

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 15th January, 2020

Present: Cllr J L Sergison (Chairman), Cllr F G Tombolis (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Mrs J A Anderson, 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 H S Rogers, Cllr M Taylor, Cllr Miss G E Thomas and Cllr D Thornewell.

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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs A S Oakley (Vice-Chairman) and D Keers.

PART 1 - PUBLIC

OS 20/1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

OS 20/2 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 10 October 2019 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE CABINET

OS 20/3 REVIEW OF PUBLIC HEALTH

The report of the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health explored a number of options for consideration regarding the future provision of the One You Kent service within Tonbridge and Malling. Financial and value for money considerations were also set out. It was reported that currently the One You Service received a funding contribution via a Kent County Council Public Health grant, although the amount had gradually reduced over the past few years.

The Director of Public Health at Kent County Council (Andrew Scott-Clark) and the Practice Manager at Snodland surgery (Dr Becky Prince) attended the meeting to share their experiences of the One You Kent service.

Members recognised the value in supporting residents and patients in making lifestyle changes that led to improved health and wellbeing. It was noted that programmes tailored to individuals had a greater chance of achieving successful outcomes. However, Members also recognised the significant financial pressures faced by the Borough Council due to the ongoing reductions in Government funding. As a result, there was in-depth discussion as to whether it was the role of the Borough Council to deliver this programme of work, especially as public health was the responsibility of other statutory bodies.

In addition, there was discussion as to whether the district partnership approach in West Kent was the best option of delivering this service. It was noted that a different model of delivery operated in East Kent which achieved similar health outcomes, although Officers advised that the links with wider Council services, such as housing, might not be in place.

In response to concerns raised regarding the level of funding contribution, the Director of Public Health indicated that Kent County Council would be open to discuss this in more detail. Members expressed concern about making a decision on the level of service provision given the lack of clarity around any potential funding offer. Alternative funding opportunities continued to be explored by the Borough Council.

RECOMMENDED: That a formal request for an increased contribution to cover management costs to enable delivery of the One You Service on a cost neutral basis be submitted to Kent County Council.

OS 20/4 REVIEW OF DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS

The report of the Director of Planning, Housing and Environment Health outlined a number of options for consideration regarding the future provision of the Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) programme and the Better Care Fund (BCF) initiatives within Tonbridge and Malling. Funding for these services and mandatory DFGs was awarded annually through the Better Care fund. Unfortunately, forward planning for services and budgets was challenging as the funding announcement was not made until the end of March and actual spend was demand led.

It was also reiterated that DFGs were a mandatory grant that the Borough Council had to administer through the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996.

Representatives from the Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust and Kent County Council Occupational Therapy shared their experiences of the West Kent Hospital Discharge Scheme and the secondment of an Occupational Therapist (OT) into the Borough Council's Private Sector Housing Team. A number of options to improve the ability to recruit into vacant OT posts and to enable the

ongoing delivery of DFG assessments in a timely manner were outlined by Kent County Council.

Members recognised the value to residents of the initiatives delivered by the Better Care Fund and the Hospital Discharge Scheme which offered patients the opportunity to return to a safe home environment. This in turn created space in hospital wards. In addition, Members recognised that the OT secondment initiative had been successful in reducing waiting times for DFG assessments and were keen to retain this service if possible.

However, the Borough Council continued to face significant financial pressures due to the ongoing reductions in Government funding. As a result, there was in-depth discussion as to whether it was the role of the Borough Council to deliver this programme of work, other than the mandatory obligations, and whether the NHS Trust should provide a greater funding contribution.

The Director of Finance and Transformation explained that the funding provided through the BCF was now insufficient to meet both the mandatory grants and the 'discretionary' programme of initiatives which the Borough Council had been successfully operating. It was expected, all other things being equal, that it would be necessary to provide £125,000 of Borough Council funding to 'top up' the BCF allocation for mandatory grants. Therefore, continuing to run the initiatives would be a further cost which was not factored into budgets across the Medium Term and would increase the funding gap, unless Members identified an alternative option that could be reduced immediately to compensate. It was noted that six months funding from the Housing Assistance Reserve had been factored into the draft Budget for the initiatives in 2020/21. This meant that there was a short period for a further review to be undertaken into funding opportunities and service provision.

Members acknowledged that the Private Sector Housing team and Health team (on behalf of the Borough Council) delivered excellent services for the benefit of residents for both the One You and Better Care Fund initiatives.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) a decision regarding the future provision of the Disabled Facilities Grant programme and Better Care Fund initiatives within Tonbridge and Malling be deferred so that:
 - a formal request for funding be made to Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust for a contribution towards the hospital discharge service; and
 - the impact of the options for the OT service within Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, presented at the meeting by Kent County Council, could be further explored.

- (2) A report setting out these issues in more detail to be reported to a future meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

OS 20/5 CORPORATE STRATEGY 2020-2023

Members reviewed a new draft Corporate Strategy for the period 2020-2023. The updated Strategy retained the same format as the 2017-19 version and focused on the key strategic issues for the Borough Council over the next three years.

Particular reference was made to the achievements made to date which included a new Digital Strategy to help drive service improvements. The Borough Council was fully committed to tackling climate change and Members welcomed the preparation of a Climate Change Strategy by May 2020.

A minor amendment to the Strategy was proposed and agreed, as set out below.

RECOMMENDED: That the updated Corporate Strategy 2020-23 be approved, subject to the following amendment:

- the second theme under 'Our Values and Priorities' be amended to read 'Embracing Effective Partnership Working and Funding'.

OS 20/6 REVENUE ESTIMATES 2020-2021

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 2020/21 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. It was reported that the latter funding stream would be highly unlikely to continue and would be phased out by 2022/23.

Members were advised that the threshold for triggering a referendum on council tax was increased by 2%, or more than 2%, and more than £5. For the purposes of preparing the budget papers and updating the MTFS an increase of £5 in 20/21 had been assumed and each year thereafter. In addition, it was proposed, subject to review each year that the maximum 'annual capital allowance' be increased from £200,000 to £250,000 to reflect cost inflation.

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. The latest projected 'outstanding' funding gap was £320,000.

Finally, reference was made to the recommendation of the Finance, Innovation and Property Advisory Board of 8 January that the budget for Christmas lighting should be capped at £40,000.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) the maximum 'annual capital allowance' be increased from £200,000 to £250,000, subject to review each year;
- (2) delegated authority be granted to the Director of Finance and Transformation, in liaison with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Innovation and Property, to respond to the provisional local government finance settlement as appropriate;
- (3) the draft Revenue Estimates contained in the Booklet be endorsed and commended to the Cabinet for its meeting on 13 February 2020, subject to noting the additional recommendation arising from the Finance, Innovation and Property Advisory Board of 8 January 2020 that the budget for Christmas lighting should be capped at £40,000; and
- (4) the Savings and Transformation Strategy be updated to reflect the latest projected 'outstanding' funding gap as part of the budget setting process.

OS 20/7 CAPITAL PLAN REVIEW

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Finance and Transformation which set out progress on the 2019/20 Capital Plan Review and sought endorsement of recommendations to the Cabinet. Particular reference was made to the ongoing financial challenges faced by the Borough Council as a result of the Government's budget deficit reduction programme which had resulted in reductions in the financial support offered to local government. Despite statements about an end to austerity a challenging financial outlook remained.

Members were reminded that the annual capital allowance was currently set at £200,000. However, due to cost inflation it was proposed, subject to review each year that the maximum 'annual capital allowance' be increased to £250,000 for the period 2020-21 to 2025-26. It was noted that based on current projections, from 2026-27 the Borough Council might need to borrow to fund such expenditure.

Particular reference was made to the schemes on List C (attached as Annex 3 to the report) recommended for evaluation. These included improvement works at Tonbridge Racecourse Sportsground; Leybourne Lakes Country Park and Tonbridge Cemetery Memorial Garden Vaults. Improvement works related to car parking were also recommended for evaluation.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) the maximum 'annual capital allowance' be increased from £200,000 to £250,000, subject to review each year;
- (2) the recommendations to the Finance, Innovation and Property Advisory Board detailed at paragraph 1.3 of the report be endorsed; and
- (3) the Capital Strategy, as set out at Annex 5 to the report, be endorsed for adoption by Council and publication on the Council's website.

DECISIONS TAKEN BY THE COMMITTEE

OS 20/8 DOMESTIC ABUSE SERVICES AND ASSOCIATED BUDGETS - SCOPING REPORT

The report of the Director of Central Services provided an overview of the current work taking place within the Borough to tackle domestic abuse. Potential gaps in service were also identified and set out.

Funding for domestic abuse services and support came from a variety of sources including the Community Safety Partnership, Kent County Council and local charities involved in the sector. Particular reference was made to the work of the Domestic Abuse Volunteer Support Service (DAVSS) who provided face to face support to all victims by using volunteers.

Members discussed the impact of domestic abuse on homelessness and recognised the importance of tackling this issue.

In conclusion, Members suggested that representatives from Kent Police, DAVSS and Clarion Housing be invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee to participate in the discussion around current initiatives, potential additional initiatives, best practice, potential improvements to the services provided and funding options. Members asked that comments from these organisations be submitted in writing in advance of the meeting. Look Ahead who provided support to high risk victims of domestic abuse and managed the refuge in Tonbridge would also be invited to submit written comments.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the content of the report be noted; and
- (2) a further report be submitted to a future meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding the considerations/options identified by Members (summarised above).

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE

OS 20/9 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no items considered in private.

The meeting ended at 10.40 pm