

February is budget month in local government and this year has been particularly difficult, with both Charnwood and Leicestershire having faced significant cost increases due to covid over the last 12 months whilst also seeing income plummet. I always keep how the Council's financial decisions affect people front and centre in my thinking and that has never been more true than this year. We have therefore agreed budgets which as far as possible balance the need to protect services with the financial impact on families.

Charnwood Borough Council budget

Charnwood Borough Council is to raise its share of council tax by less than 9p a week for a Band D property. The increase will see the annual charge for an average Band D property rise by £4.45 (3.60 per cent) to £131.08 from April 1, 2021. The final budget for 2021/22 is around £19 million. This includes making £1.5m of savings and generating income of around £600,000 largely through investments in commercial properties. Income from council tax, business rates and Government grants is expected to be around £18 million and therefore there is still a gap of £1 million which the Council will use reserves to cover.

The Covid-19 pandemic has added significant costs and reduced income from various areas including car parks, leisure centres and Loughborough Town Hall. The impact is still expected to be felt in 2021/22, accounting for an expected £900,000 of lost income. Charnwood Borough Council currently has the 23rd lowest council tax charge out of 188 district councils in the country.

Leicestershire County Council Budget

Leicestershire County Council has agreed its budget at the meeting on 17th February. The plan sets out a balanced budget for two years and shows that the difference between income and expenditure will total £79m in 2025.

A one-off £25m covid fund, enabling money to be used if further national funding isn't available, is included as well as a three per cent Council Tax levy for adult social care. Generating an extra £10m, the Government has given councils this option to offset the impact of significant increases in adult social care costs on other services. This means the budget includes in total a 4.99 per cent Council Tax increase for 2021/22 – or £5.59 a month for a Band D house.

Investment in services including children and family services, adult social care and environment in transport is proposed as well as a £450m capital pot to spend on new roads, school places, recycling initiatives and other infrastructure supporting new homes.

Rapid covid testing for key workers

A programme to provide the county's key workers with rapid community testing for Covid-19 is now underway with six centres now open for non-symptomatic testing (the closest to Rearsby being Melton and Loughborough). One in three people who have coronavirus show no symptoms, and rapid lateral flow testing, led by the council's public health team, can help to quickly identify individuals and stop the spread of infection. Rapid testing is only for those who are eligible, who don't have symptoms and aren't already isolating. It is open to key workers and anyone else in the county who cannot currently work from home.

The lateral flow tests are self-administered at an approved test site – and you can leave the site straight after you have taken your swab. Results will be sent out by text or email by the end of that day. Sites will be open 6 days each week.

Anyone who currently cannot work from home and is eligible, will be able to book a test. These can be booked online at www.leicestershire.gov.uk/coronavirus-covid-19/rapid-asymptomatic-testing.

I hope you all stay safe and if you need my help with anything please do get in touch.

Cllr James Poland CC

Tel: 07764 966677

Borough: cllr.james.poland@charnwood.gov.uk

County: james.poland@leics.gov.uk

Facebook: Cllr James Poland