

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 22nd January, 2019

Present: Cllr A K Sullivan (Chairman), Cllr Mrs A S Oakley (Vice-Chairman), Cllr F G Tombolis (Vice-Chairman), Cllr J L Botten, Cllr R W Dalton, Cllr D Keers, Cllr Mrs S L Luck, Cllr M R Rhodes, Cllr Miss S O Shrubsole, Cllr Miss G E Thomas and Cllr T C Walker

Councillors T I B Cannon, N J Heslop and D Lettington were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs J A Anderson, P F Bolt, Mrs F A Kemp, Ms S V Spence, Mr P J Drury and Mr D Still

PART 1 - PUBLIC

OS 19/1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

OS 19/2 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 18 October 2018 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE CABINET

OS 19/3 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 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 2019/20 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 which 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.

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 Committee.

The report indicated 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 response made to the provisional local government finance settlement 2019/20, as set out in Annex 1 to the report, be noted;
- (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.

OS 19/4 CAPITAL PLAN REVIEW 2018/19

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Finance and Transformation which set out progress on the 2018/19 Capital Plan Review and sought endorsement of recommendations to the Cabinet. Particular reference was made to the three schemes added to List A during the year and those recommended for fast-track evaluation and transfer to List B.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) the recommendations of the Finance, Innovation and Property Advisory Board of 9 January 2019, 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 19/5 BREXIT PREPAREDNESS

The report of the Management Team set out a range of initiatives being pursued to ensure the Borough Council was prepared to maintain business continuity in the light of possible disruption related to Brexit issues. It was noted that the key concern for Tonbridge and Malling was potentially major traffic congestion affecting the M20/A20/M26 corridor and surrounding roads in the event of severe delays at Kent ports.

Reference was made to the Council’s involvement with the Kent Resilience Forum (KRF) including preparation and management of all current draft Brexit related plans (Operation Fennel). The report set out proposed actions in respect of a range of issues including the need for remote working of staff, impact on key Council services, options for decision making if Members and staff were unable to attend council meetings due to congestion, any disruption to the local government elections on 2 May, communications and call-handling, and funding for strengthening staff resources in a number of areas.

Members were advised that a bid had been made to the Brexit Contingency Fund, managed by Kent County Council, for funding the purchase of laptops for officers to work from home to maintain essential services. The Chief Executive indicated that the report aimed to reassure Members and the community that the Council had made appropriate contingency arrangements in response to the possible impact of Brexit and for other reasons such as severe weather or the current M20 smart motorway works.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) the report be noted and further updates be provided as more information becomes available; and
- (2) the current urgency provisions in the Council's Constitution and Policy Framework be extended to include "arrangements for decision making during a period of serious and/or unexpected disruption".

MATTERS SUBMITTED FOR INFORMATION**OS 19/6 SCRUTINY REVIEW PROGRAMME 2019/20**

The joint report of the Chief Executive and Chairman of the Committee set out proposals for future reviews to March 2020. The Committee was advised that the review of the Gibson Building was awaiting a response from Kent County Council in respect of the covenants on the building and would be scheduled into the programme as soon as it had been received. Members were invited to submit other suggestions for reviews to the Scrutiny and Partnerships Manager.

RESOLVED: That the report be received and noted.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE**OS 19/7 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

There were no items considered in private.

The meeting ended at 8.46 pm