

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 28th January, 2014

Present: Cllr Miss A Moloney (Chairman), Cllr T J Robins (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Mrs E A Simpson (Vice-Chairman), Cllr A W Allison, Cllr J Atkins, Cllr Ms J A Atkinson, Cllr R W Dalton, Cllr Mrs E M Holland, Cllr D Keeley, Cllr Mrs F A Kemp, Cllr S M King, Cllr A G Sayer, Cllr Ms S V Spence, Mr P J Drury, Mr D Still and D Thornewell

Mrs J A Anderson, J A L Balcombe, O C Baldock, M A Coffin and N J Heslop were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.12.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs P Bates, C Brown, D J Cure and Dr G Court

PART 1 - PUBLIC

OS 14/1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made in accordance with the Code of Conduct.

OS 14/2 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 10 September 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE COUNCIL

OS 14/3 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - ANNUAL REPORT

Members received the draft Annual Report on the business undertaken by the Committee over the past year.

RECOMMENDED: That the draft Overview and Scrutiny Annual report, attached as Annex 1 to the report, be endorsed.

MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE CABINET

OS 14/4 REVENUE ESTIMATES 2014/15

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation referred to the responsibility of the Cabinet under the Constitution for formulating initial draft proposals in respect of the Budget. Reference was made to the

role of the Committee in assisting the Cabinet and Council in the preparation of the Budget.

Careful consideration was given to both the Revised Estimates for 2013/14 and the Estimates for 2014/15 within the context of the Medium Term Financial Strategy and the Council's priorities.

Attention was drawn to the key messages arising from the provisional local government finance settlement together with details of the level of council tax increase above which local authorities would have to hold a referendum. The potential timetabling difficulties for the budget setting process, brought about by the Council not yet having received confirmation of the final grant settlement from Government nor details of the council tax referendum threshold were outlined. An announcement from Government was anticipated on 12 February although the tight timescales made budget setting decisions difficult. In addition, if the Police and Crime Commissioner's budget proposals were not approved next week there were further implications.

Particular reference was made to the New Homes Bonus and concerns as to whether this was sustainable in its current form were set out. It was also reported that any replacement scheme could represent a real risk to the Council which could see its overall grant funding reduce by more than was presently reflected in the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

However, the Director of Finance and Transformation was pleased to report that net savings in excess of £1.2 million had been achieved against the target set of £1.1 million. Members were reassured that savings and efficiencies continued to be explored, together with new ways of delivering services and communication taking advantage of new and improving technologies.

RECOMMENDED: That the draft Revised Estimates contained in the Booklet be endorsed and commended to Cabinet.

OS 14/5 CAPITAL PLAN REVIEW

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Finance and Transformation which set out progress on the 2013/14 Capital Plan Review.

Attention was drawn to the recent announcement of an increase in Government support for Disabled Facilities Grants in 2014/15 and the outcome of the scrutiny review of Housing Assistance (see agenda item 9). A recommendation to amend the Capital Plan List A budget provisions in respect of these schemes would be incorporated in the budget report to the February meeting of Cabinet.

RECOMMENDED: That the following recommendations of the Finance and Property Advisory Board held on 8 January 2014 be endorsed:

(1) the position of the existing Capital Plan (List A), as summarised in Annex 1 to the report;

(2) the schedule of schemes recommended for addition to List C and deletion from List C, as set out in Annex 2 to the report;

(3) the schedule of List C schemes recommended for evaluation over the following year, set out in Annex 3 to the report;

(4) the schedule of evaluated schemes, set out in Annex 4 to the report, recommended for transfer from List C to List B . A further recommendation, as detailed below, was also endorsed:

1. In the case of the river wall, Wouldham scheme a specific earmarked reserve is established in the sum of £700,000 and that this scheme sits outside the annual allowance of £320,000 with an implementation date for capital plan purposes of 2015/16.

(5) endorsement of the Capital Strategy, as set out at Annex 5 to the report, for adoption and publication on the Council's website.

OS 14/6 REVIEW OF CONCESSIONARY FEES AND CHARGES - RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SCRUTINY REVIEW GROUP

Members considered the report of the Scrutiny Review Group which set out conclusions arising from a recent assessment of concessionary fees and charges.

The Review Group concluded that all concessions operated by the Council should, in future, be linked to recipients of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme. It was also recommended that to avoid having to deal with a household's changes in circumstances, and to reduce administration, the discount should be awarded to a qualifying household at the beginning of a financial year.

It was reported that financial and value for money considerations, risk assessments and the impact on potentially vulnerable people had formed part of the review process. The Equalities Impact Assessment recommended that disability/incapacity should also be included as a qualifying criterion should a discount card be implemented in the future.

RECOMMENDED: That the following recommendations be approved:

(1) the current 100% concession for pest control services should be retained;

- (2) the current 100% concession for bulky goods collections should be retained and additional marketing of the service and of the Saturday Household Waste Service should be undertaken;
- (3) a review of the discounts for leisure services/activities be undertaken by the Leisure and Arts Advisory Board to simplify the rates which apply;
- (4) the criteria which govern access to the Council's concessions be made consistent across services and in future be based primarily on those eligible for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme;
- (5) to reflect the finding of the equalities impact assessment disability/incapacity be added to the qualifying criteria for all concessions, should a single discount card be introduced;
- (6) eligibility for access to the concessions should be assessed and reviewed on an annual basis only in order to streamline administration of the concessions scheme;
- (7) the introduction of a single discount card covering all concessions be supported in principle but should be subject to further investigation taking into account examples of best practice; and
- (8) additional marketing and promotion of the discount card scheme should be considered to encourage greater take up by those eligible.

**OS 14/7 REVIEW OF DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT CONTRIBUTIONS
AND HOUSING ASSISTANCE FUNDING - RECOMMENDATIONS
OF THE SCRUTINY REVIEW GROUP**

The report of the Scrutiny Review Group presented conclusions arising from the recent assessment of the Disabled Facilities Grant contribution and Housing Assistance funding.

The aim of the review was to evaluate expenditure and value for money surrounding the allocation of Disabled Facilities Grants and Housing Assistance, to establish the opportunity for service improvements and potential savings in light of the Borough Council's overall budgetary position.

It was noted that financial and value for money considerations and risk and equality impact assessments had been undertaken as part of the review process.

Annex 1 to the report showed a revised Housing Assistance budget allocation and the model included money coming back to the Council via repaid grants.

Finally, Members received and welcomed a presentation which provided context for the review, set out objectives and key priorities of Housing Assistance, together with case studies to demonstrate how real people had benefitted.

RECOMMENDED: That the following recommendations be approved:

(1) the existing level of capital plan funding for Disabled Facilities Grants should be retained for the time being but reviewed again when changes to the funding regime take place in 2015; and

(2) the capital plan budget for discretionary housing assistance be set at £90,000 and part funded by way of grant repayments as detailed in paragraph 1.6 of the report.

DECISIONS TO BE TAKEN BY THE COMMITTEE

OS 14/8 FUTURE SCRUTINY REVIEW WORK PROGRAMME

The report of the Chief Executive set out a new review programme for future topics. It was suggested that the next two issues to be addressed by informal review groups drawn from the membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should deal with memberships/subscriptions and postage/courier costs.

RESOLVED: That informal Review Groups be established to investigate Memberships/subscriptions and Postage/courier costs

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE

OS 14/9 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no items considered in private.

The meeting ended at 8.20 pm