

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

FINANCE, INNOVATION AND PROPERTY ADVISORY BOARD

Wednesday, 9th January, 2019

Present: Cllr M C Base (Chairman), Cllr R D Lancaster (Vice-Chairman), Cllr R P Betts, Cllr T Bishop, Cllr J L Botten, Cllr V M C Branson, Cllr Mrs B A Brown, Cllr D J Cure, Cllr M O Davis, Cllr Miss J L Sergison, Cllr A K Sullivan and Cllr F G Tombolis

Councillors Mrs J A Anderson, O C Baldock, Mrs P A Bates, M A Coffin, N J Heslop, D Lettington, M R Rhodes and H S Rogers were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

PART 1 - PUBLIC

FIP 19/1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

FIP 19/2 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the notes of the meeting of the Finance, Innovation and Property Advisory Board held on 17 September 2018 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE CABINET

FIP 19/3 REVIEW OF FEES AND CHARGES 2019/20

The report of the Management Team brought forward for consideration as part of the Budget setting process for 2019/20 proposals in respect of those fees and charges that were the responsibility of the Cabinet Member for Finance, Innovation and Property or not reported elsewhere.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) in respect of the recovery of legal fees payable by third parties, the Council's fees continue to follow the Supreme Court guideline hourly rates as set out at paragraph 1.2.1 of the report;
- (2) the proposed scale of fees for local land charges searches and enquiries set out at Annex 1 to the report be adopted with effect from 1 April 2019;

- (3) the current photocopying charges of 10p (inclusive of VAT) for each page of the same document or additional copies of the same page plus postage as appropriate be retained;
- (4) the fee schedule for street naming and numbering set out in section 1.6 of the report be adopted with effect from 1 April 2019; and
- (5) the amount of council tax and business rate Court costs recharged remain as set out at paragraph 1.7.2 of the report for the 2019/20 financial year.

***Referred to Cabinet**

FIP 19/4 TONBRIDGE CASTLE - REVIEW OF FEES AND CHARGES

The report of the Director of Central Services and Monitoring Officer presented a review of fees and charges in respect of the variety of services and functions delivered at Tonbridge Castle and made recommendations to increase revenue streams from a number of different areas. It was noted that the fee model for wedding bookings had been approved in 2018 for the period to 2020/21 and that fees for concessionary users of the Council Chamber would be reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June 2019.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) the new pricing model for the Castle Tour at Tonbridge Castle be approved as set out at paragraph 1.5.4 of the report;
- (2) the new pricing model for Schoolchildren Educational Workshops at Tonbridge Castle be approved as set out at paragraph 1.6.1 of the report;
- (3) authority be delegated to the Director of Central Services to depart from the fixed fee structure for wedding bookings where he considers it is in the financial interests of the Council to do so in a particular case; and
- (4) the pricing model for hiring out the Council Chamber at Tonbridge Castle be approved as set out at paragraph 2.3.3 of the report.

***Referred to Cabinet**

FIP 19/5 PROPOSED 3% SURCHARGE ON BUILDING CONTROL STANDARD CHARGES

The report of the Director of Central Services and Monitoring Officer referred to the partnership arrangement with Sevenoaks District Council for provision of the Building Control Service, overseen by a Management Board. Consideration was given to a proposed overall fee increase of

3% for the standard charges which would reflect the current cost of the works supervised by the Building Control Partnership.

In the interests of transparency, Members were advised that the increase in charges approved in 2018 on the recommendation of the Planning and Transportation Advisory Board (Decision No D180011CAB) had unfortunately not been implemented. Hence the proposed scale of charges represented a 3% increase over the 2017/18 scale shown at Appendix B to the report.

RECOMMENDED: That the proposed fees scales for 2019/20, as set out at Appendix A to the report and representing an overall increase of 3%, be approved.

***Referred to Cabinet**

FIP 19/6 IT STRATEGY UPDATE

Decision Notice D190001MEM

Further to Decision No D180032MEM, the report of the Director of Finance and Transformation provided an update on work relating to the website development plan including the scoping of a Digital Strategy to set out the business aspect of service transformation alongside the “technology” side of the IT Strategy. A website review document containing the results of the Smart Digital Services customer testing and feedback from the latest SOCITM Better Connected national review was appended to the report.

Consideration was given to one of the recommendations regarding the establishment of an informal Member working group to assist in the website review. It was agreed that the Leader determine the membership of the group in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Innovation and Property, the Chairman of the Advisory Board and the Leader of the Liberal Democrats Group.

RECOMMENDED: That an informal Member working group with membership determined by the Leader be formed to assist with the website review.

FIP 19/7 CYBER SECURITY

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation gave details of the “Cyber Stocktake” undertaken by the Local Government Association (LGA) and the timescale of funding bids submitted to the Association by the 30 November 2018 deadline. Consideration was given to a recommendation that the Cabinet Member for Finance, Innovation and Property become the named Member for Cyber Security.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) the action to address the outcome of the LGA Stocktake and funding bid be noted and confirmed;
- (2) it be noted that further reports on the progress with Cyber Security will be presented to the Finance, Innovation and Property Advisory Board; and
- (3) the Cabinet Member for Finance, Innovation and Property be appointed as the named councillor for Cyber Security and the Director of Central Services be asked to update the Council's Constitution accordingly.

***Referred to Cabinet**

FIP 19/8 REVENUE ESTIMATES 2019/20

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation referred to the responsibility of the Cabinet under the constitution for formulating initial proposals in respect of the budget. Reference was made to the role of the Advisory Board in assisting the Cabinet and Council in the preparation of the budget within the context of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and the Council's priorities. An outline was given of the process for referring the Advisory Board's recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee prior to consideration by the Cabinet on 14 February and thereafter by the Council at its Budget meeting.

The Director of Finance and Transformation introduced the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement for 2019/20 which was the final year of the multi-year settlement accepted by the Council. She indicated that it was relatively positive for Tonbridge and Malling given the removal of the "negative RSG" payment for one year, the fact that the baseline for payment of New Homes Bonus would remain at 0.4%, and the Secretary of State's decision to maintain the threshold for triggering a referendum on council tax increase at the higher of 3% or £5. However, Members were advised that the settlement should be viewed in the context of a lack of information about future years' funding and impact on the funding gap which would have to be revisited in the light of the outcome of the 2019 Spending Review and Fair Funding Review. In addition, the Kent and Medway authorities' bid for the next pilot in respect of 75% business rates retention had failed despite the success of the previous pilot so Kent Financial Officers had written a response to the Ministry.

Alongside the provisional settlement, the Secretary of State had published two further consultation papers on the review of relative needs and resources and business rates retention reform. In view of the timescales involved and the programming of meetings, it was suggested

that delegated authority be given for a response to be made as appropriate.

The report set out the framework for considering the estimates in terms of the MTFs together with a number of Service specific issues. Attention was drawn to partnership funding pressures on Disabled Facilities Grants, public health initiatives and the Community Safety Partnership which it was suggested should be the subject of reviews by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Details were given of the factors to be taken into account when updating the MTFs and Savings and Transformation Strategy (STS). Progress was reported on savings achieved and the current funding gap. 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.


RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) the proposed increase in the minimum General Revenue Reserve balance from £2.0m to £3.0m be noted and endorsed;
- (2) the draft response to the provisional local government finance settlement 2019/20, as set out in Annex 1 to the report, be noted and updated as appropriate in liaison with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Innovation and Property;
- (3) delegated authority be given to the Director of Finance and Transformation, in liaison with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Innovation and Property, to respond to the two further papers published alongside the provisional settlement as detailed at paragraph 1.3.10 of the report;
- (4) the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be asked to review the service areas Disabled Facilities Grants, Public Health and Community Safety Partnership, as detailed at paragraph 1.7 of the report;
- (5) the draft Revenue Estimates contained in the Booklet be endorsed for consideration by the Cabinet at its special meeting on 14 February 2019; and
- (6) the Savings and Transformation Strategy be updated to reflect the latest projected “outstanding” funding gap as part of the budget setting process.

***Referred to Cabinet**

FIP 19/9 CAPITAL PLAN REVIEW 2018/19

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Finance and Transformation which reviewed the current position of the existing Capital Plan (List A). It also recommended schemes for addition to List C, some existing List C schemes for deletion or evaluation and schemes for inclusion on List B from those List C schemes previously selected for evaluation. Members were reminded that any aspirations in respect of capital schemes needed to be set within the context of the significant financial challenge facing the Council.

RECOMMENDED: That the following be endorsed for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 

- (1) the Capital Plan (List A) position as shown in Annex 1 to the report be endorsed;
- (2) the amendment of List C as detailed in paragraph 1.5.3 of the report;
- (3) the selection of those List C schemes shown in paragraph 1.6.4 of the report for evaluation or further evaluation as appropriate, including the Air Quality Monitoring Equipment and Larkfield Leisure Centre Pool Hall Roof for fast track evaluation;
- (4) the transfer of the schemes listed in paragraph 1.7.3 of the report from List C to List B and approval of the use of the Scape Minor Works Framework, Kier Construction Ltd as the framework contractor, as set out at paragraph 1.7.5 of the report, to procure the planned major programme of works at Larkfield Leisure Centre; and
- (5) the draft Capital Strategy as set out at Annex 4 to the report be endorsed for adoption and publication on the Council's website.
***Referred to Cabinet**

FIP 19/10 REVENUES AND BENEFITS UPDATE REPORT

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation gave details of recent developments in respect of council tax, business rates, council tax reduction and housing benefits. Comparative collection rates as at 31 December 2018 were updated at the meeting in respect of council tax at 83.77% (83.82% 17/18) and business rates 84.28% (84.20% 17/18). Details were given of measures announced in the 2018 Autumn Budget, the setting of the council tax base for 2019/20, the performance of the Benefits Service and roll out of Universal Credit. Members congratulated the team on achieving a ranking of third out of 391 councils in processing benefits claims with no other authority in Kent appearing in the top 20.

Further to Decision No D180061CAB, consideration was given to recommendations to the full Council that schemes for Retail Discount and Council Tax Reduction for 2019/20 be adopted, the "Class C" council tax discount be amended from 1 April 2019 and the long term empty homes premium of 100% be adopted from 1 April 2019.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) the change to the Class C discount be implemented from 1 April 2019 and a report be submitted during 2019/20 regarding any implications;
- (2) the long term empty homes premium of 100% be applied from 1 April 2019;
- (3) a local scheme be adopted for the retail discount to be awarded in line with the discretionary relief policy and MHCLG guidance from 1 April 2019 and the scheme be made available at the full Council meeting;
- (4) delegated authority be given to the Director of Finance and Transformation to grant relief in accordance with the adopted retail discount scheme, subject to any disputed entitlement to relief being referred to the Advisory Board; and
- (5) the Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2019/20 (to be made available at the full Council meeting) be effective from 1 April 2019.

***Referred to Cabinet**

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE

FIP 19/11 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 19/12 DEBTS FOR WRITE OFF

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

Decision Notice D190002MEM

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 £5,000 which had been written-off in accordance with Financial Procedure Rule 18.2 together with cumulative totals of debts in the current and previous financial years and information on budgeted bad debt provision.

RECOMMENDED: That the 30 items shown in the schedule of amounts over £5,000, totalling £57,402 be written-off for the reasons stated within the schedule.

The meeting ended at 9.26 pm