



Barrowford Parish Council

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Mr. Andrew Stephenson MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA
16th November 2016

Dear Mr. Stephenson, Member of Parliament for Pendle,

I am writing on behalf of Barrowford Parish Council about the Local Government Finance Settlement Technical Consultation, in particular proposals by the government to extend council tax referendum principles to local parish and town councils.

Our council very much welcomed the government's decisions over the last few years not to introduce referenda principles for local councils.

Local councils account for just 1.7% of the £26 billion raised through council tax in England and have demonstrated fiscal responsibility in recent years with overall increases in precepts going down, rising this year by just 6 pence per week on average as a result of local councils taking on services from principal councils and funding not being passed on to them.

We are therefore extremely concerned indeed about the proposals set out in the consultation, proposals which will be greeted by England's 80,000 local councillors as a real blow to local democracy and their democratic role to make decisions on spending priorities and work with the local community to identify and meet local needs.

Right across the country local councils are doing a brilliant job improving their areas; whether it's by building community resilience, increasing house building through neighbourhood planning, providing local transport solutions, supporting the local economy and businesses, organising community events and festivals, helping meet social care needs and making places dementia friendly or giving grants to help local groups and organisations – all this and often more for an average cost to residents of just over a pound a week.

Barrowford Parish Council plays a vital role in supporting the community through both the provision of services and facilities to enhance the lives of local residents. These have included the provision of a community centre, multiuse games area, outdoor gym equipment, planters and festive decorations. Barrowford Parish Council has whenever possible worked in co-operation with both the local and county council and over the last 20 years have jointly seen improvements in safety barriers along our main road, numerous major improvement to our local park which also doubles as the villages War Memorial.

In recent years decreases in government funding to local authorities have seen the prospect of losing services which although not a legal requirement make a real difference in the quality of village life where feasible Barrowford Parish Council has taken over the running of these services. The services we now provide include a Luncheon Club, Public Toilets, Festive Decorations, Bus Shelters and Public Benches as well as taking ownership of several pieces of land and maintaining them on behalf of the village.

Barrowford Parish Council is currently in discussions with Pendle Borough Council with regards to the future ownership and maintenance of our local park/War Memorial with the aim of eventually taking on full responsibility for the park. Barrowford Parish Council takes its financial management responsibilities seriously and fully recognises the importance of reducing costs



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and making efficiency savings so that we can continue to deliver and improve services, at the same time as minimising the tax burden whilst retaining the very services and public assets that make Barrowford what it is.

Unlike principal councils, local councils do not receive grant funding from central government or a share of business rates and are primarily financed through the parish precept.

Therefore we really do believe these proposals amount to a centralist sledgehammer to crack a nut, at a time when the government should be supporting not undermining councillors and their important role improving communities.

Introducing these new rules will also seriously damage the ability of smaller communities to help themselves and very much threatens the government's previous commitments to localism and devolution.

It is vital local councils continue to have the freedom and flexibility to raise the resources they need to invest in local services, especially at a time when they are taking on services and assets from principal councils, often much valued services which would otherwise cease completely and which communities want to see continue.

So given their important and growing role, local councils should be celebrated and supported, not hindered by central government.

The town and parish sector has taken up the challenge of delivering the localism agenda and the National Association of Local Councils is currently developing a devolution toolkit along with other resources which supports government policy on empowering local communities.

Ultimately we want more people to get involved in local decision making and to be engaged within the communities they live – to be actively involved in local elections. Effectively 'capping' parish precepts and forcing councils to hold costly referenda sends out a negative message about the first tier of local government which is meant to underpin the localism agenda.

In addition we are concerned about the unintended impact putting into question whether local councils would be able to take on a greater role including taking over services from principal authorities or taking advantage of community rights legislation such as neighbourhood planning.

There is also the significant public cost that could arise from referendums, which in certain circumstances could be triggered by changes outside of our control such as increases in business rates or national insurance.

In summary these proposals will damage communities and local services as well as undermine local democracy and the role of local councillors and we would request you support us and also write to the local government minister Marcus Jones MP to oppose these proposals.

Yours sincerely

Robert Oliver

Chairman of Barrowford Parish Council