



On Thursday 4 January 2024, the Finance & Administration Committee members met to discuss the draft budget for the 2024/25 financial year. Members reviewed the income and expenditure before a budget was agreed upon to recommend approval to Full Council.

Following this meeting, the Full Council met and set its budget for the 2024/25 financial year and subsequently what it would request as its precept from Dorset Council, paid by those who pay Council Tax, to support that budget. The total expenditure is £611,125.00 which includes operating costs and exceptional and capital items. Exceptional and capital costs are one-off items within the year that the Council feels are either required to meet its obligations or are for the benefit of the community. After calculating these figures in line with the Tax base set by Dorset Council, this leaves the Council with a deficit of £108,669.00.

You may remember, in the 2022/23 financial year, the Council resolved to use £75,000 earmarked for the potential pavilion rebuild to carry out essential maintenance and Health & Safety works at the pavilion. At the start of the 2023/24 financial year, the remaining earmarked balance was just under £43,000. This balance remains earmarked for the potential pavilion refurbishment/rebuild, along with just under £205,000 also earmarked and has restrictions upon how it can be used under a section 106 agreement with a developer and Dorset Council. The Council also needs to hold 3-6 months of operating costs.

Due to an underspend in the current financial year, as a result of reduced employee costs, efficiencies and higher than predicted income from sports provision and pavilion, the Council resolved to allocate £35,000 of the underspend to the earmarked reserves allocated for the potential pavilion refurbishment/rebuild to offset some of the monies spent in 2022/23 to carry out essential maintenance and Health & Safety works at the pavilion. The Council also resolved to allocate a further £60,000 from the general reserves to reduce the deficit to £48,669.00. With this in mind, the precept required by those who pay Council Tax, to support the budget is £551,125.00.

The impact of these decisions means the Town Council will be raising its precept by £12.29 for the year, or £1.02 per month, for a Council Tax Band D property. Obviously, this will be less for Bands A, B, and C properties and more for Bands E and higher, based on the percentage calculation. The percentage increase on the Corfe Mullen Town Council precept part of your Council Tax from the 2023/24 year to the 2024/25 year is 9.73%. When considered as a percentage figure it is slightly higher than last year, but it is as a direct result of difficult decisions in previous years that the Town Council is in a position to limit this year's rise, despite escalating costs. As stated, the 9.73% equates to £1.02 per month, or 24p per week on a band D property.

Clearly, the Town Council would prefer not to raise its precept as it recognises some residents are struggling with the rising costs due to the cost-of-living crisis. However, it is subject to the same financial pressures as all businesses and households in respect of rising utilities, fuel costs, and supplies, which has now put the Town Council in a position where the choice is to make cuts to the services it offers or raising the precept to meet the need, it was decided that cutting services in 2024/25 would be detrimental to the community and its residents.

The Town Council maintains a number of services across the Parish which residents enjoy unfettered, such as the recreation ground facilities including the sports pitches and pavilion, public toilets, play areas, two cemeteries, allotments, and Springdale open space, while also supporting local organisations and charities who directly assist residents of Corfe Mullen.

It is the pride for Corfe Mullen that the Town Council is determined to retain by continuing to provide excellent services to its community and it hopes that its residents understand the need to ask for an additional 24p per week to do so.