

Town Council precept and budget 2021/22

Following the Town Council's meeting on 18 January, it approved the draft budget and precept as published in December (see below). The Precept will increase by 5% from £554,973.00 to £582,722.00. This will mean that for a Band D property the council tax proportion for Edenbridge will be £156.22. This is an annual increase of 4.08% / £6.12 per year or 51p per month, barely the cost of a pint of milk. (This is slightly less than indicated initially.)

The Council is very mindful that the next financial year will be challenging for many in Edenbridge but faced a hard choice of either cutting services, to reduce an anticipated deficit, or to seek an above inflation increase in the precept to help reduce this. The consensus was to maintain services.

The Council has in the past taken the decision not to increase the precept, yet it has faced increasing costs. It does look to raise income from other sources, but this is not enough to meet the full demands on the budget.

On the surface, the Council looks to have strong cash reserves, but the largest part of this is Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). This is held by the Council to be used to fund infrastructure projects managed by the Town Council or community groups. The Council's general reserves has been drawn on to fund the deficit and cannot continue to do so. It should typically hold between 3 and 12 months expenditure as a general reserve, and depending on the Assets held and running costs; ([Capital and Reserves Policy](#)).

For a copy of the 2021/22 budget click [here](#).

Edenbridge Town Council draft budget and the proposed Precept for 2021-22

The Finance Committee met in December to consider the detailed budget for 2021/22. The full Council had already considered the Precept at its meeting on 09 November and instructed the Committee to prepare the draft budget based on an increase to the Precept of 5%. (The Precept is the element of a property's council tax that pays for the Town Council.) This would mean that a typical Band D property's precept next year will be £157.61; an annual increase of £7.51 or £0.63p per month (less than the cost of a second-class stamp or a chocolate bar).

The Town Council's income from the Precept will increase from £554,973.00 to £582,721.65. This is calculated by multiplying the Precept for a Band D property by the council tax base for Edenbridge. The council tax base consists of the number of band D equivalent dwellings in the area. Exemptions and discounts are taken into account and the number of properties in each band is reduced to reflect these. The tax base advised by Sevenoaks District Council for 2021/22 is 3,730.15, an increase of 32.87. The Precept is the smallest proportion of the full Council Tax.

At the time of considering any increase to the Precept it was not known then that Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) would impose an increase to the allowance for non-collection of Council Tax, a consequence of the current Covid-19 crisis. This has a negative impact to the Town Council resulting in a lower tax base figure than forecasted. This is disappointing as the Government has awarded grants to the district and county councils to help with this loss of income, but nothing has been

passed down to parish and town level. The Town Council has expressed its disappointment to the local association of councils and Tom Tugendhat MBE MP.

The Finance Committee scrutinised the draft budget. Considerations were given to the high staff costs and the 10-and-30-year maintenance plans. The Town Council owns and maintains a lot of the town's open spaces and public buildings and this adds pressure when balancing the high level of standards residents have come to expect and deserve, with the budget. It was noted that several smaller savings had already been made in the administration costs and changes to the cleaning of Rickards Hall. However, this is not sufficient to help with the budget deficit. It was also noted that the Covid-19 pandemic had had an impact on some costs and loss of income with the closure of Rickards Hall.

The question was raised, 'which services would the Council like to cut?' Members did not want to cut services, but agreed to put to Council to consider a review.

The full Council will consider adopting the draft budget and any changes at its meeting on 18th January.

Click [here](#) for a copy of the draft budget.

Click [here](#) for a copy of the November Council minutes.