

BOROUGH COUNCIL OF KING'S LYNN & WEST NORFOLK

CABINET SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee
held on Monday 18th February 2013 at 6.30pm
in the Committee Suite, King's Court, Chapel Street, King's Lynn.**

PRESENT:

Councillors C Joyce (Chairman)
B Ayres, J Collop, A Lovett, I Mack (Vice Chairman), G Sandell,
M Tilbury, A Tyler and D Tyler (substitute for T Manley)

Other Members Present:

Councillor Daubney, Leader and Portfolio Holder for Corporate/Strategic Issues and Resources

Observing:

Councillor D J Collis
Councillor Mrs S Collop
Councillor J Loveless
Councillor J Moriarty
Councillor M Shorting
Councillor Mrs Wilkinson

An apology for absence was received from Councillor T Manley.

CSC93: THE LATE COUNCILLOR DAVID JOHNSON

The Committee held a minutes silence in memory of the Late Councillor David Johnson who had recently passed away.

CSC94: MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 21st January 2013 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

CSC95: URGENT BUSINESS UNDER STANDING ORDER 7

There was no urgent business to report.

CSC96: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

CSC97: **MEMBERS PRESENT PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 34**

Councillor I Gourlay for Item CSC101: The Financial Plan 2012/2016.

CSC98: **CHAIRMAN'S CORRESPONDENCE**

The Chairman had no correspondence to report.

CSC99: **RESPONSE TO PREVIOUS COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS**

There were no previous Committee recommendations.

CSC100: **MATTERS CALLED-IN PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 12**

There were no matters called-in pursuant to Standing Order 12.

CSC101: **THE FINANCIAL PLAN 2012/2016**

Councillor A Tyler questioned the reasoning behind the Cabinet's recommendation in relation to car parking charges and queried whether consideration had been given to offering free parking on a longer term basis (as opposed to one off free parking days) particularly as research had indicated that this could have a positive effect on businesses in the town centre. In response, the Leader explained that Cabinet had considered the issue of car parking charges and the potential impact on retail activity at some length. He acknowledged that considerable research had been carried out in this area (although there was a lack of hard evidence) and that the Council would continue to review its policy whilst also giving consideration to such initiatives as the Portas report and the outcome of the Let's Talk Shop events. Whilst the current policy was to continue to freeze car park charges, the Leader highlighted that the Financial Plan included budget provision for £100k in each year to provide car parking promotions such as free parking days in order to support local businesses and retail facilities. He also drew attention to the fact that a previous decision had been taken to suspend the evening car parking charge in Hunstanton in order to support local businesses in the town.

Councillor M Tilbury questioned when the new car parking machines would be installed and whether they would have the facility to accept a "rounded fee" as many of the existing machines did not have the capacity to give change. The Leader explained that there would be a number of different methods that the public could use to make payments, including using their mobile phones. It was acknowledged that there would be a small convenience charge to the user if they did pay using their mobile phone. The Executive Director, Leisure & Public Space also confirmed that the machines would be installed in April but because of logistical and security reasons as well as cost implications they would not have the facility to offer change. However, he highlighted that change could be obtained if members of the public parked in the multi-storey car park.

In response to a question raised by Councillor I Gourlay (under Standing Order 34), the Executive Director, Leisure & Public Space confirmed that consideration was being given to credit/debit cards as a form of payment in selected machines but this created security issues and the cost associated with such machines was considerable (£900 per machine) and they were often susceptible to fraud and vandalism.

Councillor J Collop questioned why Cabinet were recommending that there was no increase in council tax for the whole of the period through to March 2016. He referred to the income foregone and the impact of meeting special expenses costs from reserves which meant that over the period of the Financial Plan, the cost of freezing council tax would be a minimum of £247,190. He questioned what measures were being taken to meet this shortfall and why the Cabinet had not given consideration to at least a nominal increase of say 1%. The Leader explained that it was part of the current administration's promise to the electorate not to increase council tax and that he was confident that the Council would be able to continue to deliver quality services without such an increase. Any shortfall could adequately be met from the general fund working balance and reserves which the Council had held higher than usual to allow for time to properly assess the impact of the service reviews and changes in grant in order to be in a position to react in a reasoned way.

Councillor J Collop referred to the cost reduction programme revised plan in 2015/2016 which showed a shortfall of income/resources compared to costs of nearly £1.7 million and questioned whether the Council would be in a position to meet this savings target. The Leader acknowledged that the target was considerable and in doing so, highlighted that increasing council tax by 1% would have little impact on making up the shortfall. He did however explain that the Council would maintain momentum in its current drive to reduce costs and remained confident that it could seek changes and opportunities to reduce costs and close the gap projected for 2016/2017 in a measured and carefully managed way.

Councillor I Mack referred to the special expenses estimated for King's Lynn which amounted to costs of £558,910 for the year 2013/2014 and questioned what advice had been offered by officers to the Cabinet in relation to financial controls and efficiency savings in relation to these costs. The Leader explained that considerable discussions and advice had been sought and such costs had been considered as part of the efficiency reviews and stated that he felt that the standard and level of services delivered were relative and offered good value for the actual level of special expenses charged. He also stated that they were very favourable compared to other similar market towns. Councillor I Mack questioned whether, as part of the process, King's Lynn Councillors and other local groups had been consulted, particularly in light of the Localism Act and whether the costs could clearly be attributed to and for the direct benefit of the residents of King's Lynn. The Leader explained that businesses and local residents had been consulted and also highlighted that the King's Lynn Representational Arrangements Task Group had recently been established to consider representations in the non-parished areas of the

Borough, and the perceived need to address the consequent lack of representation at the first tier level of Local Government.

The Executive Director, Leisure & Public Space explained that in 2008/09, the Improving Neighbourhood Programme, which had been previously supported by £3.8 million of Government funding to improve services in King's Lynn, had come to an end. Special Expenses at that time (2008/09) for King's Lynn had totalled £295,760 (Grounds Maintenance £259,840, Footway Lighting, £21,850 and Allotments £14,070). The establishment of the Neighbourhood Teams Review had been subject to an extensive consultation exercise and also been considered by the appropriate Panel (the then Community & Culture Panel on 13th October 2009) prior to Cabinet with the full cost now being met from special expenses. A charge in relation to Community Centres in King's Lynn had been introduced in 2010, although this had seen a decrease to £35,490 for the year 2013/2014 from £43,750 in 2011/12. Play areas in King's Lynn were also classed as a special expense from 2010/11.

In response to a query raised by Councillor I Gourlay, the Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that the charges in relation to Community Centres included any income generated by hiring out the facilities and therefore reflected the net charge. However, it was acknowledged, in the case of the community centre in Fairstead, it may not include income generated from hiring the facility to outside agencies if the arrangements had been put in place after the formulation of the Financial Plan. The Executive Director, Leisure and Public Space confirmed that the grounds maintenance charge was based on cutting the grass on a two weekly cycle, and although there were no definite plans to change this, it was reviewed continually. Very few complaints in relation to this particular service were received.

In response to Councillor J Collop reference to the charge for special expenses rising from £36.73 to £41.45 for a Band D and which would still represent an under recovery as the actual Band D should be £55.99, the Deputy Chief Executive explained as part of the financial settlement, the Government had included an incentive for councils to hold council tax to current levels. If councils wished to raise council tax by more than 2%, then they would have to conduct a referendum. However, he highlighted that there was no guarantee that the same criteria/rules would apply in future years. The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that the under recovery was being met from the general fund.

Councillor I Mack questioned whether there were any plans to undertake an in depth review of costs associated with special expenses particular in light of the aims and objectives of the Localism Act. The Leader explained that any such review may be dependent on future Government policy but all services would be reviewed and consideration given to those that were statutory and those that were discretionary.

In response to a question raised by Councillor A Tyler as to whether the Cabinet were satisfied that sufficient consideration was being given to the Council's future policy in relation its arts, tourism and leisure facilities (i.e.

Leisure Trust), the Leader explained that the way in which the Council delivered and who was best placed to provide these type of services was being reviewed to identify any efficiency improvements that could be achieved, such as the establishment of the recent Arts Trust.

CSC102: **PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' DECISIONS MADE UNDER DELEGATED POWERS**

The Portfolio Holders' decisions in relation to Collective Energy Purchasing and Switching Scheme and Hunstanton Community Centre were noted.

CSC103: **EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

"That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act, 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act, and that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information".

CSC104: **PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' DECISION MADE UNDER DELEGATED POWERS**

The Portfolio Holders' decision in relation to Affordable Housing Investment (Shared Equity) was noted.

CSC105: **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee was scheduled to be held on Wednesday 20th March 2013 at 6pm.

Meeting closed at 7.25pm