

FROM JEFFERSON HORSLEY
TO MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE
CC ALL COUNCILLORS

I set out below the contents of the Press Release which has gone out simultaneously with the General Fund Revenue Estimates for 2003/4.

This puts into perspective the main points of the budget and gives Councillors an insight into the strategy that is laid before you.

I'd like to thank all who have contributed to the process, in particular the colleagues of the Financial Services Manager who have worked hard and diligently towards producing this outcome. It is a team effort.

I am particularly pleased with the consultation procedure both within and without the Council. The "Mustard" packs circulated before Christmas gave councillors a good insight into the expenditure plans of the council both past, present and future. The Budget Consultation workshops and the Deane Dispatch responses have assisted us a great deal. I believe they should be taken further next year to enable us to identify even more closely with the needs and ideas of the general public.

NEWS RELEASE

BUDGET PROPOSALS

An increase of just 2% is proposed by the Executive of Taunton Deane Borough Council for 2003/04 for its share of the Council Tax. This is below the rate of inflation and means no more than 4p per week an increase for the average householder. The low increase is recommended against a background of a lower than average settlement from central government of only 5.6% when the national average for shire districts has been over 7%".

"This figure clearly illustrates the financial competence of this council", said Leader Jefferson Horsley. "We have not only announced the smallest increase but at the same time are maintaining satisfactory levels of reserves. To accomplish such a balanced budget destroys any myth that the Council is a spendthrift organisation".

" We have also listened to the responses from the consultation we held just before Christmas and made some adjustments reflecting local priorities. Every one of these

responses feeds into our Corporate Priorities and is acted upon within our Medium Term Financial Strategy”.

The Budget for 2003/04 has several notable features:

- £300,000 extra for the North Taunton Leisure Centre (Wellsprings)
- £200,000 as a contribution to the North West Taunton highway package (Silk Mills)
- £72,000 on maintaining our own assets
- £50,000 towards the Vision for Taunton Master Plan
- £25,000 extra to be spent on litter collection
- £20,000 on single property flooding grants
- a standstill (no increase) in car parking charges for all commuters

The Council has absorbed salary increases of 3.5% for its staff, an £85,000 increase in its pension fund contribution and successfully introduced kerbside collection of the “green boxes”, costing an extra £60,000 each year.

Jefferson Horsley added: “This is a balanced budget with sufficient safeguards built in to protect the Council Tax payer from any disasters. It also leaves the Council with adequate resources to meet the ongoing problems of completing The Wellsprings Centre. It is a financially competent budget proposed by a financially competent Executive”.

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