



Precept consultation outcomes

Purpose of report

This report is a summary of the results obtained from the public and stakeholder consultation undertaken to seek views on the amount of council tax the people of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent are willing to pay towards their Police and Fire & Rescue services.

Background

Funding for police and fire & rescue services is made up of a mix of central government grants, combined with the 'precept' – the contribution residents make as part of their annual council tax.

The Staffordshire Commissioner is responsible for setting the budget for Staffordshire Police, and Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Service, including the amount of council tax used for both services.

It is the Commissioner's responsibility to ensure policing, fire & rescue and community safety is properly funded in 2024/25 to provide the services expected by those who live, work and visit Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

A formal consultation took place between 7 December and 4 January. A range of methods were used to encourage participation, resulting in responses from 1,985 people from Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

The views from this consultation will help the Commissioner arrive at his proposals for the setting of the 2024/25 budgets.

How we did it

We used a range of methods to promote the consultation including:

- **Social media** – Multiple social media posts were issued from the Staffordshire Commissioner's Office (SCO), Staffordshire Police, Staffordshire Fire & Rescue and partners. Paid adverts also ran on facebook and Instagram targeting residents of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

- **Media** – A press release issued to inform local media of the importance of the consultation
- **Stakeholders** – Emails sent from the Commissioner requesting key partners' involvement including local MPs, Councillors, volunteers, community groups and business owners
- **Smart Alert** – Multiple messages issued to over 21,000 residents via Staffordshire Smart Alert
- **Internal** – Internal message sent to police and fire staff to encourage participation
- **SCO Newsletter Subscribers** – Email sent to the SCO newsletter subscriber list of 1,636 people

Consultation foreword

As your Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner, it is my duty to secure effective and efficient Police and Fire & Rescue services that ensure community needs are met, while commissioning services to prevent crime, reduce anti-social behaviour and support victims across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

I do this by setting out a strategic direction in Local Plans for Staffordshire Police and Staffordshire Fire & Rescue. I am responsible for setting their budgets and determining the contribution you make as part of your annual council tax precept.

I also appoint our Chief Constable and Chief Fire Officer. Their role is crucial as they make the operational decisions and run the organisations. I believe I have recruited two of the best in Chris Noble and Rob Barber. They have each built strong leadership teams that are driving our local services forward with dedicated and hard-working teams made up of police officers, PCSOs, firefighters, staff and volunteers.

Last year's cost of living rise hit residents hard so I decided to set council tax increases below the maximum allowed by government and below inflation. Even so, you provided an additional £6m for your local Police and £1.9m for Fire & Rescue and this has made a difference.

Our Fire & Rescue service are tackling more incidents, many due to climate change, and continue to target prevention activity at the most vulnerable while pioneering activity to support our local NHS and West Midlands Ambulance.

Staffordshire Police are more local, visible and responsive. 999 and 101 have improved and crucially the force is set to have 2,000 officers by April 2024, 400 more than 2019, and even more than I promised when elected in 2020.

Other priorities are being met too. 24/7 roads policing is imminent, new safety cameras and vans are being rolled out to improve road safety and £500k has been invested in more number plate recognition to track criminals using our roads. My office is supporting more victims, doing more prevention work and making our neighbourhoods safer.

While both services have sound finances the future is uncertain with energy costs remaining high, international instability and the cost of servicing our national debt following the pandemic likely to restrict central government grants. Staffordshire Police and Fire & Rescue will continue to make savings and increase productivity but to secure their future, to keep improving service levels and provide the security we expect, it will require investment.

Additional investment would help Staffordshire Police carry out more pro-active investigations into serious organised crime. It would also allow the service to take advantage of new technology including artificial intelligence - freeing up officers to target criminals.

Investment in Staffordshire Fire & Rescue would help secure the number of wholetime and on-call firefighters required to respond effectively across all our urban and rural areas while building their prevention team's capacity to work with NHS and others to keep us safe.

This year many people have seen their pay, benefit or pension increase but I know balancing household budgets is still challenging. I aim to keep council tax as low as possible. I will only ask for more in order to maintain or improve your Police and Fire & Rescue Service.

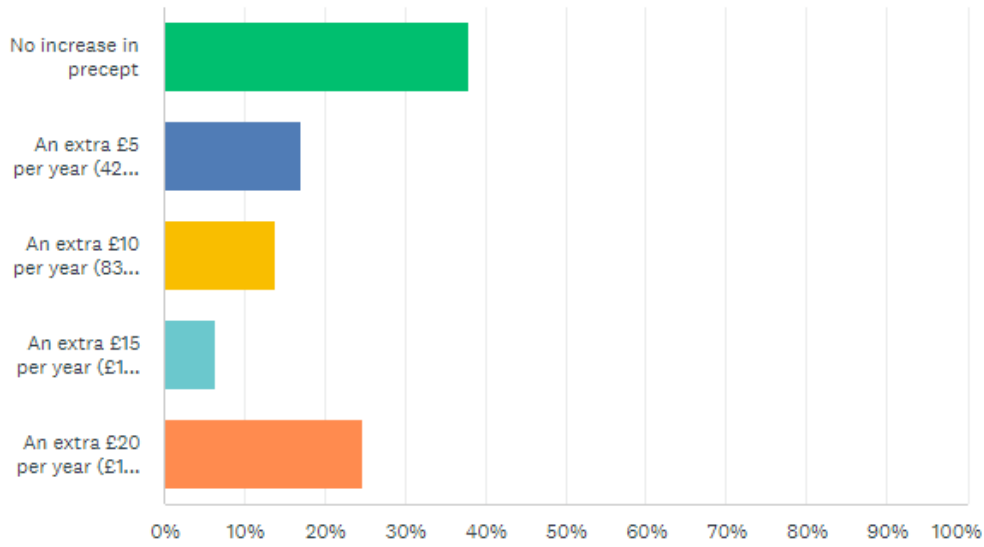
So, I would welcome your thoughts. What level of additional council tax contributions would you support to help our Police and Fire & Rescue services?

Every penny helps to keep Staffordshire safe.

The results

The following options are based on a Band D property currently paying £260.57 each year for Police services. How much more would you be prepared to pay per year for your Police services?

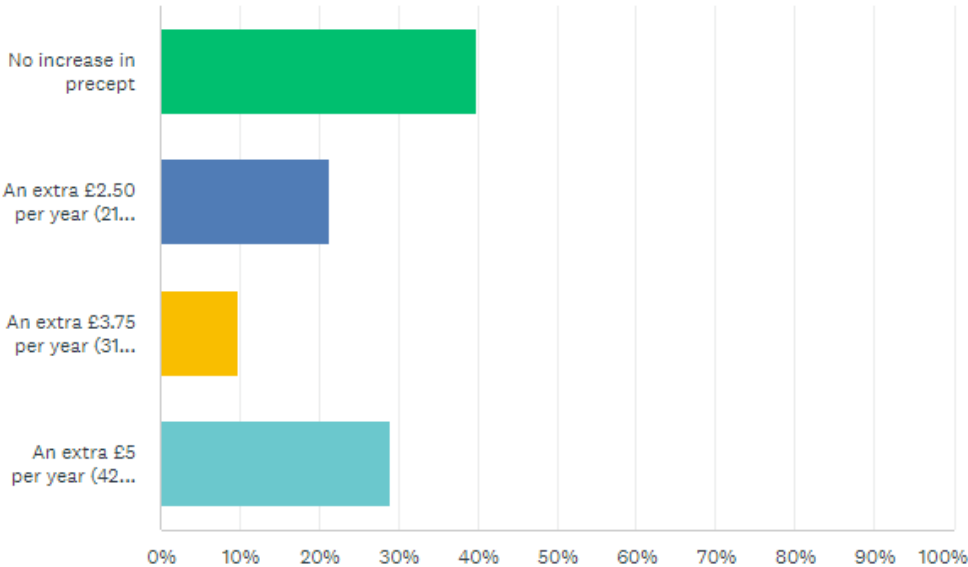
Answered: 1,969 Skipped: 16



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ No increase in precept	37.89% 746
▼ An extra £5 per year (42p extra a month) This is a 1.92% increase	17.06% 336
▼ An extra £10 per year (83p extra a month) This is a 3.84% increase	13.81% 272
▼ An extra £15 per year (£1.25 extra a month) This is a 5.76% increase	6.40% 126
▼ An extra £20 per year (£1.67 extra a month) This is a 7.68% increase	24.83% 489
TOTAL	1,969

The following options are based on a Band D property currently paying £84.25 each year for Fire services. How much more would you be prepared to pay per year for your Fire & Rescue services?

Answered: 1,966 Skipped: 19



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No increase in precept 	39.88% 784
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An extra £2.50 per year (21p extra a month) This is a 2.97% increase 	21.31% 419
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An extra £3.75 per year (31p extra a month) This is a 4.45% increase 	9.72% 191
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An extra £5 per year (42p extra a month) This is a 5.94% increase 	29.09% 572
TOTAL	1,966

Common themes from the precept consultation

891 respondents provided comments in the question 4 free text box which asked 'If you have any additional comments, please include these in the box below'. The following sections include key themes from the responses.

Police and Crime

A number of comments were focused on the lack of visible policing in their local areas, with 'no bobbies on the beat' and police stations closed. A number of respondents also expressed concerns over the quality of the service, contact and distractions from the issues that matter to communities.

'In over 38 years of living on Boley Park, Lichfield, I have only seen a full police officer once. I think closing the Police Station in the centre of Lichfield was a mistake. Not everyone can jump in a car to go out of town to the north of the City to report a crime.'

'No policing seen in my area for years and when they do come out, nothing is done, no crime number etc just told to get my own security cameras.'

'Police need to stop spending money on 'Woke' nonsense. How much and who briefed on what words to use and not use! Absolute waste of money.'

'I do not want our police force becoming the "thought police". That direction is outrageous.'

'Every year the police budget rises but we in Audley never see uniformed officers patrolling the area, crime is on the increase and phoning 101 is an absolute joke, I wouldn't mind paying the extra but like I say we do not see regular police patrols at all.'

'Policing should be centrally funded and come from an entirely different pot of money than council tax. As the partner of a serving officer I see the trauma, the hours, the behaviours they have to contend with, and how work is not always restricted to the locality for which they work in.'

'Both services are underfunded by Government and it is necessary to protect these essential life-saving services as well as build them back up to what they used to be. Without additional funding we will continue to see the most vulnerable suffer and crime rates being high. Currently there are huge issues with anti-social behaviour and Staffordshire has been identified as a failing force. There is too much emphasis on more police officers when they are only part of the answer. There are other roles in the police which can help if they have the resources and then the officers can be back out on the streets.'

'Delivery of services currently feels poor, so can't justify an increase in precept without an initial improvement in service delivery.'

'Police on the streets is what is required. A visible presence. Give PCSOs responsibility to ticket parking offences.'

'We see very little police activity in Wombourne. No police station but a working office. Very confusing. We need a face-to-face point of contact, not a multi-response telephone system and/or email. We need more visible police presence to deter thieves and law breakers.'

'I do not get a good service now, the Police force are dealing with social care issues predominantly and crime is not getting reported due to the public awareness that nothing gets done – why should we pay more? You should be working harder to expose the govt. shortcomings and promote an increase in social care spending.'

'Unfortunately, given our rural location and the fact the police are hugely overstretched, it's more feasible for us to spend more money on protecting our own properties such as upgrading burglar alarms, windows and insurance policies than it is to fund an increase which may not necessarily see increased services to our village, but instead the funding directed elsewhere.'

'My honest view is that the Police do not perform the duty that they are commissioned to do effectively at all. In fact I am very disappointed. I feel that the uniform is shoddy, attitude dreadful, officers including PCSOs not wishing to make eye contact. Trying to telephone the police is a lengthy affair. Not everyone has computers and the like. Overall I am very disappointed. I rarely see an officer in the town centre and never in my street.'

Fire and Rescue

Fewer responses were received about Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Service, but those that did included comments around demand, supporting other emergency services and staffing levels.

'I think more can be done with the fire service to reduce crewing overnight. They have very little calls for service in the night-time hours, and by either switching wholetime firefighters to a blend of in-station and on-call approaches or widening the response base during night-time hours to reduce the crews needed would save money.'

'I'm a firefighter, and I can't see anything improving, just constant cuts!'

'FRS is hugely understaffed, the levels of work are disproportionate to the people able to deliver it. This increases pressure on those in post and an increase in staffing levels would help deliver the priorities in a more proportional and productive manner.'

'I am not sure what the Fire Service is doing extra to support communities so unsure why they need a rise? Could they not be doing more? They seemed to have stuck to a traditional role when every other agency has had to do more with less. Given their 12% pay rise, the highest in public sector, I am not prepared to pay more for little to no change in role. Could they not support the Ambulance or Police more on incidents?'

'Prove to me that SFRS are attending more calls due to climate change? I spent 21 years in the job and flooding caused by development doesn't count. Sort out the retained section so

pumps are on the run at weekends instead of booked off, and get rid of pointless managers instead of frontline staff.'

'The fire and rescue service offers excellent value for money and can be protected for what is an insignificant amount given other cost of living pressures.'

'After many years of funding austerity, the Fire Service should receive maximum additional precept funding and I would choose to pay an extra £5 every year.'

'The police already get the largest amount of money and have no issues with spending on things. Whereas the fire service are running on bare bones and haven't got the equipment, facilities or money for personnel.'

'In recent years the proactive approach of the fire brigade has kept people safe. We want this vital service to be properly funded.'

'Our fire services are already well paid and have proven themselves to be self-serving rather than operating for the community with their too easily remembered strike action. Coupled to the fact the work schedules are 'light' and I don't know a single firefighter who doesn't have the ability to work a second job. As for the police – they need way more support. Services have been cut too far and society is become lawless. Irrespective of the actions of the courts, we need a stronger police presence.'

'We need more firefighters!'

Supporting an increase

A number of comments explained the reasons why they would support an increase in council tax as long as the money went to frontline services to keep communities safe.

'I think if the police are to meet the standard that are expected of them, they need much more funding than they currently have. There aren't enough officers to attend all the jobs in the timeframes expected of them.'

'Ultimately if I was victim of crime or unfortunate enough to need fire and rescue I'd expect/need help fast. For that to be the case the services need appropriate finding and efficient use of resources. The funding is the role of the taxpayer, as much as we begrudge that on a monthly payment, ultimately we'll be grateful.'

'I would be happy to contribute more if I could see how and where that benefit is gained, even if not directly to myself, but others in need.'

'Would like to see more police presence if there is an increase in the cost.'

'I feel that what they do goes unrecognised therefore would be happy to pay the extra as each day they risk the loss of their life for people.'

‘We are aware that inflationary pressures have meant significant increases in the costs of running Staffordshire Police outside of the wages bill. We are concerned that this could mean, without an increase in precept, paying the bills can only be done at the expense of police staff jobs. If that happens we will see a reduction in service to the people of Staffordshire and a less cost-effective service as the essential roles will necessarily be filled by police officers with different training.’

‘I would only be happy paying additional money if I could be sure it would be used as intended. At the moment, we have virtually no police presence and crime is on another level in Stafford.’

‘I would be prepared to pay more for the police if there was a police station, it's ridiculous to have an office in Wombourne, but with no access for the public.’

‘When you see an improvement in service you don't mind paying a bit more. Since you became Commissioner I think we have seen that.’

‘We sympathise with your position around having to raise local taxation to maintain public safety when we believe this should be funded by the Home Office as opposed to the local taxpayer. However, our precept increase last year was the lowest in the UK at £12 and over the last decade increases have been the 2nd lowest in the UK. Staffordshire has one of the lowest number of police officers in the UK. On a per head of population basis we have the 4th lowest number in the UK. The impact of this on welfare from cancelled rest days to maintain public safety is a challenge for us that higher numbers of officers would alleviate.’

‘I would want some guarantee that this was where the extra tax money was going. I would want it to be spent wisely and not just to increase the amount of middle management there are in these services.’

‘These essential services are well worth paying extra to maintain high standards. Thank you for consulting the public directly.’

‘An extra £25 a year to have a safer Staffordshire is worth every penny.’

‘My agreement to paying more for Police services is subject to the Police being far more visible and responsive in South Staffordshire.’

‘The Police and Fire Service save lives, they respond, I think both services should be getting a higher % of the council tax bill.’

‘I would sooner have a decent police and fire service and pay the higher level. When the worst happens, I want protecting and not just have a basic response “trying” to protect me.’

Not supporting an increase

The majority of additional comments were against an increase in council tax, with rising household bills being a factor. There were also concerns about Police performance in

particular, and a number of responses calling for greater efficiencies rather than increased taxation.

‘We keep paying more for a less of a service, where does the money go? Cuts to police and fire, they’re sharing locations etc, so what are you actually spending the money on?’

‘Both have had quite an increase over the last few years and I've not seen any benefit, so I am loathe to pay more for the same.’

‘We pay enough for a service that does not deliver. If the services were businesses, they would be bankrupt within 6 months.’

‘I can’t afford an increase. I recognise the need for finances for both fire and police but this should come from central government.’

‘Council tax is already crippling and yet many services are being cut despite costs rising. It's unaffordable to fund more emergency services when the local government is so unbearably greedy for money that lines their pockets and no one else's. It's their fault we can't afford more. I still believe there are efficiencies that can be made before increasing either precept.’

‘Residents are already drained dry by wildly expensive, hopelessly bad local government delivering very, very little at very, very high cost. Pay more for dire services? Why?’

‘I think the focus should be on the best possible use of the existing budget and try to avoid precept increases unless it can be shown that the increase will enable the introduction of new and additional services.’

‘People are facing hardships in their daily lives, food inflation is out of control, rent and mortgage increases are continuing. The public purse has to be curtailed.’

‘After the number of cases of police officers being found guilty of sexual assaults, rapes, kidnappings, coercive control and even murder, why should the public plough more into the institution? It’s a disgrace of a service I have absolutely no faith in. In the majority of cases the police aren’t bothered about the effects of crime on people. Don’t deserve a penny!’

Commissioner’s Office

A number of responses specifically mentioned the role and cost of the Commissioner and his office, feeling the money would be better spent on frontline services.

‘Whilst the Police force is under special measures and no sign of any real improvement following the recent IOPC report, there should be no increase in precept. I do not believe as PCC you are sufficiently holding the Chief Constable to account.’

‘Get rid of the pointless police and fire Commissioner and use the money saved to improve community police and fire services.’

'I think the office of Commissioner for Police is a created one and the millions of pounds it costs would be better spent sending direct to the police force for police officers, CID officers and forensic officers as these are wanted more than anything.'

'Yes. sack the Commissioner who is costing far too much for him and his office, money wasted on an appointment that is not necessary. We pay a Chief Constable who should be qualified enough to run his department, same with fire.'

'Delete the position of Commissioner and the extra bureaucracy associated with the role. It adds no value just additional cost.'

'The PCC role should be abolished to save money. The Conservative Party has argued for this in the West Mids as they are in special measures. It's not clear why they believe the role should continue to exist in Staffs which is in the same position.'

'Remove the Commissioner's Office and spend on policing instead.'

The Police and fire Commissioner role is to scrutinise these bodies to ensure value for money and with both of these organisations under the same body service can be shared ie service of vehicles, buildings and so forth.'

'Private companies cannot just ask for more money just because they can't manage a budget. You should look at your office and cuts there first rather than asking the public.'

Additional comments

'Council tax is a burden we don't deserve. There's problems everywhere – people striking, potholes a disgrace, speed cameras that don't work, pavements that need urgent repair that never get done. Police short staffed, can't cope – and we are paying for something we are not getting. Always excuses – councils going broke. It's all one big farce!!'

'Funding should come from central government. The number of people who pay council tax shouldn't be expected to keep footing the bill.'

'Police and Fire personnel should report all potholes etc they come across to the Highways Authority.'

'If the council filled in the potholes. They need to be held accountable for the waste projects like knock them down and start again. We vote them in, so we should have a say how money gets spent.'

'I would welcome the streets, roads and foot/bridle paths to be swept and tidied more than once a year.'

'We have very few facilities in Edingale and the roads out of Edingale get flooded so what should be a 6 or 7 mile trip to town ends up about 20.'

'I would like to feel that the Council Tax contributions made are being put to good use. I pay a not insignificant amount each month and yet drive down roads littered with potholes, dirt from farms that hasn't been cleaned and hedge clippings that destroy tyres. Social Care is funded via Council Tax contributions and yet is massively underfunded as a sector, with job vacancies at an all-time high and increasingly complex resident needs. With an ageing population this is an area that we too must focus on.'

'I think the Ambulance Service desperately need reviewing. Patients are being left for hours when in need for an ambulance. I believe the current situation is unacceptable. Wait and turnaround times are at an all-time high... Managers are obviously not getting it right. Can the fire brigade help with these wait times?'

'Yes, sirens – are they necessary overnight? We live very close to Eastern Avenue. We support our emergency services but hope they use the sirens with consideration.'

'As we are already paying so much for Council tax – much of which appears to me to be wasted on such things for example as £14 million for a car park on the outskirts of Hanley, and this other wasted monies by an inept council, as pensioners we just cannot afford to pay even more – we are now at breaking point with decisions to be made to heat or eat.'

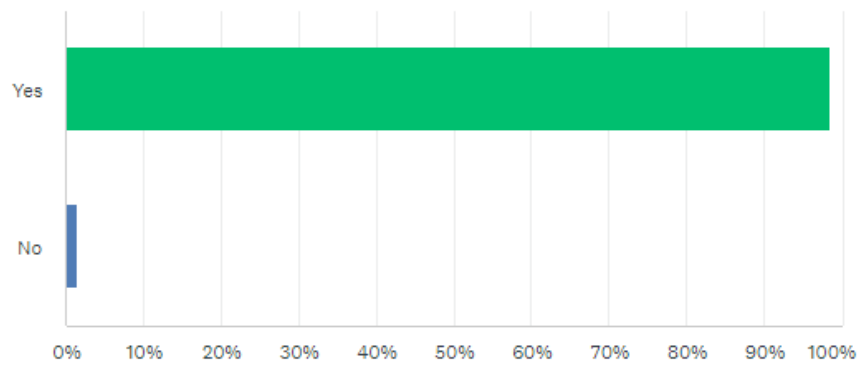
'I do not know how much money you think we have left over from one OAP, after all the increase in living costs etc. I will not be having a garden waste bin next year, because I do not have the money to pay for it. My savings are dropping by the month.'

'The Parish Council was unclear as to the purpose of giving options to members of the public and stakeholder organisations when the impact of such spending on services was not clear. It therefore felt unable to complete the actual survey. The Parish Council was very concerned about the health and safety impact for Fire Service crews and for the public of the proposal to have fire tenders crewed by only three individuals. It strongly recommended that this proposal be withdrawn.'

Additional Questions

Are you responsible for paying council tax?

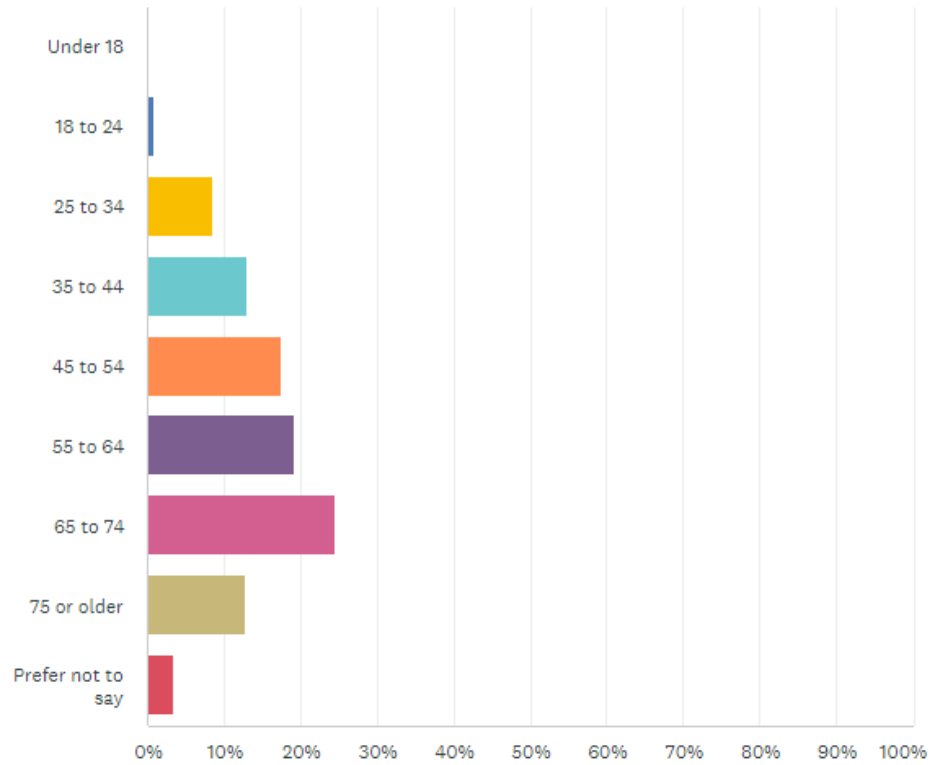
Answered: 1,922 Skipped: 63



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
▼ Yes	98.49%	1,893
▼ No	1.51%	29
TOTAL		1,922

What is your age?

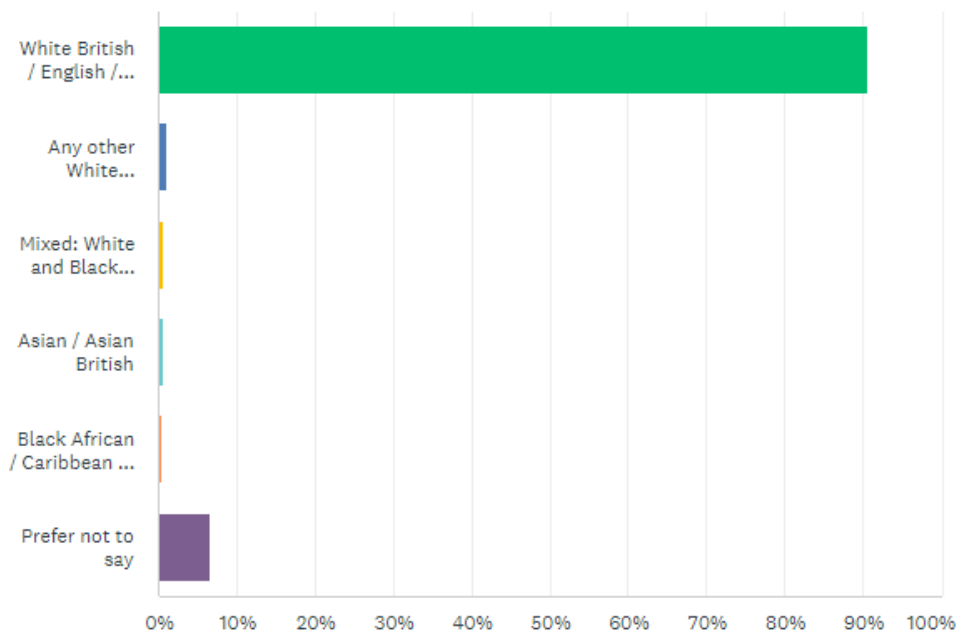
Answered: 1,823 Skipped: 162



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Under 18	0.00% 0
18 to 24	0.82% 15
25 to 34	8.61% 157
35 to 44	13.11% 239
45 to 54	17.50% 319
55 to 64	19.20% 350
65 to 74	24.52% 447
75 or older	12.78% 233
Prefer not to say	3.46% 63
TOTAL	1,823

What is your ethnic origin?

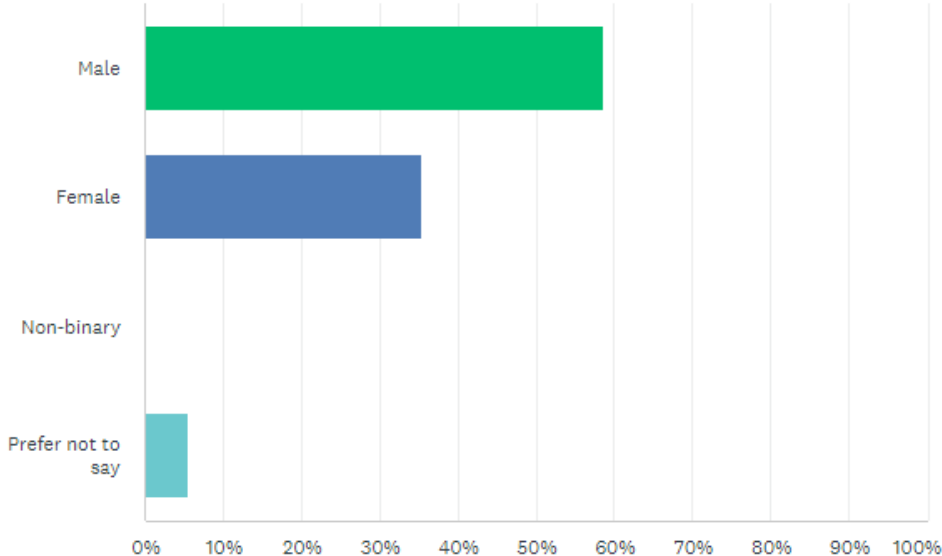
Answered: 1,797 Skipped: 188



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ White British / English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / Irish	90.54% 1,627
▼ Any other White background	1.11% 20
▼ Mixed: White and Black Caribbean / African / Asian	0.67% 12
▼ Asian / Asian British	0.61% 11
▼ Black African / Caribbean / Black British	0.45% 8
▼ Prefer not to say	6.62% 119
TOTAL	1,797

Are you?

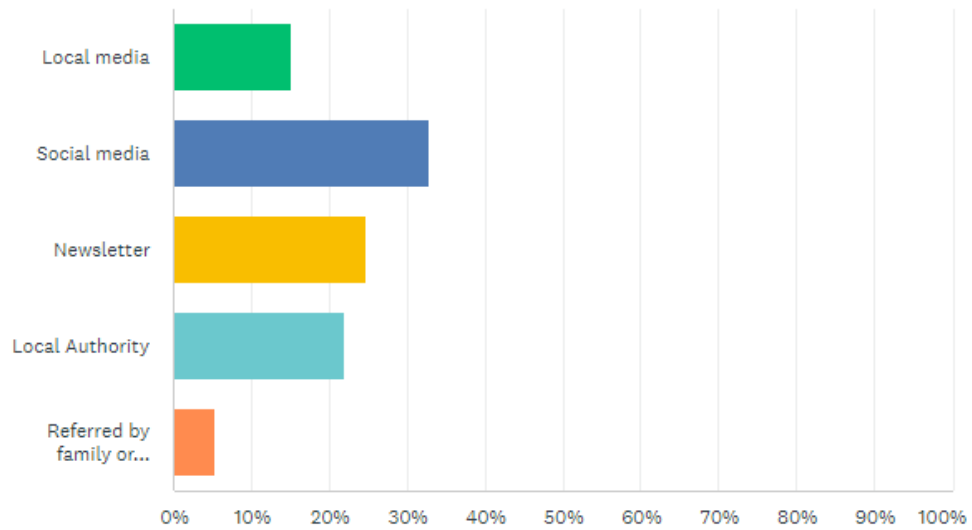
Answered: 1,812 Skipped: 173



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Male	58.66% 1,063
Female	35.43% 642
Non-binary	0.28% 5
Prefer not to say	5.63% 102
TOTAL	1,812

Where did you hear about this consultation?

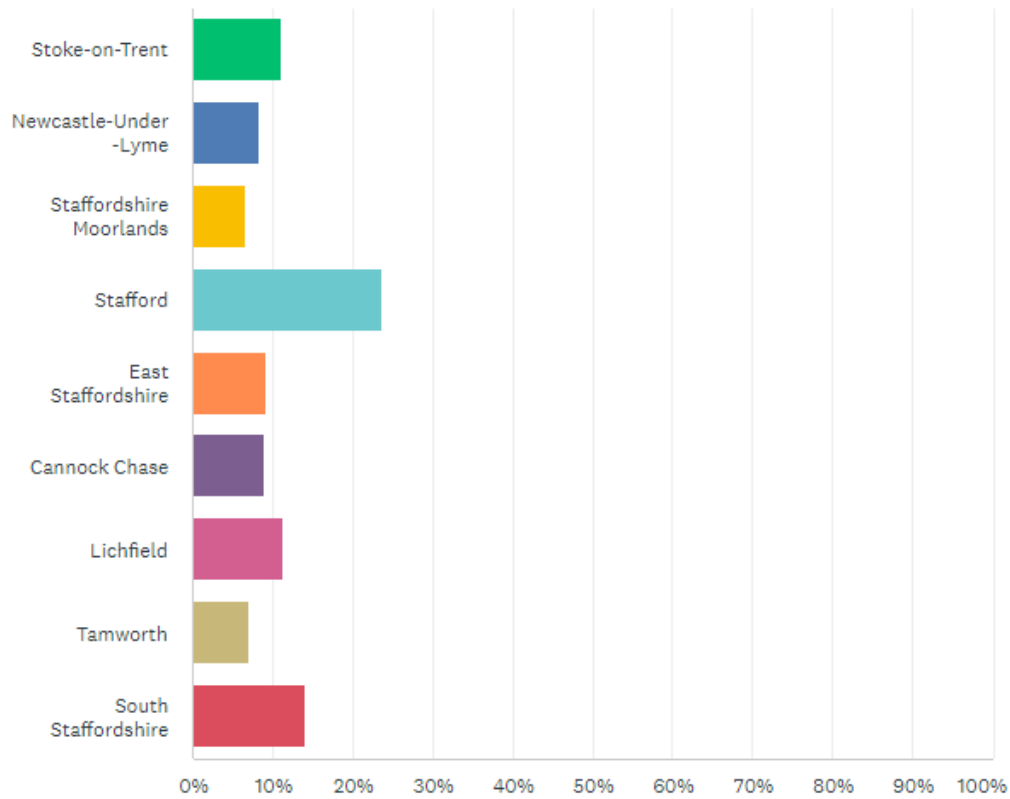
Answered: 1,530 Skipped: 455



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Local media	15.03% 230
Social media	32.94% 504
Newsletter	24.77% 379
Local Authority	21.96% 336
Referred by family or friend	5.29% 81
TOTAL	1,530

Which area of Staffordshire or Stoke-on-Trent do you live in?

Answered: 1,822 Skipped: 163



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ Stoke-on-Trent	11.09% 202
▼ Newcastle-Under-Lyme	8.23% 150
▼ Staffordshire Moorlands	6.53% 119
▼ Stafford	23.60% 430
▼ East Staffordshire	9.11% 166
▼ Cannock Chase	9.00% 164
▼ Lichfield	11.36% 207
▼ Tamworth	7.08% 129
▼ South Staffordshire	14.00% 255
TOTAL	1,822

If you would like to receive updates about the work of the Commissioner, please enter your name and email address below:

Answered: 442 Skipped: 1,543

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Name	Responses 99.55% 440
Email address	Responses 99.10% 438