

Audlem Parish Council Precept 2023/24

At their meeting on 12th December Councillors agreed to increase the Parish Council Precept. This decision was not taken lightly during this period of significant inflation for everyone. The increase has been kept as low as possible whilst continuing to operate effectively on behalf of residents.

To be clear, Councillors have not chosen to do this. It is a financial requirement of operating as an effective Parish Council on behalf of residents, given the impact of the unforeseen and challenging financial issues. We hope Audlem residents will support the Parish Council in its strenuous, ongoing efforts to move forward following this significant financial impact.

On December 4th residents were made aware that approximately £163,000 appeared to have been fraudulently removed from the Council's bank account leaving it virtually empty. Inevitably, this has had an effect on the Precept for the forthcoming financial year 2023/24. In drawing up the Budget, Councillors have had to assume that no money will be returned to the Parish Council before next month. If and when any money is recouped, the Precept in the year following its receipt will obviously take that into account.

During the current year, Councillors have striven to minimise expenditure as much as possible. However, due to having to employ a Locum Clerk through an agency and a very large increase in the cost of insurance (which has affected all Parish Councils) the forecast net expenditure against budget has increased by approximately £5,800. However, once the additional cost of the Locum Clerk and the insurance has been taken into account, due to tight financial management, there will be a forecast saving of more than £14,000.

As the Parish Council has virtually no funds, all of its ongoing expenditure has been paid by the Cheshire Association of Local Councils (ChALC). Without this amazing support by ChALC, the Parish Council would not have survived. Inevitably, when the Parish Council receives the Precept money from Cheshire East Council, ChALC will need refunding. It is estimated that by the end of the financial year, this will be in the region of £36,000, which is added to the amount required for the Council's 2023/24 budget.

The Parish Council's Precept has not increased for the last three years as a large reserve balance had been deliberately built up to fund specific committed projects. In addition, by law, a Parish Council must maintain a reserve that covers at least three months' committed revenue expenditure. This is estimated to be £20,000 including a full years' repayment of the loan for the purchase of Turnpike Field.

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The total estimated revenue expenditure for 2023/24 is £75,264 (a reduction of £7,695 on the current year). Taking into account the £56,000 identified above, the total amount to be recovered through next year's Precept is £129,314. This equates to a precept request of £120.87 for a Band D property – an increase on the current Precept of £1.31 per week.

The proposed amount for each Band is as follows:

Band	Annual £	Weekly £	Increase per week £
A	80.58	1.55	0.88
B	94.01	1.80	1.02
C	107.44	2.06	1.17
D	120.87	2.32	1.31
E	147.73	2.83	1.60
F	174.59	3.35	1.90
G	201.44	3.86	2.18
H	241.73	4.64	2.63