



Research Report



Council Tax Precept Survey 2018/19

Prepared for: Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service

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Prepared for: Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background and method

In November 2017, Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service (DSFRS) commissioned BMG Research to undertake a survey amongst 400 businesses and 400 residents. The purpose of the surveys was to assess the opinions of business decision makers and residents on how DSFRS should approach setting its budget for 2018/19 and on whether the Service is currently deemed to be providing value for money.

The questionnaire for the survey was provided by DSFRS. The contacts for the survey were purchased by BMG Research from a commercial database provider. To ensure the survey was broadly representative, quotas were set by local authority district (LAD), number of employees and broad industry sector for the business survey and local authority district, age and gender for the resident survey. The data has been weighted (adjusted) by these characteristics to correct for any under or over-representation in the final data set.

In total, 400 interviews with businesses and 400 interviews with residents were completed during December 2017. Details of the profile of the sample can be found in Appendix 1.

On a sample of 400 the confidence interval at the 95% level is +/- 4.3%. This means that if a statistic of 50% was observed, we can be 95% confident that the true response among the total population lies between 45.7% and 54.3%.

This report summarises the main findings from both surveys.

2 Survey Findings

2.1 Whether it is reasonable for DSFRS to consider increasing its element of the Council Tax charge for 2018/19

Respondents were provided with the following contextual information regarding DSFRS:

“Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority is committed to maintaining a professional service across the two counties whilst addressing the funding cuts passed down by the Government. The Service provides 85 local fire stations across Devon and Somerset and employs approximately 2030 staff, helping to keep safe a population of 1.7 million. On average the Service attends around 17,500 incidents each year, which includes flooding, road traffic collisions, fires and other emergencies. The Authority is seeking feedback about its level of Council Tax precept for the coming year and how satisfied you are with the service it provides.”

They were then informed of the following:

“Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority is considering its Council Tax charges for 2018/19. The current charge is £81.57 a year for a Band ‘D’ property. Over the last few years the Government has been reducing the funding provided for the fire and rescue service and this means that by 1 April 2018 the funding for Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service will have been reduced by approximately £11.4 million in the last five years. A further £1.7 million reduction will be made by 2019/20.”

Respondents were asked how strongly they agree or disagree that it is reasonable for DSFRS to consider increasing its Council Tax charge for 2018/19 in order to lessen the impact of the funding cuts.

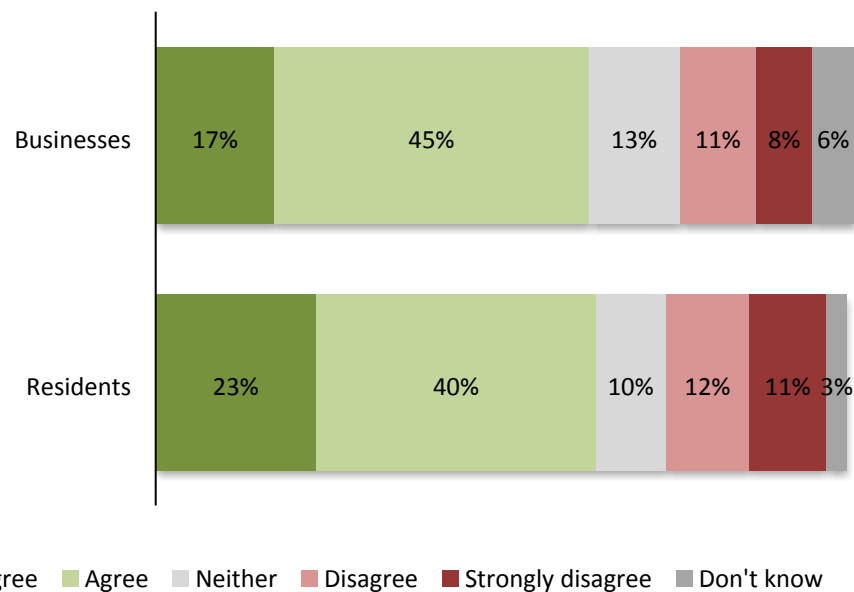
Over three in five (62%) of businesses agreed that it is reasonable for DSFRS to consider increasing its Council Tax charge for 2018/19, while a fifth (19%) disagreed that it is reasonable for them to do so, resulting in a net agreement¹ of +43%.

Agreement was consistent by industry sector, gender and age. Respondents in Torbay were somewhat more positive (71% agreed it is reasonable for DSFRS to consider increasing its Council Tax charge). Perhaps unsurprisingly those respondents who had used a DSFRS service were significantly more likely to agree (67% compared to 57% who have not used a DSFRS service).

Over three in five (63%) of residents agreed that it is reasonable for DSFRS to consider increasing its Council Tax charge for 2018/19, while close to a quarter (23%) disagreed, giving a net agreement of +40%.

Residents in Devon were significantly more likely to agree (70%) and those in Plymouth significantly less likely (46%). Levels of agreement also varied by age with those aged 16 to 34 most likely to agree (76%, compared to 56% aged 35 to 54 and 66% aged 55+). Those respondents who had used a DSFRS service were more likely to agree than those who had not (69% compared to 60%).

Figure 1: Agreement or disagreement that it is reasonable for DSFRS to consider increasing its Council Tax charge for 2018/19 (All respondents)



Unweighted sample base: 400 businesses, 400 residents

¹ Net agreement = the proportion who strongly agree/agree minus the proportion who disagree/strongly disagree.

2.2 Level of increase that would be reasonable

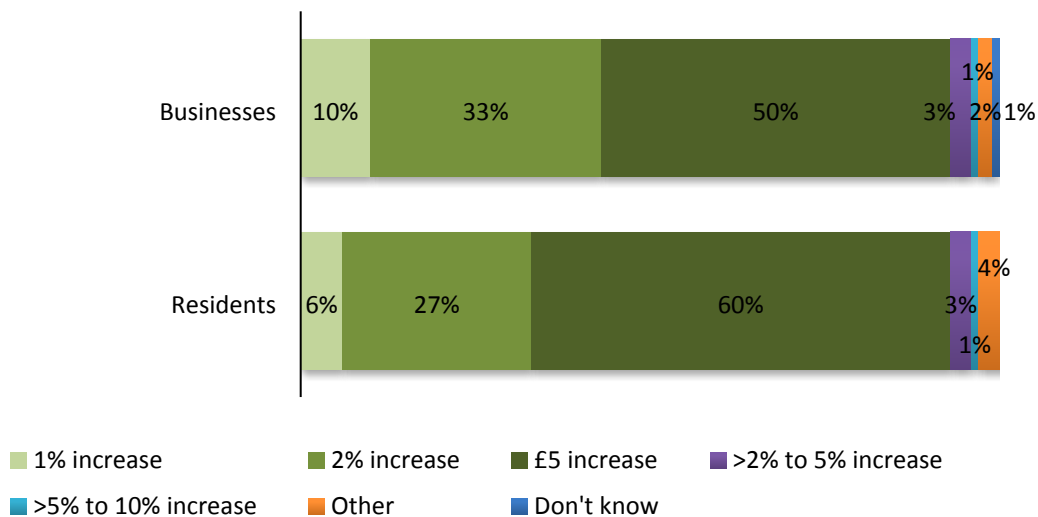
Those respondents who agreed that it is reasonable for DSFRS to consider increasing its Council Tax Charge for 2018/19 were asked at what level the increase should be;

- 1%, this would be an increase of 82 pence per year on a Band ‘D’ property
This will raise an additional £481,500 for the fire and rescue service
- 2%, this would be an increase of £1.63 per year on a Band ‘D’ property
This will raise an additional £962,900 for the fire and rescue service
- £5 increase per year on a Band ‘D’ property (pro rata for other bands)
This will raise an additional £2,951,200 for the fire and rescue service
- Some other level of increase

The largest proportion of businesses opted for a £5 increase (50%) followed by a 2% increase (33%) which was relatively consistent by LAD and industry sector, as well as gender and age.

Consistent with businesses the largest proportion of residents opted for a £5 increase (60%) followed by a 2% increase (27%) which was relatively consistent by LAD and gender. Those older respondents aged 55+ were less likely to opt for a £5 increase (50%, compared to 68% aged 16 to 34 and 69% aged 35 to 54) but more likely to opt for the 2% increase (35%, compared to 18% aged 16 to 34 and 20% aged 35 to 54).

Figure 2: Level of increase that would be reasonable (Those respondents agreeing that it is reasonable for DSFRS to consider increasing its Council Tax charge for 2018/19)



Unweighted sample base: 252 businesses, 242 residents

2.3 Reasons for disagreeing that it is reasonable for DSFRS to increase its element of the Council Tax charge for 2018/19

Those respondents who disagreed that it is reasonable for DSFRS to consider increasing its element of the Council Tax charge for 2018/19 (19% of businesses and 23% of residents) were asked why they disagreed. Typical comments made by respondents are highlighted below.

2.3.1 Businesses

'Being squeezed financially enough. Should be helping more rather than adding more charges.'

'Believe that there is still plenty of room for cuts - the number of fires falling anyway due to a greater effort being put into prevention. Furthermore, fire service pensions should be brought into line with private sector pensions.'

'Agree they need more investment I think they should take the money from other parts of the council rather than penalising households.'

'Can't take funding away and expect the same level of service as service needs to be increased because of the extra population in the area. 400 extra houses and services have to increase workload.'

'We as council tax payers pay far too much and the government should pay as they spend money on things that are not needed e.g. Devon bridge.'

'Wages aren't going up, they're not putting their prices up, so they don't have the money to pay higher taxes, plus service not improving.'

'They're cutting back on the services they provide, so why should the fee go up.'

'They should be funded appropriately but council tax shouldn't take the brunt. Central government should pay.'

'I don't think there are so many fires, as there's a lot more work on prevention these days.'

2.3.2 Residents

'Decrease their fees, they waste a lot of stuff and should share more with police and ambulance services.'

'Funding should be redirected into more important things like the fire and rescue service.'

'I already pay enough. The money should be obtained from somewhere else, not only from council tax.'

'They should be increasing the fire rescue services and decreasing the council tax.'

'We're all struggling as it is without having to pay more council tax.'

'They built a new fire call centre and they haven't used it, and it has caused the tax payers to pay millions upon millions of pounds. And they are still not using it.'

'They keep increasing council tax every year and they don't improve their services.'

'It's national health, it's people's lives we are talking about and they shouldn't increase the Council Tax charge.'

'I think the government should be paying for it not passing it on to the elector to pay for. The government make enough money to pay for it instead of spending their money on pointless things.'

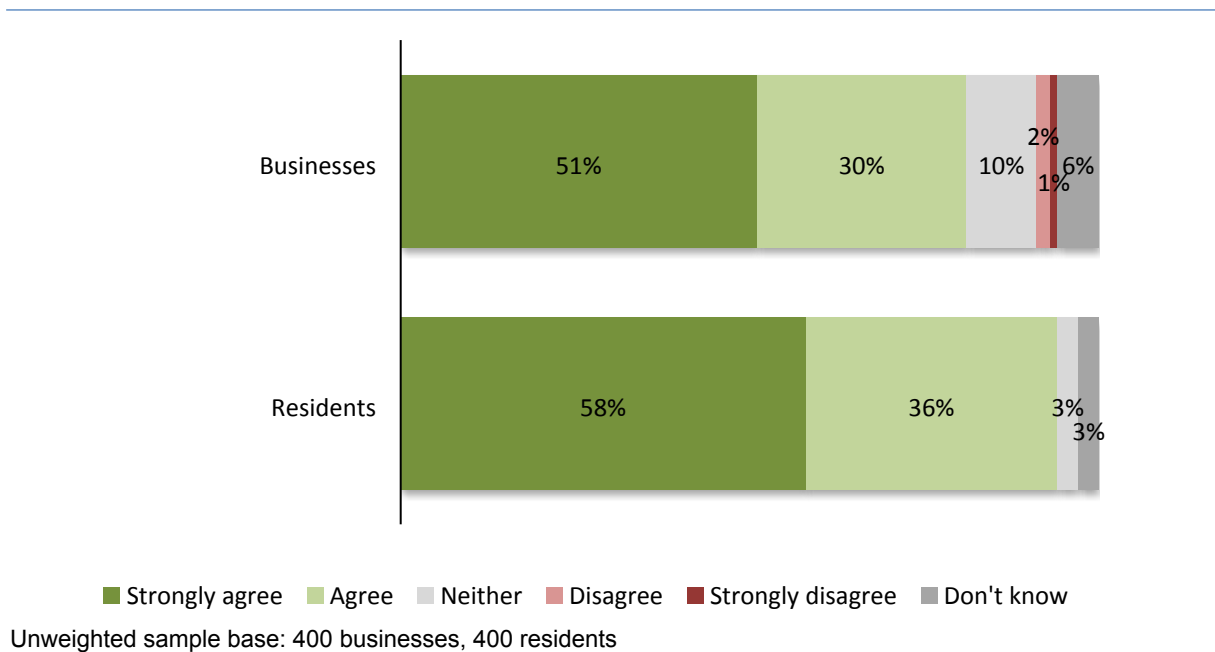
2.4 Agreement or disagreement that DSFRS provides value for money

All respondents were asked if they agree or disagree that DSFRS provides value for money.

Four in five (81%) businesses agreed that DSFRS does provide value for money, with only 3% disagreeing, resulting in a net agreement of +78%. Views were consistent by LAD, industry sector and age. Females were significantly more likely to agree DSFRS provides value for money (88% compared to 77% males) as were those that had used a DSFRS service (87% compared to 75% who had not used a DSFRS service).

Views were even more positive among residents, with 93% agreeing that DSFRS does provide value for money and less than 0.5% disagreeing, resulting in a net agreement of +93%. Residents in Torbay were less likely to agree that this is the case (88%, compared to 90% in Plymouth, 95% in Devon and 94% in Somerset).

Figure 3: Agreement or disagreement that DSFRS provides value for money (All respondents)



2.5 Reasons for disagreeing that DSFRS provides value for money

The 11 businesses and 4 residents who disagreed that DSFRS provides value for money were asked why they disagreed, and, where provided, their reasons for this are listed below.

2.5.1 Businesses

'Expensive for what they provide.'

'Had a fire on the commercial premises, firefighters were absolutely useless.'

'Highly inefficient and where has the money gone astray.'

'In some areas they are fantastic and efficient but experience of local business fires is not handled very well.'

'Might as well put sprinklers in, seems a lot of money, they could do something themselves for that amount of money.'

'Personal experience of how hard ambulance and police work, I feel that the fire service could take on more responsibilities and that currently they spend a lot of time just sitting around.'

'The distribution and network was not well organised we had many call outs but there was no co coordination with the team.'

'They do various things that I don't think should be done by the fire brigade; buying cars and motorbikes, going around telling people how wonderful they are. The fire brigade should stick to fighting fires.'

'Was it full time or part time fireman. Why are second time fireman got second jobs. Where I'm based if someone has accident as many as 10 brigades can go which is over the top. Person should pay as self-inflicted wounds.'

2.5.2 Residents

'Fire services are generally not efficient, they are rather traditional with their services and very top-heavy with senior people.'

'It's an issue.'

'People are putting their lives at risk. Why should you be targeted because you have a minimum wage?'

'They release a lot of their employees and then they employ them in different areas of the council.'

2.6 Services used

To contextualise the findings reported above, all respondents were asked if they had used any of ten specific services provided across Devon and Somerset.

Overall, over a half (51%) of businesses reported using at least one of the services, most commonly a fire safety audit (27%) at a business, and 39% of residents did so, most commonly via a community event (14%) or home fire safety visit (13%).

Businesses in Torbay were the most likely to report having used any of the services (62%, compared to 56% in Plymouth, 50% in Devon and 48% in Somerset).

Residents in Plymouth were the most likely to report having used any of the services (48%, compared to 46% in Somerset, 35% in Torbay and 32% in Devon). Younger residents were less likely to report having used any of the services (26% compared to 46% of those aged 35 to 54 and 37% of those aged 55+).

Table 1 Services used

	Businesses	Residents
Fire safety audit / check in a business	27%	6%
Other fire safety advice	13%	6%
Home fire safety visit / smoke alarm fitting	12%	13%
Community event	12%	14%
Youth education	9%	7%
Emergency response – house fire	7%	6%
Community use of fire stations	6%	7%
Emergency response – road traffic collision	5%	4%
Emergency response – other rescue	5%	2%
Emergency response – co-responder	4%	2%
Emergency response – flooding	2%	<0.5%
Other service	1%	2%
I have not used a DSFRS service	49%	61%
Unweighted sample base: 400 businesses, 400 residents		

2.7 Satisfaction with the service provided by DSFRS

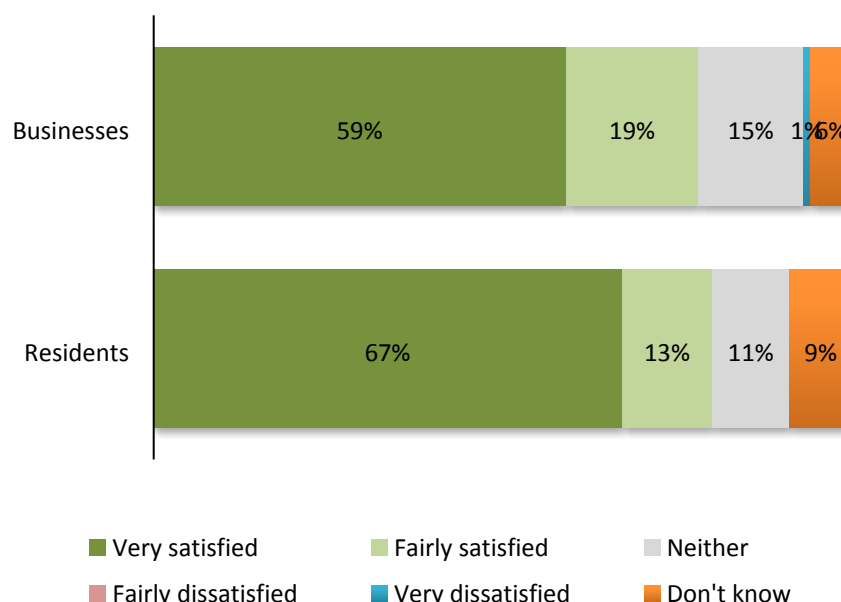
All respondents were asked how satisfied or dissatisfied they are with the service provided by DSFRS.

Four fifths (79%) of businesses were satisfied with the service provided, and only two respondents expressed dissatisfaction, yielding a net level of satisfaction of +78%. Views were consistent by LAD however, those in industry sector A to F had higher levels of satisfaction (100% compared to 67% for those in G to K and O). Levels of satisfaction significantly increased amongst those who had used a DSFRS service from 65% amongst those who have not used a service to 92%.

Four fifths (80%) of residents were satisfied with the service provided, and only one respondent expressed dissatisfaction, yielding a net level of satisfaction of +80%.

Levels of satisfaction significantly increased amongst those who had used a DSFRS service from 71% amongst those who have not used a service to 95%.

Figure 4: Satisfaction with the service provided by DSFRS (All respondents)



Unweighted sample base: 400 businesses, 400 residents

Only 2 businesses expressed dissatisfaction, and their reasons for doing so were as follows:

'Bad experiences - have had to call out the fire service for residential and commercial fires. The firefighters didn't do much at all to help but did some ridiculous things.'

'I think they have spent a tremendous amount of public money for no reason.'

Only 1 resident expressed dissatisfaction, and their reason for doing so were as follows:

'I think that the call operatives are too far away to deal with it and they don't know the local area.'

3 Appendix 1: Profile Information

3.1 Businesses

The following tables outline the unweighted and weighted demographic profiles of the sample.

Table 2 – Local authority district

Local authority district	Unweighted		Weighted	
	%	Number	%	Number
Torbay	12%	48	7%	26
Plymouth	13%	52	9%	35
Devon	45%	180	53%	211
Somerset	30%	120	32%	128

Table 3 – Industry sector

Industry Sector	Unweighted		Weighted	
	%	Number	%	Number
A to F	23%	92	24%	96
G to N, R + S	77%	308	76%	304

NB: **A to F** includes the following sectors: A: Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing; B Mining and Quarrying; C Manufacturing; D Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply; E Water supply, sewerage, waste management and remediation activities; F Construction.

G to N, R and S includes the following sectors: G Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles; H Transportation and storage; I Accommodation and food service activities; J Information and communication; K Financial and insurance activities; L Real estate activities; M Professional, scientific and technical activities; N Administrative and support service activities; R Arts, entertainment and recreation; S Other service activities

Table 4 – Job title

Industry Sector	Unweighted		Weighted	
	%	Number	%	Number
Owner/proprietor/managing director	40%	160	40%	161
Director	14%	54	13%	52
Manager/assistant manager	30%	121	30%	119
Partner	4%	15	4%	15
Company Secretary	2%	6	2%	6
Other	11%	42	11%	43

Table 5 – Gender

Gender	Unweighted		Weighted	
	%	Number	%	Number
Male	64%	254	64%	256
Female	37%	146	36%	144

Table 6 – Age

Age	Unweighted		Weighted	
	%	Number	%	Number
16 – 24 years	4%	14	4%	14
25 – 34 years	14%	54	13%	52
35 – 44 years	16%	64	16%	66
45 – 54 years	24%	94	23%	94
55– 64 years	30%	119	29%	118
65+	13%	53	14%	54
Prefer not to say	1%	2	<0.5%	2

Table 7 – Ethnic Origin

Ethnic Origin	Unweighted		Weighted	
	%	Number	%	Number
White	96%	385	97%	387
Black/Black British	1%	2	<0.5%	2
Asian/Asian British	1%	3	1%	3
Mixed/Other	1%	2	<0.5%	1
Prefer not to say	2%	6	1%	5

3.2 Residents

The following tables outline the unweighted demographic profile of the sample of residents.

Table 8 – Local authority district

Local authority district	Unweighted		Weighted	
	%	Number	%	Number
Torbay	25%	100	8%	32
Plymouth	25%	98	15%	61
Devon	25%	102	45%	181
Somerset	25%	100	32%	126

Table 9 – Age

Age	Unweighted		Weighted	
	%	Number	%	Number
16 – 24 years	2%	7	3%	13
25 – 34 years	7%	26	11%	45
35 – 44 years	18%	70	27%	109
45 – 54 years	15%	60	15%	58
55– 64 years	18%	70	18%	74
65+	42%	167	25%	101

Table 10 – Gender

Gender	Unweighted		Weighted	
	%	Number	%	Number
Male	50%	199	48%	193
Female	50%	201	52%	207

Table 11 – Ethnic Origin

Ethnic Origin	Unweighted		Weighted	
	%	Number	%	Number
White	97%	388	97%	388
Asian/Asian British	1%	2	<0.5%	2
Mixed	1%	2	<0.5%	2
Prefer not to say	2%	6	2%	7

4 Appendix 2: Call outcomes

The following tables show a breakdown of call outcomes.

4.1 Businesses

	Outcome	Contacts	% of total	% of in scope
In scope	Complete	400	10%	21%
	Refusal	712	17%	37%
	Respondent busy	796	19%	42%
	Sub-total	1,908	46%	100%
Out of scope	Unobtainable (modem, fax etc)	201	5%	9%
	Ineligible	183	4%	8%
	No contact made	1,817	44%	83%
	Sub-total	2,201	54%	100%
	Total	4,109		

4.2 Residents

	Outcome	Contacts	% of total	% of in scope
In scope	Complete	400	5%	24%
	Refusal	481	6%	29%
	Respondent busy	799	9%	48%
	Sub-total	1,680	20%	100%
Out of scope	Unobtainable (modem, fax etc)	1505	18%	22%
	Ineligible	368	4%	5%
	No contact made	4,997	58%	73%
	Sub-total	6,870	80%	100%
	Total	8,550		

Appendix: Statement of Terms

Compliance with International Standards

BMG complies with the International Standard for Quality Management Systems requirements (ISO 9001:2008) and the International Standard for Market, opinion and social research service requirements (ISO 20252:2012) and The International Standard for Information Security Management ISO 27001:2013.

Interpretation and publication of results

The interpretation of the results as reported in this document pertain to the research problem and are supported by the empirical findings of this research project and, where applicable, by other data. These interpretations and recommendations are based on empirical findings and are distinguishable from personal views and opinions.

BMG will not be publish any part of these results without the written and informed consent of the client.

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