

NOTICE OF MOTION

AGENDA ITEM NO. 8

POLICIES AND RESOURCES – 19th January 2022

To consider the following Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Michael Stead on the Policies and Resources agenda on Wednesday 19th January 2022:

The previously approved draft 2022/23 Revenue Budget required a precept of £1,743,450 which represented an increase of £45,950 or 2.7% on the current Precept.

The provisional Council Tax Base had increased by 48 properties, and this meant the required increase in the Town Council Tax, provisionally agreed by the Council in October 2021 was 1.99%

Great Aycliffe has one of the highest council tax rates in England. With residents still struggling with the impact of Covid and the added pressure of tax rises and inflationary pressures, now is not the right time to increase council tax.

It is noted that the current draft budget would result in balances and reserves remaining above £1 million next year.

It is proposed that the Council therefore agrees to a 0% council tax increase for the financial year 2022/23.

The £45,950 foregone revenue (based on the draft 2023/23 Revenue Budget) to be funded by reducing the annual £50,000 contribution in the capital reserves in 2022/23.

It is further proposed that the Council further agrees to the following reviews to identify savings:-

- 1. A review of all income generation*
- 2. A review of all spending*

It is also proposed that officers liaising with councillors give consideration to and are cognisant of the issues highlighted in the attached document as part of this motion.

Motion from Councillor Michael Stead – Additional Information

1. Inflation is running at more than 5% - review all fees and charges increases. Full review of under charging: Example we charge £6.50/£7.50 for Badminton. DCC charge £8.50 for a court regardless of membership and that is a low rate.
2. That bar charges are reviewed because for example charging £2.50 for a pint of Stella is significantly below even the local working men's clubs (£3.80 for equivalent at Big Club) and GATC should not be subsidising discounted alcohol in a leisure facility. An increase could bring in significant extra income for the Council, whilst still remaining below the average charges in the area. For bar income to be £205,000 and bar stock to cost £90,500 revenue is clearly not sufficient: The current 55% mark-up is significantly lower than the industry standard and if increased this has the potential to cover the entire council tax precept increase requirement and the prices would still be lower than elsewhere. Promoting the facilities could further improve income.
3. Sports hall income is very low. Consideration should be given to alternative uses which could bring in additional income.
4. That we review our golf course fees to consider a system of gradually rising fees up to the age of 25 by considering the fees structure of neighbouring courses such as Woodham. And review green fees as they are significantly lower than other areas. Review areas of courses being cut to see if more can be left wild to improve biodiversity and reduce cutting costs.
5. That we amend the Over 60s age limit for Golf membership as most people now retire at 65 or older and therefore have higher disposable income than younger residents. This should apply only to people who have yet to become 60 years old. At Woodham the concession age is 70! Many other clubs have no concession discount.
6. Catering income is only double catering supplies costs – this needs a full review as it is at odds in multiples to standard food outlet differentials.
7. A full staffing review to determine current staffing responsibilities to provide progression planning if any posts do not need to be replaced when retirement or vacancies occur, and consideration of a benchmarking exercise to compare running costs.
8. Full review of all areas of grass larger than 0.3 hectares currently being cut with a view to turning over to woodland/copses/wildflower meadow to reduce grounds maintenance costs.
9. Review of company providing water supplies – get quotes from NWL and two other competitors – businesses can get quotes for water as with electric and gas now.
10. Review Caravan Park charging fees – other parks charge different rates based on Low/Mid/High season/Bank Holidays – eg Beamish charges £25-37 Pnight for two people with an extra £4 for additional persons. We charge £10-£12 per night per caravan regardless of number of users. Strawberry Hill (Cassop) is £24 for caravan (2 people) and extra for more people. Review publicity of the facilities.
11. Review the Pre-School operations/capacity and capacity at other facilities in the town to determine why it is not breaking even when all private sector facilities have to. Is the facility big enough to reach a break-even point? Other nurseries in town are larger. Is there over capacity. Are chargeable fees at acceptable levels? Whilst recognising the benefits of lower cost provision, full day costs at play day nursery are £48, but only £30.50 at St Oswald's – bearing in mind those on lower incomes get free provision, do we need to further review operations/fees?

12. Review of bank/card charges. Makes no sense that charges have risen by £2500 after moving to card only payments when cash costs more to pay in to banks. £23000 in charges seems excessive – is this correct - perhaps there are alternatives.
13. Look at where grants / matched funding can be found towards any replacement costs for play facilities to help reduce £500,000 capital budget requirement. Analyse and review 'parks and play' recharge budget.
14. Review number of separate revenue budget headlines to reduce administration costs. EG Why do we need Parks and Play budget and separate Env and Open Space budgets.
15. Given the significant amount of money in reserves (over £1m), review all earmarked reserves..
16. Review £4750 postage, £3250 printing, and £6500 subscriptions.
17. Review and reduce members travel expenses budget as £1000 is 4 times average spend of few year or councillor papers to be mandatory sent as email in a single pdf file for home printing where needed.
18. Review staff travel budget including Corp services car allowances as some budgets significantly underspent.
19. Check how vehicle fuel purchases are made to ensure monitoring is in place.
20. Review loan interest payments – could loans be cleared using some of reserves to reduce ongoing interest payments without penalties.
21. Review rates charges to see if any government discounts should apply which currently do not apply – e.g. does the budget take in to account governments recent 50% discount announcement.
22. Review all phone calls made to ensure on best phone packages (mobiles and landlines)
23. Is the agency Cash Collection Service still required if no longer taking payments or is this for allotment/other fees – either way can we change policy to remove cash collection service costs