

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 20th June, 2019

Present: Cllr J L Sergison (Chairman), Cllr Mrs A S Oakley (Vice-Chairman), Cllr F G Tombolis (Vice-Chairman), Cllr M C Base, Cllr T Bishop, Cllr J L Botten, Cllr M D Boughton, Cllr C Brown, Cllr R W Dalton, Cllr M O Davis, Cllr M A J Hood, Cllr A P J Keeley, Cllr M Taylor and Cllr Miss G E Thomas.

Councillors Mrs P A Bates, N J Heslop, D Lettington and M R Rhodes were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs J A Anderson, D Keers, H S Rogers and D Thornewell.

PART 1 - PUBLIC

OS 19/12 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Whilst not a member of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor N Heslop declared an Other Significant Interest in the Tonbridge Castle – Concessionary Users item on the grounds that he was a Board Member for the Bridge Trust which was on the concessionary users list. In addition, his wife was president of the Tonbridge Art Group which also appeared on the concessionary users list. He did not participate in any discussion and withdrew from the meeting.

For reasons of transparency, Councillor M Davis advised that his father was a trustee of one of the organisations that had concessionary use at Tonbridge Castle. However, it was felt that this did not represent a Disclosable Pecuniary or Other Significant Interest and he remained in the meeting and participated in the discussion.

OS 19/13 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 14 March 2019 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

OS 19/14 APPOINTMENT OF CO-OPTED MEMBERS

The Chairman referred to the recently published Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities (attached as an annex to the Scrutiny Review Programme 2019/20) which

recommended the establishment of a co-option scheme to determine how individuals would be co-opted on to committees.

It was therefore proposed by Councillor J Sergison (Chairman), seconded by Councillor F Tombolis (Vice-Chairman) and

RESOLVED: That the co-option of Members be deferred so that a co-option scheme could be considered and/or established to review and determine how individuals would be co-opted on to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE CABINET

OS 19/15 TONBRIDGE CASTLE - CONCESSIONARY USERS

The report of the Director of Central Services and Deputy Chief Executive outlined a review of the concessionary charging regime applicable to Tonbridge Castle. A number of options were set out for further consideration.

It was noted that there were currently 29 organisations, predominantly based in Tonbridge, on the approved concessionary users list (attached as Annex 1 to the report). Of these only six had booked the Castle Chamber in 2019/20.

Members welcomed the opportunity to improve the commercial viability of Tonbridge Castle but also recognised the difficult balance in supporting the local community need. However, on balance it was felt that Tonbridge had a number of other venues that could be used by local organisations at competitive rates. The removal of a concessionary users list also provided a consistent approach with that adopted in the parished areas of the Borough.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) the concessionary user discount list be discontinued; and
- (2) any future discounts be authorised by the Director of Central Services on an exception only basis

OS 19/16 REVIEW OF CUSTOMER SERVICE SURGERIES

The report of the Director of Central Services and Deputy Chief Executive outlined a review of the Customer Service Surgeries at Borough Green, Larkfield and Snodland. A number of options were set out for further consideration.

It was noted that the cost of operating the surgeries was high compared to the low number of weekly enquiries at each location. It was also noted that there were many ways that customers could contact the

Borough Council including on-line, telephone or face-to-face to a customer services representative at Kings Hill or Tonbridge Castle.

Members recognised that the Borough Council continued to face significant financial pressures and had a commitment to identify potential areas of saving. It was felt that the surgeries did not represent value for money given their low number of visitors.

However, the wider community benefits offered by these surgeries, especially for more vulnerable residents, was important. It was indicated that if the Committee was minded to close the surgeries an Equality Impact Assessment could be undertaken to review how the more vulnerable residents would be affected.

RECOMMENDED: That the closure of the Customer Service Surgeries in Borough Green, Larkfield and Snodland on the grounds of financial unsustainability due to the low footfall visiting each site be supported in principle, subject to an Equality Impact Assessment being undertaken and further evidence collected and reported to Cabinet.

MATTERS SUBMITTED FOR INFORMATION

OS 19/17 SCRUTINY REVIEW PROGRAMME 2019/20

The report of the Chief Executive set out details of the Review Programme for the remainder of the calendar year. It was reiterated that the aim of each Scrutiny Review was to explore opportunities to improve service provision that directly affected local communities.

In addition, the recently published Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities was attached for information.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE

OS 19/18 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no items considered in private.

The meeting ended at 8.29 pm