



A Parish Council's Finances?



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Where does the money come from?

The income of a parish council is derived from the parish precept, a tax paid by the householders of the parish and collected on its behalf by the District Council. There are approximately 3,759 properties in the parish and 1 payment is collected from each property. Boxley Parish Council also receives income from the hire of Beechen Hall, Dove Hill Allotments and its burial ground but these are often balanced by the expenditure needed for these community facilities. It also applies for grants when possible.

How is the precept set?

The parish council decides annually what the precept should be. It does this by setting a budget that forecasts the expected expenditure, income and the reserves. Members then decide what precept needs to be set. These decisions are taken at meetings open to the public to attend.

Accountability.

The parish council is held accountable and monitored in many ways.

Internal audit. Councillors undertake two internal audits per year to check that the systems and finances are run correctly. They also check invoices and sign the cheques.

Independent Internal Audit. Legislation requires that there is an independent internal check on the systems and finances of the parish council.

Annual Audit. Legislation requires that the parish council be audited annually, currently by LittleJohn LLP. Part of this audit is a period where electors have access to the accounts and can raise questions with the auditor. After the audit the response is notified to the council and also to the parish. Electors have free access, via the website, noticeboards and parish office to the annual return to the auditor. Further details can be requested from the parish office.

Internal audit and controls. The accounts are prepared in accordance with the Governance and Accountability in Local Councils (England) A Practitioners Guide. The guidelines require the production of an annual Governance Statement which details the system of internal control and audit that is in place at the Council for that particular year.

The Parish Council is responsible for

- ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, and that it is used economically, efficiently and effectively.
- Ensuring that there is a sound system of internal control which facilitates the effective exercise of the Council's functions and which includes arrangements for the management of risk.
- Having internal control systems designed to assess and manage risk to a reasonable level. It is not possible to eliminate all risk, the council can only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness.
- A system of internal control based on an on-going process designed to manage these risks efficiently, effectively and economically.

How do the electors know what is going on?

Unless tenders or items that are confidential are being discussed members of the public are welcome at all the council and committee meetings. Even when it is planned to discuss confidential items this is shown on the agenda and a reason why the public will be excluded is given. Boxley Parish Council endeavours to be accountable and open in its financial matters and its budget and accounts are placed on the parish council website.

There are other ways to see what is going on:

- The Parish Council agenda contains a list of all income and expenditure.
- The Finance & General Purposes Committee undertakes bank reconciliations and checks of income and expenditure against budget.
- The Estates Committee receives financial information on income of the hall. It also sets hire fees for the hall and Dove Hill Allotments.

All agenda are published on the website or available in paper form from the parish office.

Financial Challenges

With continuing financial cutbacks facing District & County Councils, parish councils are being approached to provide top up services but with no extra funding being made available.

Parish councils are having to consider what action to take, whether to use up reserves or raise the precept. The Gov-

ernment is also looking at parish councils to fill the gap in cut services.

Can I request that money is spent in the parish?

Yes. Contact the parish office or your local councillor to request that a project is considered. You can even make the request in person by attending a council or committee meeting.

Can the parish council support local groups?

Yes and in some cases it already does. Details of the grant scheme can be obtained from the website or parish office.

Value for money?

Only a resident can decide and views will vary from person to person. However the small annual sum paid by each property, approximately £25 per year (average tax band d payment for the parish) soon mounts up. So what could you buy with approximately 50p per week?

- ◇ A community centre?
- ◇ Allotments?
- ◇ An orchard?
- ◇ Land for open spaces?
- ◇ Support for residents and the community?
- ◇ An active campaigning council?
- ◇ Staff employed to monitor what is going on and to ensure issues are debated and considered.

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