

Bruton Town Council Budget setting at Finance and Resources committee meeting 8th January 2024.

1. Introduction

- a) The finance and Resources Committee met on 8th January 2024 to consider the budget for 2024/25 and also a precept demand, to recommend to Full Council for approval at the Full Council meeting on 16th January 2024.
- b) The expenditure to budget for the current year, 2023/24, up to 30th November 2023 was used to give an indication of whether the budget for the current year had been set at a sufficient level to cover expenditure.
- c) An inflation value of 7% on the current year budget figure was used to give an indicated budget value for 2024/25. The overall % change for each budget subtotal is shown to the right hand side.
- d) There are budget lines that had firm figures that could be used, for example staffing costs, account and cemetery software, and grounds maintenance, which do not require the inflation guestimate figure.

2. Expenditure

- a) The budget lines were considered one by one, in order, as per the order on the budget spreadsheet.
- b) Council Administration: The expenses in this budget area were considered quite carefully.
 - i Audit fees have increased in the current year due to the change of internal auditor. Since the new internal auditor has been in place, various internal controls have been introduced, and more finance information is displayed on the Town Council website.
 - ii The Council IT support is to be outsourced to a contractor, and a budget provision has been introduced to meet that expenditure.
- c) Events: The Christmas trees in the Events budget has been given a separate budget line, as previously this was included in the Christmas event.
- d) Grants: Community Grant applications have been carefully considered. It is hoped that the Town Council can apply for grant funding to supplement the amounts that are currently provisionally approved.
- e) MUGA and skate park: The electricity supply for the MUGA floodlights has been transferred to an alternative supplier. The increase in budget for this line is due to the increase in standing charges.

- f) Other Maintenance: The walls in Bruton that the Town Council are responsible for require both maintenance in the next financial year, and also planned maintenance for future years. This is indicated in a maintenance budget of £5000, and also a provision for the walls fund in Services and Projects budget heading to build up a reserve for any substantial works in the future.
- g) Pitches and Dovecote: The Town Council intends to assume responsibility for pitch cutting on a year round basis, subject to Full Council approval of the budget on 16th January 2024.
- h) Service and Projects:
 - i) The Jubilee Park play area will require significant refurbishment in the future, and a reserve needs to be considered to address future replacement of play equipment.
 - i) At the November Finance and Resources meeting, a contingency budget line was considered, with a budget of £25,000, for the probable devolution of services and assets from Somerset Council to Bruton Town Council. Despite engaging with the Devolution Team at Somerset Council, there have been few details provided to enable the Town Council to make an informed decision regarding setting a realistic budget figure, in the event that any move is made to devolve assets and services. Feedback from residents has indicated the preference for Bruton Town Council to NOT take on any services currently provided by Somerset Council.
 - j) Councillors at the Finance and Resources Committee meeting on 8th January 2024 decided to make no provision at this stage for services that may be affected by budget cuts at Somerset Council, and would address these issues as and when required. Over the course of the next year, councillors will consider if there are any Somerset Council assets which would benefit Bruton Town, that can be devolved in a more measured way, and including consultation with the parishioners of Bruton Town.
- k) At the Finance and Resources meeting on 8th January 2024, there were two budget amounts omitted from the totals when the resolution was made to recommend setting the budget (£180085.12) and precept (£174395.12). this would have resulted in a Band D of £177.51, a 7.77% increase. The figures omitted are indicated on the spreadsheet; Walls Maintenance, £5000 (under Other Maintenance), and also the Pitch Cutting £2280 (under Pitches & Dovecote Car Park). Including these figures in the budget will give a precept of £181675.12, Band D of £184.92, a 12.27% rise. This is to be discussed at Full Council on 16th January 2024.

3. Income

- a) Bruton Town Council has very little income. Low risk, short term investment opportunities are currently being explored, with an improved interest rate deposits held, which will increase the income slightly.
- b) Cemetery rates and allotment rent were both reviewed at Finance and Resources on 8th January 2024. It was recommended that allotment plot fees are increased by £1 per annum for full plots and 50p per annum increase for a half plot, with raised beds remaining unchanged. The cemetery fees will be increased in line with 5% inflation (to a rounded and sensible value), with effect from 1st April 2024.

4. Precept

The Precept amount is determined as the difference between the expenditure budget prediction and the income prediction. A budget must be set and approved by Full Council each year, before the Precept Demand is finalized, and subsequently approved by Full Council.