

# IWALC INFO

The Newsletter of the Isle of Wight Association of Local Councils  
IWALC represents 29 of the 33 town and parish councils on the Isle of Wight  
Issue Two; March 2011

## **Some Local Councils hard hit by IW Service Cuts**

A survey by the Isle of Wight Association of Local Councils (IWALC) into the effect of the cuts in budgets of the Isle of Wight Council has found sharply contrasting reactions by its different members. In some parishes real taxation is falling while in other councils it is jumping up to 60% in an attempt to save valued local public services.

The survey was responded to by half the 28 parish and town member councils of IWALC between March 8<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>. Of these 16 councils seven, including Newport, have set precepts of 0% to in one case 2%, showing effectively shrinking precepts at a time of accelerating inflation. Three councils have increased by 10-13% in order to improve their reserves and four have increased by between a fifth and a quarter. The top two have raised their precept over 50%. The difference is in the areas affected by cuts in IW Council services. All six councils affected by the cuts have been forced to make rises of 20-60% to save public toilets, libraries and other facilities from closure.

Councillor Dick Doran complained that "Wootton Bridge has had to raise the precept from a low base by some 20% or £10,000 purely to cover the costs of maintaining a two-year-old £100,000 eco-public convenience block, that would otherwise be threatened with demolition. Our citizens could not support such a senseless and short-sighted waste of a much used facility."

One of the worst hit parish councils is Bembridge. Councillor Gill Rogers said "The specific implications on us have been the cut to our library service and of the five public toilets. We had only one staying open at Lane End beach. The most worrying thing is that the toilet provision in the High Street is ear-marked for closure which will have a huge effect on the businesses."

"We have had to increase our precept by 20% taking it from £97,000 to £117,000 this year. All of the increase is to compensate costs because of cuts in the IW budget. Had these cuts not come about it may well have been that we could have cut our precept demand due to prudent financial handling of our finances over the last year. Setting the precept was difficult with "a stab in the air" approach having to be taken and information on costs coming in now show that the Parish Council might be eating into reserves next year."

Another Council under the cosh is the Island's biggest town, Ryde. Its percentage increase is the highest in the survey at 59.9%, equivalent to £119,800. 30% or £60,000 is directly to compensate for IW Council cuts. However Clerk Saskia Kiernan pointed out that there are other costs which

cannot be easily measured. "The cuts have had a huge, and as yet unquantified, impact on the work of the Town Council: the precept setting has been delayed causing projects for 2011/12 to also be delayed, staff have spent a high number of hours researching the implications of the cuts and the Council has undertaken additional time-consuming consultation with the community. Moreover, any new service delivery will have an impact on existing projects and on staff and this has meant that the precept rise included an allocation for extra staff and for office accommodation."

East Cowes is also battling to save public services, the library and youth centre. Clerk Geoff Davies spoke of the genuine public anger. "Most of the residents consider that they are victims of double taxation. At least four hundred residents attended the two public meetings and voiced their views. I cannot print the comments made by residents on the IoW Council handling of this matter."

Councillor Gill Rogers of Bembridge agreed, "I do not think you would want us to put into print the comments our residents have made and how we as parish councillors feel... Our residents are victims of double taxation, paying through their council tax for others public conveniences and libraries and then having to have their precept increased to pay for our village facility."

In one response IWALC has launched an inter-active Forum on its website [www.iwalc.org.uk](http://www.iwalc.org.uk) where clerks and councillors of IWALC member councils can enter ideas and resources and share their views on the similar problems that we share across the Island.

The last Executive Committee of IWALC resolved to seek an improved relationship with the IW Council based on trust and partnership so that between us we can manage the next two years of further cutbacks in a more acceptable way with better costings and public outcomes. To this end we will invite the Council Leader David Pugh and the CEO Steve Beynon to one of our next meetings.

## **Other News**

Member Councils will soon receive a questionnaire asking about their 2011 **training needs** and wants so that the County Training Partnership can put together an annual training programme that answers to what the members want.

After several years of revision the new **IWALC Constitution** was unanimously agreed at the March Executive and on approval from NALC should be adopted at the Annual Meeting on June 16<sup>th</sup>.

Published by IWALC March 2011.

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