

Axminster Town Council – Budget/Precept Statement for Financial Year 2024-25

In November and December 2023, members of the Strategy & Finance Committee met to consider the draft budget for the next financial year for the Town Council, having reviewed the Council's finances for the previous twelve months, and looking forward for the next 12 months and beyond.

The committee members noted that, due to major and essential spending on a number of key town infrastructure projects, and continued investment in the town's flagship building, The Guildhall, the town council's reserves had been almost depleted. That situation is not tenable nor sustainable if the Council wishes to continue delivering services to Axminster residents.

The members recognised that the Council had not chosen to increase their element of the overall Council Tax bill by any significant sums in the last 5 years, partly due to the presence of the existing cash reserves (built up over many years) but also to reflect the pressures on household budgets across the town as a result of the cost-of-living crisis, and other external factors.

However, members also realised that the Town Council is facing huge calls upon its resources in the years to come; from repairs & maintenance to the town council's property portfolio (including Grade Two listed buildings), for further essential investment in the Guildhall to improve and maintain those facilities, ensuring the future viability of this much-loved community hub, and to meet new responsibilities for amenities and services in the town as these are passed down from the higher-tier authorities above this Council due to their own budget pressures.

These factors, coupled with the pressing need to prepare (and save) for future expenditure on the town cemetery extension, and the inevitable consequences of double-digit inflation on the Council's expenditure budget, have led the committee – after much deliberation, discussion and debate – to reluctantly recommend an increase in the Town Council's precept demand of just over 14 pence per day, or 99 pence per week.

This will take the Town Council's share of the overall Band D household Council Tax bill to 6.39% of the anticipated total bill for FY24-25, which is an increase of 1.84% above the FY23-24 level.

Last year's (Band D) Council Tax bill was £2256.99 and this year's expected bill will be £2410.71, of which Devon County Council's element is forecast to be £1715.67, or 71.17% of the overall total. EDDCs precept allocation accounts for 6.92% and the combined Fire & Police precept will be 15.52%. Therefore, the Town Council's share of the overall bill remains the smallest.

But, it must be noted that more than 70% of town residents will pay less than the figures stated above as their properties are designated Band C or below in Council Tax billing terms.

Members of the FULL Town Council considered the recommendations from the Strategy & Finance Committee in January, together with a report from the RFO, and resolved to approve this budget and precept, which will provide financial stability for the Council and ensure that key services for residents are maintained, strengthened and improved.

The Council does recognise that ANY increase in local taxation at a time of constrained household budgets is never welcomed by our residents but they are at pains to highlight the fact that local tax increases have been kept at the minimum possible level for nearly five years but that this position cannot be maintained at a time when our parishioners are relying on the Town Council, more and more.

The Town Council assumed the overall responsibility for the Guildhall in August last year and Councillors are heartened by the hundreds of positive comments that have been received expressing delight at the improved facilities, the vastly improved schedule of events, acts and performances and the fact that the Guildhall remains an accessible, open and competitively-priced venue for our town. But, the operation of such a large community building comes at a price, and those costs have been factored into our budget accordingly.

Members wish to reassure the public that they will monitor all Council expenditure regularly to ensure that taxpayers receive the very best value for their tax contributions and that any surplus created at year-end will be re-invested in town amenities for the benefit of all who live, work and play in the town of Axminster.

Full details of the proposals for the FY24-25 budget and precept can be obtained from the RFO (Town Clerk) upon request and this statement will also be published on the Town Council's website and on the noticeboard outside the Guildhall.

The Town Council operates according to the national Transparency Code and all of its financial transactions are available for public scrutiny according to the UK's Electoral Rights and Audit & Governance legislation

Cllr. Jill Farrow, Mayor of Axminster
Paul Hayward, Proper Officer and RFO

Axminster Town Council
4th March 2024