

Council tax kept below average

Careful

money management has enabled Farnham town councillors to agree a level of council tax that is set to remain below the national average.

Farnham

Town Council made the decision at its Full Council meeting on Thursday 23 January, resulting in the portion of council tax that it receives for a band D property being set at £66.09 per year.

“The

council has shown continued restraint in budgeting for services to keep the Farnham portion of our residents’ council tax bills at an affordable level. We’ve taken into account inflation, the cost of living and our residents’ incomes as well as global pressures such as the impact that meeting the financial cost of the climate challenge might have on our reserves,” says Councillor John Neale, the Leader of Farnham Town Council. “We have also increased income from sources other than council tax such as sponsorship from a range of local businesses. At the same time, we have taken on responsibility for selected services from our financially squeezed partners in borough and county councils.”

Although

residents pay one council tax bill, the money is divided between borough, county, town and parish councils, as well as Surrey Police. Farnham funds many of its services from its share of the tax. The sum Farnham Town Council charges its residents through their council tax bills is known as its precept.

In

2015/6, Farnham’s precept was just over £3 above the national average for town and parish councils. The council has worked hard since to keep its portion of the council tax as low as possible, and in 2019/20 its precept was £3 below the national average.

“We continue to budget sensibly and apply restraint in our spending in order to keep our precept as low as possible. This is at the same time as taking on services to support the borough and county, such as cleaning street signs and managing extra areas of land – all of which costs money – and maintaining high standards across all our services. Just like household budgeting, it is hard and requires perseverance and discipline but for residents, it means that council tax bills will increase by just 3.1p per week. At £1.60 a year, that’s less than a takeaway cup of coffee per household,” said Councillor Neale. The town council set its budget for 2020/21 at £1,400,327. It set the precept at £1,146,027 resulting in the annual cost to a band D household being £66.09 compared to £64.49 in 2019/20.

Cash boost for community groups

Almost 40

of Farnham's community organisations will benefit from the latest round of grants allocated by Farnham Town Council. Together, they will share £75,000 to support their work with people in need, sports and arts activities as well as projects for young people and the environment. The grants were agreed by Farnham Town Council at its meeting on Thursday (23 January).

"There

are too many fantastic projects to list but to give a flavour, this year's Community Grants scheme is supporting groups ranging from the Helen Arkell Dyslexia Charity to Hale Carnival Committee as well as helping the Woodlarks Centre buy a minibus and the Rowledge and Bourne Ringers purchase a new A flat bell," says Councillor John Neale, Leader of Farnham Town Council. "Some grants will provide vital support for people when they need it most – parents, people with disabilities, older residents – while others positively enhance the lives of local people through sports, educational and cultural activities," he says.

The

scheme, which is supporting many organisations, shows how investing a relatively small amount of money in the community can benefit many people, with some of the grants being just a few hundred pounds.

Among

the beneficiaries is arts group FADEG which will use its grant of £250 to help finance a community arts show to encourage creativity among amateurs, particularly those who benefit from art as a therapy. Farnham disability charity, Challengers will receive £750 to support activities for its summer play scheme, such as a drumming workshop and messy play. A grant of £350 will enable Farnham Brass Band to purchase a new bass drum and new carol and hymn books while the Parenting Space will receive £1,200 to support local families on Talking Teens parenting courses.

Farnham

Town Council invites applications from not-for-profit organisations for financial support of up to £2,000 through its community grants scheme. Applications can be for one-off projects or funding for up to three years. The council considers requests for work relating to, for example, young people's projects, heritage and cultural schemes, facilities in community buildings, sport, leisure and play activities, community transport and environmental projects.

Small

grants of up to £250 are available for specific community projects throughout the year. To apply, email town.clerk@farnham.gov.uk.

Music in the Vineyard returns

January marks the return of Music in the Vineyard which is a free live music concert organised by Farnham Town Council throughout the winter months.

The first of the monthly concerts is on Sunday 26 January from 3-5pm at The Vineyard Centre in Union Road. Shuffle Tunes Choir will be first to perform and promise to share their enthusiasm and joy for singing.

Councillor Alan Earwaker, Lead Member for Tourism and Events says: "After the busyness of Christmas, January can feel quite flat but our programme of free music concerts aims to lift the spirits and provide an opportunity for some socialising. The concerts are always very popular so, if you intend to come, I urge you to get there for the start as numbers are limited."

At each concert, a local charity will host the refreshment stand serving tea, coffee and cake. [space2grow](#) will support January's Music in the Vineyard.

The concerts are scheduled for the last Sunday of the month from January until April. Details of who's playing can be found on our [Music in the Vineyard](#) page.