

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE SPECIAL FINANCE COMMITTEE,
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, KING'S HOUSE, THETFORD ON
TUESDAY 23rd AUGUST 2022, STARTING AT 4.00 P.M.

Councillors:

D Crawford, C Harvey, J James (Chair) and B Tullett (Vice Chair)

Officers:

A Yorke (Deputy Town Clerk and Finance Officer)

2 members of the public were also present.

MINUTES

265/22	<u>DECLARATIONS OF ANY DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS</u> None.
266/22	<u>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</u> Councillor R Brame.
267/22	<u>ROYAL BRITISH LEGION (RBL) RENT PAYMENT PROPOSAL</u> After a discussion of the attached briefing paper, Councillor D Crawford proposed and Councillor C Harvey seconded: RESOLVED: The Committee accept the rental proposal made by the RBL. Councillor C Harvey proposed and Councillor B Tullett seconded: RESOLVED: The Committee approve that the remedial work requested by the RBL which relates specifically to the reinstatement of the floor in the cellar and the kitchen. The Committee also requested that the RBL be asked to deal directly with the Council's property agents that have been appointed to oversee the administration of the Council's leased properties.

Chairman

BRIEFING PAPER ON THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION (RBL) PROPOSAL

Background

The Finance Committee received briefing information on the RBL flooring issue in the January 22 Finance Committee held on 18 January 2022 (Item 655/21). In summary, the front internal wooden floor areas of the RBL, particularly the cellar and the kitchen have rotted due to water ingress over a period of time. The air vents at the front of the building are at pavement level and when there is a lot of rain, water enters the building below floorboard level. The cellar room at the RBL has been affected and can no longer be used. The kitchen is still in use.

It appears that this has been a long recurring issue as the floorboards in the cellar were repaired approximately 11 years ago by the Council's own works team. The Council has submitted an insurance claim, but this has been rejected by the Council's insurers.

The Council had a survey done and then appointed a consulting engineer to make recommendations to resolve this challenge. It appears that the best solution is to fill the space under the floorboards with concrete thereby preventing future water ingress into the buildings.

Full Council at its meeting held on 29 March 2022 undertook to carry out the repairs and awarded a tender to CEL Limited to do the work.

The repairs entitled the removal of the entire floorboards in the cellar, kitchen and part of the bar area.

Action taken by the RBL

At the conclusion of the COVID period (31 March 2021), the RBL's rent was paid up to date. However, the RBL has only paid a third of the rent due to the Council since then. Their rationale for doing so was because the floor in the cellar and the kitchen area was unsafe affecting their ability to generate income.

It should be noted that the RBL did not approach the Council to discuss or seek approval of this proposal and the Council's Finance Officer did not send Rent Demands for the rent that was unpaid.

Action taken by the Council

The Finance Officer sent a "Rent Demand" to the RBL on 2 August 2022 for the balance of the unpaid rent.

Proposal by the RBL

On receiving the "demand for rent", the RBL subsequently responded with a proposal to resolve the outstanding rental issue. The RBL has proposed to pay a further third of the outstanding rent (excluding VAT) on the basis that it has lost approximately one-third of its income due to the cellar and kitchen floor challenges of its premises.

It has also asked in its proposal for some work to be completed in the kitchen and bar area to enable it to be compliant with various legal requirements.

Once this is done, and Council accepts the proposal, RBL will immediately pay the additional third of the rent as "full and final settlement" of its rental debt.

Recommendation

It is recommended that:

1. The Finance Committee consider the proposal by the RBL and whether or not to accept or reject it.
2. The Finance Committee consider the remedial work requested by the RBL.