



Here's edition 145 of our Clerk's Column circulated as usual to the 490 residents on our Residents' Forum email list and through the Chronicle's page 4.

## BUDGET & PRECEPT FOR 2023/24

The 2023/24 Precept has to be agreed at tonight's Town Council Meeting. Members and staff have worked over the past month to keep next year's Precept as low as possible in the context of rising prices for the services we need in order to maintain the assets and support that are so important to the town. We are predicting a total spend in the year of around £513,000 and the draft Budget shows that £430,731 of will come from the Precept, which will mean an increase in the Precept of £47,361 from last year, adding 11.97% to the Band D cost, or 35 pence a week.

The major increases in the draft budget are:

**Wellbeing Café:** as it has grown from five members to 90, and revealed such a high level of need for it, the Town Council agreed at its January meeting to expand it to five sessions a week with its Co-ordinator becoming a full-time member of the staff team, requiring an increase of £20,00 in its funding.

**Public Toilets:** an increase of £29,427 includes the addition of the cleaning of the Ventnor Park toilet (£7,500), the repayments to the Public Works Loan Board for the new public toilet (£7,556), the Isle of Wight Council's rental charge for the four car park spaces to put it on (£2,900), the absence of this year's anticipated income from the new public toilet (£5,000) and the increased electricity costs (£1,500).

**Grounds Maintenance:** the Town Council's contractor has increased charges for the work in the town and Ventnor Park by the 10.7% of the CPI in December.

**Salaries:** excluding the major change to the Wellbeing Café from the total shows an overall percentage increase of the other posts of 5.2%, well short of the current 10.7% inflation increase.

Members reduced the Precept required by £29,000 though a reduction in the Beach Safety Project and committing some of the income from Salisbury Gardens and car parks.

## MAYOR'S MONTHLY SURGERY

The town's Mayor, Steph Toogood, will be available for questions and chat about the town and Council in our Green Room from 10am to 11am on Friday.

## PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING

Only one of the five applications on the Committee's Agenda on Monday was not supported: the construction of access to Homelands on Southgrove Road for which the Committee's unanimous verdict was:

*Ventnor Town Council expresses its serious concerns about the land stability in the area [and] formally asks that detailed professional investigation of the land conditions is undertaken before permission is considered.*

The other four were supported, one strongly: Ventnor House on Hambrough Road got *strongly supports this application which will significantly improve the appearance of the building and enhance the street scene.*

## BOB SEELY MEETING

I joined nine other Town and Parish Council representatives in the occasional Zoom meeting the Island's MP holds to update on his work and engage in a Q&A. We heard that he had tried to move on the development of the Camphill site, visited Ventnor Post Office, was pleased about the reopening of Bluebells as an interim care facility and been selected to represent Ventnor West in the next election.

Time for questions was more limited than usual, so just two: what happened to the Island Deal and the need from progress in dealing with anti-social behaviour in Freshwater.

## ROAD CLOSURE

The long sign-posted closure of *Leeson Road* for 12 days is due to begin today.

*Grove Road* is due to close for the whole of the coming week between both its junctions with Southgrove Road from 8am to 5pm.

## OFFICE OPENING HOURS

Due to staff absences our office at Salisbury Gardens will continue to close at 2pm Monday to Friday. Phone and email connections will continue to be live and meetings will take place as usual.

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## FROM MY TWITTER FEED THIS WEEK

- A new Report from [Action for Children](#) says: 'there are 440,000 children in poverty living in families where the parent(s) are already working full-time... some families simply cannot work their way out of financial hardship.'
  - Based on its new research the [Living Wage Foundation](#) announces today that 4.8 million workers (17% of the UK workforce) are paid less than the real living wage.
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