

Summary of the results of the consultation

The consultation questions are shown in the Briefing Note at Appendix A.

125 Towns and Parishes responded, the detailed responses are shown at Appendix D.

Where Y/N or option has not been filled in but it is clear from the text what the preference is it has been inserted. No changes have been made where the Y/N or option has been filled in.

A summary of the responses and general comments are shown below;

A. What level of grant does your Council think would be reasonable given the shortfall of funding being provided by the Coalition?

Nil	16
Reduce by Settlement Funding Assessment	56
Other	
Make no change	20
Other	23

Comments made;

- 25%/50% & 75% of current grant
- Any grant reduction needs to be phased in gradually
- Chippenham Town Council would expect to receive the maximum possible grant funding and as close to 100% as possible
- The Town Council recognises the reduction in grant provided by the Coalition but is of the opinion that sufficient money should continue to be given to town and parish councils so as to ensure that they are not disadvantaged by the reduction in the tax base caused by changes in benefit distribution.
- The Town Council thinks that 25% would be reasonable
- A 20% year on year reduction to eventually nil
- Downton Parish Council approved a 20% reduction as per the options circulated
- Ideally, the grant should be passed down to town and parishes. However, in view of the inevitable and continued reduction of public sector funding and the lack of certainty on whether a grant would be passed down from Wiltshire Council in future years then Marlborough Town Council looks to retain its independence and not rely on it.
- It would need to be determined by the requirements of the individual Parish/Town.
- There is a basic “cost of democracy” which all councils’ must bear. We would suggest that a minimum sum is guaranteed to all councils – say £750. Larger councils can more easily make up the shortfall through their precepts and other activities
- We would see if we could make the necessary cuts to compensate for the loss of the grant.
- We would support consultation with central government as we wish to see the current level of precept maintained.

B. Should all councils be supported to the same extent, or should the grant be concentrated on those Councils where the impact is greatest?

Should all councils be supported to the same extent?

Yes **72**

No **30**

- Give some extra help where the impact is greatest
- Balanced against impact
- Councils should receive help commensurate with their level of need if they are to deliver the necessary services
- Chippenham Town Council would expect to receive the maximum possible grant funding and as close to 100% as possible
- Concerned that the grant will be directed to more urban communities with a higher population
- Given the reduction in the tax base demanded by the localised council tax support system that has been introduced, the town and parish councils most affected tend to be those experiencing most deprivation

C. Does your Council support Town and Parish Councils being independent and not relying on a grant, if so over how many years would you wish to see this achieved?

Yes **56**

- The timescale for achieving independence from a grant varied between 2 and 5 years and was an average of 3.6 years. Comments on gradually (3) and tapering were not included in this calculation.

No **33**

- Chippenham Town Council considers the reduction in grant support as being a reality and not one of choice. It does not support the view that it should be independent of any grant support.
- If there is money available for councils all councils should receive it.
- Being a small parish we need a grant.
- As a tier of government, paid by and accountable to taxpayers, parish councils should not be independent. To whom would they report?
- Hilperton Parish Council does not support town and parish councils being independent and not relying on a grant.
- In an ideal world we would prefer to be independent. However, under the “new” rules we would opt for a grant rather than a large rise in rates
- We need to keep taking the grant for as long as it is available as it has a great impact
- The change to the tax base calculation came without warning and was set by central government without the understanding of the impact on 1st tier councils. This has left many Town and Parishes without the reserves or possible areas to cut expenditure

D. If you received no grant or a reduced grant would you favour a large increase in precept in 2014-15 to compensate for this or would you look to spread this over the next four years?

Yes

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- A large increase in 2014 – 2015 as we can lay the blame clearly on central government.
- With the implied threat of a cap the option of spreading over a period may not be possible. We would therefore reluctantly need to consider a larger increase in 2014-15 than would otherwise be the case.
- We would seek a large increase in 2014-15, as spreading it over subsequent years could lead to problems if a cap were introduced in subsequent years to prevent or control increases.
- With a threat of the 'capping' of precepts for town and parish councils to 2% in future years and possibly as soon as 2015/16, it is prudent to ensure that Marlborough Town Council is able to properly plan for expenditure so it can continue to provide existing and take on new services.
- We have no confidence that any four year has credibility when the rules of the game keep changing. We therefore favour an increase in Precept in 2014/15 to compensate immediately.
- With complete uncertainty as to how central government is going to interpret and administer the changes published to date, it would be most imprudent not to start building reserves at the earliest possible moment, especially as the billing authority will not be taking reserves into

No

58

E. If the Coalition were to introduce a precept cap does your Council have sufficient reserves to compensate for a reduction in grant?

Yes

23

- Reserves are being built up for a new Community Centre which will be built after the Tidworth Campus is built
- At present, but that may not be the case on the future.
- But not indefinitely, the action of a cap would have a serious impact on the council's ability to continue to improve and create better services for the community. It would definitely have a detrimental impact in any service devolution talks. We have already started a precept support reserve from underspends in our budget for 2012/2013, so we are trying to forward plan budgets to lessen the impact as far as possible, but it's not easy.
- Only in the short term. A cap on Corsham Town Council's precept is unlikely to be financially sustainable if current service levels are to be maintained.
- Reserves are finite
- Only in the short term

No

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- Our reserves would quickly diminish if a reduction in grant was accompanied by a cap on precept increases. This would cut into our ability to promote 'Localism' projects
- Downton Parish Council has built up reserves to enable it to replace the roof on its Memorial Hall in three years. Once those reserves are spent, there would be insufficient reserves remaining to compensate for a reduction in the grant.
- Reserves are not for routine expenditure – reserves enable specific planned projects. Relying on reserves for annual business would be foolhardy as reserves would eventually disappear, and the work of the parish could not be viably funded.
- Whilst reserves could be called upon, the effect would be to create significant financial pressures that would inevitably lead to a dramatic reduction and realignment of the services and facilities provided.
- Reserves are meant to cover emergencies and unexpected expenditure. It would be imprudent to use them for normal revenue expenditure

F. Have you plans to reduce your budget over the next four years?

Yes

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- We are continually seeking to reduce costs.
- Although it is hard to identify further savings we will try.

No

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- We already run the budget as tightly as possible and keep the precept at a minimum.
- We certainly want to maintain our services to the community and take on more from Wiltshire Council. Reductions can only mean cuts, and those cuts would be to services which generate pride in our community, i.e. floral displays, Christmas lights and events. That would be so wrong and have such a detrimental impact on the health and wellbeing of the town.
- The budget has been reduced as far as possible to keep essential services/facilities in the village going but with no flexibility for unforeseen problems
- We have not formally considered this matter yet but the council is committed to improving the services for the community and therefore cannot operate on a reduced budget.
- Parishes are being asked to take on more roles and will need finance to do it.
- As communities follow the principles of Localism, and as funding from other sources is reduced, the demands falling on parish councils are increasing, as are the financial costs of providing local services. There is little scope for trimming services, at a parish level, which has not previously been explored.
- It is small enough as it is, and we must cover the costs of our Clerk and administration, so to reduce it further would leave us very constrained indeed.

G. Are there any other issues you think we should consider?

- There is very great concern about capping.
- Amalgamation of smaller Parishes

- Formal working agreements between Parishes to reduce the costs.
- Sharing administration costs between Parishes.
- Need for a Community Governance Review of boundaries.
- Resistance to capping of Town and Parish precepts.
- Relevant financial support when delegation occurs.
- Burden of legislation on smaller Parishes such as pensions
- The precept issue is obliging them to try to solve a technical problem created by government. It is wasting valuable time unnecessarily. Undermining parish councils' income is also a sure-fire way to erode volunteer enthusiasm
- Consideration should be given to amalgamating smaller Parishes on a 'Unitary Parish' basis.
- The Coalition has made much of the importance of developing Localism and yet the unintended consequences of changes such as this undermine this stated aim
- The government has put in place a package to deal sensibly with the precept issue in respect of Police and Fire services, they should do the same with Parish Councils.
- There needs to be a publicity campaign to highlight the problem, its impact and what caused it.