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Up to £1 where sold

Would members of Epsom’s H band stump up?

15 September 2024



People living in homes in the top council band will be asked to help the community after plans to ask Band H homeowners to voluntarily pay into a council-run charity were approved. **Waverley Borough Council**’s executive committee launched the drive in the hope of encouraging people to support community projects.

Though a “voluntary tax” is a contradiction in terms, is it a good idea for Epsom and Ewell Borough Council? Plenty of H band properties in the Borough and plenty of urgent causes for the Council to support locally? Let us know your views. Epsom and Ewell Times.

The Voluntary Council Tax Initiative is based on a similar scheme running in Westminster Council which brings in an additional £300,000 each year to the London borough. Council’s have to provide certain services by law but community projects such as leisure centres, parks, mobility buses and homeless schemes are considered to fall outside that bracket and are under increased pressure from budget cutbacks.

Waverley Borough Council hopes the new voluntary scheme will help save deeply important resident services and will now ask Band H rate payers first, if they back the idea, and second, for input into which community groups to support. The money, the council made clear, is not for potholes or street lighting.

Councillor **Tony Fairclough**, deputy leader of the council, said that Westminster talked about support for the homeless and that any money Waverley raised would likely follow suit. He added: “The first and most important thing is that this will be a voluntary scheme and indeed that is one of the key points of the consultation.

“It will invite residents of Band H properties to make a voluntary contribution to local projects or the provision of local services. We will consult with the residents of those Band H properties to ascertain whether they are minded to support this scheme and assuming that they are, which type of projects or services should be supported by the revenues generated from it.

“This is a concept that has proved to be very successful in Westminster and in many ways, in my opinion, it actually addresses a slight flaw in government policy, namely that council tax bands are probably a bit too limited. Going out and speaking to Band H homeowners, this is an ideal opportunity for us to, on a voluntary basis, secure revenue for the sort of projects that this council is minded to do.”

The smallest homes, those in Band A, pay about £1,500 a year in council tax, while those in the very largest homes (Band H) pay between £4,500 to £4,900. The criteria was set in 1991 and has not been updated since, leading to some to criticise the system as being regressive in nature. Councillors during the meeting on Wednesday, September 3 suggested the voluntary contribution could help redress any imbalance.

Westminster has used the money to fund youth services, tackling rough sleeping and helping those who were lonely and isolated, Cllr **Liz Townsend**, portfolio holder for planning said. She added: “We’re all hearing about the black hole in Government, the £22billion black hole, so we are fairly pessimistic about the amount of money that local government perhaps will attract from central government. So we do have to be innovative in the ways we raise additional funds for discretionary services.”

Cllr **Kika Mirylees** said: “People must realise that if they are putting this money in, it’s not going to go to potholes and things like that. It will go to the benefit of the community. It’s not going to be there for your trees or hedges to be trimmed. It’s really there to benefit people who are in need of support and it’s much more to do with homelessness, because it would be nice for the people to have a home who don’t have one.”

Image: Jacob Jordaens – Rich man giving to the poor.

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