

North Norfolk report to Wells T C - 5th February 2024
From Peter Fisher

North Norfolk District Council's proposed budget is set to be recommended by Cabinet for approval at the next Full Council meeting on February 21.

Like the majority of Councils in the UK, NNDC faces some tough challenges and decisions in the next financial year as there is a shortfall of £1.5million to find before it can balance its budget for 2024/25

The Council is seeing a significant rise in temporary accommodation costs, which have soared by over 30% since 2022/23. Like household budgets, the Council has also seen costs continuing to increase sharply for many products and services, particularly energy and staff costs, over the past 18 months - and the costs are not coming down again.

Although welcome, recent slight falls in the headline national inflation rates will merely mean the rate at which costs increase will slow down marginally.

NNDC is carrying out consultation with the public and business rates payers about the budget it is proposing for the coming financial year. This includes a potential rise of 3.03% to Council Tax for 2024/25, which equates to an increase of £4.95 for the year 2024/25 for an average Band D household in North Norfolk.

Of the total Council Tax Bill paid by each North Norfolk resident, the District Council receives only 8p out of every pound, with the rest paying for County Council, Police and Parish Council services. The extra cash generated for the District Council with its proposed increase in Council Tax of £4.95 for a Band D property will not be enough to cover this year's projected shortfall.

The Council has therefore additionally undertaken a thorough internal cost-saving exercise and has so far identified £975,000 in potential savings and areas where income could be increased. Examples of savings include replacing computer software in some services, not replacing staff in some services and not holding or supporting some annual events in the District, with the priority being always to maintain essential services and look to reduce costs in other areas.

The Council has also investigated possible revenue growth and one area where this can potentially be realised is through extra car parking spaces becoming available. The income can be maximised if the Council can achieve this before the start of the main tourist season.

In addition, further cost-saving measures have been put forward for Councillors to consider and debate, including the possible closure of some toilets over the winter months or permanently.

Leader of the Council, Cllr Tim Adams, commented:

“The pressures on local authorities have grown significantly in recent months due to the national economic situation, with consistently high inflation and massive increases in energy costs. These realities have affected our finances in the same way they have effected those of businesses, organisations and residents throughout our district.

“These rising costs have been acutely exacerbated by a sharp increase in the number of people presenting as homeless and needing temporary accommodation solutions in North Norfolk. Meeting that need is both a legal and moral obligation of this Council and as the numbers involved rise, the cost of meeting that requirement rises correspondingly.

“The external financial challenges we are facing as we approach the 2024-25 financial year are unprecedented in the Council’s recent history, but we are proposing a range of sensible and practical measures to meet those challenges. This has included a rigorous review of our own costs and revenue opportunities, through which we have identified savings of nearly £1million for consideration by members when our budget proposals go to Full Council on February 21.

“Our primary objective throughout this process has been, as always, to protect and preserve vital core public services this Council provides to the North Norfolk public.”

Stearman’s Yard Toilets

The 2023 Loo of the Year Awards upgraded the new toilets from Diamond to Platinum.