a poor job? Is that very/fairly good or very/fairly poor?



Base: All respondents (1,009), December 2004

Source: MORI

The proportions of residents who think that the police are doing a good job is, overall, remarkably similar across the four areas. Looking at more detail within these areas, however, residents in North Shropshire and the city of Worcester are more likely to feel that the police in their areas do a good job (75% in each case).

Residents in Redditch (22%) Herefordshire (14%) and South Shropshire (19%) are most likely to say that the police do a poor job, which may explain why (in Herefordshire and South Shropshire) participants are less willing to pay more council tax to increase police services. Those who have had contact with the police are more likely to say they do a poor job (18% compared to 7% who have not had contact).

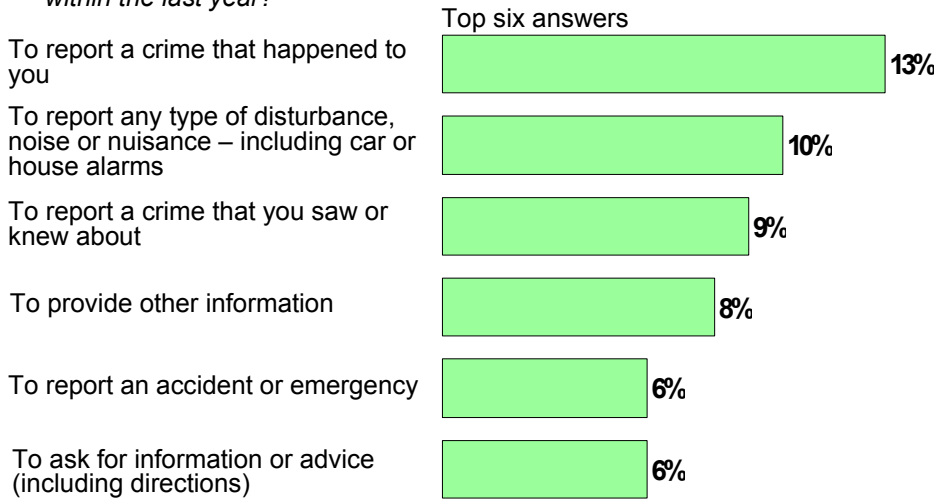
There is little difference in the views of those who have or have not had contact with the police over the last year (64% and 69% respectively saying that the police in their area do a good job).

Contact with the police

Around a third (36%) of residents say they had some kind of contact with the police within the last year. Top reasons for contacting the police in the area are to report a crime that happened to them (13%), to report any type of disturbance, noise or nuisance (10%) and to report a crime that they saw or knew about (9%).

Police contact

Q I am going to read out a number of different types of contact with the police. For each one, please tell me if you have been in touch with the police for that reason within the last year?



Base: All respondents (1,009), December 2004

Source: MORI

Young people are more likely to have had contact with the police (45% of 18-34 years olds compared to 36% overall).

Final Comment

Whilst fear of crime may be a top concern for residents, and the idea of more police officers on the beat in local communities appealing, when faced with the responsibility for paying for these services, many residents are inevitably less enthusiastic.

However, a significantly large proportion of residents in West Mercia support paying an increase in council tax in order not just to maintain but to increase police services in the area.

In general, those who tend to be most concerned about crime and safety are often least likely to be able to afford to pay more council tax to fund policing. For example, older people (who are not working) and disadvantaged people, who are likely to live in poorer areas, may benefit most from more visible policing yet are least in a position to choose it. Residents most in favour of increasing the level of council tax to increase police services are more likely to be employed, and perhaps therefore more able to afford it.

But the overall picture to emerge from this survey is clear. A broadly consistent picture of support for the council tax option involving the largest increase (of the three options provided) emerges, predicated on the understanding that this would facilitate service improvements. This is regardless of area or demographic characteristics.

Appendices

Statistical Reliability

The responses to the questionnaire are only samples of the total ‘population’, so we cannot be certain that the figures obtained are exactly those we would have if every West Mercia council tax payer had been interviewed (the ‘true’ values). We can, however, predict the variation between the sample results and the ‘true’ values from knowledge of the size of the samples on which the results are based and the number of times that a particular answer is given. The confidence with which we can make this prediction is usually chosen to be 95% – that is, the chances are 95 in 100 that the ‘true’ value will fall within a specified range. The table below illustrates the predicted ranges for different sample sizes and percentage results at the ‘95% confidence interval’.

| Size of sample on which survey result is based | Approximate sampling tolerances applicable to percentages at or near these levels | | |
|--|---|------------|-----|
| | 10% or 90% | 30% or 70% | 50% |
| | ± | ± | ± |
| 100 interviews | 6 | 9 | 10 |
| 200 | 4 | 6 | 7 |
| 500 interviews | 3 | 4 | 4 |
| 1,009 interviews | 2 | 3 | 3 |

For example, in our sample size of 1,009, 56% say that, of the options before them, they would prefer a council tax increase of 7.5%, on the understanding that this would result in an improved police service. The chances are 95 in 100 that the ‘true’ value (which would have been obtained if the whole population had been interviewed) will fall within three percentage points of the sample result, i.e. between 53% and 59%. The likelihood is that the true result will be towards the middle of this range.

When results are compared between separate groups within a sample, different results may be obtained. The difference may be ‘real’, or it may occur by chance (because not everyone in the population has been interviewed). To test if the difference is a real one (i.e. if it is ‘statistically significant’) we again have to know the size of the samples, the percentage giving a certain answer and the degree of confidence chosen. If we assume the ‘95% confidence interval’, the differences between the results of two separate groups must be greater than the values given in the table below.

| Size of samples compared | Differences required for significance at or near these percentage levels | | |
|--------------------------|--|------------|-------|
| | 10% or 90% | 30% or 70% | 50% |
| | \pm | \pm | \pm |
| 50 and 100 | 10 | 16 | 17 |
| 100 and 100 | 8 | 13 | 14 |
| 100 and 200 | 7 | 11 | 12 |
| 200 and 200 | 6 | 9 | 10 |
| 500 and 1,000 | 3 | 5 | 5 |

For example, when comparing a sample of 500 with the population of 1,009 where 30% give a particular answer, the chances are 19 in 20 that the “true” value (which would have been obtained if the whole population had been interviewed) will fall within the range of plus or minus 5 percentage points (± 5) from the sample result.

Topline Findings

Computer tabulations
