

# Statement from Chair of Finance

Parish Council Meeting Monday 16th March 2020

I am pleased to announce that our Precept for 2020/2021 has been reduced by 0.7%.

Whilst some of this can be accounted for by the increase in homes paying Council Tax there are other factors both for and against.

The main reason we have been able to reduce the precept is that the previous clerk was being paid 35 hours a week, although we could not see any justification for such a large number of hours. Our present clerk feels that 24 hours a week is plenty for this Parish. Judging by what we have achieved in the short time she has been with us this is adequate. She also works exclusively for this parish, so is not distracted by other duties elsewhere.

Much time has been spent on various topics, some of which have cost money.

A new website has been produced, and hopefully, following this meeting, all councillors will be contactable through a Parish email address. This follows established guidelines. The website still needs some work but will help us communicate much more easily with parishioners.

We have upgraded our Finance system and now use the RBS software which is recommended for Councils. This allows us to be transparent to councillors, parishioners and auditors, in contrast to the old fashioned paper system.

When our new clerk started in September not only did she have to spend time setting up the new systems as above, but also had to sort all the office paperwork which had been left in piles, and much of which was from other parishes. The office paperwork is now in order and in relevant files in the filing cabinet, and all the required policies have now been either updated or installed if not in place.

Many thanks to our clerk for achieving this in just over 66% of the time paid to the previous clerk.

The reduction in the Precept would have been greater if we had not had a number of unexpected expenses that we had not accounted for.

We have spent a lot of money on tree work this year. This has been necessary because there was no apparent maintenance plan in place and the recent bad weather has made the situation worse.

Hopefully we can now proceed to do the proactive work we all joined the Council to deliver. This may mean that next year's Precept will increase as we are not interested in maintaining the status quo, and want to see Stone Cross and Westham develop into a thriving community.

With this in mind we are producing a development plan, full of ideas for the future, which we hope will see facilities provided for all age groups. It will soon be available for comment from parishioners, and this will enable us to make additions, or improve our ideas and priorities.