

Berwick-upon-Tweed Town Council – Budget & Precept 2016-2017

Proposal – Cllr Georgina Hill

Introduction

It is to be welcomed that Berwick Town Council has recently extended the internal consultation process in relation to setting the 2016-2017 budget.

Berwick Town Council recognises that further improvements need to be made to the budget-setting process. This will be addressed as part of the current review which also includes considering the role and powers of the current Committees, regular budget monitoring and developing an investment and reserves policy.

Berwick Town Council's guiding principles will be openness, accountability, ensuring proper consultation and scrutiny on all proposed financial and budgetary commitments and delivering value for public money.

Reasoning

On the 23rd November, Berwick Town Council voted to freeze the Precept for 2016-2017 at last year's level of £218,200, delivering a 0% increase on the precept which will benefit residents of Berwick, Tweedmouth and Spittal, many of which are struggling with their own personal and household budgets and unacceptably high numbers are facing considerable financial difficulty. Northumberland County Council have recently announced plans to increase their Council Tax levy by 16% over 4 years.

Berwick Town Council's financial situation could legitimately be regarded as being very healthy with, as referred to in the Warren report "substantial reserves" (approximately £252,283 as of 30.10.15) Berwick Town Council's projected income for 2016-2017, exceeds projected outcome; *

Based on the current precept level and Schedule III surplus

Without using current reserves

Including all new proposed expenditure (much of which has not yet been recommended or agreed by the Council or a Committee of the Council)

Berwick Town Council is, therefore, in the enviable position of being able to freeze the precept without cutting any service and can deliver on new spending commitments, pending further consultation and agreement by the Council

In conclusion, there is no grounds to increase the Council Tax burden on residents of Berwick, Tweedmouth and Spittal and, otherwise it would be undesirable.

Proposal

To freeze the Berwick Town Council Precept for 2016/2017 at last year's level of £218,200
To agree the budget at a level to deliver the 0% increase as set out below (changes to draft budget)

Changes to draft budget

£95,929 available from Schedule III surplus - £37,170 to be added to "Park and Play Areas Reserves (currently at £120,000)" and £58,759 to general reserves

£37,170 for Park and Play areas to be taken out of "Park and Play Area Reserve" fund

£4,324 to be added to "Other grants" heading to allow for £2,000 for Spittal events, as agreed, and

£2,324 left unallocated for other requests.

(The above delivers a £0 difference on the revenue budget)

To remove from the draft budget the following;

War memorial repair - £8,500 (funded elsewhere)

Apprentice - £5,460

Grant Funding Officer - £15,828

Victoria Fountain repair - £5,000

Hide Hill Premises lease - £10,000

(these projects could later, if agreed, be funded from general reserves following resolution of the Council)

CCTV (£15,000) and Seat Refurbishment (£10,000) to be taken from general reserves (standing at approx. - £109,250)

To remove the note "Tourist Officer" in relation to "other marketing - £10,800 but retain heading and allocated expenditure.

* After deducting the £8,500 included in the draft budget for the Tweedmouth War Memorial repair which has been met elsewhere