

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 23rd January, 2018

Present: Cllr A K Sullivan (Chairman), Cllr Mrs A S Oakley (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Ms S V Spence (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Mrs J A Anderson, Cllr M C Base, Cllr P F Bolt, Cllr J L Botten, Cllr T I B Cannon, Cllr Mrs F A Kemp, Cllr Mrs S L Luck, Cllr M Taylor, Cllr Miss G E Thomas, Cllr F G Tombolis, Cllr T C Walker and Mr D Still

Councillors O C Baldock, V M C Branson, N J Heslop, D Lettington, R V Roud and Miss J L Sergison were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D Keers and M R Rhodes and Mr P Drury

PART 1 - PUBLIC

OS 18/1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

OS 18/2 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 24 January 2017 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

OS 18/3 REVIEW OF THE SCRUTINY FUNCTION

Consideration was given to a report by the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee making suggestions as to how the Committee could add value to the delivery of the Council's Savings and Transformation Strategy. Reference was made to the concerns expressed at the recent meeting of the Finance, Innovation and Property Advisory Board about the need for Members to have a more active role in exploring areas of Council expenditure that could be reviewed and assessing opportunities for making the savings/increase in income needed.

For background information, a summary of the Savings and Transformation Strategy was provided including performance over the past three years regarding achievement of the savings targets. The Chairman put forward a suggested approach involving up to six formal meetings of the full Committee (rather than scrutiny panels) over the

coming year, each focusing on one or two potential savings or opportunities for increased income. It had been agreed with officers that the two outstanding reviews of the Gibson Building – Option Appraisal and the Council’s Constitution would be completed via special meetings of the Committee in March/April. A list of initial suggestions for review was set out and Members invited to contribute ideas.

RESOLVED: That the proposals set out in the report be endorsed.

MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE CABINET

OS 18/4 REVENUE ESTIMATES 2018/19

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 the Council in preparation of the Budget for 2018/19 within the context of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and the Council’s priorities.

Details were given of the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement and the position regarding New Homes Bonus funding. Members were advised that the Secretary of State had increased the threshold for triggering a referendum on council tax increase to the higher of 3% or £5.

The report indicated the factors to be taken into account when updating the MTFS and referred to the Savings and Transformation Strategy (STS) which provided a structure and focus for addressing the significant financial challenge facing the Council. Progress was reported on savings achieved and it was noted that the MTFS would continue to be updated as more information became available and the targets and timescales within the STS would be revisited and realigned with the latest projected funding gap during the budget setting process. Reference was also made to the successful outcome of the Kent and Medway authorities’ bid for pilot status in respect of 100% business rates retention.

The report suggested a mechanism for responding to the technical consultation announced by the Secretary of State, entitled “Fair funding review: a review of relative needs and resources” in view of the timescales involved.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) the draft Revenue Estimates contained in the Booklet be endorsed and commended to the Cabinet for its meeting on 8 February 2018;

- (2) the Savings and Transformation Strategy be updated to reflect the latest projected 'funding gap' as part of the budget setting process; and
- (3) delegated authority be given to the Director of Finance and Transformation, in liaison with the Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Innovation and Property to respond to the technical consultation entitled "Fair funding review: a review of relative needs and resources".

OS 18/5 CAPITAL PLAN REVIEW 2017/18

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Finance and Transformation which set out progress on the 2017/18 Capital Plan Review and sought endorsement of recommendations to the Cabinet. Particular reference was made to the reduction of £50,000 in the Council's funding of Disabled Facility Grants, arising from a review of spending and associated government grant funding, which would contribute towards the savings target.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) the recommendations of the Finance, Innovation and Property Advisory Board held on 3 January 2018, as set out at paragraph 1.3 of the report, be endorsed; and
- (2) the Capital Strategy, as set out at Annex 5 to the report, be endorsed for adoption and publication on the Council's website.

OS 18/6 SELECT COMMITTEE REVIEW OF EFFECTIVENESS OF LOCAL AUTHORITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

The report of the Chief Executive summarised the Select Committee review of the effectiveness of local authority overview and scrutiny committees and considered the recommendations arising. Reference was made to the Council's approach to the overview and scrutiny function and it was noted that three of the five Select Committee recommendations were already implemented. The remaining recommendations advocated overview and scrutiny matters being reported to full Council rather than the Executive and that service users and the public should be more involved in the scrutiny process.

Members suggested that the circumstances and process for referring recommendations to the Council be considered fully during the review of the Constitution.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) the recommendations of the Select Committee regarding the effectiveness of Overview and Scrutiny Committees be noted; and
- (2) further consideration be given to
 - (i) the introduction of a process whereby recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee which are not accepted by Cabinet can then be referred to full Council;
 - (ii) where appropriate to the review being undertaken, opportunities to engage service users and the public be explored to assist with that review.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE

OS 18/7 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no items considered in private.

The meeting ended at 8.31 pm