

Statement Chair of Finance Committee – 24/25 Precept Increase

As you will now be aware, the Parish Council has had to put through a larger increase in precept than we would ideally have liked to and I appreciate that there will be unhappiness regarding this.

We have as a council looked at every option to keep this as low as possible. The last year has seen a significant cost incurred with the repair of a retaining wall the council is responsible for, which has cost almost £30,000. The Council also had to move our grounds maintenance contract to a new contractor and inevitably there is a higher cost in doing this, but hopefully residents will see an increase in the level of works being undertaken in return for this cost. As I am sure we are all aware, the cost of everything is increasing and this means that the Council is incurring higher costs across the board.

In previous years, the Precept has not been increased as much as it perhaps could have been and this has meant that our reserves are below the recommended levels and so we have had to include an element to ensure that we observe best practice in this respect.

We have also looked at income due to the Council and have agreed to increase these where we can, again to keep the precept as low as possible. We have increased the rent on a property that we let out, on our allotments, moorings and cemetery fees.

We have also looked, many times, at every single thing that the Council spends money on – and have where possible removed or at least deferred all but the most essential spending to ensure that we are exercising due diligence in this respect.

Our councillors have spent many unpaid hours carrying out jobs around the village of Kingswear themselves, rather than paying others to do things – and a working party of volunteers has been formed to do this. We also have plans to try to set something similar up in Hillhead to, where residents can work together on projects to improve our environment.

I wish to assure residents that the decision to increase the precept to the level agreed upon this year has not been taken lightly and that we are all committed as councillors to do all that we can to ensure that we keep costs down and get the best value for money that we can for those whom we serve.

Cllr Mark Bentley – Head of Finance Committee, Kingswear Parish Council