

MIDDLETON CHENEY

Parish Council



Parish Meeting Room
Main Road
Middleton Cheney
Banbury
Oxon
OX17 2LR

20th July 2021

STATEMENT FROM THE CHAIR

The precept is the method by which the Parish Council are funded to meet their obligations. The precept comes from the Council Tax which residents pay.

In December 2020 the Parish Council created a role for a Maintenance and Project Manager to be responsible for maintenance, repair or replacement of its equipment and materials. The total cost to the Council of employing the new member of staff, was £25,000. This includes the salary among other costs.

The decision to create this new role led to an increase in the precept of 19.1% over and above the 3% increase that was agreed by Council. This was visible in resident's Council Tax bills in March 2021.

In view of the concerns raised by residents about this matter the Parish Council has:

- Examined the process followed by the Parish Council to understand why the precept demand was not that agreed by Council on 7th December 2021
- Examine the process followed by the Parish Council to create and recruit to the new role

The review was undertaken by a working party comprising of Councillors and an independent third party.

In the considered opinion of the review team Middleton Cheney Parish Council failed in its duties in the following ways:

Precept Setting

1. The budget process was not adhered to or correctly approved and was therefore technically not lawful.
2. The budget increase was agreed by Council as a percentage increase not a monetary value and is therefore technically not lawful
3. The precept demand of 22.1% submitted was not the demand approved by Council at 3% and was therefore not lawful

Chairman: Cllr. Mark Allen
Vice Chairman: Cllr. Susannah Smith
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Recruitment

1. No business case or budgetary analysis for the creation of the Maintenance and Project Manager role was carried out
2. The recruitment process followed in the appointment to the role breached Middleton Cheney Parish Council Equal Opportunities policies.
3. The Declaration of Pecuniary Interest was completed at an incorrect point in the process due to the failures in the following of the Equal Opportunities policy

For the avoidance of doubt the term “not lawful” in this statement indicates that the law was not complied with, it does not indicate that the law was broken.

Middleton Cheney Parish Council consulted Northants CALC (the advisory body for parish councils in Northamptonshire) regarding the findings and the advice is that the Council takes the 2021/22 unapproved element into account in the 2022/23 budgeting process. The difference between a 3% increase and a 22% increase in precept in Middleton Cheney was £16.86 per Band D property per year

Whilst we recognize there are procedural irregularities in the setting of the precept the Parish Council are bound to operate within and report against the budget allocated in the precept demand for 21/22

I would therefore like to apologise to the residents of the Parish of Middleton Cheney on behalf of the Council for failing to follow our policies and procedures on financial management, transparency and equal opportunities.

The Council have agreed a number of procedural and policy changes to be urgently addressed, and the implementation of a greater level of control in the budget setting process.

A fully copy of the review final report is available on the website www.middletoncheney.org.uk

If you have any questions or concerns on the above, please contact the Chair by email on cllr.mark.allen@middletoncheney.org.uk

Yours sincerely



Cllr Mark Allen
Chair
Middleton Cheney Parish Council

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