

REPORT TO: Town Council – 18th December 2023

REPORT ON: Council Budget and Precept 2024-25 with recommendations and reports on key budget lines.

REPORT BY: Responsible Finance Officer

REPORT DATE: 15th December 2023

BACKGROUND

Each Committee has reviewed their services, ambitions, operational needs and duties to support the community for 2024/25 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.

The budget for CCTV contribution has been decreased by £1.2K as the challenges faced by retailers during the cost-of-living crisis has resulted in a decrease of the number of retailers subscribed to the business together retail scheme.

The price per pole for allotments has increased for 2024/25, the overall impact is a minimal increase in the income 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 2023 of the interest rates, it is anticipated that the return on the council's reserves will increase, the budgeted income has been increased by £3.3K to reflect this change for 2024/2025.

A contribution of £25K from West Northamptonshire Highways, has been negotiated, this is an increase in income of £5.5K for 2024/2025, which 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 increase of £0.4K for subscriptions, due to an anticipated increase in annual charges.
- a decrease of £1.2K for telephone, due to the cancellation of phone lines no longer required.
- a decrease of £1K for Training requirements, unspent monies for 2023/2024 are to be earmarked (please see appendix A) for use in 2024/2025.

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- an increase of £2.7K for insurance costs, due to anticipated increase in annual charges and to the introduction of an employee benefits scheme.
- a reduction of £1.1K for Civic Expenditure for 2024/2025.
- an increase of £4.3K for premises costs, due to anticipated increase in annual charges for utilities for 2024/2025.
- an increase of £1.5K for CCTV Electricity, due to an anticipated increase in electricity cost for 2024/2025.
- an increase of £3.8K for PCSO Sponsorship, due to an increase in annual charges.
- the inclusion of new budget line £1.3K for the retail crime initiative scheme which was introduced in September 2023 to combat and prevent shoplifting in Daventry Town, unspent monies within the current Sponsored PCSO budget have been used to fund the service in 2023/2024, additional unspent monies within the Sponsored PCSO budget for 2023/2024 are to be earmarked (please see appendix A) for use to partially fund the service for 2024/2025, with the shortfall being included within the budget.
- Continued support for Daventry and District Citizen's Advice by awarding grant of £10,000 for financial year 24/25.

Personnel Panel

The personnel panel having received a report from the Chief Officer on a review of all employee's job descriptions and satisfactory performance (via appraisals) together with a predicted pay offer of 5%, being agreed by NJC and the Unions for the financial year 24/25, propose: a budget of £428913.62, with any shortfall in 2024/25 to be funded via the general reserve, and the total amount of any shortfall to be considered for inclusion in the precept for the financial year 25/26.

Parks, Open Spaces and Environment

The Parks, Open Spaces and Environment Committee are proposing:

- an increase of £37.6K for the management and maintenance of the environmental and landscaping services, which include Welton Road Cemetery and the Holy Cross Churchyard. The annual uplift for 2024/2025, is estimated to be an increase of 5%, based on three indexation elements, see summary below:
 - **fuel cost** - indexation confirmed and agreed -15.84%
 - **all other costs** – Estimated indexation 4.6% (based on October 2023 CPI). To be confirmed on the release of the November CPI, to be published on 20th December 2023.
 - **employee costs** – NJC pay award for 2024/2025 to be confirmed. Discussions to agree the estimated indexation are ongoing. Norse are currently estimating a 7% increase for the NJC uplift element of the contract.
- a decrease of £3K for repairs and maintenance costs for Welton Road Cemetery, the schedule of repairs identified have been completed.
- an increase of £1k for Welton Road Cemetery electricity costs, due to anticipated increase in annual charges for utilities in 2024/2025.

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- the removal of the repairs and maintenance budget line for the sum of £2K for The Holy Cross Churchyard, unspent monies for 2023/2024 are to be earmarked (please see appendix A) for use in 2024/2025.
- a decrease of £7.5K for tree works, unspent monies for 2023/2024 are to be earmarked (please see appendix A) for use in 2024/2025.
- a decrease of £1.5K for Bus Shelters, due to anticipated costs saving for 2024/2025.
- an increase of £1.5K for litter bins, to complete a schedule of replacements for 2024/2025.
- an increase of £1.7K for street lighting, due to an anticipated increase in electricity cost for 2024/2025.

Community Services

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

- a decrease of £1K to the external communication's budget line, due to cost savings.
- the reintroduction of the community transports budget line for 2024/2025 of £7.5K, the council used unspent monies from 2020/2021 when the service was paused due to the covid-19 restrictions (please see Appendix A) towards the expenditure for the service during 2023/2024.
- The inclusion of a new budget line for the sum of £5k for Youth Provision, the council used unspent monies from 2022/2023 (please see Appendix A) to provide funding for the provision of a youth hub and youth outreach programme in 2023/2024. It is proposed that the provision continues for 2024/2025, with unspent monies from the events budget and sponsored PCSO budget being earmarked (please see Appendix A) for use for the provision in 2024/2025. The unspent monies will not provide the full level of funding required for the service to continue in 2024/2025, so the inclusion of a £5k budget will fund the anticipated shortfall.
- a decrease of £0.3K to the events budget. The Committee propose a decrease of the fireworks budget line of £3K, due to anticipated costs savings for 2024/2025. The Committee propose an increase in the specialist market budget by £1K, which will provide sufficient funds for the council to provide three family friendly themed markets for 2024. The committee proposed a modest increase of £0.2K for the Heritage Buses to return and be part of the councils Heritage Open Days programme for 2024. The Committee proposed the inclusion of £1.5K for the return of a dog show for the events programme for 2024.
- a decrease of £3K to the Town Enhancements budget. The Committee proposes the inclusion of £2.5K to explore an alternative location for a permanent Christmas Tree for the town centre. The Committee propose a decrease of £6K for the provision of floral displays, due to anticipated cost savings in 2024/2025. The Committee propose an increase of £1K for the installation and removal of the bunting and flags due to an increase in anticipated costs for 2024/2025. The Committee proposes the introduction of a £0.6K budget for an annual safety check of the flag poles. The Committee propose a decrease of £1K for the Town Gardens, as the maintenance identified in 2023/2024 has been completed.

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Museum Committee

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

- an increase of £0.1K to account for increased costs to manage and maintain the museums events and exhibitions.

Planning & Development

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

- that an increase of £2K be included for the appointment of professional advice for future development proposals, to be used with the balance of unspent monies earmarked in 2019/20 (please see appendix A) in 2024/2025.

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.

RECOMMENDED

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 £1,799,432 be approved and a precept of £1,614,861 be approved, as an increase of £6.03 per year (11.6 pence per week) on a band D property (3.46%).

**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.*