

Policing in Essex Precept Survey

Report on Survey Findings

December 2018

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Introduction

Funding for Essex Police comes from two sources: central government funding and local council tax. Taking these two funding sources into account Essex Police receives the lowest funding per resident of any police force in the country and has the sixth lowest council tax for policing.

Last year we carried out a survey asking whether or not you would pay more to increase investment in policing in the county. More than 5,000 people took part and overwhelmingly supported increasing funding.

Two thirds (65%) of those who responded said they wanted to see the cap on the policing precept element of Council Tax funding lifted. Three-quarters of these people said they were prepared to contribute an additional £10 per year or more to invest in policing with around two thirds of them saying they were prepared to pay more than £20.

Following the results Roger Hirst, the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex, worked with the Government to get the cap on funding lifted and then raised the policing element of the Council Tax by £12, or £1 a month, for a Band D property.

This extra funding, along with the £450 million secured for policing nationally from the Government, has allowed Essex Police to recruit 150 more frontline officers, increasing the total number of officers to 3,000. These officers are currently being recruited and trained and will be in the community by April 2019.

Three-quarters of the extra funding was invested in local policing. A district by district plan has been published by Essex Police showing where the extra investment will go. You can view this at <https://www.essex.police.uk/your-area/>

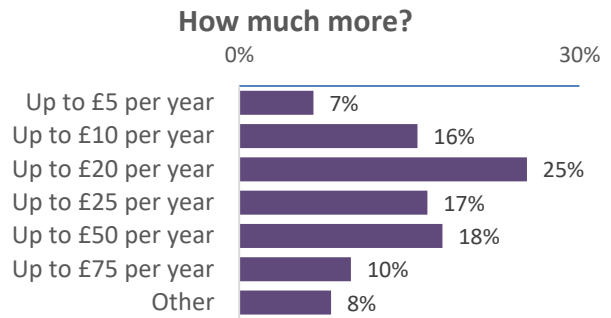
A survey was again carried out in order to find out the views of Essex residents to help inform our plan for police funding in 2019/2020.

The Police Precept survey was live between 6th November and 27th November 2018 and the total number of respondents of the survey was 4,187.

Executive Summary

- 4,187 people responded to the survey. 71% of respondents said that in general, they would be prepared to invest more in policing to help improve the service provided (up from 66% a year earlier). Younger respondents and those in Council Tax Band A, B and C were less likely to say this, while older people and those in Bands G and H were more likely to say they would be prepared to invest more.

- 73% of those who gave a view said they were prepared to contribute at least £20 more to invest in policing. Another 16% were prepared to pay up to £10 a year more and 48% said they were willing to invest £25 or more.



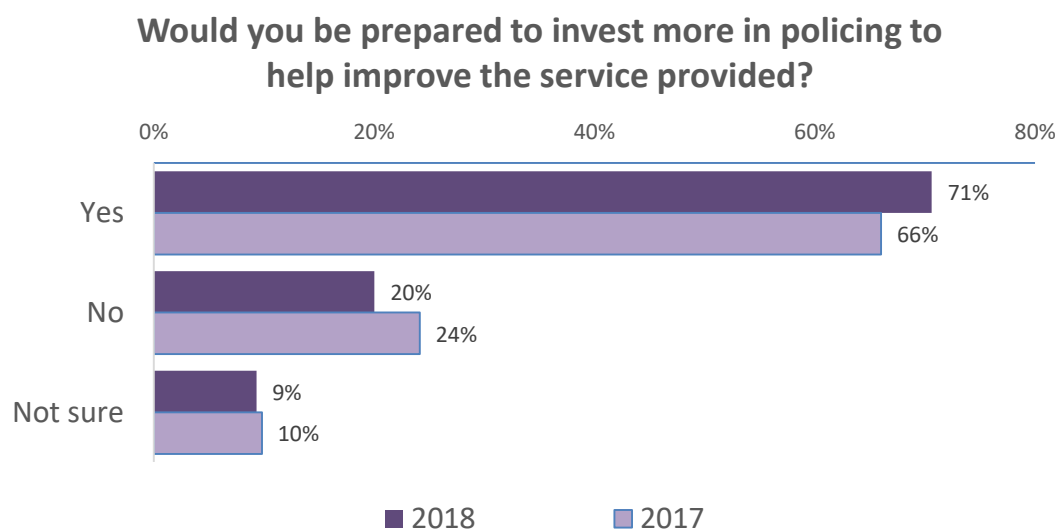
- As in 2017, local neighbourhood policing was rated as the most important area to focus any additional funds on, followed by tackling anti-social behaviour, tackling gangs, and serious and organised crime.

Detailed Findings

Where respondents provided their postcode, these were matched to the most likely Council Tax Band for each postcode area and a total of 3,338 matches were made. The results for Bands G and H were combined due to the small sample sizes within each band.

Respondents were asked whether, in general, they would be prepared to invest more in policing to help improve the service provided.

71% of respondents said that in general, they would be prepared to invest more in policing to help improve the service provided. This is higher than the 66% who said this in 2017.



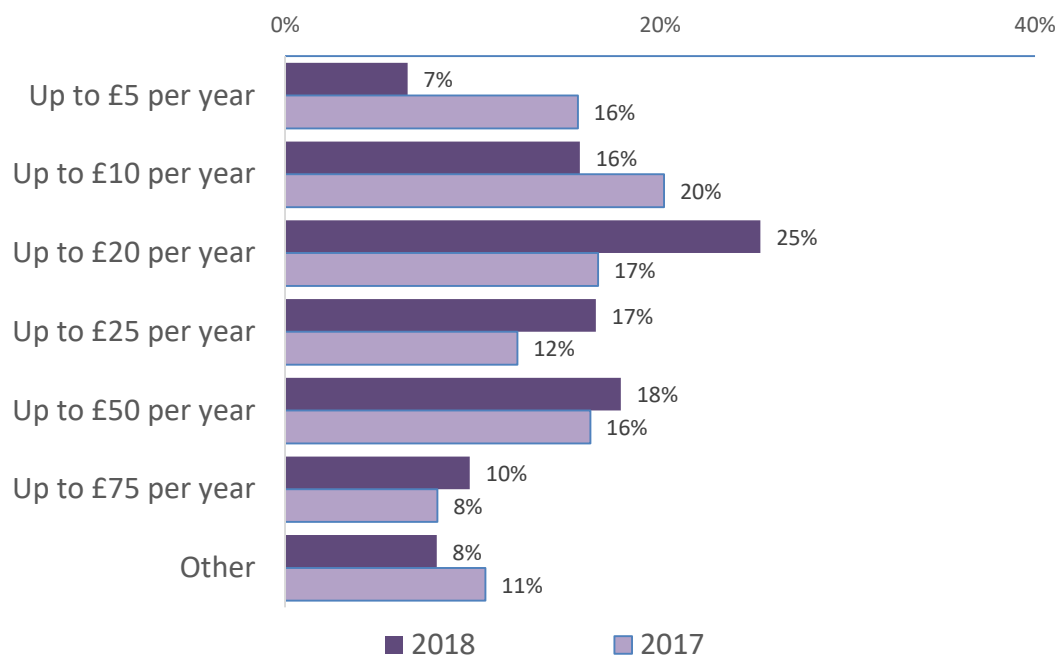
Respondents aged 35 or under and those who are likely to be in Council Tax Band A, B and C were less likely to say they would be prepared to invest more, while those aged 66 or over and those in Bands G and H were more likely to say this.

Council tax band	A	B	C	D	E	F	G & H	All respondents
Yes	67%	65%	67%	72%	73%	72%	80%	71%
No	23%	22%	24%	18%	20%	16%	11%	20%
Not sure	10%	13%	9%	10%	7%	11%	9%	9%
Number of respondents	195	317	854	627	776	280	289	3923

The Band D council tax for policing in Essex for 2017/18 is £169.02. Respondents were asked how much more they would be prepared to contribute to support more investment in policing.

Of the 3,156 respondents who replied to this question, nearly three quarters (73%) said they were prepared to contribute at least £20 more per year to invest in policing. Another 16% were prepared to pay up to £10 a year more. 48% said they were willing to invest £25 or more.

How much more would you be prepared to contribute to support more investment in policing?



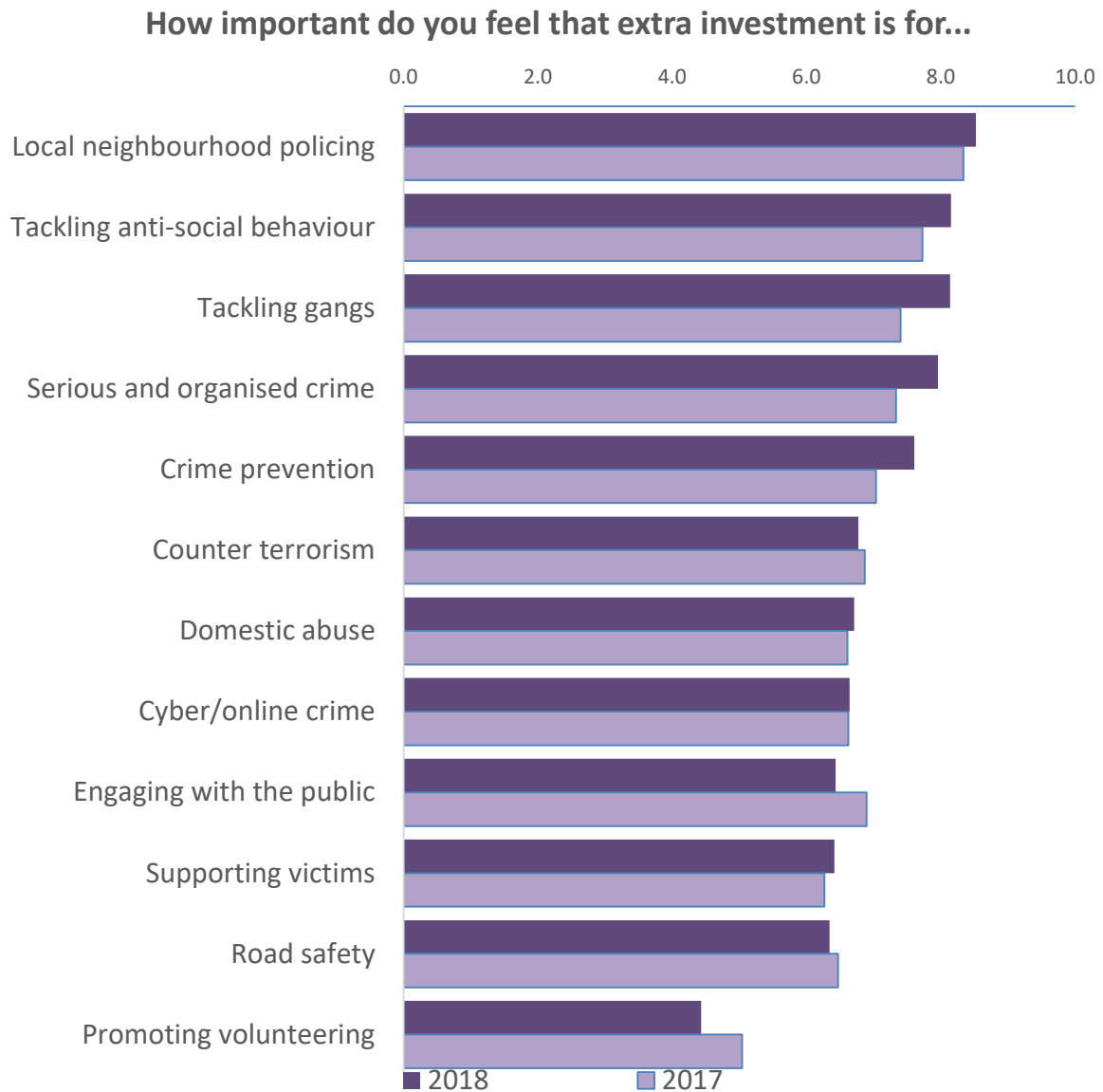
8% of respondents suggested other amounts, as detailed in the table below. Out of these respondents, 4% said that it would depend on what service they got from the increase and 4% said that it would need to go on local or front line policing.

'Other' amounts	Percentage of respondents who specified an 'other' amount
Nothing	31%
Between £1 and £12 per year	11%
Up to an extra £100 per year	22%
Up to an extra £120 per year	13%
Other specific amounts	14%

In recent years the nature of crime and the risks to the public have changed and policing has changed to meet this need. For example, Essex Police has increased its investment in counter terrorism activities, tackling hidden harms such as online abuse and fraud, and investigating complex organised crime. These areas of investment, while not always visible, are essential parts of what the police do to keep Essex safe. As the Police have limited financial resources, they wanted to know where respondents would like them to focus any additional funding that they might receive through the precept.

Respondents were asked how important they feel that extra investment is for each area, on a scale of 1 to 10 (where 1 is not at all important and 10 is extremely important). Local neighbourhood policing was rated as 8.5 out of 10 in importance (compared to 8.3 in 2017), followed by tackling anti-social behaviour (8.2 compared

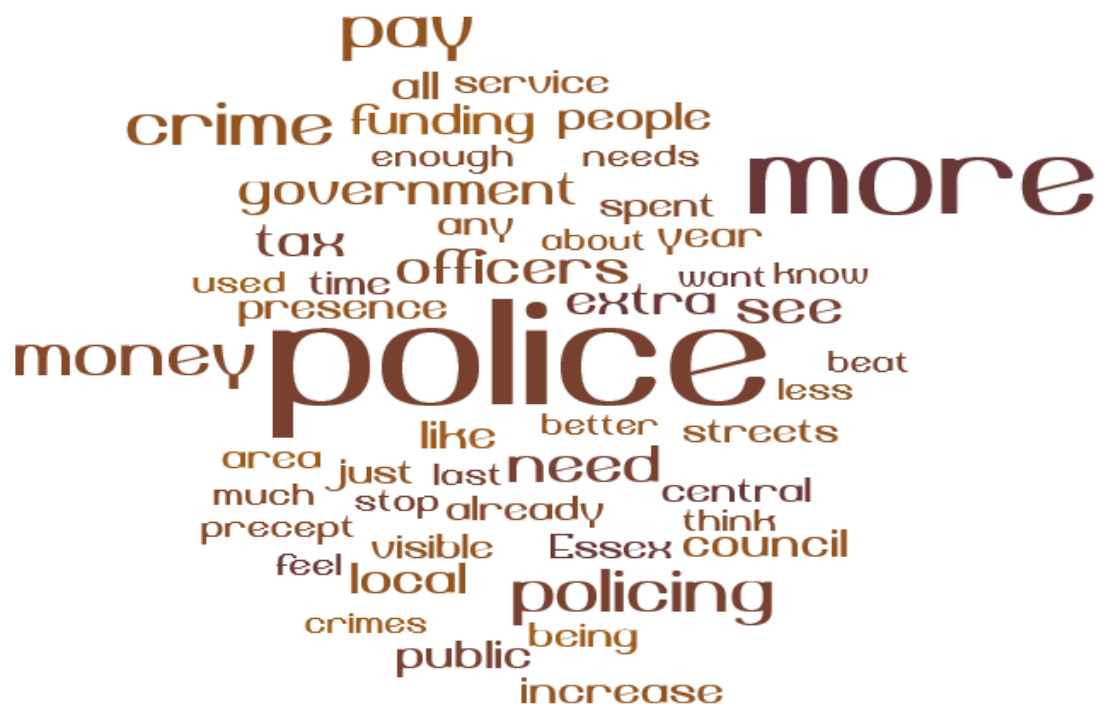
to 7.7), tackling gangs (8.1 compared to 7.4) and then serious and organised crime (8.0 compared to 7.0).



Respondents were asked whether there was anything else that they would like to say about the policing precept, and 1,308 comments were made. The main themes were:

- Many respondents wanted more visible policing/a greater police presence (including in rural areas) and more frontline resources. This was often linked to the visibility of police acting as a deterrent to crime or that the lack of a visible police presence has led to an increase in crime.
- Many of the comments made were that central government should fund policing rather than it coming from council tax.

- A number of people wanted to see neighbourhood policing come back, often in relation to deterring or preventing crime through better local intelligence. Some lamented the closure of local police stations or suggested they would improve the service provided – with regard to having a presence, improving response times (especially in less populated areas) or connecting better with the local area.
- A proportion of respondents felt that the police response to crime is poor – often clearly based on personal experience. Some wanted the police to deal with real crimes and/or “get back to basics” in respect of policing. Others wanted a better response to the kinds of day to day/low level crime that they see or that affect them and their communities.
- Many people who agreed with additional funding wanted it to go into actual policing or police resources, or to go to policing in their local area. Others suggested that the police force could become more efficient or cut existing waste.
- Some respondents felt that they have not seen any results from the recent increase in the precept, or felt that residents are paying more money but getting a worse service or no services, or that they do not get value for money currently.



“I think our police do a first class job and should be given more recognition for the excellent work they do, both the specials and regular police.”

“Policing has changed too much. Too much is being placed on officers to do with so few resources. Either they need the resources or they need some of the burden taken off them.”

“I feel that the relationship between the public and police has taken a negative turn as people no longer see a familiar representative of the police force in their day to day life.”

“I would be happy to pay more for policing so long as there is a visible difference, e.g. police response to calls, deterrent effect for anti social behaviour, etc”

Policing and police visibility

As in the 2017 survey, the highest number of comments (by nearly 180 respondents or 14% of all comments made) related to having more visible policing or a greater police presence. This was often linked to the visibility of police acting as a deterrent to crime or that the lack of a visible police presence has led to an increase in crime. Respondents aged 66 or over, or in tax bands D to F, were more likely to say this.

“If we do pay more then priority should been visible policing. Perception at present is there are no police available to tackle crime from the view of the public and the criminal.”

“We have no police here and have seen more problems as a result of people knowing this. We pay our taxes so should surely deserve some police presence?”

“We desperately miss a visible police presence on the street and there has been a marked increase in antisocial behaviour since it disappeared. I believe in zero tolerance policing to avoid escalation to more serious crime. I understand current difficulties places on the police service both financially and in prioritisation of resource but would like to see basic law, order and respect for people and property restored.”

The third highest volume of comments made by nearly 120 respondents (9% of all comments) were about having police on the street. This was often related to a having a greater police presence/visibility or acting as a deterrent to crime and criminals. Respondents aged between 56 and 75 were more likely to say this (there were no differences by tax band). Around 10 people wanted more police in patrol cars/on the roads.

“We need more police on the streets - visible to help deter violence and crime. We need more police to respond to burglary.”

“I would like to see police on the beat and being proactive not reactive.”

“I would like to see more patrols both foot and mobile. I can go days without seeing a police officer.”

In addition, over 80 respondents (6% of comments) wanted more frontline police/resources. (Another 10 said that this should be police officers rather than PCSOs or volunteers.)

“Any extra investment should be spent 100% on front line services and not on administration.”

“More police, less crime, no brainer.”

Over 50 people (representing 4% of all comments) mentioned police stations, either lamenting their closure or suggesting that they would improve the service provided – with regard to having a presence, improving response times (especially in less populated areas) or connecting better with the local area.

“I don’t think it’s been a good idea to close such a lot of local police stations - it makes the police so inaccessible and you end up feeling like a number rather than a person with a problem.”

“Police bases are required in the rural areas and even though you have shut down the stations a base could be shared with town council offices. Police take too long to respond as they are not local anymore. The service is poor and inadequate as it stands. I feel a lot of this survey stuff is a tick box exercise and blows lots of hot air!”

Nearly 50 respondents (4% of comments) felt that crime is either very high or has risen substantially over the recent years. Many linked the rise to the reduction in the number of police officers and/or their lack of visibility.

“Increasing police numbers in Essex is absolutely paramount, recently criminal activity has rapidly increased and we need the funds and the manpower to tackle this.”

“I believe the cuts to policing have directly affected the crime rate.”

Over 40 people (3% of all comments) wanted a more visible presence in rural areas and villages or highlighted what they see as an absence of service in these areas.

A lack of police presence in the rural community has given rise to more crime. Tackling theft and burglary would help with gangs and larger organised crime. Essex has become an easy target and gate way for many criminals. We receive little or no response from police when crimes are reported and as a result an escalation of violence, aggression and theft are increasing. These people know little or nothing will be done and they will be gone before the police can attend. Our nearest police are 30 or 45 minutes away. We have no police station near us.”

Nearly 50 respondents (4% of comments) wanted to see neighbourhood policing introduced or re-instated, often in relation to deterring or preventing crime through better local intelligence.

“If you employ more beat neighbourhood officers, they can tackle the nuisance in area. Learn about what is going on in area get to know certain people and areas. Give reassurance to elderly and the school children of today. Locals will again speak to their local officer and Intel is given in possible drugs. Gangs. Local suspects .. Neighbourhood policing should return.”

“I live at West Mersea and our local policing ended several years ago, which I think was a big mistake. We are a big community and more and more law breaking has gone on. The local policing kept the youngsters on the right path, and helped with problems.”

Another 40 people (3% of comments) wanted more engagement with the community and/or schools and young people, while 20 wanted police to be more proactive in crime prevention.

“Try engaging with the community. You will for sure achieve higher levels of information related to crime.”

“Build a rapport between police force and the young by attending schools and patrolling streets of towns and villages.”

“Investing in working with public in preventative measures surely is a good investment.”

Around 90 people (7% of all comments) said that the police response to crime is poor – this was often clearly based on personal experience.

“I don’t feel safe in my own home having been burgled and it took day/ weeks for someone to come. Yes I get it that I’m a small fry and you never expected to catch the scum but I still felt very vulnerable and alone, let down for leading a honest lifestyle.”

“Crime is growing in my local area however reporting crime is becoming harder. 101 is a terrible wait and people give up. Reporting online does not feel as though anything is/will be done. People have lost faith. As a community we all know someone who has been burgled, had their car stolen or had anti social behaviour however these seem to be viewed as low level crime and not important. After being burgled I can tell you my family remain affected by it 2 years afterwards. Our case was closed, no one apprehended (I assume) and the insurance had to pay out. But it’s not all about money some things can not be replaced like feeling safe in your home or in the area that you live.”

Over 70 respondents (6% of comments) wanted the police to deal with real crimes and/or “get back to basics” in respect of policing. Some respondents did not want police to “waste time” dealing with crimes such as hate crimes, traffic offences and historic crimes or national issues such as counter terrorism and cyber-crimes.

“Burglary, robbery, moped crime, antisocial behaviour and fraudsters. Tackle crimes that are local and hurt the community...”

“It’s time the police went back to policing and had their powers restored. Too many times we hear that the police can’t do anything, it’s the council, but the council say the opposite. Know your job, do your job and crack down on all crime. Make people feel safe again.”

“Scare police resources should be focused on basic law and order eg burglary, car theft, knife crime etc and not PC offences like hate crimes.”

Over 60 people (5% of all comments) wanted a better response to the kinds of day to day/low level crime that they see or that affect them and their communities. Many of them also felt that this would prevent escalation in criminal behaviour and “stop people moving on to bigger crimes”.

“There has been a recent surge in antisocial and criminal behaviour conducted by a very small number of individuals that everyone would like to see stamped out.”

“Minor crimes are escalating due to lack of policing. These criminals will grow with confidence if they are not stopped at low level.”

Police funding

The second highest number of comments made by over 140 respondents (11% of comments) was that central government should fund policing rather than it coming from council tax. Respondents aged between 36 and 65, or in tax bands E and F, were more likely to make this comment.

“You cannot expect the public to continue to pay higher amounts each year via council tax. Central government should be funding any increases needed which they already recoup through general taxation.”

“I pay enough Council Tax and now getting less service for it, why should I pay more? This is NOT value for money. It should and must be Centrally Funded through Government. Commissioners and Chief Constables should stop asking the Public for money and, ON MASS, banging on the doors of the Home Office very Publically!! Stand up for what is right as you expect your Officers to!!??!!”

Around 40 respondents (3% of comments) were simply to do with agreeing that funding should be increased. However, nearly 20 people felt that no more money should be allocated.

“We contribute less per head than every where else in the UK, raise this so we are in line with the rest of the country.”

“We need a good and strong police force to be well funded to be able to work properly...”

“Police should provide a service within their budget and not seek extra public funding.”

Nearly 70 people (5% of all comments) wanted any additional funding to go into actual policing or police resources, while around 50 (4%) wanted it to go to policing in their local area. Around 15 respondents linked funding to ensuring that they feel safe.

“Increasing police numbers in Essex is absolutely paramount, recently criminal activity has rapidly increased and we need the funds and the manpower to tackle this.”

“I’m happy to pay more but for those additional funds I’d want to see tangible local improvements and extra police presence.”

“Don’t mind paying extra for policing on my council tax as long as what I pay is definitely going to go towards policing in my town.”

“If nothing is done soon no one is going to feel safe in their homes and criminals will take over. An authority with powers needs to be present and stop the criminals.”

Nearly 60 respondents (4% of comments) felt that they have not seen any results from the recent increase in the precept, while another 10 felt that the annual increases in past years should be enough.

“The police tax rose by 5% last year and I have yet to see an improvement. What do we get for our money or should the people of Witham employ their own private security team instead.”

“As we were asked a similar question iro funding last year and as there has been increased crime locally, there seems NO POINT in extra funding because it has achieved NOTHING!”

“You seem to put it up by more than inflation every year, more than the general council tax rises and there seems to be little benefit from it.”

Another 60 or so comments (4% of them) related to a feeling that residents are paying more money but getting a worse service or no services, or that they do not get value for money currently.

“We had to pay more last year and yet services drastically declined, so getting the tax payer to fund the police even more has been shown to have no material benefit to the public.”

“Quite frankly the Police presence in Essex is laughable, yet not funny in any way. Police are not visible and drug crime is at epidemic levels. What are you spending the money on now? The year on year cuts have put the Police and other front line emergency services on to their knees. My town no longer feels safe and a Police response takes a long time.”

Over 30 people (3% of comments) said that any increase needs to reflect a better service.

“I think if you are asking for more money from the public it is vital to get more boots on the ground so to speak... if people are paying more money each year for the police then the public will want to see a visible increase in frontline police staff. With an increase in funding there needs to be improvements to the response of small crimes as well as the life risk/urgent ones.”

“I would be happy to pay more for policing so long as there is a visible difference, e.g. police response to calls, deterrent effect for anti social behaviour, etc”

There were 25 comments (2%) made about the lack of investment/funding of the police force.

“Please feedback that austerity and police cuts are destroying the fabric of our society.”

Around 20 respondents said that they already pay enough money for policing, while another 20 said that they already pay too much. About 25 said that they can't afford to pay any more.

“If I wouldn't have to pay so much for council tax and so much tax from my wages then I would pay more for police but now I cannot afford it we pay to much for council and pay tax on people that are not working at all because they cannot be bothered to even if they can it's not fair.”

“We pay enough through our council tax and still there is a large amount of crime which police at times fail to turn up for, why should we pay more for a service we are not getting.”

“The extra shouldn't be put on people on welfare, we already struggle to survive as I am disabled and whilst I would love to pay extra, it would mean we would be in even more trouble financially.”

Spending and efficiencies

Nearly 90 people (7% of comments) wanted the police force to become more efficient or to cut existing waste, with specific suggestions about:

- Reducing red tape and paperwork, or using IT to get paperwork done faster.
- Improving IT or not wasting money on IT systems that “aren't fit for purpose”.
- Cutting top tiers of management.
- Reducing the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's budget.
- Reducing the number of officers in back office roles.
- Replacing outdated equipment to allow police to do their jobs.
- Not buying new/expensive cars.
- Deploying police officers in appropriate numbers (“6 officers to arrest 1 male???”)
- Merging all emergency services.
- Having a central organisation to source standard equipment for the whole of the UK.
- Raising money by renting out buildings or charging for services.
- Spending less on advertising.

“I consider this poll flawed as it assumes the only way to provide extra resources is more money, rather than more efficiency measures.”

Another 15 or so respondents wanted less wastage or cuts in other services provided by the government or councils (such as foreign aid or road building).

In addition over 30 comments related to salaries or pensions (some which were contradictory) including:

- The need for a pay increase to boost police morale.
- Not using the increase for higher and higher salaries, especially for senior management.
- Cutting the number of senior officers (who have high wages).
- Not using the increase on overtime.
- Not using the increase on pension payments.

Just over 20 respondents wanted to see evidence about improvements made while another 20 wanted more accountability or transparency in how money is spent.

“I am willing to pay more to ensure the policing effort is stepped up but I would want to see more people on the beat, this is a bigger deterrent. I would also want to see the justification and evidence the money is put into the right areas and this may give the public more confidence however, the minute the money goes in the wrong direction the integrity will be lost.”

I would like to see a constituency breakdown of where money is being spent, and definitive results of successful investment.”

“I would need to know that the money is spent purely on policing and on aspects of policing that I deem important. Transparency of spending would be vitally important.”

Nearly 50 respondents (4% of comments) suggested getting rid of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner. Around 10 suggested the need for a strategy or long term plan.

“Save money on roles like police commissioner and use money for grassroots policing.”

Other comments

Over 30 comments related to tax issues, including:

- Paying for policing already comes from general taxation and/or council taxes, and respondents feel that it is unfair or that they shouldn't have to pay twice – *“it is an indirect stealth tax”*.
- Funding shouldn't be linked to varying council tax bands but people should all pay the same as their needs are the same – *“or do the higher payers get a better service?”*
- Large companies such as Amazon and Facebook should be contributing to taxes.
- New housing developments mean increased council tax receipts, but this should pay for police funding in their local area.
- Police staff shouldn't have to pay the increases as paying for their own job comes out of their wages in the first place.

- Scepticism about whether any increase would actually go to the police.
- The government is holding onto tax money and it isn't true to say that police funding has gone up.

Just over 20 people commented about sentencing or the criminal justice system, with most wanting tougher sentences or for the police to have more powers.

“I think the police are up against it when our justice system is so useless and ineffective.”

Some 25 respondents (2% of all comments) highlighted the good job that the police do.

“The Police, along with other public services, deserve greater support from central government. The Police do a fantastic job with diminishing resources and I know how much harder they have to work just to maintain the status quo (my son-in-law is in the Met).”

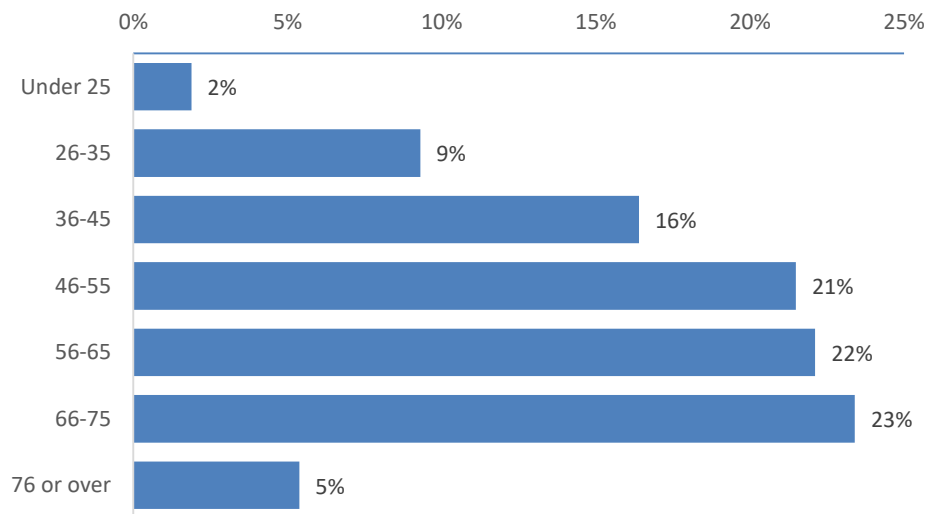
There were also a number of comments made that did not fall under any of the themes above. These included:

- Managing public expectations as *“emergency services can no longer be everything for everyone”*.
- Address the time and money spent by police on people with mental health issues.
- Policing is an absolute requirement and has to be paid for.
- The need for police to be given back their powers in order to *“stop the criminals”*.
- A heavy reliance on online contact with the police is no good for the elderly or vulnerable members of society, and loses the trust and interaction developed by personal contact.
- Morale is very low due to low salaries and the amount of work required, leading to time off with stress and unsafe practices.
- There is a need to look into why so many police officers are leaving the force.
- Consider raising the retirement age for police.
- Positions during school times only would attract more single parents to join the force either as volunteers or employees.
- Unused property (e.g. closed police stations) should be dealt with.
- It takes a long time to train and recruit additional officers. Existing police officers need to be retained.
- Essex Police should follow the Clos Pass initiative.
- Money for the police should be ring fenced.
- Could money be cut from the Fire Service and put into policing?
- The police force and fire service should be exempt from cuts as they both stop people needing the health service.
- Additional funding could be financed by local Parish Councils. Some councils are already funding additional security in their parishes.
- Investing in the police is better than in private security.

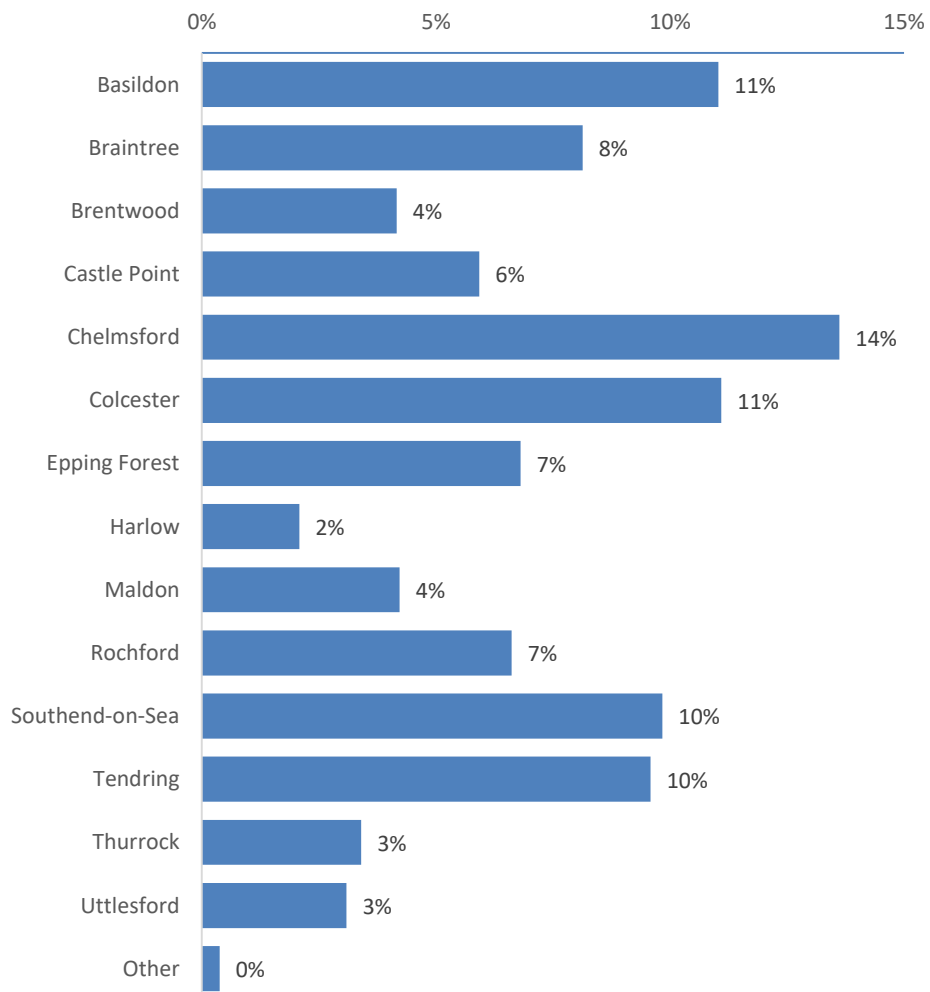
- Funding should be set per capita of the population area.
- Will the precept be lowered should extra government funding be given to a national equivalent level?
- What happens to the revenue gained from motoring offences?
- The more that is paid for locally, the less influence central government should have.
- The root causes of crime (e.g. addictions and lack of respect for society) are not addressed.
- Increases in the precept should be determined by public vote rather than surveys.
- Will there be a similar survey about the “*underfunded*” Fire and Rescue Service?
- Victims of crime should receive a rebate/discount.
- Victims should be supported by agencies other than the police.
- The police should be more vocal about the risks of part night lighting.
- Wildlife crime is currently biased in favour of blood sports.
- Criminals should be charged for the time and effort spent.
- The survey is biased/a waste of money.
- The word ‘precept’ is not easily understood – plain English should have been used.

Who gave their views?

A total of 4,187 people responded to the survey this year (compared to 5,044 in 2017). 55% of respondents were male, and the age ranges are shown below.



The responses by home district/unitary authority are shown below.



This report published in December 2018.

The information contained in this document can be translated, and/or made available in alternative formats, on request.