

## HWTC Questions Monday 1 February 2021

No	Question	Response
1 [Cllr Mr Clarke]	<p>Para 2.2(i). How have we come to a reduction of 600.6 in the tax base? We have a number of ongoing developments which have seen an increase in the number of households in the unparished area. What is the justification for this reduction? If the number of residents currently claiming CT benefit cease to claim during the FY21/22 what impact on the tax base will that have? Will it impact or constraint on the ability to raise the precept? The Government is giving local authorities funding to redress the loss in CT. Where is the proportion of that money due to special expenses shown?</p>	<p>The calculation of the Council Tax base for an area is defined by government guidance. The starting point is the 'effective Band D properties', since all bands are defined as a proportion to the Band D rates. In order to calculate the base this is then adjusted for the following factors; new homes expected, claimant rate for Council tax discount and overall collection rate.</p> <p>Due to the current economic conditions the Council is expecting there to be fewer new homes added to the current list than in previous years, a significant increase to the number of claims for Council tax discounts, and a reduction in the overall collection rate (from 98.5% to 98.1%). In aggregate these 3 downward pressures on the Council Tax base give rise to a reduction in the base.</p> <p>If/when the number of claimants for Council Tax discounts and the collection rate return to more normal levels, this will see the Council Tax base increase above what would normally be expected. As such this is a temporary reduction to the base position and would be expected to return to normal as the economy recovers.</p> <p>The funding given for local authorities for losses is Council Tax is specifically for Upper and Lower tier authorities and is not given to fund changes in Parish and Special Expense areas. These areas are protected from in-year losses of Council tax as they are paid their precept total regardless of actual Council Tax collected in their area, and any losses fall to the Collection fund.</p>
2 [Cllr Mr Clarke]	<p>Para 2.1(ii). The increase proposed of 31p per band D property represents a 2.6% rise on the amount charge for the FY 20/21. Is this legal as I understood that a rise of more than 1.99% would have to go to referendum for their agreement.</p>	<p>Increases in Special Expenses Council Tax increases are not legally constrained by the referendum threshold set by the Chancellor. The referendum threshold only applies to Upper and Lower tier authorities. Parishes are therefore also not legally constrained by the referendum threshold when increasing their precept.</p> <p>However Special Expenses Council Tax forms part of the Buckinghamshire Council referendum threshold calculation as they are an element of the 'Average Band D' Council Tax charge which is used to calculate the percentage increase for referendum threshold purposes.</p> <p>The 'Average Band D' Council Tax is the total of the income from Buckinghamshire Council's Council Tax income + total Special Expenses Council Tax income divided by the Band D</p>

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2 [Cllr Mr Clarke] ..cont	<p>Para 2.1(ii). The increase proposed of 31p per band D property represents a 2.6% rise on the amount charge for the FY 20/21. Is this legal as I understood that a rise of more than 1.99% would have to go to referendum for their agreement.....cont</p>	<p>equivalent tax base for Buckinghamshire. As such if the total increase in Special Expenses Council Tax is above the referendum threshold then the Buckinghamshire Council element must be below the threshold to ensure the referendum threshold is not breached.</p>																																				
3 [Cllr Mr Clarke]	<p><b>Recreation Grounds (Local).</b> Which recreation grounds are included in these expenses?</p> <p>How much is the charge for each recreation ground and what does the charge cover?</p> <p>Why is there no income?</p>	<p>The recreation grounds are Booker (Fernie Fields), Shelley Road (QEII) and Totteridge. Also included in the cost is routine maintenance at All Saints, the closed Churchyard in the centre of town.</p> <p>The routine maintenance costs are as follows:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="847 645 1369 913"> <thead> <tr> <th>Rec Local</th> <th>Routine</th> <th>Play</th> <th>Total</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>All Saints</td> <td>4,270</td> <td></td> <td>4,270</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Booker</td> <td>30,778</td> <td>4,510</td> <td>35,288</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td>144</td> <td>144</td> </tr> <tr> <td>shelley</td> <td>14,250</td> <td>4,510</td> <td>18,760</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td>144</td> <td>144</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Totteridge</td> <td>36,784</td> <td>4,510</td> <td>41,294</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td>144</td> <td>144</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td><b>86,082</b></td> <td><b>13,962</b></td> <td><b>100,044</b></td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>There are also additional work orders which are charged on an ad hoc basis. The grounds maintenance includes all grass and shrub maintenance, play area maintenance, litter bins, general litter picks and sports pitch preparation. The charge for All Saints relates to building maintenance and flower beds.</p> <p>The income is retained by the contractor as part of the contractual arrangement.</p>	Rec Local	Routine	Play	Total	All Saints	4,270		4,270	Booker	30,778	4,510	35,288			144	144	shelley	14,250	4,510	18,760			144	144	Totteridge	36,784	4,510	41,294			144	144		<b>86,082</b>	<b>13,962</b>	<b>100,044</b>
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4 [Cllr Mr Clarke]	<p>Allotments. I understand that the management of allotments within the unparished area was contracted out by WDC to a 3<sup>rd</sup> party. The management company does not remit the allotment fees to the council but retains them to pay for the activities that they carry out. What maintenance to the allotments has been carried out in the current FY? What maintenance is planned for the next FY? What is the management activity carried out by BC?</p>	<p>The routine maintenance costs are as follows:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="847 1339 1182 1720"> <thead> <tr> <th>Allotments</th> <th>Routine</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Back Lane</td> <td>631</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Desboro</td> <td>684</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Greenhill</td> <td>1,146</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Hardenway</td> <td>590</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Hicks Farm</td> <td>468</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Hugh</td> <td>198</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Lime</td> <td>617</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Castlefield</td> <td>2,686</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Queensway</td> <td>1,319</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td><b>8,339</b></td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>The contractor maintains all the access paths through the sites cutting grass and keeping them clear. They also check and maintain all the water points and gates, fences etc. as well as some plot clearance and preparation for new tenants where required. This routine maintenance will continue next year. If there are any additional works required, they will be charged on an ad hoc basis.</p>	Allotments	Routine	Back Lane	631	Desboro	684	Greenhill	1,146	Hardenway	590	Hicks Farm	468	Hugh	198	Lime	617	Castlefield	2,686	Queensway	1,319		<b>8,339</b>														
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<p>4 [Cllr Mr Clarke] ....cont</p>	<p>What computer hardware and software is used? How much time is the computer used for?</p>	<p>The management activity carried out is management and letting (via contractor) The contractor is responsible for letting and managing plots, including managing the waiting lists, issuing invoices, taking payments, dealing with day to day inquiries, performing regular inspections and issuing notices to tenants not maintaining plots.</p> <p>The computer system, Colony, is a specialist Allotment management system and stores all the records for every tenant, produces the invoices and any letters. It also provides information on lettings, waiting lists. This is the system the Council used when the allotments were managed internally. The contractor has purchased the same system and the council have access to monitor their live system.</p>
<p>5 [Cllr Mr Clarke]</p>	<p><b>High Wycombe Cemetery.</b> Why is the repairs and maintenance expense 4.3 times that budgeted for?</p> <p>What grounds maintenance does the charge cover?</p> <p>Why is the outturn 20% greater than the budget?</p> <p>When were these increases in outturn identified and what action has been taken to minimise them?</p> <p>Concrete burial chamber expenditure. We were told at the Town Committee meeting that there had been a purchase of these chambers during the summer of 2020. Why is the outturn shown as £0?</p> <p>BC Management Fee. What is this for? What activities and how much officer time does this cover?</p>	<p>The forecast expenditure for the year includes one off expenditure in relation to fencing to retaining walls £9,650 and painting the palisade fencing £13,900 [both commitments]. The forecast was based on actuals plus commitments and an estimate of other costs.</p> <p>Grounds maintenance covers all of the grass, shrubs flower beds works on site and litter clearance as well as opening and closing the site and maintaining the public toilets. Some tree work and removal of tributes off grave</p> <p>The cost of the burial chambers £72,000 is included in the grounds maintenance charge. The actual recharge from the contractor is expected to be lower than budget due to less than usual ad hoc works taking places and the forecast reflects this estimated reduction in expenditure.</p> <p>Their cost and forecast is shown on grounds maintenance line. The cost of the concrete burial chambers is an unbudgeted cost in 20-21. We were not anticipating buying any more in 20-21 but due to the pandemic this may have become necessary. Income should offset costs as they are sold at cost, so there will be an increase in future income to compensate.</p> <p>The BC management fee covers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintenance of the cemetery and office</li> <li>• Management of burials</li> <li>• Provision of a full time manager</li> <li>• Invoicing and banking of income.</li> </ul>

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<p>5 [Cllr Mr Clarke] ...cont</p>	<p>BC Management Fee. What is this for? What activities and how much officer time does this cover?...cont</p>	<p>The percentage of officer time that is part of the BC recharge is listed below.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="847 255 1278 506"> <thead> <tr> <th>Officer</th> <th>2020-21</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Head of Service</td> <td>5%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Contract Manager</td> <td>15%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Green Space Officer</td> <td>20%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Green Space Officer</td> <td>10%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Service Director</td> <td>2%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>The contract manager's [Andy Sherwood] percentage recharge allocation has increased in the first 2 quarters, with the increase being offset by compensating savings on the vacant cemeteries post. Andy Sherwood has had to step in and work almost exclusively on cemeteries the first half of the year.</p> <p>The estimated recharge for BC for the year is likely to be higher for cemeteries BC mgt but will be compensated by savings on the vacant cemeteries posts.</p>	Officer	2020-21	Head of Service	5%	Contract Manager	15%	Green Space Officer	20%	Green Space Officer	10%	Service Director	2%
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<p>6 [Cllr Mr Clarke]</p>	<p><b>Community Centres.</b> When were the last unqualified accounts for the Hilltop Community Centre presented?</p>	<p>Buckinghamshire Council has no responsibility in relation to Hilltop Community Centre accounts. Hilltop Community Centre is a separate entity with a lease in place. HWTC pay them an annual grant of £13k. Hilltop Community Centre pay an annual premises rent to Buckinghamshire County Council and an annual repayment sum in respect of an interest free loan to the Centre for a replacement boiler system.</p>												
<p>7 [Cllr Mr Clarke]</p>	<p><b>Financial Assistance to voluntary groups.</b> Why is the management fee more than 25% of the money earmarked for grants?</p>	<p>The management fee is not a proportion of the grant distributed. The charge is based on estimated officer time: 10% of one grants admin officer; 5% of Localism Specialist Projects lead, Kerry Rackstraw; 1% of Kerry's manager- Sue Drummond.</p> <p>The functions carried out by the team are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management of grants programme in line with agreed and audited process             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) -Managing all aspects of the grants programme including; publishing of information and criteria, online application function, carrying out application assessments, producing assessment reports and recommendations for HWTC Chair, corresponding with applicants (both potential and pending) as required, carrying out eligibility checks, processing payment, requesting and assessing grant award reports and monitoring budget.</li> </ol> </li> </ul>												

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<p>7 [Cllr Mr Clarke] ...cont</p>	<p><b>Financial Assistance to voluntary groups. ...cont</b>          Why is the management fee more than 25% of the money earmarked for grants?</p>	<p>2) The HWTC grant programmes and their processes are also subject to audit. The Grants Officer would be responsible to responding to the auditor's requests for information and implementing subsequent procedures, processes and policies as a result of auditor recommendations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessment of grant application against agreed criteria and preparation of recommendation for HWTC Chair.             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Assessment of the grant application includes reviewing all the information provided by the applicant to gain a clear and robust understanding of how a grant would be utilised and if it meets the HWTC grant programme criteria. Depending on the volume and depth of information provided within the application, this can also include requesting additional or more transparent information from the applicant in order to ensure a full assessment can be carried out. On occasion, this can also include providing further support and guidance to the applicant in assisting them to understand the criteria and complete the application in full.</li> <li>2) With regards to facility grant applications, further assessment steps are taking to ensure matched funding has been achieved (as detailed in the criteria)</li> </ol> </li> <li>• Carry out applicant eligibility checks (i.e. ensuring organisation is constituted and has a valid bank account with at least 2 signatories)             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Organisations are subject to eligibility checks as part of the grant award process. This includes obtaining a copy of the organisation constitution when needed as well as carrying out informal background research about the organisation, particularly if they have been newly formed or are a new applicant to the grant programmes. Where deemed necessary this can also including requesting further information on the organisation's financial status by requesting up to date copies of accounts.</li> </ol> </li> <li>• Oversee payment             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Carrying out bank detail checks, processing a payment request and ensuring transaction has been processed on SAP.</li> </ol> </li> </ul>
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<p>7 [Cllr Mr Clarke] ...cont</p>	<p><b>Financial Assistance to voluntary groups. ...cont</b> Why is the management fee more than 25% of the money earmarked for grants?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respond to all queries in relation to grant programme, criteria and process             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) The grants officer is responsible for responding to all queries with regards to the HWTC grant programmes, including its criteria and processes. This includes monitoring the grants inbox and providing additional guidance and support to both prospective and pending applicants when needed. Queries can at times be in depth.</li> </ol> </li> <li>• Monitor grant budget             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) The grants officer is responsible for monitoring the awarding of grants in line with set annual budgets. This includes capturing all applications for funding and payments made.</li> </ol> </li> </ul>
<p>8 [Cllr Mr Clarke]</p>	<p>In appendix b is it correct that the fees identified are for: Leisure – each use of the facility, Allotments – yearly fee and Cemeteries – each event. I do not believe that we have cremation facilities within the unparished area and so the sub heading should have &amp; CREMATORIA removed.</p> <p>Where is the income from Allotments, Sports pitches and other uses of the recreation grounds shown?</p>	<p>Leisure – yes Allotments – yes Cemeteries - yes There are no cremation facilities.</p> <p>The income is retained by the main contractor. The contractor uses the income to offset their managements of the allotments and sports bookings</p>
<p>9 [Cllr Mrs Clarke]</p>	<p>BC Management Fee totals £94,890, which is 25% (.249896633 to be precise) of the Total Special Expense.</p> <p>What does it actually cover?</p>	<p>The proposed revised budgeted management fee of £85,360 is around 23% of the net budget, or 15.5% of the gross expenditure budget. The regular activities carried out by various departments within the Council are summarised below.</p> <p><b>Grounds:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hampden Road Cemetery; maintenance of the cemetery and office; management of burials; provision of a full-time manager; invoicing and banking of income.</li> <li>• Allotments; management and letting (via contractor)</li> <li>• Recreation Local sites – Totteridge, Shelley, Booker; sports bookings (via contractor). maintenance of grounds and play areas</li> <li>• All Saints closed churchyard; maintenance of grounds</li> <li>• Tree management for all sites via Arboriculture Officers</li> <li>• Maintenance of main war memorials at All Saints, Kings Road and Cemetery</li> <li>• Town Twinning; payment of annual fee</li> </ul>

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<p>9 [Cllr Mrs Clarke] ...cont</p>	<p>BC Management Fee totals £94,890, which is 25% (.249896633 to be precise) of the Total Special Expense.</p> <p>What does it actually cover?....cont</p>	<p><b>Democratic Services:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrange meetings (which now include webcasting)</li> <li>• Organise and support officers in report preparation</li> <li>• Support and respond to member queries</li> <li>• Prepare agendas</li> <li>• Attend meetings</li> <li>• Advise members on governance procedures</li> <li>• Prepare minutes of meetings</li> <li>• Respond to public queries when required.</li> </ul> <p><b>Finance:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparation of quarterly special expenses report</li> <li>• Preparation of annual budget including fees &amp; charges and calculation of precept</li> <li>• Finance support on capital project</li> <li>• Calculation of management recharge</li> </ul> <p><b>Grants Officers: (for more details see answer to Q7)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management of grants programme in line with agreed and audited process</li> <li>• Assessment of grant application against agreed criteria and preparation of recommendation for HWTC Chair</li> <li>• Carry out applicant eligibility checks (i.e. ensuring organisation is constituted and has a valid bank account with at least 2 signatories)</li> <li>• Oversee payment</li> <li>• Respond to all queries in relation to grant programme, criteria and process</li> <li>• Monitor grant budget</li> </ul>
<p>10 [Cllr Mrs Clarke]</p>	<p>What are the recreational grounds that cost Special Expenses £142,095, which is 37% of the Special Expenses budget.</p>	<p>Answer in Q3</p>
<p>11 [Cllr Mrs Clarke]</p>	<p>There appear to be no income for the recreational grounds we pay for, why is that?</p>	<p>Answer in Q3</p>

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12 [Cllr Mrs Clarke]	Can there be an explanation as to why the Maintenance and Repair expenses are so high for the High Wycombe Cemetery at 56% of the cemetery budget?	Answer in Q5
13 [Cllr Mrs Clarke]	What is the Computer software and what function does it perform for £3,000?	Answer in Q4
14 [Cllr Mrs Clarke]	How many concrete chambers do we now hold in stock? We were told that some more had been purchased in the summer, can we be told how many and at what cost and where is that reflected in the budget?	100 concrete chambers were purchased and installed in 2020 for £72,000. They came into use in December 2020 and 18 have been used to date.
15 [Cllr Mrs Clarke]	Footway lighting, when was there an audit of the footway lighting special expenses covers done last and are there any lampposts in need of replacement?	The only lights are in the car park at Booker and the uplighters on the church at All Saints. There has been no audit of the footway lighting and none currently need replacing.
16 [Cllr Mrs Clarke]	War Memorial - what is the £3,000 charge for Commemorative Services - General cover?	This is a budget for specialist cleaning and minor repairs to the War Memorials.
17 [Cllr Tony Green]	Why has the BC Management fee gone up in the 20/21 outturn forecast compared to the estimate when the budget for 21/22 returns it to a more acceptable level?	The management fee outturn forecast has increased as the Cemetery manager post was vacant for the first half of 2020/21. BC employee Andy Sherwood had to cover the post and his increased reappropriation of costs are charged as part of the BC management fee. This is mitigated by an underspend in the Cemetery manager post.
18 [Cllr Tony Green]	How is the BC management fee calculated?	The charge is not an exact science as officers do not record exact time spent on HWTC related work. However, the Council endeavours to recharge a proportion of costs which reasonably reflects work performed by officers. (please see answers to previous questions and also the main report)
19 [Cllr Zia Ahmed]	Allotment I believe we out contract them and still appear on budget.	We have to pay the contractor and recharge the costs to the HWTC. Full details on allotments in answer to Q4.
20 [Cllr Khalil Ahmed]	Please can we have a detailed answer to what the management fee is being charged for?  Why is there a management fee being charged for the administration of certain functions of this committee by officers that are employed by Buckinghamshire Council?  Are there similar charges for the planning committee or any other committee within the council?	Answer in Q9.  <b>Clarification required on what functions are being referred to – emailed Cllr Ahmed on 28 January 2021. No response to date.</b>  Committees within the Council are funded from the Buckinghamshire Council base budget funding and there is no requirement to recharge

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20 [Cllr Khalil Ahmed] ...cont		costs. HWTC is part of Special Expenses, which is funded from precept, and costs of management and support functions carried out by officers at the Council are recharged to HWTC.
21 [Cllr Julia Wassell]	Why is so little apportioned to the voluntary sector and is the 5k admin charge part of an officers post and inclusive of on costs?	<p>BC officers review prior year and in year spend when drafting the budget. The budget for grants to the voluntary sector has been underspent in 2018/19 and 2019/20. To date in 2020/21, £4,000 has been spent from the £20,000 grants budget. Officers would not recommend increasing a budget that has been consistently underspending.</p> <p>The management charge is based on officer time and includes on costs as outlined in the main report and in previous answers.</p>
22 [Cllr Julia Wassell]	Does the BC 70k include legal, consultancy fees and input from other BC departments? If so which ones?	<p>The management recharge reflects the cost of management and support functions carried out by officers at the Council. The charge is not an exact science as officers do not record exact time spent on HWTC related work. However, the Council endeavours to recharge a proportion of costs which reasonably reflects work performed by officers.</p> <p>Details of the work carried out by officers is outlined in main report and previous answers.</p>
23 [Cllr Julia Wassell]	How does the cost of running a Town Committee compare to the cost of running a Town Council like Aylesbury. Particularly the management costs.	<p>Management costs are recharged based on work carried out by officers at the Council. Details of the work carried out by officers is outlined in main report and previous answers.</p> <p>The comparison is not like for like as different functions are included within other TC's, but the methodology is the same for calculating the charges.</p>
24 [Cllr Julia Wassell]	May I have an update on my request for a basketball hoop in Tadros Park in 19/20. This was being dealt with by the then Cabinet Member Graham Peart and officers. It was said it was anticipated it would be funded this year. I will forward you an email.	<b>To Follow.</b>
25 [Cllr Julia Wassell]	What is the full cost of holding the extra meeting?	The cost has not been calculated.