

BOROUGH COUNCIL OF KING'S LYNN & WEST NORFOLK**KING'S LYNN AREA CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE**

Minutes from the Meeting of the King's Lynn Area Consultative Committee held on Wednesday, 7th December, 2022 at 5.00 pm in the Assembly Room, Town Hall, Saturday Market Place, King's Lynn PE30 5DQ

PRESENT: Councillor A Tyler (Chair)
Councillors A Dickinson, C Hudson, B Jones, A Kemp (Zoom), J Lowe, J Rust, A Tyler and M Wilkinson

Officers present:

Michelle Drewery, Assistant Director, Resources
Mark Whitmore, Management Team Representative

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bambridge, Mrs S Collop, C Joyce and J Lowe.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest declared.

3 URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business to report.

4 MEMBERS PRESENT PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 34

Councillor A Kemp.

5 CHAIRMAN'S CORRESPONDENCE (IF ANY)

There was no Chairman's correspondence to report.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS ON SPECIAL EXPENSE CHARGE FOR KING'S LYNN - 2023/2024

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The Chair invited the Assistant Director, Resources & Section 151 Officer to present the report.

The Assistant Director, Resources explained that the terms of reference for the Committee described one of its roles as acting as a consultative forum on the funding raised by, and utilisation of the King's Lynn Special Expenses, and to offer input on priorities for the expenditure and if appropriate the level of funds to be raised.

The Assistant Director, Resources drew the Committee's attention to what Special Expenses were currently charged for, as set out at 1.3 in the report.

1.4 of the report explained that the total cost of Special Expenses was met by the Council tax-payers of King's Lynn. It was explained that the total special charge for 2022/23 for King's Lynn was £533,320.

Attention was drawn to paragraph 2.1 which explained that the Council Tax base for King's Lynn for 2023 / 24 was currently estimated at 10,835 which was an increase of increase of 67 from 2022 / 23. This resulted in a Band D charge of 60.00 resulting in an increase of £10.47.

The Assistant Director, Resources explained the main movements between the special expense charges to 2022/23 and 2023/24 as follows:

- Footway lighting increase of £23,150 – this increase in costs was due to a significant increase in utility rates of circa 57%. This was an estimated figure including an element of forecasting so there was a possibility that this cost could increase further.
- Play areas increase of £3,870 – this increase reflected an increase in staffing costs and a small increase in utility costs.
- Community Centres increase of £14,810 – this increase was a result of significant increase in utility costs and a reduction income levels due to a decline in room lettings and associated recharges.
- Closed churchyards, pavilions, dog bins, public conveniences – these increases were based on inflationary increases reflecting staffing, utility and general inflation increases.
- Open spaces increase of £38,500 – this increase was again a reflection of increases in staffing costs as well as other inflationary increases.
- Bus Shelters increase of £1,140 – this was incorporating an issue in utility costs and the inclusion of the new bus shelter scheme running costs. The was offset by a reduction in rates and an increase in advertising costs.

The above figures presented a significant increase in the cost of services provided through Special Expenses. The increase of £10.47 significantly exceeded the £5 increase in council tax that the Council was permitted to levy without going through a referendum exercise.

It was explained that the Council applied a notional split of the £5.00 increase in Council Tax as follows: Borough Council £4.50 and Special Expenses £0.50.

In order to bring the level of increase in special expenses down from £10.47 to £0.50, this would require supplementing from the Council's budget. The supplement was currently estimated at around £108,000. It was explained that the Council would not know the true figure until the budget setting process was near completion and the Council tax resolution could be calculated in detail.

The Committee was informed that there were currently no proposals for new schemes for consideration at the time of writing the report. However, as could be seen from the detail in the report, there was no spare capacity to fund any new schemes at this point in time.

The Committee was asked to consider and endorse the special expenses charge for 2023/24 and corresponding council supplement, as set out in the report whilst noting the financial implications also set out in the report.

The Chair then invited the Committee to ask questions / make comments, which are summarised as follows:

- Footway lighting increase – there had been a push to use LED lighting to reduce utility costs and it was queried whether consideration had been given to using solar lighting? The Assistant Director, Resources explained that the Council did have a Refit programme in place and lighting was one of the projects. This was now being progressed including replacement of some of the columns which had been red flagged, these would take priority and the lighting would be changed at the same time. She would check to see whether solar lighting had been considered.
- The Community Centre budget was not credible. Fairstead Community Centre charged £29.00 per hour to hire it and that was one of the reasons that the level of subsidy was required. As Alive West Norfolk ran the Community Centres business rates should not be charged, and this needed to be checked. The Assistant Director advised that Alive West Norfolk operated the buildings on the Council's behalf, but those buildings still belonged to the Council. She would check the legislation around that. The Community Centres had recently been re-evaluated and would be implemented in April 2023 and as part of that there would be a slight reduction in business rates to be implemented, but she would check to see if discretionary business rates could be applied.
- Increase in pavilion costs, which were rarely used. Cleaning was not acceptable for the increase in costs as the pavilions were rarely used. The Assistant Director, Resources advised that she would feedback the comments to Alive Leisure.
- In response to a query regarding staffing costs in relation to Open Spaces, the Assistant Director, Resources explained that she was aware that the staff costs that had been incorporated had been based on the current year's pay award and an estimate for the following year

so there should not be any further increase than that which had been absorbed into the staff increases.

- With regards to the Fairstead Community Centre, it was asked what the income was. The Assistant Director, Resources undertook to find out that information.
- Footway lighting – many lights were quite often out, and it was asked whether it was only when it had been reported before they were checked and repaired because they could be not working for weeks. Were the lights checked regularly? The Assistant Director, Resources advised that this was an operational matter which she would follow up.

Councillor Rust stated that with regards to the Refit scheme regarding street lighting and the replacement of identified red rated streetlights specifically in relation to King's Lynn, why should residents potentially pay more on their special expenses because of the Council's failure to replace lights in King's Lynn.

Councillor Rust also noted from the report that there would be no future schemes brought forward unless they were fully funded. She considered that if Parish Council's had sufficient funds for new schemes, the unparished area would suffer a significant detriment and disadvantage than a parished area and considered that King's Lynn should receive additional funding to level-up with the parished areas and that new schemes should be able to come to the Committee.

The Assistant Director, Resources advised that Parish and Town Councils had their own levies that they could pass on to their parishioners and they also had no cap on their increases either so they could raise income through their levy through Council Tax. Unfortunately, King's Lynn did not have the same flexibilities around that. The Borough Council's Council Tax supported that and that was why there was a notional split.

In the current climate, the Council was seeing a significant increase in costs which were having to be absorbed, so at the moment, for any schemes there was not the flexibility to do that, but it was within the Committee's ability to put any recommendations to Cabinet or Council to see if they would support that.

Councillor Jones stated that he thought it would be a priority for the Council to try and reduce its utility costs by the use of solar energy and solar streetlights because it would save the taxpayer money and also enhance the green credentials by using renewable energy.

The Assistant Director, Resources provided details of the Refit Programme to the Committee.

Councillor Kemp asked what the income was from South Lynn Community Centre. If Council Officers were using part of the Community Centre, was that credited as income to the Community Centre. With regards to streetlights some parts of the town centre and Gaywood Road, after dark it seemed that the lighting had been turned down too much for safety. She supported the use of LED lighting and solar panels.

She also queried the governance with Parish Councils but ultimately the Committee needed to be able to set its own projects. She added that the governance needed to be more transparent and accountable to serve the needs of the people in the town.

The Assistant Director, Resources explained that she would include the income for both South Lynn and Fairstead Community Centres and circulate to the Committee following the meeting.

With regards to streetlighting she would feedback to the Team and provide a response to the Committee.

The Assistant Director, Resources explained that there was income which was credited to the South Lynn Community Centre. With regards to officers using the Community Centre to work those costs were not passed on through Special Expenses and absorbed by the Council.

The Assistant Director, Resources clarified that the information she would be obtaining would be sent out to the whole Committee.

In response to queries raised in the meeting regarding footway lighting, it was suggested that an officer could be invited to a future meeting to give a presentation to the Committee.

Councillor Rust proposed that the Committee should defer making a decision on the Special Expenses report until further information was available.

The Assistant Director, Resources provided further clarification to the Committee and explained that the proposal was to charge 50p to residents for the Special Expenses charge for 2023 / 24 and the rest would be absorbed by the Borough Council budget. Any responses would not make a difference in terms of the costs going through the budget.

The Assistant Director, Resources clarified the budget project and explained that Special Expenses was part of the Borough Council's budget. The Borough Council did not know of the Government's provisional settlement until December therefore officers were working on estimates and a number of assumptions had to be built into the Financial Plan.

Councillor Kemp asked how much was being brought in by the residents of King's Lynn this year and next year into the Council. The Assistant Director, Resources would provide a response to all the Committee.

In view of the further clarification provided, Councillor Rust withdrew her proposal to defer making a decision on the Special Expenses charge for 2023 / 24.

RECOMMENDED: (1) That the Committee endorse the Special Expenses charge for 2023 / 24 as set out in section 2.2 of the report.

(2) That a presentation be given to the Committee on the Refit project.

7 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Committee would be held on Monday, 30 January 2022.

The meeting closed at 6.02 pm