

## **Hankelow Parish Council**

### **Draft Budget Proposals 2024-25**

#### **Report to Parish Council Meeting – 6 November 2023**

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The Parish Council is invited to give initial consideration to draft budget proposals for 2024-25. Members may wish to make amendments to the draft, following which a final report will be submitted to the 2 January 2024 meeting to enable a precept request to be submitted to Cheshire East Council by 12 January 2024. The draft budget proposals enclosed are based on core expenditure.

## **2 PRECEPT REQUESTS**

The following is the list of precept requests made in previous years.

2015-2016	£3,780
2016-2017	£3,260
2017-2018	£4,500
2018-2019	£2,500
2019-2020	£4,900
2020-2021	£4,400
2022-2023	£3,400
2023-2024	£3,100

## **3 BUDGETING APPROACH**

Good governance, accountability and transparency are essential to local councils and a cornerstone of the government's approach to improving public services. Those who are responsible for spending public money are accountable for ensuring that it is conducted in accordance with the law and proper practices. The style of Annual Return changed in 2015-2016 to emphasise to local councils their duty in confirming that the accountability framework is satisfactory. The preparation of an annual budget is one of the key statutory tasks to be undertaken by a Parish Council, irrespective of its size. The budget has three main purposes:

- 1) It results in the Council setting the precept for the year (ie the money which it requests from the Borough Council to fund the shortfall between its own funds held and the budget proposals for the forward year).
- 2) Subject to the Financial Regulations, it gives the Clerk overall authority to make spending commitments in accordance with the plans approved by Members.
- 3) It provides a basis for monitoring progress during the year by comparing actual spending against planned spending.

The importance of the budget should not be under-estimated. It is essential that Members understand how it is put together and how it should be used in the operation of the Council. Members should also note that an allocation in the budget is not an authority to spend; it is simply an allocation. Each item of expenditure must be specifically approved at a Parish Council meeting.

Members have a duty to ensure that the budget proposals for the forward year are appropriate and are encouraged to question them. At its simplest, the budget compares what the Council would like to spend in the forthcoming year on local services and projects, with the amount of income which it expects to generate, with the excess of planned spending over income being made up, mainly by the precept.

#### **4 Review of the current year budget and spending**

Most Parish Councils start their process by examining the current year figures with three main purposes:

- 1) To identify activities which are being carried out this year and will also be carried out in the next year and therefore, need to be budgeted for again.
- 2) To identify items such as projects or schemes which are occurring in the current year but will not occur in the forward year and there is, therefore, no need for a budget.
- 3) To identify items, such as new schemes, which are not an activity in the current year but should be added for next year's budget.

All of the above is 'incremental budgeting' as it builds on the decisions which the Parish Council has taken in the past. Although zero-based budgeting is a 'clean sheet' approach and is not constrained by what has happened in previous years, the incremental approach is more practical. Members are, nevertheless, encouraged to question more closely each item of expenditure. Every item of expenditure must be considered and justified, and there must be a reasonable prospect of each item coming to fruition during the financial year, to avoid criticism by the auditor and to demonstrate to the electorate that the Parish Council is a prudent manager of public money. Each year, the Clerk, on behalf of the Council is required to provide a detailed variance schedule which shows the difference in spend between two financial years and the reasons for any significant differences. Both over-spend and under-spend represent poor budgeting.

Members should also consider carefully what additional items ought to be included to avoid spending on un-budgeted items during the year. It is suggested that Members pay particular attention to the budget for the Neighbourhood Plan process.

#### **5 BUDGET PROPOSALS**

The following documents are attached:

- Budget monitoring schedule to 5 October 2023, together with a draft budget for 2024-25.

Calculations are given to show how the likely balance available on 1 April 2024 has been calculated.

## **6 DECISION REQUIRED**

At its January 2024 meeting, the Council will be asked to RESOLVE –

- (a) That a budget of (to be agreed at the meeting) be approved;
- (b) That the Clerk be authorised to request a precept of (to be agreed at the meeting) from Cheshire East Council; and
- (c) That the Clerk's salary for the forthcoming 12 months be determined.

**Paula Cottrell**  
**Clerk**