

REPORT TO: Town Council – 30th January 2023
REPORT ON: Council Budget and Precept – 2023-24
REPORT BY: Responsible Finance Officer
REPORT DATE: 24th January 2023

BACKGROUND

Each Committee has reviewed their services, ambitions, operational needs and duties to support the community for 2023/24 and beyond, with the Finance and Policy Committee having reviewed and considered each of the budgets put forward by each committee.

The Finance and Policy Committee makes the following recommendations based on a review of each budget line, identifying the major increases and reductions that influence the final precept proposal:

BUDGET ANALYSIS

Income

The allotments, retail radio scheme and Welton Road Cemetery are the only income generating services provided by the Council.

Due to there being no anticipated changes to the retail radio scheme, the budgeted income for the CCTV contribution remains the same.

The price per pole for allotments has increased for 2023/24, the overall impact is minimal, so the budgeted income remains the same for this facility.

Due to there being no increases to the burial fees for Welton Road Cemetery the budgeted income remains the same.

Due to the increase in 2022 of the interest rates, it is anticipated that the return on the council's reserves will increase, the budgeted income has been increased by £1.1K to reflect this change for 2023/2024.

An anticipated contribution of £19.5K, currently under negotiation from West Northamptonshire Highways, provides for the cyclic highway maintenance, which forms part of the responsibilities within the environmental and landscaping services.

It is predicted that the outside event organisations (e.g. circus) will continue to request to use land currently under the management and maintenance of the council which will provide an anticipated income of £1.2K.

Expenditure

Finance & Policy

The Finance and Policy Committee are proposing:

- an overall increase in wages and salaries of £21.3k (5.75%). Further to a review of all employee's job descriptions and working practices, carried out via appraisals, and following a report submitted to the Personnel Panel at its meeting on 14th December 2022, it is recommended that a budgetary provision of 5.75% be approved to ensure the council meets its contractual pay increments and the predicted pay increase agreed by the National Joint Council for 2023/2024.
- an increase of £1K for subscriptions, due to an anticipated increase in annual charges.
- an increase of £1K for software licences, due to the addition of new functionality within the cemetery software and an anticipated increases in annual charges.

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- a decrease of £1K for office & IT infrastructure requirements for 2023/2024.
- an increase of £1K for premises costs, due to anticipated increases in annual charges for utilities and office cleaning.
- a decrease of £5K for Grants & Donations for 2023/2024, to bring the budget back in line with pre-pandemic levels.
- an increase of £6.5K for CCTV Monitoring, due to an anticipated 10% increase in annual charges.
- an increase of £1.2K for PCSO Sponsorship, due to an increase in annual charges.

Parks, Open Spaces and Environment

The Parks, Open Spaces and Environment Committee are proposing:

- an increase of £71K for the management and maintenance of the environmental and landscaping services, which include Welton Road Cemetery and the Holy Cross Churchyard.
- the removal of the memorial testing budget line for the sum of £2K for The Holy Cross Churchyard, unspent monies for 2022/2023 are to be earmarked (please see appendix A) for use in 2023/2024.
- the removal of the one-off budget line for the sum of £10K for play equipment renewals, unspent monies for 2022/2023 are to be earmarked (please see appendix A) for future use.
- the removal of the one-off budget line for the sum of £20K, for the appointment of a consultant to assist the council in conducting a review of the open spaces to inform a forward plan for the needs of the community. Unspent monies for 2022/2023 are to be earmarked (please see Appendix A) for future use.
- the removal of the street arts/structures budget line for the sum of £1K, the unspent monies for 2022/2023 are to be earmarked (please see appendix A) for future use.
- the inclusion of £6.8K for the continuation of the management and maintenance of the lakes and ponds within the open spaces.
- a decrease of £3.5K for the management and maintenance of public realm/street furniture, the project to refurbish of the notice board at the new street park entrance has been completed so this element of expenditure is not needed in 2023/2024.

Community Services

Finance and Policy Committee have reviewed and recommend the following proposals from the Community Services Committee:

- a decrease of £2K to the external communication's budget line, due to cost savings.
- the removal of the community transports budget line for 2023/2024 for the sum of £7.5K, the council will use unspent monies (please see Appendix A) for the service which was paused in 2020 due to covid-19 restrictions to provide adequate funding for the provision of a community transport service one day per week in 2023/2024.

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- an increase of £11.5K to the events budget. The Committee propose an increase of fireworks budget line of £7K, due to an increase of various elements that are integral to the event. It is proposed as the Council holds sufficient equipment for the council led community litter picks for 2023/2024 the Litter Campaign budget line for the sum of £1K be removed. The Committee propose an increase in the specialist market budget by £3K, which will provide sufficient funds for the council to provide three family friendly themed markets for 2023. The committee proposed the inclusion of £1K for the Heritage Buses to return and be part of the councils Heritage Open Days programme for 2023. The Committee propose an increase of £1.5K for the summer activities programme for 2023.
- a decrease of £8K to the Town Enhancements budget. The Committee proposes a decrease of £8.5K for the Christmas Lights Scheme, the council has sufficient earmarked reserves set aside for the purchase of new lights when the current scheme is no longer viable. The committee propose an increase of £1.5K for the provision of additional watering of the town flowers during the warmer months. The Committee proposes the removal of the flag poles and shields for the twinning area budget line of £1K, as the maintenance required has been completed.

Museum Committee

Finance and Policy Committee have reviewed and recommend the following proposals from the Museum Committee:

- an increase of £0.4K to account for the increased costs to the advertising and promotions budget to provide additional advertising for the museums events and exhibitions.

Planning & Development

Finance and Policy Committee have reviewed and recommend the following proposals from the Planning & Development Committee:

- that a £0 budget should be maintained for 2023/24, as monies have been earmarked for to provide for the appointment of professional advice as required.

Earmarked Reserves

Finance and Policy Committee have reviewed the proposals from all committees in relation to earmarking funds for future projects. Please refer to appendix A for a full report.

RECOMMENDATION

On reviewing the budget proposals submitted by each Committee and having due regard to the Council's duties and the needs of the community the Council budget of £1,691,620 and a precept of £1,537,237 be approved, based on the tax base* and precept for 2023/24 this will be an increase of £4.78 per year (9 pence per week) on a band D property (2.82%).

**The council tax base figure reflects the actual amounts paid by residents and takes account of those who are eligible for discounts via local support schemes. The tax base figure is calculated by the principal authority (West Northamptonshire Council) and is expressed in terms of Band D properties.*