



Warbleton Parish Council

Finance & GP Committee – 1st December 2022

Budget 2023/24

Councillors are reminded that the budget can only be agreed at full Council. This will be debated at Council on 8th December 2022 and if necessary, agreed at the January 2023 Council. The budget is the responsibility of all councillors.

In recent years the budget has been relatively straightforward, where most costs could be predicted with reasonable certainty. The recent economic upheaval in the UK will result in significant increased and unavoidable costs for Warbleton Parish Council in 23/24, which places pressure of discretionary budget items. This budget is, therefore, challenging and presents some difficult choices for councillors.

Normally the funding for the budget comes from the precept (the tax on each property in our Parish), which matches the budget. With no other income source (see below re CIL) any shortfall must be met from General Reserves. In 21/22, it was exceptional agreed to fund £1,000 from General Reserves – £500 to support the Diamond Jubilee celebrations and £500 to allow for increased investment the maintenance and improvement of the parish infrastructure with falls within the responsibility of the Parish Council. It was recognised at the time of agreeing the 2022/23 budget that any funding from General Reserves could only be a short-term measure and that it was not intended to continue beyond 12 months.

The attached spreadsheet shows the potential spending commitments. All budget lines should be reviewed but those highlighted in “yellow” are the ones that can be influenced with a material impact. We are faced with substantial and unavoidable increases in cost for: Parish Clerk, mowing contract and election expenses. This puts into question what discretionary costs can be agreed for 2023/24

The following comments should be read in conjunction with the spreadsheet:

1) Clerk's salary

The Council has agreed to amend the Clerk's contract (to a higher salary point and increased contractual hours) with effect from 1st April 2023

There will be a national pay award effective from 1st April 2023 but typically this is not agreed until several months later. In the current economic climate, it is not possible to predict what this will be. External recommendations have suggested it might fall anywhere between 5-10%. For the purposes of the budget an assumption has been made at 7.5%. An award of 5% would reduce this figure by £240 and an award of 10% would increase it by £240.

2) Clerk's CILCA qualification

Our Clerk is currently studying for her professional CILCA qualifications. It is expected that these will be completed in July/August 2024. Achievement of this award would increase the clerk's salary to the next pay point. This has been assumed w.e.f. 1st August 2023.

3) Overtime

The Clerk's contract will increase to 10.5 hours per week w.e.f. 1st April 2023. This reflects the previous contract and 2.5 hours per week voluntary overtime. In 2022 it was also agreed that an additional 30 hours for specific project work. With the change in contract overtime should be much reduced, but there are certain times of the year when it still may be necessary (eg year-end/audit, budget).

32 hours has been included, but councillors may wish to consider if this can be reduced.

4) Grants

The total of £2,254 reflects the **total amount** requested by the 4 applications received. The Council must agree the grants awarded but the FGP normally reviews the applications and make a recommendation to Council. In 2022/23, £1050 was awarded and it would be difficult to justify any higher amount. Councillors should also bear in mind and consider the grants to village halls for use of the premises by the Parish Council, recognising the increased costs that they face.

5) Mowing contract

We are awaiting all the quotations to be returned by the end of this week. To date only 1 has been received, which is £4,500. This amount has been included but it is hoped other tenders will be lower. Jackie will update as soon as the remaining quotes have been received.

6) Election expenses

In 2019 there was an election in BSG ward and an uncontested election in Warbleton Ward. This cost the Parish Council c£1,000. The costs were roughly split 2:1 between BSG:W.

I have spoken to the Election Services team at Wealden DC re potential costs for the 2023 election. There are many variables and any estimated costs is a guide only. Due to various legislative and other cost increases (voter ID, disability relayed support, increased costs of hiring venues, staff costs....), there will be potentially a substantial increase in 2023.

In the event that there are contested elections in both wards, the estimated costs for us would be c £4,500/£5,000. If both wards are uncontested the cost is estimated at £1,500.

Our reserve for election expenses has been built up over 3 years and, as at 31.3.23 will be £1,500. For the purposes of discussion and debate a budget figure of £3,000 has been included for 23/24.

This is a major drain on our resources and a potentially limiting factor in what can be spent in 2023/24. Depending on how much is spent in 2023, in future years a smaller budget could be set at maybe c£500-£1,500 per annum.

7) Training

This budget has been left unchanged, as there are full Council elections in May 2023 and there may be new councillors elected. Councillors may feel a reduction can be made given the financial restraints faced.

7. Maintenance/Infrastructure

The amount recommended by the Environment Committee was £2,500, which has been included for discussion. Councillors should consider whether there are projects which are essential to be completed or could be deferred for a period. As previously mentioned, the increase from £1,500 to £2,000 in 2022/23 was funded from General Reserves.

Councillors can propose that any unused budget from 2022/23 (virement) can be rolled over to 2023/23. Councillors should also consider whether any projects fall within CIL eligibility (and the priorities for CIL expenditure).

Budget funding

It is for councillors to determine the budget for 2023/24 and how it is funded. If all the current spending claims are met in full (and realistically this cannot be the case) and the budget is to be financed through precept, this would mean an increase in the precept of 43.84%.

In 2022/23 it was expected that we would return to a balanced budget in 2023/24 – i.e. that expenditure would be met by the precept. It remains my view that the budget for 2023/24 should be met through the precept.

My recommendation to FGP Committee and Council is that there needs to be significant reductions in spending commitments.

Cllr Steve Williamson
Chairman F&GP Committee
24th November 2022