

Forest Row Parish Council

Clerk: Mr David O'Driscoll
Email: parishclerk@forestrow.gov.uk

(Office Hours: Monday to Friday 9am to 2pm)



To: All members of FOREST ROW PARISH COUNCIL:
Cllrs. Eichner (Chair), Christie, Cocks, Evans,
Gilbert, Jaffay, Killick, La Djoi, Matthews, Rainbow,
Scott, Summers, Taylor-Smith, Volkers & A M
Waters

Community Centre
Hartfield Road
Forest Row
East Sussex
RH18 5DZ

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Dear Sir/Madam,
Your attendance is required at an extra-ordinary meeting
of the FOREST ROW PARISH COUNCIL to be held on
TUESDAY 14th JANUARY 2025 in the Garden Room at
the Community Centre at **7.30 PM**.

Date: 8th January 2025

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'D. O'Driscoll'.

Mr David O'Driscoll
Clerk to Forest Row Parish Council

THE FIRST FIFTEEN MINUTES ARE AVAILABLE FOR QUESTIONS AND REMARKS FROM THE PUBLIC.
MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ARE WELCOME TO STAY AND ADD QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS ON THE
AGENDA ITEMS, AT THE DISCRETION OF THE CHAIR OF THE MEETING

AGENDA

1. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION
2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE
3. RECORDS OF PREVIOUS MEETING OF 3rd DECEMBER 2024
4. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS/DISPENSATION REQUESTS FOR THIS MEETING
5. DELEGATED DECISIONS
6. CHAIR'S COMMENTS
7. SUMMARY FINANCIAL REPORT
8. APPROVAL OF DRAFT REVENUE BUDGET
9. SETTING OF PRECEPT FOR 2025-26
10. TO CONSIDER AN URGENT REQUEST FROM A VILLAGE ORGANISATION
11. ITEMS FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION BY FULL COUNCIL OR COMMITTEE

**COUNCILLORS' BRIEFING FOR THE MEETING OF FULL COUNCIL
ON 14th JANUARY 2025**

- 1. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**
- 2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**
- 3. RECORDS OF PREVIOUS MEETING OF 24th SEPTEMBER 2024**
- 4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST/ DISPENSATIONS**
- 5. DELEGATED DECISIONS**
ACTION: to note & approve

- 6. CHAIR'S COMMENTS**
- 7. SUMMARY FINANCIAL REPORT**
A printout is attached showing the position to the end of month 9/quarter 3. Members will note variations as between the various Committees, with the property element of Facilities being the highest spender. The overall summary, however, is of 101% income and 71% expenditure, which is acceptable for this point in the year.
ACTION: to note
- 8. APPROVAL OF DRAFT REVENUE BUDGET**
The budget was presented to the previous meeting of Full Council, and accepted without alteration. No further representations have been made since then and Council is accordingly invited formally to adopt the revenue budget as drafted
ACTION: to resolve accordingly.
- 9. SETTING THE PRECEPT FOR 2025-26**
As set out in the Advice Note to the budget dated 27th November, the revenue budget, together with the reserves requirement, is predicated on a precept of £670,000. Council is invited to set the precept in that amount.
ACTION: to resolve accordingly.

- 10. TO CONSIDER AN URGENT REQUEST**
I have received an urgent request from the Village Club for permission to put a direction sign on the fence at the bottom of Station Road. They have pointed out that they removed their original sign on request, in **February** last year. Discussion followed about a revised signage policy, but this has not progressed to a conclusion, and the Village Club say they are losing business for the lack of a clear directional sign, while the larger issue is still unresolved. I have not felt able to decide this on a delegated basis, but it seems entirely reasonable.
ACTION: to resolve accordingly.

- 11. ITEMS FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION BY FULL COUNCIL OR COMMITTEE**

Detailed Income & Expenditure by Budget Heading 07/01/2025

Month No: 10

Committee Report

	Actual Year To Date	Current Annual Bud	Variance Annual Total	Committed Expenditure	Funds Available	% Spent
Finance & Policy						
401 Finance & Administration						
4176 FI-Precept Received	651,991	650,000	(1,991)			100.3%
4181 FI-Wayleave Income	4	5	1			89.0%
4182 FI-Devolved Services Income	794	1,450	656			54.7%
4190 FI-Interest Received	6,714	5,000	(1,714)			134.3%
Finance & Administration :- Income	659,503	656,455	(3,048)			100.5%
4101 FI-Salaries	300,007	418,700	118,693		118,693	71.7%
4102 FI-Payroll Outsource Costs	400	800	400		400	50.0%
4103 FI-Contrib. to Library Salary	0	5,000	5,000		5,000	0.0%
4105 Community services - developme	172	0	(172)		(172)	0.0%
4108 FI-Staff Training/Travel	(874)	1,000	1,874		1,874	(87.4%)
4111 Forest Rate	0	30	30		30	0.0%
4120 Postage	355	300	(55)		(55)	118.2%
4121 Telecommunications	7,233	7,700	467		467	93.9%
4123 Stationery	525	450	(75)		(75)	116.6%
4124 FI-Subscriptions	4,793	6,600	1,807		1,807	72.6%
4125 FI-Insurance	10,084	11,000	916		916	91.7%
4126 Printer/copier	3,955	4,400	445		445	89.9%
4133 FI-Chairman's Fund	0	250	250		250	0.0%
4134 FI-Parish Meeting	0	200	200		200	0.0%
4135 FI-Councillors Training/Travel	428	2,000	1,572		1,572	21.4%
4136 Security Checks	24	150	126		126	15.9%
4137 FI-Members Allowances	2,671	7,000	4,329		4,329	38.2%
4151 FI - Bank Charges	1,353	1,800	447		447	75.2%
4156 FI-Legal & professional fees	2,310	3,500	1,190		1,190	66.0%
4157 FI-Audit & Financial Managemen	4,259	4,000	(259)		(259)	106.5%
4158 FI-Van Lease	40	300	260		260	13.3%
4160 Office Equipment	831	500	(331)		(331)	166.1%
4161 Office Maintenance	0	500	500		500	0.0%
4165 FI-Election Fund	0	1,000	1,000		1,000	0.0%
4166 Wayleaves	1	10	9		9	14.5%
4169 Community Occasion	1,392	1,000	(392)		(392)	139.2%
7101 PR- Advertising/Publicity	163	1,500	1,337		1,337	10.9%
7102 PR-Website	720	1,000	280		280	72.0%
7110 PR-Newsletter & Distribution	0	2,000	2,000		2,000	0.0%
7113 PWLB Repayment	0	10,000	10,000		10,000	0.0%
Finance & Administration :- Indirect Expenditure	340,843	492,690	151,847	0	151,847	69.2%
Net Income over Expenditure	318,660	163,765	(154,895)			

Detailed Income & Expenditure by Budget Heading 07/01/2025

Month No: 10

Committee Report

	Actual Year To Date	Current Annual Bud	Variance Annual Total	Committed Expenditure	Funds Available	% Spent
403 Other Grants						
4358 Receipt from FrowResource CIC	5,000	0	(5,000)			0.0%
4380 Other Grants/donations	2,000	0	(2,000)			0.0%
Other Grants :- Income	7,000	0	(7,000)			
4360 Other Grants	10,625	17,500	6,875		6,875	60.7%
Other Grants :- Indirect Expenditure	10,625	17,500	6,875	0	6,875	60.7%
Net Income over Expenditure	(3,625)	(17,500)	(13,875)			
Finance & Policy :- Income	666,503	656,455	(10,048)			101.5%
Expenditure	351,468	510,190	158,722	0	158,722	68.9%
Movement to/(from) Gen Reserve	315,035					
<u>Amenities & Services</u>						
101 Allotments						
1180 Allotment Rents	2,178	2,000	(178)			108.9%
Allotments :- Income	2,178	2,000	(178)			108.9%
1135 Allotments-Water & Upkeep	1,030	700	(330)		(330)	147.2%
Allotments :- Indirect Expenditure	1,030	700	(330)	0	(330)	147.2%
Net Income over Expenditure	1,147	1,300	153			
102 Village Greens						
1280 VG-Hire Income	1,580	750	(830)			210.7%
3188 Grants & Donations	0	100	100			0.0%
Village Greens :- Income	1,580	850	(730)			185.9%
1236 Outdoor Maintenance	2,718	20,000	17,282		17,282	13.6%
1237 Outdoor Planting	789	1,000	211		211	78.9%
1238 Street Cleaning / Litter	0	12,000	12,000		12,000	0.0%
1239 VG-Utilities	0	400	400		400	0.0%
Village Greens :- Indirect Expenditure	3,508	33,400	29,892	0	29,892	10.5%
Net Income over Expenditure	(1,928)	(32,550)	(30,622)			
104 Amenities General						
1400 Amenities grants/donations	0	1,000	1,000			0.0%
4180 Misc Income	48	0	(48)			0.0%
Amenities General :- Income	48	1,000	952			4.8%

Detailed Income & Expenditure by Budget Heading 07/01/2025

Month No: 10

Committee Report

	Actual Year To Date	Current Annual Bud	Variance Annual Total	Committed Expenditure	Funds Available	% Spent
1436 Skate & Play areas	18,394	18,000	(394)		(394)	102.2%
1447 Dog Fouling	2,574	3,500	926		926	73.5%
Amenities General :- Indirect Expenditure	<u>20,968</u>	<u>21,500</u>	<u>532</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>532</u>	<u>97.5%</u>
Net Income over Expenditure	<u>(20,920)</u>	<u>(20,500)</u>	<u>420</u>			
105 Outdoor Maintenance						
1501 Outdoor Maintenance Equipment	1,559	2,500	941		941	62.4%
Outdoor Maintenance :- Indirect Expenditure	<u>1,559</u>	<u>2,500</u>	<u>941</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>941</u>	<u>62.4%</u>
Net Expenditure	<u>(1,559)</u>	<u>(2,500)</u>	<u>(941)</u>			
203 Street Lighting						
2314 SL-Power	3,683	6,600	2,917		2,917	55.8%
2336 Streetlights	10,327	20,000	9,673		9,673	51.6%
Street Lighting :- Indirect Expenditure	<u>14,009</u>	<u>26,600</u>	<u>12,591</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>12,591</u>	<u>52.7%</u>
Net Expenditure	<u>(14,009)</u>	<u>(26,600)</u>	<u>(12,591)</u>			
204 Road Safety						
2436 RS-Road Safety	0	1,500	1,500		1,500	0.0%
2440 Shed Project	0	2,000	2,000		2,000	0.0%
Road Safety :- Indirect Expenditure	<u>0</u>	<u>3,500</u>	<u>3,500</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>3,500</u>	<u>0.0%</u>
Net Expenditure	<u>0</u>	<u>(3,500)</u>	<u>(3,500)</u>			
601 Cemetery						
6180 BU-Burial Fees	8,084	18,000	9,916			44.9%
Cemetery :- Income	<u>8,084</u>	<u>18,000</u>	<u>9,916</u>			<u>44.9%</u>
6123 Cemetery Admin	441	350	(91)		(91)	125.9%
6151 BU- Cemetery Rates	1,480	1,200	(280)		(280)	123.4%
6152 BU-Memorial Repairs	116	0	(116)		(116)	0.0%
Cemetery :- Indirect Expenditure	<u>2,037</u>	<u>1,550</u>	<u>(487)</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>(487)</u>	<u>131.4%</u>
Net Income over Expenditure	<u>6,047</u>	<u>16,450</u>	<u>10,403</u>			
Amenities & Services :- Income	11,889	21,850	9,961			54.4%
Expenditure	43,110	89,750	46,640	0	46,640	48.0%
Movement to/(from) Gen Reserve	<u>(31,221)</u>					

Property & Assets

Detailed Income & Expenditure by Budget Heading 07/01/2025

Month No: 10

Committee Report

	Actual Year To Date	Current Annual Bud	Variance Annual Total	Committed Expenditure	Funds Available	% Spent
205 Miscellaneous Assets						
1439 Public Seats	1,364	0	(1,364)		(1,364)	0.0%
2551 Offsite Car Parks	75	0	(75)		(75)	0.0%
Miscellaneous Assets :- Indirect Expenditure	1,439	0	(1,439)	0	(1,439)	
Net Expenditure	(1,439)	0	1,439			
301 Community Centre						
3180 CC-Lettings	25,396	20,000	(5,396)			127.0%
3181 CC-Equipment Hire	897	400	(497)			224.2%
3182 CC-Rents	11,367	22,000	10,633			51.7%
3185 MISC - incl books/copying)	521	400	(121)			130.2%
3187 CC Drinks Machine Income	502	600	98			83.6%
3189 Misc Property Refunds	18,600	0	(18,600)			0.0%
4180 Misc Income	98	0	(98)			0.0%
Community Centre :- Income	57,381	43,400	(13,981)			132.2%
3108 CC-Staff Training	520	0	(520)		(520)	0.0%
3111 CC-Rates & Services	32,577	65,000	32,423		32,423	50.1%
3116 CC-Upkeep/Cleaning	32,696	0	(32,696)		(32,696)	0.0%
3127 CC - Drinks Machine	1,289	1,000	(289)		(289)	128.9%
3136 CC-Enhancement	19,902	5,000	(14,902)		(14,902)	398.0%
Community Centre :- Indirect Expenditure	86,984	71,000	(15,984)	0	(15,984)	122.5%
Net Income over Expenditure	(29,603)	(27,600)	2,003			
303 Venue on the Green						
3306 VOTG Income	1,465	2,200	735			66.6%
Venue on the Green :- Income	1,465	2,200	735			66.6%
3304 Votg Non Youth Equip	0	500	500		500	0.0%
3305 VOTG Running Costs	2,807	4,000	1,193		1,193	70.2%
Venue on the Green :- Indirect Expenditure	2,807	4,500	1,693	0	1,693	62.4%
Net Income over Expenditure	(1,343)	(2,300)	(957)			
Property & Assets :- Income	58,846	45,600	(13,246)			129.0%
Expenditure	91,231	75,500	(15,731)	0	(15,731)	120.8%
Movement to/(from) Gen Reserve	(32,385)					

Localism & Community Projects

Detailed Income & Expenditure by Budget Heading 07/01/2025

Month No: 10

Committee Report

	Actual Year To Date	Current Annual Bud	Variance Annual Total	Committed Expenditure	Funds Available	% Spent
206 Community Transport						
2678 Medical Car Scheme Income	67	300	233			22.3%
Community Transport :- Income	<u>67</u>	<u>300</u>	<u>233</u>			<u>22.3%</u>
2554 Wealdlink	1,056	1,200	144		144	88.0%
2601 Voluntary Medical Car Service	118	50	(68)		(68)	236.5%
Community Transport :- Indirect Expenditure	<u>1,174</u>	<u>1,250</u>	<u>76</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>76</u>	<u>93.9%</u>
Net Income over Expenditure	<u>(1,107)</u>	<u>(950)</u>	<u>157</u>			
207 Market						
3184 CC-Market Income	6,597	7,500	904			88.0%
Market :- Income	<u>6,597</u>	<u>7,500</u>	<u>904</u>			<u>88.0%</u>
3151 CC-Market expenditure	6,408	7,000	592		592	91.5%
Market :- Indirect Expenditure	<u>6,408</u>	<u>7,000</u>	<u>592</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>592</u>	<u>91.5%</u>
Net Income over Expenditure	<u>189</u>	<u>500</u>	<u>311</u>			
209 Localism & Community Proj Misc						
2670 Shed Project	(1,260)	0	1,260			0.0%
2905 Repair Cafe & Wellbeing Serv	0	500	500			0.0%
4180 Misc Income	953	0	(953)			0.0%
Localism & Community Proj Misc :- Income	<u>(307)</u>	<u>500</u>	<u>807</u>			<u>(61.4%)</u>
2700 Repair Cafe & Wellbeing	2,275	2,000	(275)		(275)	113.8%
2710 Environmental Support	0	1,000	1,000		1,000	0.0%
2715 Community Consultation	0	2,500	2,500		2,500	0.0%
2720 Capital Projects R & D	491	2,500	2,009		2,009	19.6%
2750 YOUTH FORUM	730	0	(730)		(730)	0.0%
Localism & Community Proj Misc :- Indirect Expenditure	<u>3,496</u>	<u>8,000</u>	<u>4,504</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>4,504</u>	<u>43.7%</u>
Net Income over Expenditure	<u>(3,803)</u>	<u>(7,500)</u>	<u>(3,697)</u>			
304 Cafe						
3480 Gages - Sales	19,837	22,000	2,163			90.2%
Cafe :- Income	<u>19,837</u>	<u>22,000</u>	<u>2,163</u>			<u>90.2%</u>
3436 Gages-Purchase of Equipment	608	2,000	1,392		1,392	30.4%
3460 Gages -Purchases Food etc	9,521	18,000	8,479		8,479	52.9%
Cafe :- Indirect Expenditure	<u>10,128</u>	<u>20,000</u>	<u>9,872</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>9,872</u>	<u>50.6%</u>
Net Income over Expenditure	<u>9,708</u>	<u>2,000</u>	<u>(7,708)</u>			

Detailed Income & Expenditure by Budget Heading 07/01/2025

Month No: 10

Committee Report

	Actual Year To Date	Current Annual Bud	Variance Annual Total	Committed Expenditure	Funds Available	% Spent
306 Thursday Club						
3680 TC-Subscriptions	232	200	(32)			116.0%
Thursday Club :- Income	<u>232</u>	<u>200</u>	<u>(32)</u>			<u>116.0%</u>
3636 TC-Running Costs	281	750	469		469	37.5%
Thursday Club :- Indirect Expenditure	<u>281</u>	<u>750</u>	<u>469</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>469</u>	<u>37.5%</u>
Net Income over Expenditure	<u>(49)</u>	<u>(550)</u>	<u>(501)</u>			
406 Youth Provision						
4676 YP-Grants & Other Income	785	2,500	1,715			31.4%
Youth Provision :- Income	<u>785</u>	<u>2,500</u>	<u>1,715</u>			<u>31.4%</u>
4603 YP - Dev costs & General Expen	2,098	3,500	1,402		1,402	59.9%
4604 YP - Youth Forum	0	500	500		500	0.0%
Youth Provision :- Indirect Expenditure	<u>2,098</u>	<u>4,000</u>	<u>1,902</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>1,902</u>	<u>52.5%</u>
Net Income over Expenditure	<u>(1,314)</u>	<u>(1,500)</u>	<u>(186)</u>			
Localism & Community Projects :- Income	27,209	33,000	5,791			82.5%
Expenditure	23,585	41,000	17,415	0	17,415	57.5%
Movement to/(from) Gen Reserve	<u>3,624</u>					
Grand Totals:- Income	764,448	756,905	(7,543)			101.0%
Expenditure	509,394	716,440	207,046	0	207,046	71.1%
Net Income over Expenditure	<u>255,053</u>	<u>40,465</u>	<u>(214,588)</u>			
Movement to/(from) Gen Reserve	<u>255,053</u>					

**CONSOLIDATED DRAFT BUDGET
2025-26 (post-Committee)**

FINANCE & POLICY INCOME	TBC	notes
4176 Precept	0	none guaranteed
4180 Misc F&P income	5	unchanged
4181 Wayleaves	1600	inflation uprate
4182 Devolved services income	7000	rate dependent
4190 Interest received	8605	encl-precept & ringfenced carryover
TOTAL F&P INCOME		approx 133% of 2024-25 figure

FINANCE & POLICY EXPENDITURE

4101 Salaries	441000	notes current year + 5%
4102 Payroll costs	800	unchanged
4103 Library salary	6500	inflation uprate
4108 Staff training & travel	1000	unchanged
4111 Forest rate	30	unchanged
4120 Postage	450	inflation uprate
4121 Telecommunications	8500	inflation uprate
4123 Stationery	600	inflation uprate
4124 Subscriptions	6800	unchanged
4125 Insurances	11000	unchanged
4126 Printer/copier	5000	inflation uprate
4133 Chairmans Fund	0	no longer required
4134 Parish meeting/ event	200	for APM
4135 Cllr training & travel	1000	underused
4136 Security checks (DBS)	150	unchanged
4137 Cllr allowances	7000	current full sum
4151 Bank charges	1800	unchanged
4156 Legal & professional fees	3500	unchanged
4157 Audit/financial mgt	5000	inflation uprate
4158 Van lease	300	unchanged
4160 Office equipment	500	unchanged
4161 Office maintenance	500	unchanged
4165 Elections	1000	pos by-election
4166 Wayleaves	10	unchanged
4169 Community event	1000	enhanced frequency
7101 Advertising	1500	general PR-banners
7102 Website	500	new website
7110 Newsletter	1000	print run allowance
4360 Grants made (incl FRSGA)	17500	unchanged
TOTAL F&P	523940	

(approx 105% of 2024-25 budget figure)

FACILITIES: INCOME		notes
1180 Allotment rents	2200	as per 2024-25 forecast
1280 VG hire	1000	split prev two years performance
1281 VG utilities	0	unchanged
6180 Burial fees	15000	prev year + predicted increase
1400 Am'ts grants & donations	1000	guesstimate
3180 CC lettings	25000	as per 2024-25 forecast
3181 CC equipment hire	700	as per 2024-25 forecast

FACILITIES: EXPENDITURE

1135 Allotment upkeep	1000	as per 2024-25 forecast
Village green utilities	0	now part of VENUe overheads
1236 Outdoor maintenance	10000	as per 2024-25 forecast
new Street cleaning/litter	2000	new code
1237 Outdoor planting	1000	unchanged
1501 Outdoor equipment	2500	unchanged
1436 Skate & play areas	10000	repairs & m'tce

3182 CC rents	12000	allowing rent: 'holidays'
3185 CC misc income	500	as per 2024-25 forecast
3187 CC drinks machine	600	as per 2024-25 forecast
3188 CC grants & donations	0	none predicted
3306 VotG income	2000	return to 2023-24 level
TOTAL FACILITIES INCOME	60000	(approx 89% of 2024-25 figure)

1447 Dog waste	3500	as per 2024-25 forecast
6123 Cemetery admin	450	as per 2024-25 forecast
6151 Cemetery rates	1600	as per 2024-25 forecast
2314 Streetlights - power	6000	allows for increased bills
2336 Streetlights	20000	estimated inflation uprate
2136 Bus shelters	0	no budget allowance - to be
1439 Benches	0	financed through CIL monies
1442 Litter bins	0	see above new code
2551 Offsite car park	0	postponed this budget year
2553 Grit bins	0	no budget allowance - to be
6139 War memorial	0	financed through CIL monies
7108 Noticeboards	0	
3111 CC rates & services	70000	inflation uprate
3127 Drinks machine	1400	inflation uprate
3136 CC enhancement	20000	as per 2024-25 forecast
3304 VotG non-youth equipment	500	unchanged
3305 VotG running costs	3000	as per 2024-25 forecast
Local artists fund	1500	new code per F&P meeting
TOTAL FACILITIES EXPENDITURE	154450	(approx 94% of 2024-25 figure)

COMM SERVICES		
2678 Medical transport income	120	as per 2024-25 forecast
3184 Market income	7500	unchanged
2905 Service development income	500	nominal
3480 Gages sales	22000	unchanged
3680 Th.Club subscriptions	200	unchanged
4676 Youth grants/subscriptions	1000	as per 2024-25 forecast
4180 Misc.income	0	not guaranteed
TOTAL C-S INCOME	31320	(= approx 95% of 2024-25 figure)

C/S EXPENDITURE		
2601 Medical car scheme	100	as per 2024-25 forecast
2554 Wealdlink	1100	matches current demand
3151 Market expenses	8000	as per 2024-25 forecast
3460 Gages food	15000	current year + inflation
3436 Gages equipment	2000	unchanged
3636 Thursday Club costs	750	unchanged
4603 Youth expenses	3000	current year + inflation
new: Youth forum	1000	as per 2024-25 forecast
new: Shed project	0	n/a
Emergency equipment	0	n/a
2436 Road safety	500	assessments
new: Environmental support	1000	as per 2024-25 forecast
new: Community consultation	2500	unchanged
2700 New service support	6500	to include counselling support
new: capital projects R&D	500	feasibility studies
TOTAL C-S EXPENDITURE	41950	(=approx 99% of 20234-25 figure)

TOTAL INCOME (pre-precept): 95925
TOTAL EXPENDITURE: 720340

SHORTFALL for precept: 620415

ADVICE NOTE ON THE BUDGET 2025-26

The draft budget for 2025-26 has now been through both the Committee stage and scrutiny by the Chairs of Council and Committees, and is submitted for consideration by Full Council.

As Council will recall, 2024-25 was something of a watershed year, being the first budget prepared for this Council and involving a 40% uplift on the previous year's precept to £650,000. That occasioned some adverse comment. But my view, and the response of Council, was that the increase was necessary: a) to redress the internal balance of the council's finances; b) to compensate for the ongoing effects of inflation on our overheads; and c) to allow for Council to invest in a community-led programme of service development, which was the platform on which it was elected.

Reviewing the financial position towards the end of month 8, I am satisfied that objective a) has been largely achieved in terms of revenue provision, but subject to my observations below on reserves. I am also satisfied that objective b) has largely been met, and current performance against forecast bears this out. Service development has been something of a slow starter, partly because it has taken the new Council time to find its feet, and perhaps principally because Council has spent time and ongoing effort, to identify the residents' priorities for service provision.

The budget for 2025-26 is therefore intended as a continuity budget, with the following comments:

- The precept for 2024-25 was £650,000, but this was not all applicable to revenue. Predicted operational income was £106,905, and predicted expenditure £706,440, leaving a pre-precept shortfall of £599,535. That would have meant a precept of £600,000. However, I stated in my advice: "To this should be added a £50,000 increase in reserves, being a more realistic amount to bring them up to appropriate levels. Hence a precept of £650,000."
- Looking realistically at the likely revenue position for 2025-26, I have estimated that operational income, not including grants, will be £99,925 (a slight fall on the previous year), while the expenditure requirement will be £720,340. That creates a pre-precept shortfall of £620,415, or approximately 3.5% more than last year, which seems a realistic estimate in the current climate. Hence a first tranche of the precept of £620K to cover revenue expenditure.
- However, that is not the end of the matter. The additional injection into reserves last year restored them to their previous level. But it did not provide significant extra funding for longer term investment, particularly for play facilities, the overall costs of a cemetery extension, and the refurbishment of the Community Centre. (And, I might add, increasing the general reserve of £200K against a net annual liability of £620K, which is permissible, but not ideal). The Council has given serious thought this year to longer term priorities, and the wider local government context has shown the folly of over reliance on borrowing to provide services. I therefore propose for this year also an additional £50K on the precept to strengthen the reserves for longer term investment. Hence a total precept of £670,000: a 3.08% increase on last year, which will add less than £9 per year to a Band D Council tax bill.
- Finally, a point may be taken that on current figures, we may run a surplus on this year's revenue budget. That would be gratifying, but is in practice unlikely, as there are several projects coming to fruition before the financial year end which will absorb significant funds: the enhanced litter and street sweeping scheme, and completion of the Crittall window insulation, to name but two. The aim, as always, is as far as possible to balance the books.

DOD / Parish Clerk & RFO

27th November 2024