

Finance and Budget Statement 2011

Following several meetings of the Finance Committee, and in response to a range of information received from Northumberland County Council, I would like to propose the following budget and precept for 2011/12 on behalf of the Finance Committee.

Key Messages

We agreed and accepted our Town Plan in the December 2010 meeting and this budget reflects the aspirations within that document.

The overall precept that we recommend requesting of Northumberland County Council remains unaltered from last year at £113,110. The Finance Committee recommend no change to last year's precept for this year for several reasons:

1. This will give us time to begin implementing projects as set out in our aims and objectives described in our Town Plan.
2. More time and detailed information is required to consider local service issues with the County Council.
3. It acknowledges the difficult economic situation that we find ourselves in.
4. It reflects the request made by Central Government to County Councils to not increase the precept this year. This request has only been made to County level, but we feel this reflects the spirit of the request.

We propose to set the overall budget for 2011/12 at £134,610, which incorporates spending against this year's precept that we could not start in earnest until the Town Plan had been agreed.

Last year saw a special charge levied against Newbiggin by the Sea council tax payers in addition to the County Council's tax request. This was raised to cover costs of play areas in particular, and did not form part of the Town Council precept or budget. This year, we propose to allocate funds in the budget to pay for the maintenance and safety of play areas in Newbiggin by the Sea. The exact mechanism for the delivery of this service still needs to be worked out, but incorporating this expenditure into our budget will remove the special expense from Newbiggin bills, and potentially give more local influence over this service.

The situation regarding the transfer of services from the County Council to us has been dynamic over recent weeks, and remains uncertain as we look to establish meaningful discussions with the County Council. We have been given some rough estimates of service cost, which are frankly unaffordable, and plan to negotiate better service terms over the coming year. Each service will need to be treated individually, and discussions and decisions will be tabled at full council meetings as required. It is worth noting though, that it is inevitable that responsibility for some services is likely to transfer to us, and future budgets will need to reflect this situation accordingly.

In detail

Administrative expenses totalling £56,710 include some minor revisions based on 18 months of real expenditure. I covered these in detail in my statement last year, so in brief summary this year, these costs include salary, training budgets, room and building hire and office costs, insurance covering public and employers liability, money for publicity, publications, audit and professional subscriptions, a 50% reduction in the budget for members' expenses, and general civic expenses.

Service delivery includes a growing portfolio of areas of responsibility for the Town Council.

1. Allotments continue to be a real success story in Newbiggin by the Sea, ably managed by the Allotments Association.
2. Play Areas will include money to pay for regular, weekly safety inspections, annual inspections and replacement equipment. This will not be special charged for by Northumberland County Council again this year.
3. The Christmas Lighting in 2010 was a real success, and a slight increase in the seasonal lighting budget should ensure that, in partnership with the Trader's Association, we can continue and maybe build upon our 2010 display.
4. Public Toilets are the number 1 priority for Newbigginers as demonstrated with empirical evidence in the various consultation exercises that we undertook last year as part of our research for the Town Plan. We plan to look again in detail this year at a range of options for improving public toilet provision within Newbiggin by the Sea.
5. The Farmers' Markets were extremely successful last year, and this figure will enable us to run regular markets this year and establish this as a regular event in Newbiggin by the Sea.
6. The Newbiggin Nipper bus service provided by WATbus and co-funded by Northumberland County Council and Newbiggin Town Council, has been extremely successful, carrying 774 passengers since its inception in late October 2010. This budget will ensure that this service continues for another year.
7. The School Crossing Patrol and Speed sign at Spittal are initiatives to which we have recently agreed.

Special events provides funding for particular activities that bring prestige, pride and visitors to Newbiggin by the Sea.

Project funding covers areas of expense that will enable us to start progressing other areas of our Town Plan. In particular, the money is set aside for activities promoting sports, arts and literature; community events; partnership working, and training and employment promotion. Other features include dog control and environmental cleansing, to run in conjunction with the revised dog control orders recently agreed by the County Council; the continuation of the small grants scheme that has benefitted 24 groups with £6,310 over the last 18 months; money to scope a wasteland management proposal; to establish a seafront strategy group and to investigate putting tourist telescopes on the promenade - ideas raised through the public consultation exercises conducted last summer; and to consider developing a youth garden and enhancing the south entrance to the Town.

Conclusion

Of course, the success of these projects will not be solely reliant on the Town Council, but in the establishment of good partnerships and equal working relationships with other organisations in the area, such as community groups, the County Council and other public bodies, businesses and individuals. I would like to invite all Newbigginers to consider joining us in realising our ambitions, by volunteering your time and skills and join our wonderful range of community and project groups to really make a difference in our community.

When we agreed the Town Plan we acknowledged that it was ambitious and far-reaching. I believe that this budget will help us start to realise our aims and objectives and ensure that this Town Council makes a positive and lasting contribution to Newbiggin by the Sea.

Recommendations

1. That the Town Council accept the proposed budget of £134,610.
2. That the Town Council accept the proposed precept of £113,110.

Cllr Rebecca McCready,
Chair, Finance Committee
January 2011