



PARISHES across the borough are set to benefit from a £75,000 grant next year to help deal with changes to council tax after Swindon Council withheld this year's cash. Swindon Council was the only local authority in England in 2013 to not pass on a grant from the Government, which was recommended to be handed over to parish councils. But for 2014/15 the authority is recommending its budget, being settled in February, to include half of the £167,000 council tax benefit support grant. This cash was made available following Government changes, which meant people receiving council tax benefits were no longer included in the council tax base. The worst affected parishes this year were Wroughton and Stratton St Margaret – with both pushing up their tax as a result. Wroughton Parish Council was forced to increase its precepts by five per cent after it found out it was not being given the £27,000 it was expecting. And Stratton St Margaret lost around £83,000, which meant its tax went up by 2.5 per cent. Stratton council's head of finance, Cllr Nigel Chalk, said he was pleased money was likely to be made available next year. "It's nice they are going to give us some money," said Cllr Chalk. "They (Swindon Council) are the only major authority who did not pass it on (this year). We have to put up our precepts because we didn't get the money, which we didn't want to do. "With Nythe Parish being formed, we are really going to need to attract more money." David Renard, leader of Swindon Council, said parish councils did a lot to support communities and deserved a share of the money, but it was important for it to be proportionate to the borough's finances. "The final decision won't be made until February, but it is the plan to pass on some of the money," said Cllr Renard. "Parishes are a statutory organisation and they do help the community, so we need to do what we can to support them. Equally, it should be recognised that the borough is one of the lowest financed in the country and we have one of the lowest percentages to spend on residents. "We have made savings in lots of areas, which other authorities are only just looking at, to make sure we get the best value for money for our residents."

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