

Report on finances for 2025/26 (un-audited accounts)

Income

For 2025/26 the Town Council received a precept of £370987, this represented a 10.42% increase to meet the increasing costs of wages and utilities.

In 2025/26 the Council received additional income of approximately £220140: £50K down from the previous year, primarily due to a lower receipt of developers contributions (including an additional CIL grants from NFDC towards the mens shed (£21k)). This includes lengthsman income (£13200), burial fees & churchyard maintenance (£14674), allotments (£2392), CIL funding (£101833), hall lettings (£4288), recreation ground fees (£13864), hanging basket fees (£2681), lease income (£7500), information office income/map/leaflet sales (£13856), sundry income/donations (£10942) and interest (£16236 – an increase of £11k over the previous year due to higher level of CIL funds on deposit and use of CCLA rather than Lloyds).

Expenditure

During the year the main additional items of expenditure items of note are the Neighbourhood Planning fees (£10k) and new boilers for the town hall and changing rooms (£7500)

The Council continued to underwrite the Christmas Lights and contribute towards the Hanging Baskets/Floral Displays and are currently supporting a limited number of events in the town following the cessation of the Events Group.

Within the individual budgets there are areas of overspend but these have been covered by underspends in other areas of the budget. Overspends are due to staff costs, increased professional fees (NP and Town Hall works), water leak and changing room/shower issues. Underspend in grounds maintenance costs, loan costs (second loan not yet taken) and play equipment budget (repairs due).

Looking at year end 2025/26, taking into account CIL receipts (£122833.50) less CIL expenditure (£73745.95), there will be a transfer to CIL reserves of £49087.55. Some expected invoices were not received until after year end and interest received was higher than in previous years, so the expected underspend for the year is approximately £25k, this will be transferred to general reserves.

S137 Grants

The Council have a budget of £5100 for S137 grants, during 2025/26 £5851.95 was allocated (compared with £3800 in 2024/25) – a slight overspend due to the requests for higher levels of support from each individual group.

Fordingbridge Museum – plaques	£804.00
Ratz Riders - skate park event	£394.95
Hope for Tomorrow – mobile cancer unit/ongoing costs	£500.00
Home-Start Hampshire – training for volunteers	£250.00
The Green Gram – baking activity/half-term	£195.00
Avon Valley Dementia Support	£500.00
Stronger Together Across Ringwood and Fordingbridge	£500.00
Victoria Rooms – updating toilet facilities/accessible	£2208.00
Citizens Advice New Forest – local service	£500.00
Total	£5851.95

Budget for 2026/27

For 2026/27 the Town Council requested a precept of £425927.

	Council Tax Requirement	Tax Base	Council Tax per Band D
2025/26	£370987	2576.90	£143.97
2026/27	£425927	2599.40	£163.86
Increase	£54940	22.50	£19.89

Members are attempting to balance the increasing costs facing the Town Council due to above inflation rises in utility costs, an increase in the population due to local housing developments and developing a Neighbourhood Plan (increase in professional fees/advice to support the plan). The increase per Band D property is £19.89 over the year.

In response to a number of comments on social media about the relatively large percentage increase in parish council tax in Fordingbridge next year, Cllr Millar provided the following details to answer some of the points raised:

As a general point, the Town Council takes the council tax rate very seriously. Increasing it isn't something that is undertaken lightly and there is always a sensible debate. And unlike NFDC or HCC the Town Council is non-political - the Councillors sit as ordinary residents taking on a volunteer role, which they take very seriously.

The discussions are held in public. The Council meets most Wednesday evenings, with full Council the first Wednesday of the month and Finance Committee the last Wednesday of the month. Agenda and papers are published two weeks in advance and the meetings are public with no need to book - come along to the town hall and have your say.

As for the increase, a band D property in Fordingbridge will be paying £163.86 a year for 2026/27, up £19.89 from last year. That is the largest rise in several years and it is driven by a number of factors. First thing to know is that the town council don't set the Band D rate directly. The Town Council sets a budget to cover the cost of running the town, which is referred to as the 'precept'. It is the amount needed to cover all costs that fall to the town council - staff costs, buildings insurance, equipment, tools, professional fees, licenses, vehicles, maintenance etc. Fordingbridge's precept for 2026/7 is £425,927. Compare this figure to the precept for other towns in the district:

<i>Ringwood</i>	<i>£740,842</i>
<i>Fawley</i>	<i>£821,534</i>
<i>Hythe & Dibden</i>	<i>£1.2m</i>
<i>Lymington & Pennington</i>	<i>£1.2m</i>
<i>New Milton</i>	<i>£1.6m</i>
<i>Totton & Eling</i>	<i>£1.8m</i>

Ours is much lower. So why is our council tax relatively high per property? Because there are relatively few properties in Fordingbridge.

Fordingbridge is a town, with all that comes with it - facilities to maintain, work for officers to do. The town council owns and maintains buildings such as the town hall and property such as the recreation ground and the cemetery. But unlike other towns, we have far fewer houses across which to spread the costs. And we are one of the few Town Councils that don't own a car park so earn no additional revenue from parking fees.

Looking at the number of Band D properties, you can see this clearly. I have listed below the number (rounded) of Band D properties in various places:

<i>Fordingbridge</i>	<i>2600</i>	<i>Lymington & Pennington</i>	<i>8000</i>
<i>Ringwood</i>	<i>5500</i>	<i>New Milton</i>	<i>10800</i>
<i>Fawley</i>	<i>4600</i>	<i>Totton & Eling</i>	<i>9600</i>
<i>Hythe & Dibden</i>	<i>7500</i>		

Fordingbridge falls into the category of a small town, and that makes our costs relatively higher. As Fordingbridge grows, so will the number of properties and that will make the cost of running the town more efficient.

So why has the council tax gone up this year? Well, there are three factors:

- 1. Most of the Council's costs have gone up year on year. The cost base has increased by around 3.5% on average for most items.*
- 2. There is an increase in staff costs due to an increase in hours. Our town is run with very little officer time and we have had to increase some hours to manage additional responsibilities the town has taken on (such as planning events now the Events Group has disbanded).*
- 3. There is an increase in costs associated with the Neighbourhood Plan. Completing the Plan requires professional fees and these have had to be factored into the budget for this year. But completing the Neighbourhood Plan will increase the amount of money which comes to Fordingbridge from developer contributions - our share will increase to 25% of the money paid meaning more of it will be spent where the development happens. The professional fees are therefore an investment.*

If you are struggling with Council tax there are several schemes run by NFDC which may help - you can find out more here: <https://www.newforest.gov.uk/article/1251/Council-Tax-support>

Hopefully the above provides some background to our level of precept and expenditure. The full accounts will be available for inspection once the internal audit has inspected them – please contact the office for more information.

*Martine Coatham, Responsible Financial Officer
May 2026*