

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

FINANCE, INNOVATION AND PROPERTY ADVISORY BOARD

Wednesday, 3rd June, 2015

Present: Cllr Mrs F A Kemp (Chairman), Cllr Mrs B A Brown (Vice-Chairman), Cllr O C Baldock, Cllr R P Betts, Cllr J L Botten, Cllr T I B Cannon, Cllr D J Cure, Cllr R D Lancaster, Cllr D Lettington, Cllr L J O'Toole, Cllr Miss J L Sergison and Cllr A K Sullivan

Councillors Mrs J A Anderson, P F Bolt, V M C Branson, M A Coffin, N J Heslop, S M King, B J Luker, P J Montague, Mrs A S Oakley, S C Perry, M R Rhodes and H S Rogers were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs S Bell, T Bishop, M O Davis and B W Walker

PART 1 - PUBLIC

FIP 15/20 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor R Betts declared an Other Significant Interest in the item on Applications for Discretionary Rate Relief in respect of renewal applications by Tonbridge and Malling Leisure Trust on the grounds of being a member of the Trust's Board. He withdrew from the meeting during their consideration.

FIP 15/21 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the notes of the meeting of the Finance, Innovation and Property Advisory Board held on 7 January 2015 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

FIP 15/22 INTRODUCTORY PRESENTATION

The Advisory Board received an introductory presentation by staff of Financial Services for the particular benefit of new Members on council tax, business rates, council tax reduction and housing benefit.

MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE CABINET

FIP 15/23 APPLICATIONS FOR DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF

Decision Notice D150041MEM

The joint report of the Director of Finance and Transformation and Cabinet Member for Finance, Innovation and Property gave details of renewal applications for discretionary rate relief and rural rate relief

together with new applications for discretionary rate relief which were considered in accordance with the previously agreed criteria for determining such applications.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) in respect of the re-applications for relief shown at Annex 3 to the report, with the exception of Cobdown Sports & Social Club and the Pre-School Learning Alliance, 20% discretionary rate relief be awarded in each case with effect from 1 April 2015 and time limited to 31 March 2017;
- (2) in respect of the re-application from the Pre-School Learning Alliance, 5% discretionary rate relief be awarded with effect from 1 April 2015 and time limited to 31 March 2017;
- (3) in respect of the re-application from the Cobdown Sports & Social Club, 10% discretionary rate relief be awarded with effect from 1 April 2015 and time limited to 31 March 2017;
- (4) the renewal applications for rural rate relief be awarded on the basis set out at Annex 4 to the report; and
- (5) the new applications for discretionary rate relief be determined as follows:

St John Ambulance Brigade, 136 Vale Road, Tonbridge – no discretionary relief be awarded

The Heart of Kent Hospice Trading Ltd, 5 Malling Road, Snodland and 109 Hall Road, Aylesford – no discretionary relief be awarded

Holborough Management Ltd, 6 Higham Avenue, Snodland and 2 Amisse Drive, Snodland – no discretionary relief be awarded

The Charity Bank Ltd, Ground and First Floor Fosse House, 182 High Street, Tonbridge – 30% discretionary relief be awarded, time limited to 31 March 2017.

FIP 15/24 FINANCIAL PLANNING AND CONTROL

Decision Notice D150042MEM

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation provided information on the Council's key budget areas of salaries, major income streams and investment income for the year ended 31 March 2015. It also gave details of the variations agreed in relation to the revenue

budget, summarised to provide an overall budget outturn position for 2014/15 which showed a net adverse variance of £85,687, largely attributable to a shortfall on the Business Rates Retention Scheme.

Details were provided of variations identified through budgetary control in respect of 2015/16. Reference was made to the loss of recycling income arising from the demise of Aylesford Newsprint, pressures of government initiatives in respect of housing benefits and the impact on the savings target set in the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

An update was also given on capital expenditure and variations agreed in relation to the capital plan.

RECOMMENDED: That the contents of the report be noted and endorsed.

**FIP 15/25 BUSINESS RATES REVIEW: DISCUSSION PAPER FROM
HM TREASURY**

Decision Notice D150043MEM

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation gave details of a discussion paper from HM Treasury seeking views on the business rates system. It also provided information about the Council's recent deputation to the Minister for Local Government regarding the impact of the loss of a significant business within the Borough. Consideration was given to the delegation of authority to formulate a final response by the deadline of 12 June.

In addition to answering the detailed questions posed in the consultation paper, it was proposed to incorporate the impact of the Aylesford Newsprint situation as a principle in the response and the Director of Finance and Transformation offered to circulate copies to any Members interested.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) authority be delegated to the Director of Finance and Transformation, in liaison with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Innovation and Property and the Leader (as the portfolio holder for Economic Regeneration) to formulate a final response on behalf of the Council by the deadline of 12 June;
- (2) the views of the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of both the Finance, Innovation and Property and Economic Regeneration Advisory Boards be sought in drafting the response; and
- (3) copies of the final response be circulated to the local Members of Parliament and the South East England Councils Network.

MATTERS SUBMITTED FOR INFORMATION

FIP 15/26 BENEFITS UPDATE

Members were advised of current issues arising in the benefits field namely performance and workload of the Benefits Service and progress with various aspects of welfare reform including preparations for the start of Universal Credit in the Borough in October. The Advisory Board was pleased to note that the best annual performance for a number of years had been achieved within the Benefits Service.

FIP 15/27 COUNCIL TAX AND BUSINESS RATES UPDATE

The report gave details of recent developments in respect of council tax and business rates including the final collection rates for the year 2014/15 which had both exceeded the targets set. Thanks were recorded to the staff involved for the excellent rates achieved.

FIP 15/28 WEBSITE REDESIGN UPDATE

The report provided an update on the planned improvements to the Council's website design to ensure that it remained fit for purpose to reflect changes in users' preferences and technology. A demonstration was given of the introduction of the "I want to..." navigation box, constructed to be as accessible as possible and usable on smartphone and tablet technology.

FIP 15/29 PUBLICATION OF ALLOWANCES PAID TO MEMBERS DURING 2014/15

The Advisory Board received a copy of the statement of the actual allowances paid to Members during the financial year 2014/15 which had been published in accordance with Regulation 15(3) of the Local Authorities (Members Allowance) (England) Regulations 2003.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE

FIP 15/30 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Chairman moved, it was seconded and

RESOLVED: That as public discussion would disclose exempt information, the following matters be considered in private.

PART 2 - PRIVATE

MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE CABINET

FIP 15/31 DEBTS FOR WRITE OFF

(LGA 1972 – Sch 12A Paragraph 2 – Information likely to reveal information about an individual)

Decision Notice D150044MEM

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation sought approval of the writing-off of debts considered to be irrecoverable. Details were also given of debts under £1,000 which had been written-off in accordance with Financial Procedure Rule 17.2 together with cumulative totals of debts in the current and previous financial years and information on budgeted bad debt provision.

RECOMMENDED: That the eight items shown in the schedule of amounts over £1,000, totalling £27,233.46 be written-off for the reasons stated within the schedule.

FIP 15/32 PROPOSED DISPOSAL OF ST JOHN AMBULANCE SITE, TONBRIDGE

(LGA 1972 Sch 12A Paragraph 3 – Financial or business affairs of any particular person)

Decision Notice D150045MEM

Further to Decision Number D150006MEM, the report of the Director of Central Services gave details of the outcome of negotiations for the disposal of the St John Ambulance site, Tonbridge including the recommendations of an independent valuer.

RECOMMENDED: That disposal of the St John Ambulance site for development be approved on the basis outlined in the report and as recommended by the independent valuer.

The meeting ended at 9.52 pm