

To all Members of Newbury Town Council

Re: Budget 2017-18

From Councillor David Goff, Leader of the Council

This is the second budget prepared by a Conservative administration. It needs to be seen in the context of the changing way that Local Government is to be financed in future. It is quite right that Local Government should be fully funded out of local resources (Council Tax, Business rates etc.) but this is a journey that is not yet complete. This journey is causing significant financial pressure for West Berkshire Council (WBC) and this is impacting on the services that they deliver. Town and Parish Councils across West Berkshire are being asked to contribute to some of these services and you will see this reflected in this budget statement.

As mentioned in last year's statement we will receive no Precept Support Grant from WBC for 2017-18, a loss of £18,384 from compared to this year. There is the £10,000 cost of taking on the refilling of grit bins from WBC. We consider this an essential service from a road safety perspective. We are going to ensure that the Wharf toilets remain open to the public, but the additional cost of running them will be £11,350.

We have set aside £10,000 to enable Newbury to complete the Town Design Statement and also to prepare a Town Plan. This is an important strategic document for Newbury and its future development. There is also the £14,175 estimated increase in the Grounds Maintenance Contract which will be retendered in September this year. There are also additional salary costs of £16,899 allowing for pay increases, pension increases and £1,500 for some additional part-time meetings support in order to reduce staff time lost through our current Time Off In Lieu scheme.

Finally we have been asked for a new £31,275 contribution to Newbury Library over the next three years. This, in conjunction with contributions from other towns and parishes, will ensure the continuation of some library services and also enable the Town Council to have a say in how the Library service develops.

There are also some savings that have been made. In particular the £59,000 no longer needed for the Neighbourhood Wardens. Whilst this has been a valued service in the past, since its discontinuation by Sovereign Housing no viable alternative scheme has been forthcoming. We will continue to incorporate some of the work that the Wardens carried out in our Grounds Maintenance Contract.

Working with one of our Town Hall tenants we have been able to provide a Visitor Information Service at a cost of £2,000, a saving of £8,000. There is also a one-off £6,000 reduction in CCTV spending due to the delayed implementation of that project. We have additional income of £12,000 from the Town Hall's suites.

Turning now to some other items of note. We are budgeting £12,000 towards a contribution to the Newbury BID for this year's Christmas lights. We have increased the Grants Sub-committee budget by £3,000 to £10,000 which can then be match-funded through the Good Exchange. We have maintained the CAB grant at £17,500 but will explore means by which we can obtain some match funding from the Good Exchange to increase its value.

Before I conclude, I would like to thank all officers and members who have been involved with the budget process this year.

So the big question is what does this all mean for the precept? Well I am very pleased to say that the above savings, together with an increase in the Tax Base (the number of properties in the parish paying Council Tax) have enabled us to produce a budget with no increase in the amount Council tax payers will have to pay to Newbury Town Council. I therefore commend it to you.

David Goff,

Leader