

Precept Letter 2025-26

Dear Resident,

I am writing to inform you about the Town Councils' budget and precept decisions for the coming year 2025-26. Setting the annual budget and precept remains one of the most significant responsibilities of the Town Council, affecting all residents in our community

The numbers that the Town Council must consider are on a much smaller scale than those that Milton Keynes City Council (MKCC) or The Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner must deal with but, as a Town Council we consider it vitally important that you, the residents of Stony Stratford, Galley Hill and Fullers Slade hear about your Town Council's budgetary decisions and the precept level.

Following careful consideration during our budget meetings between September and December, at our January Full Council meeting, we approved a modest increase of £9,500 to the Precept, bringing it to £305,464 for the year 2025-26. For **Band D** properties, this equates to a **2.5%** (£2.82) increase, in line with the inflation rate at the time the Precept was set, taking it to **£115.85** per household per year. We managed this despite a reduction of £2,718.96 in the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTS).

We understand that any increase in costs affects our residents, particularly during challenging economic times. However, this measured increase is necessary to ensure we can continue delivering essential services while addressing several key priorities:

- **Staff Resources and Support:** Much of the increase was due to the Government changes to Employer National Insurance contributions. We must maintain appropriate staffing levels and can continue providing high-quality services to our community.
- **Digital Infrastructure:** We have increased investment in our digital presence, with enhanced funding for computer software, licenses, and website maintenance to improve our communication with residents.
- **Youth and Community Support:** We have significantly increased the youth activities budget from £12,000 to £17,100, demonstrating our commitment to supporting young people in our community.
- **Community Buildings:** We have allocated £43,000 for the maintenance of 5-7 Church Street, along with £15,000 which is earmarked to save for capital improvements e.g. a new passenger lift in 5-7 Church Street in the next few years, to ensure our community assets remain viable for years to come.

To help offset these increases, we have implemented several cost-saving measures:

- Decreased expenditure on dog bins by tendering for a new supplier, reducing it from £10,000 to £8,000
- Increased income generation through facility hire and community events.

There was also a reduction in the Elected Members' Allowances from £6,482 to £1214.

Other tools we have used to try and keep the increase to a minimum are: -

- Trying to keep a lid on our own expenses by careful negotiations of contracts to make sure that we deliver value for money.
- Use of earmarked reserves where possible.
- Obtaining grants

Our total budgeted income for 2025-26 is £417,366.04, which includes the precept, various grants, and income from our facilities and services. This balanced budget ensures we can maintain and enhance our services while keeping the precept increase as low as possible.

We continue to welcome grant applications from community groups and organisations looking to enhance our area. Details about our grant program can be found on our website at www.stonystratford.gov.uk/your-council/grants/

The Town Council remains committed to transparent financial management and ensuring value for money in all our services. If you have any questions about the budget or would like to learn more about our planned activities for the coming year, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Thank you for your continued support of our community.

The precept increase reflects a balanced approach to addressing these crucial needs while minimising the impact on residents. We understand that any rise in costs requires careful consideration and we have explored all alternative avenues before arriving at this decision.

The figures for our forecast income and expenditure are as follows: -

Income

1000	Precept	£305,464.00	1047	Allotment Rents - Boundary Cre	£1,000.00
1005	LCTS Grant	£4,350.04	1050	Newsletter Sales	£1,000.00
1010	Bank Interest Received	£2,000.00	1060	Sponsorship - Stony in Bloom	£1,500.00
1025	Landscaping Grant	£78,000.00	1066	Big Lunch Income	£1,500.00
1040	Farmers Market Income	£1,200.00	1067	Apple Day Income	£500.00
1045	Allotment Rents - Wolverton Rd	£3,152.00	1080	5-7 Church St Income	£17,000.00
1046	Allotment Rents - London Rd	£700.00		Total Income including Precept	£417,366.04

Expenditure

4000	Salaries	£111,334.00	4047	Conferences - External	£1,224.00
4001	Employers NI etc	£33,262.00	4055	Office Equipment	£1,600.00
4002	PAYE Admin	£521.00	4065	Finance Software	£1,457.00
4005	Officer Travel and Subsistence	£360.00	4067	Computer software & licenses	£4,663.00
4006	Human Resources	£717.00	4070	Stationery & Postage	£200.00
4015	Copy Licence	£383.00	4100	Memberships	£1,890.00
4020	Telephones and Broadband	£1,465.00	4150	Newsletter/Publishing	£5,840.00
4025	Room Hire	£179.00	4152	Website	£1,120.00
4030	Insurance	£952.00	4160	Elected Members Allowances	£1,214.00
4035	Domain Licence	£100.00	4170	Civic Budget	£35.00
4040	Internal audit	£350.00	4200	Toilets Maintenance	£19,700.00
4041	External Audit	£920.00	4210	Toilets Reserves	£0.00
4045	Training	£5,250.00	4250	Dog bins	£8,000.00
4046	Conferences - Council Run	£100.00	4251	Litter Bins	£828.00
			4253	Landscape Contract	£69,000.00

4255	Litter Picking	£1,790.00	4422	Allotments - Boundary Crescent	£4,000.00
4260	Farmers Market	£800.00	4425	Capital Borrowing - BC Allots	£2,708.00
4267	Citizens Advice contract	£4,961.00	4428	Play Sessions	£8,000.00
4300	Annual Community Award	£125.00	4450	Grants	£3,500.00
4350	5-7 Church St	£43,000.00	4451	Community Grant fund	£3,500.00
4351	5-7 Church Street Improvements	£15,000.00	4460	Civic Initiatives	£7,682.04
4353	Capital Borrow PWLB	£8,922.00	4462	Fitness Classes Overhead Expenditure	£4,114.00 £417,366.04
4400	Youth Activities	£17,100.00			
4406	Big Lunch	£4,000.00			
4415	Floral Features	£9,000.00			
4419	Apple Day	£2,500.00			
4420	Allotments - Wolverton Rd	£4,000.00			

The budget for the year and the level of precept were set at the Full Council on 21st January 2025, the minutes of the meeting can be found here: -

<https://stonystatfordcouncil.sharepoint.com/:w:/s/SSTCOperations/ERNuNgZVwbNPvUulvWhMIZYBmnHvJC oGohXmvg3rkc21tA?e=sTcPFW>

An important part of the council's financial activities is providing grants to local organisations to support their activities in the community. During the last year we provided over £7,000 of grants as detailed below: -

Fullers Slade Estate Renewal Forum	Summer Fete	£1,500
Galley Hill Residents Assoc.	Christmas community event	£675
Stonylive!	Community entertainment event	£450
Drama Llamas	community plays	£600
MK Lions	Annual Remembrance Service costs e.g. band & PA	£350
MK YMCA	Entertainment and activities	£1,600
Stony Stratford Allotment Gardeners Assoc (SSALG)	tools and a shed for a community allotment plot on the London Road Allotment site	£440
Lantern Project 2024	contribution towards costs	£300
Bletchley Youth Centre charity (York House Centre Youth club)	Youth trip to 'Climb Quest'	£472
Unity MK (Homelessness charity)	Support to run winter night shelters, one of which is in Stony Stratford in 2024-25	£1,500
Total grants awarded to 31st January 2025		£7,887

We would like to encourage as many community activities as possible throughout the Town Council area and would encourage organisations and community groups to apply for grants if they felt this would help them. The criteria and grant application form can be found on our new website at:

<https://www.stonystatford.gov.uk/your-council/grants/>

My fellow councillors have been working very hard during, what has proved, another challenging year. This has included a great deal of work on initiatives to boost the town centre, the S.106 Public Art project, and on flood protection, whilst at the same time coping with, recruitment challenges, rising costs and additional activities. I would like to thank them for the service to the community. Also, the council's hard-working staff: Lynne Compton (Town Clerk), retired Deputy Town Clerk, Amanda Jones, new Deputy Town Clerk (and former Council Support Officer) Fran Shackleford (Deputy Town Clerk), Melanie Hyde (Information Officer) and Alan Box (Caretaker) have proved again that they can rise to the task of keeping the Town Council's activities running smoothly in challenging times. I'm pleased to say that in January 2025, following a job role restructure, Rob Clarkson joined the council staff as Events and Services, bringing the council staff back up to full complement.

During the coming year the Council will continue to work to enhance the town, directly by our own activities, supporting local groups and lobbying and acting as a mouthpiece for all aspects of Stony Stratford, Galley Hill and Fullers Slade. If you have any questions about the work of the council or are thinking about becoming a councillor, please do not hesitate to contact me via email at roy.adams@stonystratford.gov.uk

Roy Adams, Chairperson
Stony Stratford Town Council