Trysull and Seisdon Parish Council

Precepts and Parish Council Spending

Again, we would very much like to thank all those who have taken the time to correspond with the Parish Council of late thanking us for the noticeable improvements around the village. The new Village Signs have particularly drawn comment from many of you and it's really pleasing to hear how such changes for the better are being appreciated. Such kind acknowledgments indicating that we are actually making a difference is no better encouragement to deliver more of the same and, of course, we have plans to oblige. But what is the cost of this progress to you, the parish taxpayers?

The intention of this article is to firstly highlight just a few interesting facts about Parish Council financial powers in general and secondly to provide some specific parish related statistics and figures. Fully detailed budgets may always be viewed on our website.

- The Parish Council has a legal obligation to set an annual 'Precept'. This is basically the amount it will ask the parish households to pay in order to cover the budgeted expenditure.
- Budgets therefore need to be determined and agreed well before a Precept request is justified and submitted to District.
- The Precept must be agreed by members in council. It has to be submitted in January each year and will relate to the financial year beginning on the 1st April next.
- It is paid, by District, to the Parish Council in two equal instalments usually in April and September each year.
- District is then responsible for collecting this from parish households via the Council Tax system.
- Surprisingly there is no legal limit on the amount of Precept a Parish Council may level on its residents! So, what may temper this significant tax raising power? Well, nothing more than old fashioned political expediency that should always ensure a demonstratable justification and the necessary delivery of value for money.
- Can the Parish Council spend money on whatever it wants? Absolutely not. Spending powers are actually quite limited and extraordinarily difficult to summarise given they are provided by thirty-five or more different Acts of Parliament. Each item of expenditure has to be sanctioned under a specific legal power. We may only do what the law specifically allows.
- We are fortunate to be granted some leeway under s.137 Local Government Act 1972 which provides a flexibility in spending on items not specifically sanctioned or prohibited elsewhere in legislation. But again, there are strict controls and per capita limits set annually for use of this power and any spending under such authorisation must be proportionate and produce a direct benefit to the area or its inhabitants.

So, in terms of cost to the tax payer how does our Parish compare to others in Staffordshire? Each Parish will have a different tax base, which is the equivalent number of band D properties. Each in turn will also have different contractual obligations and services to provide that will be unique to that particular Parish. Having our wonderful playing fields, for example, will also necessitate a provision for their maintenance and not all Parish Councils will have to provide this type of service.

So, direct comparisons with other Parish Council headline Precepts and spending budgets may be a little more difficult than first imagined. Nevertheless, cost per household (based on an equivalent band D property) is one of the published national statistics and such data does provide for the following comments:

- Our current cost (included in your council tax) is £55.55 per household i.e., just £1.07 per week.
- Increases in our Parish Precept over the last three years have been on average only £0.06 per week. The increase in the last round was £2.57 per annum per household, which is less than £0.05 per week.
- Our Precept, per household has been, on average, a significant £8.95 lower than the South Staffordshire Parish Council average, according to the latest three years of published national data.

We genuinely hope, therefore, that we are indeed seen to be delivering value for money, particularly when also considering the delivery of much-needed improvements of late and achieving all these at a very meagre increase in cost to parish residents, whatever statistic is chosen. So, my gratitude again to the Parish team for helping achieve these proven efficiencies and very tangible output for the Parish and who do so willingly and continuously without any prospect of personal reward.

Parish Chair - Andrew