

Responsible Financial Officer's Annual Report 2023-2024

The Parish Council started the 2023-2024 year with a much reduced balance in the Bank Account due to the rapid increase in costs which had not been anticipated. As a result, the Clerk had to agree to defer part of the annual salary payment for 2022-2023 until the new precept had been received in April 2023.

Councillors had agreed in 2022 to substantially increase the Annual Precept in 2023-2024 for the Parish Council to meet the increasing cost of services being experienced. The new level of the precept in 2023-2024, allowed the Parish Council to start increasing its reserves and to match all inflationary pressures with service costs.

Councillors agreed to continue to increase the precept in 2024-2025 and subsequent years until an adequate reserve balance is achieved.

The decision by Microsoft to change the specification of all computers that can use the latest Windows operating system, is likely to cause the PC to lose its ability to extend the life of the laptop which it owns. The laptop has to run the PAYE payroll each month and report the results to HMRC (a nil return 11 months each year). If a Windows Operating System is to be continued to be used safely by the Parish Council, then a new laptop will need to be purchased and the annual budget increased to fund the purchase.

As an alternative, the Parish Council could follow in the footsteps of some German Government departments and opt to transition to the use of 'open source' (free software) which is readily available on line. The PC already uses open source Office software (LibreOffice) and has done so for the last few years. Whilst the conversion to open source technology for the laptop's operating system is not difficult, there are fewer specialists available with knowledge of installing it and its use. The Clerk/ RFO is currently exploring this alternative operating system on his own computers with a known local enthusiast and will be recommending its use at minimum installation cost (£50.00 - £60.00) as a worthwhile investment, subject to Councillor's approval, if his own computers conversion is successful.

L T I Grant

Clerk/Responsible Financial Officer