



Lewes District Council
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Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held in the **Ditchling Room, Southover House, Southover Road, Lewes** on **Tuesday 20 August 2013** at **10.00am**

Present:

Councillors S J Osborne (Chair), P F Gardiner, S J Gauntlett, J V S Harris, J M Harrison-Hicks, E C Merry, E E J Russell, J Stockdale and I J White

Officers Present:

R Allan, Scrutiny and Committee Officer
J Magness, Director of Finance

Minutes

46 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2013 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

47 Lewes District Council Tree Management

The Committee considered Report No 130/13 regarding the current arrangements for the management of Lewes District Council's tree stock. Due to unforeseen circumstances and more urgent matters on the agenda, it was decided to consider this item at a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

Resolved:

- 47.1** That Report No 130/13 relating to Lewes District Council's Tree Management Policy be considered at the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 5 September 2013.

SCO

48 Special Expenses

The Committee received a presentation from the Director of Finance relating to Special Expenses, a copy of which is contained in the Minute Book.

The Director of Finance explained that Special Expenses were a legislative mechanism that enabled the cost of local services provided by the District Council to be paid for by residents in the town/parish locality in which the services were provided. This mechanism mitigated the claim of double taxation which could arise where some local services were provided by town/parish councils and paid for by residents through their local town/parish precept and at the same time these residents also paid towards the cost of similar services provided by the District Council in other areas across the District.

The Director of Finance advised that patterns of service provision and use were inherently complex. He added that a balanced approach would aim to make local taxation as fair as possible, whilst accepting that not every anomaly could be removed. A discussion followed, and the Director of Finance explained that there was no correct solution to double taxation, but that there were different approaches that would suit differing local circumstances and that this issue should not go unconsidered.

In response to a Councillor's question, the Director of Finance took the Committee through the history of Special Expenses, and explained why this was now being considered by the Council. He added that changes to Special Expenses at the Council would attempt to make a fairer system and also address double taxation.

The Director of Finance advised how Special Expenses would appear on future council tax bills, and added that initial modelling demonstrated that some areas of the District would receive a reduction in council tax, but other areas may experience a rise in council tax.

In response to a Councillor's question, the Director of Finance explained that Special Expenses would be considered at the Cabinet meeting in November 2013, followed by the Full Council meeting in December 2013. He added that the Council's Constitution stated that a minimum four week consultation period on Special Expenses was required. A discussion followed, and Councillors expressed the view that a longer consultation period than four weeks would be more beneficial than the minimum four weeks required.

The Director of Finance took the Committee through a series of graphs as part of his presentation which demonstrated how the introduction of Special Expenses could have an effect on residents in the District. He added that Lewes and Newhaven would be the two areas which could experience a rise in council tax, with other areas receiving a reduction.

The Committee felt that a further meeting of the Scrutiny Committee would be required in order to take account of the results of the consultation, especially those Town and Parish Councils affected. Councillors enquired as to whether a transitional scheme could be considered for the District in order to ensure a correct Special Expenses scheme was devised.

In response to a Councillor's question, the Director of Finance advised that other areas, such as car parks, could technically be Special Expenses and that Cabinet had considered this. A discussion followed in relation to whether the proposals for Special Expenses were fair on all residents in the District. The Committee advised that facilities in areas in Lewes and Newhaven were often used by the whole District, such as Southover Grange gardens. It also commented that spaces, such as Malling Recreation Ground, were used by clubs outside of Lewes Town, such as Ringmer Football Club.

Some Councillors suggested that it was important to include devolution as part of the discussion regarding Special Expenses, and that the District should consult with Towns and Parish Councils about a joint approach to devolution before considering Special Expenses.

Some Councillors suggested that the Director of Finance could consider expanding the Special Expenses consultation to include information regarding the devolution of assets. The Director advised that Cabinet had already set the parameters for the consultation, which focused on special expenses in relation to parks and open spaces and that Scrutiny had a role as a key consultee. He advised that reference would be made in the public consultation documents to the Cabinet report and reference material.

The Director drew the Committee's attention to the points in paragraph 6.7 of the Cabinet Report which formed the basis of the consultation. The first point related to which expenses should be covered by the regime.

There was some discussion on whether Special Expenses should be accompanied by a time limited transitional protection scheme, similar to that which is required to be considered when a Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme changes. The Committee asked the Director to give this some consideration.

The Director of Finance advised that the consultation document was being prepared and would be available shortly.

Resolved:

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| 48.1 | That the Director of Finance be thanked for his presentation at the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 20 August 2013 regarding Special Expenses; | SCO |
| 48.2 | That the Scrutiny and Committee Officer be requested to arrange a further meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on 7 November 2013 at 10am to consider the Special Expenses consultation results, in a venue to be notified by the Scrutiny and Committee Officer; | SCO |
| 48.3 | That the Director of Finance be requested to attend the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 7 November 2013 with an analysis of the consultation results regarding Special Expenses; | DF |

48.4 That the Director of Finance be requested to give consideration to a transitional protection scheme. DF

and it was further

Recommended:

48.5 That Cabinet be requested to extend the consultation period regarding Special Expenses to the end of October 2013. DF

49 Date of Next Meeting

Resolved:

49.1 That the next scheduled meeting of the Scrutiny Committee to be held on Thursday 5 September 2013 at 10.00am in the Telscombe Room, Southover House, Southover Road, Lewes be noted. All to note

The meeting ended at 11.55am

S J Osborne
Chair

