

Thorverton Parish Precept

As you may know, the Precept is the sum of money that the Parish Council asks the District Council to collect on its behalf by adding it to the Council Tax. Thorverton Parish Council has decided to impose what is in percentage terms a very large (43%) increase and as the decision is the responsibility of Councillors rather than the Clerk it was also decided that I, as the Chairman, should use Focus to explain. It is my personal explanation, other Councillors will probably offer a different view.

Next year's Precept will be increased by about £6,000 to £19,500. Keeping to round figures, if all the properties in Thorverton that paid the tax were Band D there would be about 370 of them paying £52 per year. In fact last year there were 424 which would produce an average of £46.

The Band D rate is the figure that appears on the Council Tax demand and which is published for all parishes. It is also, by complete chance £1 per week. We in fact arrived at the figure for the Precept by going line by line through the Budget that our Clerk, Alison Marshall, had drawn up in December. There is a copy with the Draft Minutes on the Web site and notice board, and if you are interested you will see that whilst some items passed without much comment, Council was in no way unanimous on others, and I hope that provides some reassurance that Council is working as it should.

We are having to deal with the fact that for several years our senior Councils have been forced to cut services by a reducing central government grant whilst they can only increase their tax take by a small amount. They, and especially the County Highways department, have been urging parishes to take on some of their work, and are promoting schemes whereby their limited funds are available to Parishes that do something or make a financial contribution in return.

Additionally, the Council has decided to promote our ability to give grants. This year we gave £600 for the upkeep of the Churchyard and have assisted with this for as long as Councillors can remember. We have recently given grants to organisations like Tiverton Mobility to help offset cuts from senior councils. We have now adopted a policy which extends the scope of the grants and, as an example, have just given the Memorial Hall £650 towards the cost of chairs.

An inevitable effect of both novel circumstances is that budgeting is very uncertain when there is no past experience and no certainty as to demands we may face, and no certainty as to grant funds we may receive. The Council has the power to vary the amount that is budgeted to each category of expenditure during the year and my expectation is that circumstances will make us do this as events pan out and our grant policy beds in. However there is one exception I should mention: Council has decided to ring fence £2,000 from this year's precept to establish a reserve fund to replace Recreation Ground equipment; we do not have to do this, and I am one of the majority of Councillors who supported this.

If you have stuck with reading this so far I hope you will appreciate that Council has had to make difficult decisions about how they are spending other peoples money, and I am sure I speak for all Councillors when I say we would welcome any feed back from Parishioners.

Stuart Crang (Chairman Thorverton Parish Council).