

Edenbridge Town Council draft budget and the proposed Precept for 2023-24

Every autumn the Town Council budget goes through a rigorous process of preparation and review. The Town Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer in discussion with the Head Groundsman and Property Manager identify potential projects or issues for the forthcoming year and draft the budget after further discussions with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Finance Committee.

The detailed 2023-24 budget, for the year from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 was presented to the Finance Committee on 14th November. This was later adjusted by £1,200 additional insurance premium to reflected updated valuations of Church House and Rickards Hall, and Doggetts Barn.

At the December full Council meeting, the Council considered the draft budget proposals and recommendations for the Precept.

Some estimates of inflation are included, but most have assumed similar costs (with some savings). Utilities for the buildings were in contract until June 2025, but the street lighting would see increases from 1 April.

The main increase from the current year's budget to next year's is staff costs. There has been a marked lag in the NJC agreeing pay increases with the pay rise for 2022-23 only recently being agreed. As a result, the staff costs (salaries, pensions, National Insurance contributions) for 2022-23 (this year) will be approximately £398,000, £25,000 more than budgeted. This has been the start point for the 2023-24 staff costs.

The Council maintains specific reserves that are earmarked for future planned projects and expenditure, for example the elections and maintenance to Council assets. The forecasted year-end for these earmarked reserves is £345,452.

The General Reserves position are in a reasonable position but below levels lower than is comfortable. Ideally, the Council should hold a minimum of six months' value of expenditure, i.e., closer to £385,000; the forecasted level for year-end 31 March 2023 to be £244,028.

Bearing this in mind it would be preferable not to draw on the reserves to cover a budget shortfall and this would not be good practice.

For completeness, it is worth noting that CIL Funds are strictly part of the Council's reserves (there are strict rules how this money can be spent, it is set aside for community infrastructure and not Council ongoing costs). At the end of October, the Council had £158,863 general CIL; and allocated £142,467, £301,330 in total. (The November CIL Board awarded a further £153k to community projects.)

Every year, the Council is mindful of the financial challenges to residents and this year particularly with cost of living crisis. Any decision is always difficult. The Council is proud of the facilities and services it provides for the community including several well-maintained open spaces, playgrounds, the Millennium Wood, the four cemeteries and two allotment sites. It owns and maintains five buildings, five out-buildings, and the public toilets. It is responsible for 251 streetlights with a replacement programme to provide newer and energy efficient columns. In addition, it provides Council office services, promoting tourism, manages the Market, and works with agencies and groups to represent Edenbridge.

The 'tax base' is used when calculating the Precept and is made up of a Town/Parish area converting all property bandings to Band D equivalents. The final figure represents the amount of tax that would

be raised by the levy of £1 in band D. For Edenbridge the tax base has been steadily growing over the last few years. At the time of the December, the Council could only assume the tax base for 2022-23. The tax base has since been estimated to be 3,891.91 (including an allowance for non-collection).

Past experience had shown keeping the Precept increase to a minimum had created future problems, depleting the reserves. Council has agreed to increase the Precept sufficiently to ensure a balanced budget and securing the future reserves position.

Budget 2023-24

Expenditure: £771,841

Income: £92,773 plus the Precept

Council Precept: £689,182 (increase of £22,704)

Band D equivalent £177.08 – an increase of 3.05% or £5.24 annually/£0.43 per month

To balance the budget for 2023-24 a precept income of £679,068 is needed.

The Council will consider adopting the draft budget and any changes at its meeting on 16 January 2023.

To [view draft budget summary](#) (includes full cost centres breakdown)

To [view the full Council minutes](#) December 2022.