

2026/2027 Budget

In October and November 2025 the finance committee met several times to discuss the budget for 2026/2027. A very difficult challenge to predict what the costs are going to be 6 months in advance.

Some of the costs for 2026/27 were known, the majority however were unknown and therefore had to be estimated by looking at what the Council had spent to date delivering services, estimating the cost to the end of the financial year and applying a % increase to reflect the ever fluctuating costs for services.

All of the Council's contractors have put their costs up, this includes TT Jones for all street light maintenance, the Council has 226 street lights that we are responsible for. It also includes the District Council who manages refuse collection but charges the Town Council for it. Public toilet maintenance, the public toilets cost the Town Council in excess of £26,000 every year. These are just a few examples of some of our contractors. However these are known costs for the new financial year, the more challenging part is the unknown costs, this predominantly is utilities. Upon completing the budget as Responsible Financial Advisor I researched reports that we see in the news regarding the rate at which utilities are increasing. Water for example was estimated to increase by 26% minimum with electricity and gas anticipated at a minimum of 10%. All other costs were increased by the RPI index.

As a Council, we have a duty of care not to become bankrupt and as such in Government legislation we have to keep a quarter of our operating budget as a General Reserve in case there is an emergency so that we can keep delivering essential services.

What we provide is the following, the play area and playing field, dog bins, litter bins on the playing field, we maintain The Plain, Churchfield's roundabout, the open space at the back of South Norfolk Precinct. We provide all the street furniture, bus shelters, benches, we operate SAM2 machines to help combat speeding. Street lights as already mentioned, public toilets, the pavilion and then there is the community work that we provide, youth café and working with young people, events which is heavily subsidised by the Council to aim to keep the costs down, quarterly newsletters to ensure engagement, maintaining the website and we provide a lot of guidance with signposting to other organisations. Behind the scenes the Council team work hard looking at new opportunities for residents, we are currently researching a new skate park, events and provision to tackle loneliness, how to keep Long Stratton thriving now that the bypass is here, we are looking at Long Stratton in Bloom, there is much more that we provide and we regularly put updates on the website on what we are doing.

This year's budget was very difficult, it is very much a chicken and egg scenario where the Council is trying to prepare for the new housing that we know is coming however this does have a cost attached to it. The Council tax element is made up from all the properties that pay council tax in Long Stratton. When the extra housing comes the Council tax element will be split between more houses; for example currently there are 1421 houses paying Council tax, when the housing is delivered there could be 3000 houses paying Council tax. So if Council tax is raised at £100,000 split between 1421 houses the cost would be £70 per household but split between 3000 houses would be £33.33 per household and the Council tax element will go down.

I cannot guarantee that Council tax will go down however no one was particularly happy with the raise that we had to implement as all the Councillors are volunteers that live in Long Stratton so they have to pay that raise too.

The breakdown for the budget is on the Council's website.