**West & Middle Parish Council Budget Statement 2023– 2024**

The AGAR has now been completed and the final budget for 2023/2024 has been finalised.

The budget planning process for 2023/24 has been a complicated process and not representative of the normal Budget Planning Cycle.

The annual budget planning meeting took place on 14.12.22 and it was agreed that there was not only a lot of uncertainty in the National economy, but a complete lack of information on the impact of the new Unitary structure at Somerset County Council on the budgeting process for Parish Councils. Due to the lack of guidance for Parish Councils, Members asked the Clerk to take advice from both local politicians, Senior Managers at SSDC, the SALC Chairman and various other sources.

The Clerk was also asked to consider how other parishes were going to set their budget as well as to take into consideration how the new Local Community Networks (LCN’s) would operate and if they would have any financial responsibility for budgets in their geographical area.

The cause of the major uncertainty was that the new Unitary structure had not yet indicated what “costs” Parish Councils will have to take on board, and whether these will be funded or not. The general consensus from everyone that the Clerk had spoken to was to create a budget in line with inflation, at 10%.

Items which were “rumoured” for the Parish Council’s to start funding included pot holes, drain cleaning, hedge cutting, salt, emptying of dog bins, cutting of village verges.

The Clerk duly carried out the request to undertake further advice and carry out primary research and presented the results.

The Precept was **resolved by Members via an online vote on 15th January 2023** with a final decisionto raise the Precept by 10%, from £15,000 to £16,500 and accept the budget proposals. This Resolution was ratified at the Parish Council meeting on 8th February 2023, with 5 Members being in favour and one against. (Cllr Cockrem, who voted against the final rise, stated she had still been in favour of a rise to £16,000 under the current situation).

The new SCC Unitary governance became live on 1st April 2023, and the Parish Council hopes to have a clearer steer in 23/24 as it has proved incredibly difficult to budget for “any item” which was traditionally funded by SSDC or SCC. The Clerk explained the whole process had been incredibly time consuming, however was confident, that the Parish Council had produced the best due diligent budget it could under extremely difficult circumstances.

Having previously undertaken a half year review of the 22/23 budget, a further review on the 14.12.22 and again since the year-end figures were finalised, it was agreed that under-spends should be earmarked and carried forward to the 23/24 budget. This included drains, general maintenance, Traffic Management.

**Priorities:**

* Drains still remain a priority and funding c/f from 22/23 and are ring fenced
* Speed concerns remain a priority, with £1000.00 funding carried forward specifically for Traffic Calming from 22/23.
* No further maintenance budget has been allocated for the Allotments and going forward any further costs for funded from plot income. (Plot prices will be reviewed in line with National Recommendations starting to be agreed in May 23, commencing April 24).
* A Community grants budget of £1,500.00 has been included in the budget and there will be 2 funding rounds, one in July and one in November. A portion of this budget, up to £200.00 has been awarded for Coronation Community costs.
* Asset Review. In line with National Guidance a full Asset review will take place and a budget of £3000, 00 has been ring fenced.
* A contingency of £2000.00 has been set aside to cover unplanned maintenance.

**Year End 2023-2024 Budget Statement**

**Total Projected Income: £ £30,665.00. (Includes £10K grant for Recreation Ground Play Equipment and £16,500.00 precept.**

**Proposed Expenditure: £43, 092.00. (This includes £23,000.00 for play equipment – ring fenced from CiL)**

**Capital Reserve April 2022, £28,212.00 (Strict guidance on use for Capital projects only as part of historic Land purchase).**

**Contingency from Cash Reserve, £2000.00**

**General Cash Reserve May 22, £6,806.00. This is within recommended reserve guide lines.**