

# TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL



## EXECUTIVE SERVICES

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### Chief Executive

Julie Beilby BSc (Hons) MBA

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**NB - This agenda contains proposals, recommendations and options. These do not represent Council policy or decisions until they have received proper consideration through the full decision making process.**

Contact: Democratic Services  
[committee.services@tmbc.gov.uk](mailto:committee.services@tmbc.gov.uk)

13 July 2021

To: MEMBERS OF THE FINANCE, INNOVATION AND PROPERTY ADVISORY BOARD

(Copies to all Members of the Council)

Dear Sir/Madam

Your attendance is requested at a meeting of the Finance, Innovation and Property Advisory Board to be held in the Council Chamber, Gibson Drive, Kings Hill on Wednesday, 21st July, 2021 commencing at 7.30 pm.

Members of the Committee are reminded that social distancing measures will be in place for this meeting. Other Members are required to participate online via MS Teams.

Information on how to observe the meeting will be published on the Council's website.

Yours faithfully

JULIE BEILBY

Chief Executive

## AGENDA

1. Guidance for the Conduct of Meetings - Coronavirus Regulations

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## **PART 1 - PUBLIC**

2. Apologies for absence 7 - 8

3. Declarations of interest 9 - 10

*Members in any doubt about such declarations are advised to contact Legal or Democratic Services in advance of the meeting*

4. Minutes 11 - 16

To confirm as a correct record the Notes of the meeting of the Finance, Innovation and Property Advisory Board held on 19 May 2021

### **Matters for recommendation to the Cabinet**

5. Discretionary Rate Relief 17 - 36

*The report gives details of renewal applications for discretionary rate relief. Details of new applications for discretionary rate relief are also brought forward for Members' consideration.*

6. Financial Planning and Control 37 - 60

*The report brings together information on three key budget areas – salaries, major operational income streams and investment income. The performance of the key budget areas, together with approved variations to the revenue budget and areas identified through revenue budget monitoring are then summarised to provide an indicative overall budget position for the year. The report also updates Members on capital expenditure and variations that have been agreed in relation to the capital plan.*

7. Customer Services 61 - 68

*This report asks Members to consider proposals for the future opening hours and operation of Customer Services*

### **Matters submitted for Information**

8. Digital Strategy Update 69 - 92

*The report provides an update on progress with the delivery of the Digital Strategy*

9. IT Infrastructure Update 93 - 106

*The report provides an update on progress with the upgrade of IT infrastructure*

10. Revenues and Benefits Update Report 107 - 114

*The report details recent developments in respect of council tax, business rates, council tax reduction and housing benefits.*

11. Business Grants Schemes 115 - 118

*This report details the Government schemes that have assisted businesses and charities affected by the COVID-19 lockdown.*

12. Urgent items 119 - 120

Any other items which the Chairman decides are urgent due to special circumstances and of which notice has been given to the Chief Executive.

**Matters for consideration in Private**

13. Exclusion of Press and Public 121 - 122

The Chairman to move that the press and public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting during consideration of any items the publication of which would disclose exempt information.

**PART 2 - PRIVATE**

**Matters for Recommendation to the Cabinet**

14. Proposed Letting of Unit 29 Martin Square, Larkfield 123 - 126

*This report sets out the proposed letting of Unit 29 Martin Square.*

**Matters submitted for Information**

15. Debts for Write Off 127 - 130

*The report provides details of debts that have been written off*

16. Urgent items 131 - 132

Any other items which the Chairman decides are urgent due to special circumstances and of which notice has been given to the Chief Executive.

## **MEMBERSHIP**

To be advised following the meeting of Council on 13 July 2021

**Measures under which all meetings of the Council will be conducted after 7 May 2021 to comply with coronavirus regulations and/or guidance in place at the time.**

As it is necessary to maintain social distancing to limit the spread of infection the way meetings are conducted will change. This page summarises the process. If you have any questions, please contact Democratic Services via the contact details provided on the agenda.

## **Attending Meetings**

- All meetings of the Council will be held in the Council Chamber, Gibson Drive, Kings Hill until social distancing requirements are no longer necessary.
- To help contain the virus, Members of the public (including anyone exercising a right to speak e.g. at an Area Planning Committee) are encouraged to participate remotely via MS Teams if possible.
- Meetings will also be live streamed via our [YouTube channel](#) to minimise the need for the public to attend in person.
- Any members of the public wishing to attend in person at the Gibson Building can view proceedings via video link in the Committee Room (maximum capacity of 10).
- Prior notification on a “first come first served” basis for entry to the Committee Room will be adopted. Anyone wishing to ‘reserve’ a place in the Committee Room should contact [committee.service@tmbc.gov.uk](mailto:committee.service@tmbc.gov.uk)
- Public speakers for planning committees will be hosted in a separate area and escorted into the Council Chamber for their allocated time. There will be a limit on the number of public speakers at planning committees due to capacity issues arising from social distancing guidelines.
- Public speakers are asked to remain standing to address the Committee to avoid having to clean or change seats between speakers.
- Staff will be available to escort public speakers into the meeting room and to manage any crowd control issues.
- Doors and windows will remain open throughout all meetings to ensure circulation of fresh air. Attendees are advised to dress appropriately.
- All participants are required to wear face coverings when not speaking at meetings.
- Hand sanitiser will be available at entrances.
- All attendees must have the Test and Trace app and scan the QR code at the entrance to the building/meeting room if they wish to participate.
- The toilet facilities at Gibson Building will be open but may be used by only one person at a time.
- Car parking: Attendees are asked to leave a parking space free between vehicles.
- Refreshments will not be available, and all participants are advised to bring their own water or other refreshments.

**Anyone with covid symptoms should not come to the Council offices.**

**Thank you for your assistance.**

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Apologies for absence

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Declarations of interest

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## TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

### FINANCE, INNOVATION AND PROPERTY ADVISORY BOARD

Wednesday, 19th May, 2021

**Present:** Cllr K B Tanner (Vice-Chairman, in the Chair), Cllr G C Bridge, Cllr R I B Cannon, Cllr A E Clark, Cllr Mrs R F Lettington, Cllr Mrs M Tatton and Cllr C J Williams

(Note: As Councillor K King was unable to attend in person and participated via MS Teams, she was unable to vote on any matters)

Councillors Mrs J A Anderson, Mrs S Bell, M D Boughton, V M C Branson, M A Coffin, N J Heslop, M A J Hood, D Lettington, B J Luker, Mrs A S Oakley, W E Palmer, M R Rhodes, J L Sergison and M Taylor participated via MS Teams and joined the discussion when invited to do so by the Chairman in accordance with Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M C Base, T Bishop, C Brown, M O Davis, D W King, K King, H S Rogers, Miss G E Thomas and F G Tombolis

#### PART 1 - PUBLIC

##### **FIP 21/21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

##### **FIP 21/22 MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:** That the notes of the meeting of the Finance, Innovation and Property Advisory Board held on 6 January 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

#### MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE CABINET

##### **FIP 21/23 APPLICATION FOR DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF**

(Decision Notice D210047MEM)

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation provided details of an application for discretionary rate relief in respect of businesses premises in Platt. The Borough Council's policy in respect of discretionary rate relief was set out at Annex 1 to the report.

**RECOMMENDED:** That the application for discretionary rate relief received from Keyboard Print Solutions Limited be rejected as it was contrary to the Borough Council's policy and there was no specific benefit to residents within the Borough over and above the benefit to residents of other areas in which the business operated.

#### **FIP 21/24 FINANCIAL PLANNING AND CONTROL**

(Decision Notice D210048MEM)

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation set out information on the three key budget areas of salaries, major income streams and investment income. Performance of the key budget areas, together with approved variations to the revenue budget and areas identified through revenue budget monitoring, were summarised to provide an indicative provisional outturn position for 2020/21.

In addition, the report provided updates on capital expenditure and variations which had been agreed in relation to the capital plan for the year ended March 2021.

For information, the report set out details of an agreement reached with Tonbridge and Malling Leisure Trust on the transfer of responsibility for all telephony hardware and systems and its replacement to the Trust.

**RECOMMENDED:** That the contents of the report be endorsed and noted.

#### **FIP 21/25 COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER POLICY**

(Decision Notice D210049MEM)

Consideration was given to a proposed Community Asset Transfer Policy to deal with enquiries received from local groups or organisations as to whether they could take control or ownership of a Borough Council owned asset. A draft policy, which identified key objectives and criteria and provided a fair, flexible and transparent system when dealing with these enquiries, was attached at Annex 1 to the report of the Director of Central Services and Deputy Chief Executive.

**RECOMMENDED:** That the Community Asset Transfer Policy, as set out at Annex 1, be adopted.

**FIP 21/26 PROPOSED DISPOSAL OF LAND TO BOROUGH GREEN PARISH COUNCIL**

(Decision Notice D210050MEM)

The report of the Director of Central Services and Deputy Chief Executive provided details of the proposed disposal of two areas of public open space in Borough Green to Borough Green Parish Council.

It was reported that the sites had no borough-wide significance and, as local amenity areas, would be best served by the Parish Council taking over responsibility for them. Covenants would be included in the transfers stating that the land could only be used as public open space. A small saving would be generated by the Borough Council not having to maintain the areas in future.

**RECOMMENDED:** That the two areas of open space at Crowhill and Staleys Acre be transferred to Borough Green Parish Council as detailed in the report.

**FIP 21/27 WEBSITE UPDATE**

(Decision notice D210051MEM)

The joint report of the Director of Finance and Transformation and the Director of Central Services and Deputy Chief Executive provided an update on the progress made with the new website due to be launched on 29 June 2021 and advised that an on-line informal demonstration of the website would be provided to Members on 22 June 2021.

**RECOMMENDED:** That

- (1) the progress with the implementation of the new website be noted; and
- (2) an informal on-line demonstration be offered to Members ahead of the launch date of 29 June 2021.

**FIP 21/28 SPECIAL EXPENSES CONSULTATION**

(Decision Notice D210052MEM)

The report of the Management Team advised of a consultation to be launched in June/July 2021 regarding a potential update to the Special Expenses Policy.

It was reported that the public consultation should include questions related to public conveniences, to reflect the new arrangements for the

provision of these as a concurrent function arising from the transfer of facilities to parish councils, and to the provision of Christmas lighting.

**RECOMMENDED:** That

- (1) the launch of a consultation in June/July 2021 related to the provision of public conveniences and Christmas lighting be noted; and
- (2) delegated authority be given to the Leader, the Cabinet Member for Finance, Innovation and Property and the Chairman of the Finance, Innovation and Property Advisory Board to agree consultation material with the Head of Communications in advance of the launch.

**MATTERS SUBMITTED FOR INFORMATION**

**FIP 21/29 PUBLICATION OF ALLOWANCES PAID TO MEMBERS IN THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2020/21**

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation provided details of the Statement of Allowances paid to Members published in accordance with regulation 15(3) of the Local Authorities (Members Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003.

**RESOLVED:** That the content of the report be noted.

**MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE**

**FIP 21/30 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 21/31 PROPOSED DISPOSAL OF LAND AT WELLAND ROAD,  
TONBRIDGE**

(Decision Notice D210053MEM)

(Reasons: LGA 1972 Sch 12A Paragraph 3 – Financial or business affairs of any particular person)

The report of the Director of Central Services and Deputy Chief Executive set out details of a proposed disposal of land to Hilden Oaks School.

**RECOMMENDED:** That

- (1) approval be given to dispose of the freehold interest in the area shown at Annex 1 to the report to Hilden Oaks School; and
- (2) the remaining area be leased to Hilden Oaks School.

The meeting ended at 9.11 pm

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## TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

### FINANCE, INNOVATION and PROPERTY ADVISORY BOARD

21 July 2021

#### Report of the Director of Finance and Transformation

#### Part 1- Public

**Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken by the Cabinet Member)**

#### **1 APPLICATIONS FOR DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF**

**A report giving details of renewal applications for discretionary rate relief. Details of new applications for discretionary rate relief are also brought forward for Members' consideration.**

#### **1.1 Renewal applications for discretionary rate relief and discretionary rural rate relief**

1.1.1 Members will be aware that discretionary rate relief can be granted (as shown at **[ANNEX 1]**) either as a top-up to mandatory rate relief (in respect of charitable organisations and community amateur sports clubs) or, on its own, to non profit-making organisations that are not charities etc. (and do not therefore qualify for mandatory rate relief).

1.1.2 Members will also be aware that discretionary rural rate relief can be granted either as a top-up to mandatory rural rate relief or, on its own, in cases where mandatory rural rate relief may not be granted (as shown at **[ANNEX 2]**). It is the Council's policy to seek the views of the appropriate parish councils in respect of applications for rural rate relief regarding properties in their areas. However, we have not consulted the parishes in respect of these cases because they are not new applications for relief but renewal requests.

1.1.3 Organisations that had awards of discretionary rate relief time-limited to 31 March 2020 were not required to reapply for the 2020/21 financial year as all were entitled to 100% Expanded Retail Discount.

1.1.4 As this discount has now reduced to 66% effective 1 July 2021, organisations have been invited to re-apply for discretionary relief from that date, and I have listed, at **[ANNEX 3]** and **[ANNEX 4]**, applications that have recently been received.

1.1.5 The annexes detail the levels of discretionary rate relief awarded in 2019/20 and the proposed amount of relief the organisations would receive in 2021/22.

- 1.1.6 For Members' information, under the discretionary relief rules, relief can be backdated to 1 April 2020 providing applications are received before 30 September 2021. The applications were received during June and July this year.
- 1.1.7 There is no longer a direct cost to the Council in awarding relief. However, Members should note that all awards of relief affect the Council's business rate yield; for 2021/22, based on previous criteria and level of applications, it has been estimated that £206,933 discretionary relief will be awarded.
- 1.1.8 In respect of the organisations shown at **[ANNEX 3]**, I have considered the applications and believe that they comply with the policy, and are of particular benefit to the needs of the residents of the Borough. Therefore, there appear to be good grounds for continuing the current level of discretionary rate relief in all cases.
- 1.1.9 In respect of the organisations shown at **[ANNEX 4]**, I have considered the applications for Lucky Hands Ltd and Mr Subasharan and believe that they comply with the policy, and are of particular benefit to the needs of the residents of the Borough. Therefore, there appear to be good grounds for continuing the current level of discretionary rate relief in these cases. In respect of the other applications, these properties are now entitled to 100% mandatory relief. Primary legislation has not been updated as yet, so Government expects the current award of 50% relief to be 'topped up' to 100% as per **[ANNEX 5]**. The proposed relief amounts shown at **[ANNEX 4]** therefore reflect the additional 50% discretionary relief.
- 1.1.10 The Council's own financial position is, of course, still very challenging and it is important to recognise that whilst it may be possible to provide the level of assistance at the current time, it may not be sustainable into the future. Accordingly, Members might consider that, when writing to the organisations concerned, it would be prudent to advise the organisations that there could be a reduction in the level of relief awarded by the Council in the future should further applications for relief be made.
- 1.1.11 Members are **REQUESTED** to **RECOMMEND** to Cabinet that, in respect of the re-applications for relief as shown at **[ANNEX 3]** and **[ANNEX 4]**, discretionary rate relief be awarded with effect from 1 July 2021 and time-limited to 31 March 2023.

## **1.2 New applications for discretionary rate relief**

- 1.2.1 Since the last meeting of the Board, I have received one new application for rate relief that has reached a stage where it is ready for Members' consideration. I give below further details of this application.

**1.2.2 Malling District Scout Council, Scout Camp Site Comp Wood, Seven Mile Lane, Offham, West Malling, Kent, TN15 8QY. Rateable Value £1,100.**

1.2.3 The applicant is a registered charity and I have therefore granted 80% mandatory rate relief. It is for Members to decide whether discretionary relief should be granted as well.

1.2.4 The property is used to provide a venue for development activities for young people aged 6 to 18 and to occasionally host meetings of the district committee.

1.2.5 The Valuation Office has recently entered the assessment into the rating list with effect from 1 April 2017; however, as previously mentioned, there are restrictions on how far back relief can be backdated. With 100% Expanded Retail Discount in place from 1 April 2020 to 30 June 2021, any award of relief will therefore be effective from 1 July 2021.

1.2.6 An award of 20% discretionary relief with no time limit seems appropriate as this would be consistent with similar applications that have been received (Decision No. D180029MEM refers).

1.2.7 Should Members decide to award the maximum 20% 'top up' relief, the applicant will receive £140.10 for the period 1 July 2021 to 31 March 2022.

1.2.8 Members are **REQUESTED** to consider the application and make an appropriate **RECOMMENDATION** to Cabinet regarding discretionary rate relief.

### **1.3 Legal Implications**

1.3.1 As the granting of relief is a discretionary action, the only implication would be a challenge by way of judicial review if an organisation were unhappy with a decision. Such a challenge can succeed only when the Council behaves unreasonably.

### **1.4 Financial and Value for Money Considerations**

1.4.1 In respect of all applications for rate relief, the financial considerations of granting relief are as set out in the body of the report. If relief is not granted, there is a beneficial impact on the Council's finances. This should not prevent each application being considered on its own merits however, as there must be some degree of consistency to prevent a legal challenge.

### **1.5 Risk Assessment**

1.5.1 The only risk that I am aware of is a legal challenge to the Council's decisions (see above). This is unlikely.

## 1.6 Equality Impact Assessment

- 1.6.1 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

## 1.7 Policy Considerations

- 1.7.1 Community

## 1.8 Recommendations

- 1.8.1 Members are **REQUESTED** to **RECOMMEND** to Cabinet that, in respect of the re-applications for relief as shown at **[ANNEX 3]**, discretionary rate relief be awarded with effect from 1 July 2021 and time-limited to 31 March 2023.
- 1.8.2 Members are **REQUESTED** to **RECOMMEND** to Cabinet that, in respect of the re-applications for relief as shown at **[ANNEX 4]**, discretionary rate relief be awarded with effect from 1 July 2021 and time-limited to 31 March 2023.
- 1.8.3 Members are **REQUESTED** to consider the application from Malling District Scout Council and make an appropriate **RECOMMENDATION** to Cabinet regarding discretionary rate relief.

The Director of Finance & Transformation confirms that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and policy Framework.

Background papers:

contact: Glen Pritchard  
01732 876146

Applications for relief from the organisations referred to in the main body of the report received since May 2021 and held in Financial Services.

Sharon Shelton  
Director of Finance and Transformation

## **DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF POLICY 2021/22**

### **Background**

The Council is empowered to award Discretionary Rate Relief (DRR) under S.47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988. This may be awarded as a 'top-up' to those organisations qualifying for Mandatory rate relief (mandatory relief amounts to 80% of the rates due) or up to 100% DRR to other organisations who do not qualify for mandatory relief.

The Council wishes to promote equality between organisations when granting discretionary rate relief. In deciding whether to award rate relief it will take into account previous awards that have been made to similar organisations/bodies.

Awards of rate relief will be reviewed on an annual basis by Members of the Finance, Innovation & Property Advisory Board unless a longer award date has been previously agreed.

The Council may also award relief to any local ratepayer to encourage new business and investment as well as to support local shops or community services.

Any relief granted is used to reduce the amount that the organisation is required to pay in Non-Domestic Rates, commonly known as Business Rates.

### **Charity Relief – Mandatory Relief (80%)**

Section 43 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 allows mandatory relief (80%) to be granted on premises if the ratepayer is a charity or trustees for a charity and the premises are wholly or mainly used for charitable purposes. From 1st April 2008 Section 45A of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, as amended, allows for no charge to be made in respect of unoccupied premises where it appears that when next in use it will be wholly or mainly used for those purposes.

#### **Charity registration**

Charities are defined by s.67 (10) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 as being an institution or other organisation established for charitable purposes only or by persons administering a trust established for charitable purposes only.

### **Community Amateur Sports Club (CASC) – Mandatory Relief (80%)**

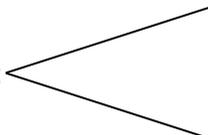
The legislation was amended by the Local Government Act 2003 to include a club/organisation with CASC (Community Amateur Sports Club) status. They automatically receive 80 per cent mandatory relief which is fully paid for by the Government.

### **Non profit-making bodies - Discretionary Relief (20% Top-up)**

**Registered as a charity or CASC - up to 20% top-up relief can be granted to:**

- Sports clubs if registered as Community Amateur Sports Clubs (CASC)
- Recreational facilities, sports grounds and playing fields occupied by charities
- Applications where special considerations may apply

**Discretionary 'Top-up' – up to 20% paid by:**



40% TMBC  
9% Kent County  
1% Kent Fire

50% Government

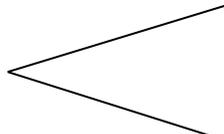
### **Discretionary Relief (up to 100%)**

Section 69 of the Localism Act 2011 allows a local authority to grant discretionary relief in any circumstances where it feels fit.

The provisions are designed to give authorities flexibility in granting relief where it is felt that to do so would be of benefit generally to the area and be reasonable given the financial effect to Council Tax payers.

The Council has a duty to carefully consider every application on its merits, taking into account the contribution that the organisation makes to the amenities of the area.

**Discretionary – up to 100% paid by:**



40% TMBC  
9% Kent County  
1% Kent Fire

50% Government

It is acknowledged that if a club or organisation has no recognised accreditation it is still entitled to apply for up to 100% discretionary rate relief and the officers will use this criteria to assess whether there are specific circumstances which should be taken into account in making a decision to award rate relief to such an applicant.

### **Factors to be used in determining awards of Discretionary Rate Relief**

In determining awards of relief, the Council will bear in mind all the facts of each case including the following factors;

- The hereditament must be used wholly or mainly for the purpose of the organisation.
- There must be evidence in the Constitution or Articles of Association that the organisation is non-profit making.
- Membership or access is open to all sections of the community. Membership fees should be set so as to be accessible to people on low incomes.
- The facilities are made available to other sections of the community, e.g. schools.

- The organisation provides training/education or coaching to its members and/or the local community.
- There is suitable evidence of safeguarding and equality measures in place for its members or those using the facilities, e.g. for safeguarding children or vulnerable adults and an inclusion policy.
- Consideration will be given to the income and expenditure accounts for as many financial years as deemed necessary and must be provided on request or the application will be refused. Surpluses must be reinvested in the organisation and there must be no substantial reserves which would suggest that support is not necessary.
- Consideration will be given to all sources of income.
- If the organisation operates a bar, it will need to prove that its profits are used solely for the benefit of the organisation and its members.
- The organisation must be a local organisation.
- Consideration will be given to the impact of the organisation on other local businesses.
- Consideration will be given to the use of the property and if it appears to be proportionate to the size of the property.
- The ratepayer must occupy the premises (no discretionary rate relief will be granted for unoccupied premises)
- The organisation must directly benefit Tonbridge & Malling residents and must relieve the Council of providing similar facilities.

In addition, relief may also be granted if the applicant body caters for special needs (see below).

### **Meaning of 'special needs'**

Does the organisation cater for a section of the community which the Authority considers particularly deserving of support, e.g. persons with disabilities, persons with learning difficulties, the very young or the very old?

Where the applicant body provides such special needs or supplies facilities that would not otherwise be available in the area or supports the Council's key priorities, the maximum amount of relief will generally be awarded, subject to the following;

### **Restrictions on the granting of relief**

In determining whether relief should be awarded, the Council will be inclined not to grant relief or to limit the amount of relief awarded in the following cases.

- As a general rule, the Council is unlikely to grant relief to national charities located within the Council's area unless there is some specific benefit to the residents of Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council over and above the benefit to the residents of other areas in which the charity operates;
- The Council is unlikely to grant relief to charity shops or shops operated by the trading arms of charities;
- Where an applicant body is a national organisation but operates only in part of the Council's area, any relief that may be awarded will generally be reduced pro rata the population of the area of the Borough that receives benefit from that

organisation. This restriction will not generally apply if the body is not a national body and has been established to benefit only a part of the Council's area;

- Membership of the organisation is restricted by the amount of the subscription or other limiting factors which preclude the whole of the public from having effective access to the organisation's activities;
- A substantial portion of the organisation's income comes from bar receipts (unless profits are used solely for the benefit of the organisation and its members);
- A club is run for political purposes;
- There would be duplication of financial assistance where grant aid of any other kind is being given by the local authority directly or under Section 48 of the Local Government Act 1985;
- The applicant is a Housing Association.

### **Special cases**

The Council recognises that there will be occasions when an applicant body does not satisfy the above criteria. The criteria are not restrictive and nothing in them shall be taken as restricting the Council's ability to depart from its general policy as to the granting of relief if it sees fit to do so bearing in mind the facts of the case

### **Application Process**

Ratepayers will be obliged to make a written application to the Council, for which forms are provided.

All awards of Discretionary Rate Relief will be subject to Member approval.

In all cases, the Council will notify the ratepayer of decisions made.

Where an application is successful, the following will be notified to them in writing;

- the amount of relief granted and the date from which it has been granted;
- the date on which any relief granted will end;
- the new chargeable amount;
- the details of any planned review dates and the notice that will be given in advance of a change to the level of relief granted; and
- a requirement that the applicant should notify the authority of any change in circumstances that may affect entitlement to relief.

Where relief is not granted then the following information will be provided, again in writing;

- an explanation of the decision within the context of the authority's statutory duty; and
- an explanation of the appeal rights

Relief is to be granted from the beginning of the financial year in which the decision is made. Since 1997 decisions can be made up to 6 months after the end of the financial year for which the application was made.

Under the Local Government Finance Act 1992, there is no right of appeal against the Council's use of discretionary powers. However, the Council operate an internal review process and will accept a customer's request for an appeal of its decision.

All requests must be made in writing to the Revenues Manager, within one month of the Council's decision, and should state the reasons why the ratepayer is aggrieved with the decision of the council. New information may be submitted at this stage to support the ratepayer's appeal. Requests will be considered by Members of the Finance, Innovation & Property Advisory Board.

If an unsuccessful applicant decides to make a request for an internal review they will still need to continue to pay their rates bill. If the request is successful, the rates bill will then be adjusted.

For ratepayers who remain aggrieved and wish to pursue the matter further, the next step is to make an application for judicial review.

### **Affordability**

Discretionary Relief is not a matter of right. The Council is entitled through this policy to determine different levels of discretionary relief according to the nature and circumstances of individual organisations.

The above criteria will be subject to budgetary provision being available. Although the Council will aim to achieve equality between organisations in terms of the level of relief that it grants, this might not always be possible. The Council has the right, subject to giving the requisite notice required by law, to vary the level of relief that it has previously granted either in respect of a particular organisation or in respect of a class of organisation or to all organisations in receipt of relief. The Council also has the right to apportion rate relief based on the levels of budget available at the time of applying.

**Decision Form**

**Name of Organisation:**

**Reason for Application:**

**Liability**.....

**Discretionary Rate Relief Awarded**

**YES**

**NO**

**If yes Amount Awarded**.....

Awarding Discretionary Rate Relief – Factors Considered by Members of the Finance, Innovation & Property Advisory Board

Reason for refusing Discretionary Rate Relief, if applicable

Signed.....

Dated.....

## Policy in Respect of Rural Rate Relief

### Introduction

Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council recognises the importance of local facilities to the life of rural communities. To this end the Council supports the legislation that allows the Council to:

- Grant rate relief to village shops, post offices, petrol filling stations and public houses (mandatory rural rate relief).
- Allows the Council, at its discretion, to top up any mandatory rural rate relief that has been granted (discretionary rural rate relief).
- Permits the Council, at its discretion, to grant relief to other businesses in rural areas where the use of premises occupied by the businesses is of benefit to the local community but where the business does not qualify for mandatory rural rate relief (discretionary rural rate relief).

### The legislative background

Rural rate relief – whether mandatory or discretionary – may be granted only if a property is located within a rural settlement. Rural settlements are defined by reference to the Council's Rural Settlement List. The List is available for inspection at the Council's office at Kings Hill.

### The rural settlements

As at September 2020, the following are defined as rural settlements:

Addington	Golden Green/Barnes St	Platt
Addington Clearway	Hadlow Village	Plaxtol
Aylesford Village	Hale Street	Ryarsh
Basted	Herne Pound	Shipbourne
Birling	Hildenborough Village	Snoll Hatch
Blue Bell Hill	Ightham	Stansted
Burham	Ivy Hatch	Trottiscliffe
Crouch	Little Mill	Wateringbury
Dunks Green	Mereworth Village	West Malling
Eccles	Offham	West Peckham
East Malling Village	Oldbury	Wouldham
East Peckham Village	Peckham Bush	Wrotham
Fairseat	Peter's Village	Wrotham Heath

### Mandatory rural rate relief

Mandatory rural rate relief can be granted to the following types of property:

Type of property	Rateable value limit £
General stores	8,500
Post offices	8,500
Public houses	12,500
Petrol filling stations	12,500
Food shops	8,500

Where a property qualifies for mandatory rural rate relief, then the relief is given at the rate of 50% of the rates liability for the property.

If the rateable value of a property exceeds the rateable value limit, then no mandatory rural rate relief may be granted.

### **Discretionary rural rate relief**

Discretionary rural rate relief may be granted either to top up an award of mandatory rural rate relief or where the property does not qualify for mandatory rural rate relief. Where the discretionary relief tops up mandatory relief, the discretionary relief added to the mandatory relief cannot exceed the total rates due for the property. Discretionary relief on its own cannot be granted for a property where the rateable value for the property exceeds £16,500.

This following policy sets out the guidelines that the Council will follow in considering whether to grant discretionary rural rate relief.

## **The policy**

### **Policy objectives**

In formulating this policy, the Council wishes to maintain the diversity of local shops available to the residents of Tonbridge & Malling who live in rural areas by building on the provisions of the mandatory rural rate relief scheme.

### **General considerations**

Although all applications will be entertained, the Council wishes to target relief primarily at properties that are providing essential facilities for the local community, e.g. general stores, post offices and food shops (eg butchers and bakers), where the number of such facilities in any settlement is limited and mandatory rural rate relief has been awarded. Further references to shops in this policy should be read accordingly.

The Council will consider granting relief to other businesses that are demonstrably important to the life of the community, such as a sole public house or petrol filling station, primarily serving the local catchment area.

As a general rule, the Council takes the view that the amount of relief that it would grant should decrease as the number of shops in a rural settlement increases.

The Council recognises that a number of rural settlements have already lost all of their shops. In recognition of this fact, the Council might be willing to consider granting discretionary rate relief of 50%, on top of mandatory rate relief of 50%, or 100% discretionary rate relief, in respect of businesses opening in such settlements. The Council would be willing to grant such relief for the first two calendar years from the date the business commences trading.

### **Discretionary relief (top-up relief) in cases where mandatory rural rate relief applies**

In respect of shops (general stores and food shops) and post offices, the Council will generally be willing to grant discretionary relief of 30% (in addition to 50% mandatory rural rate relief) where the shop or post office is the only such property within the rural settlement and it has already qualified for mandatory relief.

In respect of public houses and petrol filling stations, the Council will consider granting discretionary relief of 30% (in addition to 50% mandatory rural rate relief) where the public house or petrol filling station is the only such property within the rural settlement and it has already qualified for mandatory relief.

**Discretionary rate relief in cases where mandatory rural rate relief does not apply**

Where the property would, but for its rateable value, qualify for mandatory rural rate relief, the Council will consider granting discretionary relief of 80%.

Where the property is not the only property of its type within the rural settlement, and is therefore excluded from gaining mandatory rural rate relief, the Council will consider granting 60% relief where there are two such properties and 40% relief where there are three such properties (i.e. each property would receive either 60% or 40% relief). The Council will not normally grant relief where there are more than three such properties.

**Limitations**

As a general rule, the Council will not normally consider granting relief for a particular property where the total of the mandatory and discretionary relief sought by the applicant would exceed 80% of the rates bill.

**Procedure**

The Council will give consideration to any application for discretionary rate relief from a business operating in a settlement within a rural area.

**Consultation**

It is the Council's intention that parish councils should play a role in the decision making process on applications for relief. Therefore, before making a decision on whether relief should be granted in any particular case, the Borough Council will seek the views of the appropriate parish council.

**Financial considerations**

The Council, in formulating this policy, also bears in mind the cost of any relief granted to the residents of the Borough as a whole.

Applicants for discretionary rural rate relief should note that the cost of relief falls partly on the Council. As such, in determining the level of relief to be granted, the Council must have regard to its budgetary position. Although the Council will aim to achieve equality between organisations in terms of the level of relief that it grants, this might not always be possible. The Council has the right, subject to giving the requisite notice required by law, to vary the level of relief that it has previously granted either in respect of a particular organisation or in respect of a class of organisation or to all organisations in receipt of relief.

**Interaction with other reliefs**

Where a property is eligible for mandatory rural rate relief and small business rate relief, it shall receive rural rate relief.

Where a property is eligible for mandatory rural rate relief, mandatory charitable rate relief and small business rate relief, it shall receive charitable rate relief.

**Period of relief**

Any grant of relief shall normally be given for a fixed period not exceeding three years.

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<b>Scout/Guides Groups</b>			
<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Relief awarded 2019/20</b>	<b>Proposed relief to be awarded 2021/22</b>
1st Ditton Scout Group	R/O 18 New Road, Ditton, Aylesford, Kent, ME20 6AD	N/A*	£87.55
* Did not reapply for relief			<b>£87.55</b>
<b>CASC Organisations</b>			
<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Relief awarded 2019/20</b>	<b>Proposed relief to be awarded 2021/22</b>
Borough Green Bowls Club	Dryland Road, Borough Green	20% Top Up	£154.20
Hadlow Cricket Club	Common Road, Hadlow	20% Top Up	£39.21
Hadlow Bowls Club	School Lane, Hadlow	20% Top Up	£63.38
Townsend Hook Bowls Club	North Downs View, Paddlesworth Road, Snodland	20% Top Up	£156.81
Leybourne Cricket Club	Rectory Lane North, Leybourne	20% Top Up	£156.81
Wrotham Bowls Club	R/O Bull Hotel, Bull Lane, Wrotham	20% Top Up	£58.15
Tonbridge Bowling Club	Tonbridge Farm, Darenth Avenue, Tonbridge	20% Top Up	£172.50
Riverside (Tonbridge) Bowls Club	Avebury Avenue, Tonbridge	20% Top Up	£54.23
Ditton Bowls Club	Adj Community Centre, Kiln Barn Road, Ditton	20% Top Up	£120.22
Plaxtol Cricket Club	School Lane, Plaxtol	20% Top Up	£45.74
Tonbridge Cricket Club	Darenth Avenue, Tonbridge	20% Top Up	£256.13
Plaxtol And Shipbourne Tennis Club	Upper Green Road, Shipbourne	20% Top Up	£34.63
Hildenborough Tennis Club	Riding Lane, Hildenborough	20% Top Up	£48.35
Angel (Tonbridge) Indoor Bowls Association	Angel Bowling Club, Avenue Le Puy, Tonbridge	20% Top Up	£836.35
Tonbridge Canoe Club	New Wharf Road, Tonbridge	20% Top Up	£209.09
			<b>£2,405.80</b>

<b>Other applications</b>			
<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Relief awarded 2019/20</b>	<b>Proposed relief to be awarded 2021/22</b>
Trustees Of Malling Memorial Institute	9 High Street, West Malling	20% Top Up	£51.62
Mereworth Village Hall Committee	The Sports Pavilion, The Street, Mereworth	20% Top Up	£52.92
Ditton Church Pre-School	New Road, Ditton	20% Top Up	£326.70
Rochester Indoor Skatepark Club	Unit 1b, 1, Laker Road, Rochester Airport	20% Top Up	£1,012.76
Happy Faces Pre-School Ltd	Hectorage Road, Tonbridge	20% Top Up	£326.70
Wateringbury Sports & Recreation Field Association	The Pavilion, Fields Lane, Wateringbury	20% Top Up	£37.24
Addington Recreation Ground	Park Road, Addington	20% Top Up	£129.37
St Georges Pre-School Committee	R/O St Georges CPS, Old London Road, Wrotham	20% Top Up	£139.36
Rock Uk Adventure Centres Ltd	Caroty Wood, Higham Lane, Tonbridge	20% Top Up	£1,986.32
West Kent Mind	3 St Marys Road, Tonbridge	20% Top Up	£46.39
Poppy Pre-School Ltd	Teapot Lane, Aylesford	20% Top Up	£829.81
Roselands Preschool Higham Wood Limited	Higham School Road, Tonbridge	20% Top Up	£692.60
Tonbridge & Malling Leisure Trust	Tonbridge Swimming Pool	20% Top Up	£5,096.49
Tonbridge & Malling Leisure Trust	Angel Centre, Tonbridge	20% Top Up	£3,293.12
Tonbridge & Malling Leisure Trust	Larkfield Leisure Centre	20% Top Up	£11,303.75
Tonbridge & Malling Leisure Trust	Poultwood Golf Course	20% Top Up	£1,829.51
Snodland Community Association	Snodland Community Centre, Paddlesworth Road	20% Top Up	£326.70
East Malling Centre	The St James Centre, Chapman Way, East Malling	20% Top Up	£243.06
Tonbridge Juddians R F C	Old Juddians Rugby FC, The Slade, Tonbridge	100% Disc	£2,324.34
K Sports Management Ltd	Cobdown Sports & Social Club, Station Road, Ditton	90% Disc	£8,115.18
			<b>£38,163.94</b>

<b>Rural Rate Relief Applications</b>			
<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Relief awarded 2019/20</b>	<b>Proposed relief to be awarded 2021/22</b>
Mr N Stannard	192 Tonbridge Road, Wateringbury	50% Top Up*	£1,191.49
Mr Bankim Vyas & Mrs Rupal Vyas	47 Bow Road, Wateringbury	50% Top Up*	£1,229.92
Lucky Hands Ltd	30 Swan Street, West Malling	40% Discretionary	£764.17
Mr Subasharan	4-6 The Broadway, High Street, Hadlow	80% Discretionary	£1,528.34
			<b>£4,713.92</b>
<b>* Now entitled to 100% mandatory relief</b>			

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# **ANNEX A: AUTUMN STATEMENT 2016: 100 % Rural Rate Relief Available to Eligible Business Ratepayers**

## **Fact sheet**

### **About this fact sheet**

1. This fact sheet is intended to support local authorities in administering the relief for rural businesses announced in the Autumn Statement on 23 November 2016. This relief applies to England only. Enquiries on this relief should be addressed to [ndr@communities.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:ndr@communities.gsi.gov.uk)

### **Introduction**

2. At the Autumn Statement on 23 November 2016 the Chancellor of the Exchequer confirmed that rural rate relief will double from 50% to 100% from 1 April 2017.
3. The Government intends to amend the relevant primary legislation to require local authorities to grant 100% mandatory rural rate relief to take effect from 1 April 2018. However, before the requirement to grant mandatory relief comes into force we expect local authorities to use their local discount powers to grant 100% rural rate relief to eligible ratepayers from 1 April 2017.

### **The rural rate relief scheme – background**

4. The rural rate relief scheme was introduced to help protect the last retail outlets and similar services in rural settlements with a population of less than 3,000.
5. Under the scheme, the following businesses in designated rural settlements are entitled to 50 per cent mandatory rate relief:
  - the sole village shop or post office with a rateable value of up to £8,500
  - the sole public house or petrol station with a rateable value of up to £12,500
6. Local authorities have a discretionary power to top up the mandatory relief to 100 per cent.

### **Who is eligible for 100% rural rate relief?**

7. Anyone who is entitled to the mandatory Rural Rate Relief as above will be eligible for the increased level of discount off their rates bill.

### **When does this happen?**

8. The revised reliefs will apply from 1 April 2017.

### **How will the relief be provided?**

9. For 2017-18, local authorities will be expected to use their discretionary relief powers (under section 47(3) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 to grant the revised rural rate relief in line with the eligibility criteria set out in this document.
10. Central Government will reimburse local government for the actual cost to them under the rates retention scheme of granting the additional relief.
11. Local authorities will be able to provide an estimate of their likely total cost for providing the relief in their National Non Domestic Rate Return 1 (NNDR1) for 2017. A reconciliation exercise will be conducted based on NNDR 3 returns in the usual way.
12. The relief will be subject to state aid de minimis levels in the normal way.

## TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

### FINANCE, INNOVATION and PROPERTY ADVISORY BOARD

21 July 2021

#### Report of the Director of Finance and Transformation

#### Part 1- Public

**Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken by the Cabinet Member)**

#### **1 FINANCIAL PLANNING AND CONTROL**

The report brings together information on three key budget areas – salaries, major operational income streams and investment income. The performance of the key budget areas, together with approved variations to the revenue budget and areas identified through revenue budget monitoring are then summarised to provide an indicative overall budget position for the year. The report also updates Members on capital expenditure and variations that have been agreed in relation to the capital plan.

#### **1.1 Salaries Monitoring Statement**

1.1.1 Appended for information at **[Annex 1]** is a budgetary control statement that compares actual expenditure on basic salaries, temporary staff, overtime, superannuation and national insurance to the end of June 2021, with the appropriate proportion of the original estimate for 2021/22.

1.1.2 Members will note that management savings to the end of June are **£52,050 more** than anticipated.

#### **1.2 Income Monitoring Statement**

1.2.1 Appended for information at **[Annex 2]** is a budgetary control statement that compares actual income from fees and charges to the end of June 2021, with the appropriate proportion of the original estimate for 2021/22.

1.2.2 Members will note that overall income to the end of June is **£87,150 less** than anticipated, a contributing factor being the third national lockdown and delay in the relaxation of Covid-19 restrictions.

### 1.3 Treasury Management

#### *Core Funds*

- 1.3.1 The Council achieved a return of 0.33% on its core fund investments for the period ended June 2021, compared to the 3-month LIBID benchmark of minus 0.04%. Investment income achieved for the period ended June 2021 is £15,000.
- 1.3.2 At the end of June 2021 the value of core funds stood at £20m. This was invested at an average rate of 0.29% and an average maturity of 156 days.

#### *Cash Flow Funds*

- 1.3.3 The Council achieved a return of 0.04% on its cash flow investments for the period ended June 2021, compared to a 7-day LIBID benchmark of minus 0.08%. Investment income achieved for the period ended June 2021 is £2,100.
- 1.3.4 At the end of June 2021 the value of cash flow investments stood at £21.4m. This was invested at an average rate of 0.04% and an average maturity of 5 days.

#### *Property Investment Funds*

- 1.3.5 Property funds pay dividends quarterly based on activity to the end of March, June, September and December. At the time of writing the Council had yet to receive notification of the dividends to be paid for the quarter ended June.
- 1.3.6 At the end of June 2021, the sum of £5m was invested in property investment funds spread across three different funds.

#### *All Investments*

- 1.3.7 The combined return figure for core and cash flow investments is compared with the original estimate for 2021/22 later in this report.

### 1.4 Approved Variations to the Revenue Budget

- 1.4.1 Listed below are the variations that have been agreed to the revenue budget. It has been based upon those variations approved by Portfolio Holders, Committees, Cabinet and Council up to the meeting of Cabinet on 6 July 2021.
- 1.4.2 General Purposes Committee 23 March 2021
- Approved various changes to Building Control and Planning Technical teams on the cessation of the shared Building Control Service with Sevenoaks District Council (SDC). The changes will result in growth of £19,349 per annum, that is more than offset by the partnership payment of £45,000 paid to SDC. The net saving of £25,651 is to be ring fenced to meet additional costs in Customer Services and membership of Local Authority Building Control.

#### 1.4.3 Finance, Innovation and Property Advisory Board 19 May 2021

- Recommended the disposal of a small piece of amenity land at Welland Road, Tonbridge in the sum of £5,000.

#### 1.4.4 Communities and Housing Advisory Board 25 May 2021

- Recommended the provision of electric vehicle charging points in Council car parks at an annualised capital renewals cost of £12,000.
- Recommended that £75,342 of the additional Homeless Support Grant to be received in 2021/22 be used to fund a temporary Homelessness Prevention Officer post for two years and the remaining £58,637 be used to offset increased temporary accommodation costs. Please also see paragraph 1.6.2.

#### 1.4.5 Street Scene and Environment Services Advisory Board 8 June 2021

- Recommended that a formal consultation be undertaken in respect of the proposed one-year trial of a new Tonbridge Town Centre Residents Season Ticket scheme. Should the consultation result in the trial being implemented, the scheme could generate additional income of £29,000.

#### 1.4.6 General Purposes Committee 16 June 2021

- Approved the regrading of the Private Sector Housing Initiatives Officer post at an annual cost of £3,870 (£1,000 reflected in Salaries Monitoring Statement above).
- Approved various changes to Planning Services with immediate effect. The changes will result in short term growth of £60,095 per annum for two years and ongoing growth of £6,130 per annum thereafter. It is intended to use section 106 monitoring fees (as reported to Planning and Transportation Board on 11 November 2020) as well as management savings and funding from the Homes England "Garden communities" programme to fund the increased costs.

#### 1.4.7 Planning and Transportation Advisory Board 29 June 2021

- Recommended that the current local plan be withdrawn, reviewed, refreshed and resubmitted. This is expected to cost in the region of £650,000 to £750,000, spread over three years. Third party expenditure on the local plan is funded from the Local Development Framework Reserve which receives a current annual contribution of £80,000. The estimated cost of resubmission exceeds the anticipated levels in the reserve over the next three years and additional amounts will need to be set aside in the reserve. This will be addressed within the wider context of the review of the Council's finances over the coming months.

1.4.8 A summary of the approved variations to the revenue budget is given in the table below.

<b>Description</b>	<b>Paragraph Reference</b>	<b>2021/22 £</b>	<b>2022/23 £</b>
Building Control Shared Service	1.4.2	-	-
Amenity Land, Welland Road	1.4.3	(5,000)	-
Electric Vehicle Charging Points	1.4.4	-	12,000 *
Homeless Support Grant	1.4.4	(58,650)	-
Tonbridge Residents Season Ticket	1.4.5	-	(29,000)
Private Sector Housing Initiatives Officer	1.4.6	2,900	3,900 *
Planning Services	1.4.6	-	-
Local Plan	1.4.7	-	-
<b>Total</b>		<b>(60,750)</b>	<b>(13,100)</b>

Those items marked with an asterisk\* will need to be considered and reflected as appropriate in updating the Medium Term Financial Strategy beyond 2022/23.

## 1.5 Virements

1.5.1 There have been no virements made to the original revenue estimates for 2021/22 reported to Council on 23 February 2021.

## 1.6 Revenue Budget Monitoring

1.6.1 As part of our budget monitoring and control arrangements Chief Officers confirm that budgetary control has been undertaken within the Service areas under their control each month and at the same time highlight those areas, if any, which they wish to bring to the attention of the Director of Finance and Transformation. In addition, the Accountancy Section also monitors budgetary performance across the whole range of services during the year. At the time of writing this report the following areas have been brought to my attention.

1.6.2 Homeless caseload has continued to increase since the 2021/22 budget was prepared in Autumn 2020. In addition, measures expected to reduce expenditure on temporary accommodation (TA), for example, conversion of houses at Pembury Road, Tonbridge into TA units, has been delayed. Should caseload remain at current levels, the estimated net increased cost in respect of TA in 2021/22 will be around £300,000.

1.6.3 In response to anti-social behaviour, the Council has employed a private security company to open/close the gates at Holly Hill public open space near Snodland at an annual cost of £7,300.

- 1.6.4 The Non-Domestic Rating (Public Lavatories) Bill received Royal Assent in April 2021. As a result the Council received a refund of £18,900 in respect of business rates paid in 2020/21.
- 1.6.5 The Council Tax Support administration grant awarded by the MHCLG for 2021/22 is £17,800 more than budgeted.
- 1.6.6 The Council is to receive a local council tax support (LCTS) grant in the sum of £224,557 in recognition of the impact of LCTS on council tax income.
- 1.6.7 Kent County Council are to pay, subject to confirmation, in the order of £200,000 in recognition of the increased council tax yield as a result of changes made to council tax discounts and exemptions.
- 1.6.8 An agreement has been reached with Tonbridge and Malling Leisure Trust whereby the Council pay a capital grant in lieu of a capital renewals provision in return for the transfer of responsibility for all telephony hardware and systems and its replacement to the Trust delivering an annual revenue saving of £3,530.
- 1.6.9 Estimated increased costs of £120,000 as a result of the engagement of solicitors to provide, amongst other things, contractual and employment advice and related payments.
- 1.6.10 Estimated reduction of £7,000 in the payment due to the TMLT in respect of pension payment obligations under the management agreement.
- 1.6.11 As reported to Cabinet on 2 June 2021, under emergency powers the Leader of the Council authorised works in the sum of £28,000 to facilitate the permanent live streaming of in-person Council meetings following the end of legislation allowing meetings to be held remotely. The cost to be funded from the General Revenue Reserve.
- 1.6.12 Management Team have made the following establishment changes under delegated authority:
- The existing temporary arrangements in Waste and Street Scene Services associated with the new waste services contract have been extended to the end of October 2021 at a cost of £12,050 (£5,150 reflected in Salaries Monitoring Statement above).
  - The temporary additional administration resources in Waste and Street Scene Services have been extended to the end of August 2021 at a cost of £9,400 (£3,150 reflected in Salaries Monitoring Statement above).
  - A reduction in the hours of the Administrator / Assistant Cemetery Registrar generating a saving of £6,150 (£1,550 reflected in Salaries Monitoring Statement above).

1.6.13 The Council has been awarded the following grants from central government which will be used to fund as yet unbudgeted expenditure or reductions in other government funding streams:

- Contain Outbreak Management Funding £156,173
- Domestic Abuse Duty New Burdens Grant £34,242
- Rough Sleeping Initiatives £129,712 (April 2021 to June 2021)
- Rough Sleeping Initiatives £260,787 (July 2021 to March 2022)
- Verify Earnings and Pensions Alerts Grant £25,488
- Welfare Reform Grant £27,879

1.6.14 A summary of the items identified through budgetary control is given in the table below.

<b>Description</b>	<b>Paragraph Reference</b>	<b>2021/22 £</b>	<b>2022/23 £</b>
Temporary Accommodation	1.6.2	300,000	-
Holly Hill Open Space	1.6.3	7,300	7,300 *
Public Conveniences Business Rates	1.6.4	(18,900)	-
Council Tax Support Admin Grant	1.6.5	(17,800)	-
Local Council Tax Support Grant	1.6.6	(224,550)	-
Council Tax Discounts / Exemptions	1.6.7	(200,000)	-
TMLT Telephony	1.6.8	(3,550)	(3,550) *
Legal Expenses and Related Payments	1.6.9	120,000	-
TMLT Pension Payment Obligation	1.6.10	(7,000)	(7,000) *
Live Streaming of Council Meetings	1.6.11	28,000	-
Establishment Changes	1.6.12	8,550	(6,150) *
Central Government Grants	1.6.13	-	-
<b>Total</b>		<b>(7,950)</b>	<b>(9,400)</b>

Those items marked with an asterisk\* will need to be considered and reflected as appropriate in updating the Medium Term Financial Strategy beyond 2022/23.

## 1.7 Revenue Budget Summary

The table below brings together information on the key budget areas, the variations agreed to the revenue budget and items identified through budgetary control to provide an indicative overall budget position for the year.

Description	Budget to June £	Actual to June £	Variance £
Salaries Monitoring Statement	2,711,250	2,659,200	(52,050)
Income Monitoring Statement	(1,195,000)	(1,107,850)	87,150
Treasury Management	(19,950)	(17,100)	2,850
Approved Variations to the Revenue Budget			(60,750)
Revenue Budgetary Control			(7,950)
<b>Net Favourable Variance</b>			<b>(30,750)</b>

- 1.7.1 This would suggest if nothing else changed, the contribution to the General Revenue Reserve would be £435,800 compared to £405,050 anticipated when the budget was set in February 2021.

## 1.8 Savings and Transformation Strategy

- 1.8.1 Alongside the Medium Term Financial Strategy sits a Savings and Transformation Strategy. The purpose of the Strategy is to provide structure, focus and direction in addressing the financial challenge faced by the Council. In so doing, it recognises that there is no one simple solution and as a result we will need to adopt a number of ways to deliver the required savings and transformation contributions within an agreed timescale. A number of key themes have been identified, together with outline targets and timescales.
- 1.8.2 Members will no doubt be aware of the report to the 6 July Cabinet meeting on the Council's finances and the updated projected funding gap of £1,775,000 excluding the initiatives already built into the Medium Term Financial Strategy. This is clearly a difficult and challenging financial outlook, if not daunting, where consideration as to how we might address the funding gap over the medium term needs to begin now, in addition to delivering as a minimum this year's savings target of £100,000.

## 1.9 Capital Monitoring Statement

- 1.9.1 Appended for information at **[Annex 3]** is a capital monitoring statement which compares actual capital expenditure for the period 1 April 2021 to 30 June 2021 with the 2021/22 Capital Plan. The Capital Plan for 2021/22 is based on the 2021/22 budgets that were approved by Council on 23 February 2021, amended for slippage from 2020/21.

- 1.9.2 Prior year's expenditure is only shown for finite schemes for which there is a budget in 2021/22. Where schemes are of a rolling programme nature, prior year's expenditure has not been shown in order to avoid large, generally meaningless, totals building up.
- 1.9.3 Capital Plan schemes which are scheduled to start in 2022/23 and beyond have not been shown. The budget profile for these schemes can be found in the 2021/22 Revenue and Capital Budgets Book.
- 1.9.4 Members will note a Capital Plan spend (net) at the end of June 2021 of £105,000 against a budget for the year of £3.95m.

### **1.10 Approved Variations to the Capital Plan**

- 1.10.1 An agreement has been reached with Tonbridge and Malling Leisure Trust whereby the Council pay a capital grant of £35,300 in lieu of a capital renewals provision in return for the transfer of responsibility for all telephony hardware and systems and its replacement to the Trust. Please also see paragraph 1.6.8.
- 1.10.2 Communities and Housing Advisory Board on 25 May 2021 recommended the installation of electric charging points in Council car parks across the borough at a cost of £120,000. Of this, £80,000 will be funded by government grants and the supplier. The remaining £40,000 will be funded from the Council's Business Rates Retention Scheme Reserve.
- 1.10.3 As reported to Cabinet on 2 June 2021, under emergency powers the Leader of the Council authorised works in the sum of £28,000 to facilitate the permanent live streaming of in-person Council meetings following the end of legislation allowing meetings to be held remotely. The cost to be funded from the General Revenue Reserve.

### **1.11 Capital Plan Issues**

- 1.11.1 The capital plan monitoring statement, as presented to this Board, is essentially aimed at monitoring the financial performance of the capital plan overall and on a Service and scheme basis. Notes have been provided to supply further information where this is felt to be particularly relevant. Other monitoring reports, which provide greater information about individual schemes, are presented by the Services to the relevant Advisory Board.

### **1.12 Legal Implications**

This report fulfils the requirement of the Local Government Act 2003 which places a statutory duty on the authority to monitor income and expenditure against budget and to take action if overspends or shortfalls in income emerge. If monitoring establishes that the budget situation has deteriorated, authorities are required to take such action as they consider necessary. This might include

action to reduce spending in the rest of the year, to increase income or to finance all or part of the shortfall from reserves.

### **1.13 Financial and Value for Money Considerations**

1.13.1 As set out above.

### **1.14 Risk Assessment**

1.14.1 Budgetary control is a prerequisite of good financial management, financial planning and control and needs to be kept under review to ensure it remains effective and relevant.

### **1.15 Equality Impact Assessment**

1.15.1 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

### **1.16 Recommendations**

1.16.1 Members are asked to:

- 1) Note that as at the end of June 2021 the projected overall outturn position for the year 2021/22 is a net favourable variance of circa £30,750 when compared to the budget set in February 2021.
- 2) Note the position in respect of the updated projected funding gap reported to Cabinet on 6 July 2021 of £1,775,000 and the need to identify and implement opportunities to deliver as a minimum this year's savings target of £100,000.

The Director of Finance and Transformation confirms that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and policy Framework.

Background papers:

contact: Neil Lawley

Nil

Sharon Shelton  
Director of Finance and Transformation

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**Salaries Budgetary Control Monitoring Statement**

Annex 1

**Period Ended Last Day of June 2021****2021/22 Financial Year**

	<b>Annual Budget 2021/22</b>	<b>Budget to end of June (a)</b>	<b>Actual to end of June (b)</b>	<b>Above (Below) Budget (b - a)</b>
<b>Service</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
<b>Central</b>				
Administration & Property	875,150	218,850	209,300	(9,550)
Legal	576,150	144,050	139,500	(4,550)
Personnel	495,000	123,750	117,150	(6,600)
<b>Executive</b>	532,800	132,750	137,000	4,250
<b>Finance &amp; Transformation</b>				
Finance	1,747,750	436,750	428,850	(7,900)
Information Technology	1,072,600	268,150	238,650	(29,500)
<b>Planning, Housing &amp; Environmental Health</b>				
Environmental Health & Housing	1,495,250	373,800	392,300	18,500
Planning	1,072,600	515,150	455,600	(59,550)
<b>Street Scene, Leisure &amp; Technical</b>				
Street Scene & Leisure	1,353,050	338,950	334,650	(4,300)
Technical	685,300	171,300	166,200	(5,100)
Management Savings	9,905,650	2,723,500	2,619,200	(104,300)
Shared Working Arrangements	(26,700)	(4,400)	(4,400)	0
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>9,878,950</b>	<b>2,719,100</b>	<b>2,614,800</b>	<b>(104,300)</b>
Non-budgeted spend on recruitment & other expenses to the end of June				400
Payments outstanding for the period to the end of June				44,000
Budgeted ring-fenced sum to the end of June				(22,150)
Budgeted management savings to the end of June				30,000
<b>Net Management Savings</b>				<b>(52,050)</b>

Financial Services  
6 July 2021

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**Income Budgetary Control Monitoring Statement**

Annex 2

**Period Ended Last Day of June 2021****2021/22 Financial Year**

	<b>Annual Budget 2021/22</b>	<b>Budget to end of June (a)</b>	<b>Actual to end of June (b)</b>	<b>(Above) Below Budget (b - a)</b>
<b>Service</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
<b>Central</b>				
Land Charges	(243,000)	(68,500)	(78,950)	(10,450)
Licensing	(339,400)	(76,250)	(63,300)	12,950
	-----	-----	-----	-----
Sub-Total	(582,400)	(144,750)	(142,250)	2,500
	-----	-----	-----	-----
<b>Planning, Housing &amp; Environmental Health</b>				
Planning Fees	(792,000)	(198,000)	(181,650)	16,350
Building Regulations	(404,000)	(33,650)	(34,700)	(1,050)
	-----	-----	-----	-----
Sub-Total	(1,196,000)	(231,650)	(216,350)	15,300
	-----	-----	-----	-----
<b>Street Scene, Leisure &amp; Technical</b>				
Garden Waste Collection	(1,175,000)	(23,000)	(59,350)	(36,350)
Recycling Performance Payment	(590,000)	0	0	0
Bulky Refuse Collection	(120,000)	(30,000)	(35,850)	(5,850)
Short Stay Car Parking	(1,640,000)	(405,000)	(350,300)	54,700
Long Stay Car Parking	(620,000)	(160,000)	(112,700)	47,300
Penalty Charge Notices	(273,000)	(68,250)	(57,600)	10,650
Car Parks Season Tickets	(166,000)	(58,000)	(45,700)	12,300
Residents Parking Permits	(140,000)	(38,000)	(33,650)	4,350
Country Parks Parking	(121,200)	(36,350)	(54,100)	(17,750)
	-----	-----	-----	-----
Sub-Total	(4,845,200)	(818,600)	(749,250)	69,350
	-----	-----	-----	-----
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>(6,623,600)</b>	<b>(1,195,000)</b>	<b>(1,107,850)</b>	<b>87,150</b>
	-----	-----	-----	-----

Financial Services  
6 July 2021

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**CAPITAL PLAN MONITORING STATEMENT 2021/22 TO 30 JUNE 2021**  
**SUMMARY OF SERVICES**

	Expenditure To 31/03/21	2021/22 Including Prior Year Slippage	2021/22 Actual to 30 June 2021
	£'000	£'000	£'000
<b>Capital Plan Schemes</b>			
Planning, Housing & Environmental Health	1,490	799	38
Street Scene, Leisure & Technical Services	12	1,139	38
Corporate	87	190	2
Sub-total	1,589	2,128	78
<b>Capital Renewals</b>			
Planning, Housing & Environmental Health	n/a	0	0
Street Scene, Leisure & Technical Services	n/a	1,416	21
Corporate	n/a	410	6
Sub-total	n/a	1,826	27
<b>Total</b>	1,589	3,954	105

**CAPITAL PLAN MONITORING STATEMENT 2021/22 TO 30 JUNE 2021**  
**PLANNING, HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH**

	Expenditure To 31/03/21	2021/22 Including Prior Year Slippage	2021/22 Actual to 30 June 2021
	£'000	£'000	£'000
<b>Capital Plan Schemes</b>			
Housing			
Grants	n/a	155	(8)
Temporary Accommodation	1,490	644	46
Sub-total	1,490	799	38
<b>Capital Renewals</b>	n/a	0	0
Total Planning, Housing and Environmental Health	1,490	799	38



**CAPITAL PLAN MONITORING STATEMENT 2021/22 TO 30 JUNE 2021**  
**STREET SCENE, LEISURE & TECHNICAL SERVICES**

	Expenditure To 31/03/21	2021/22 Including Prior Year Slippage	2021/22 Actual to 30 June 2021
	£'000	£'000	£'000
<b>Capital Plan Schemes</b>			
<b>Street Scene</b>	n/a	106	32
<b>Leisure</b>			
Sports Grounds	4	201	6
Open Spaces	0	60	0
<b>Technical Services</b>			
Car Parking	8	232	0
Transportation	0	40	0
Land Drainage / Flood Defence	0	500	0
Sub-total	12	1,139	38
<b>Capital Renewals</b>	n/a	1,416	21
<b>Total Street Scene, Leisure &amp; Technical Services</b>	12	2,555	59

**CAPITAL PLAN MONITORING STATEMENT 2021/22 TO 30 JUNE 2021**  
**STREET SCENE, LEISURE & TECHNICAL SERVICES**

	Code	Expenditure To 31/03/21	2021/22 Including Prior Year Slippage	2021/22 Actual to 30 June 2021	Notes
		£'000	£'000	£'000	
<b>Street Scene</b>					
(a) Green Waste Bins Growth / Replacement	P02BC	n/a	31		
(b) Refuse Bins Growth / Replacement	P02DA	n/a	61	32	
(c) Garden Waste Bin Replacement	P03CF	n/a	14		
Total Street Scene to Summary		n/a	106	32	
<b>Sports Grounds</b>					
(d) Racecourse Sports Ground Riverside Revetment Less Grants	P05DD	21 (17)	204 (11)	6	
Sub-total		4	193	6	
(e) Racecourse Sportsground Rugby Pitch Drainage Less Developer Contributions	P05DE	10 (10)	16 (8)		
Sub-total		0	8	0	
Total Sports Grounds to Summary		4	201	6	
<b>Open Spaces</b>					
(a) Leybourne lakes Country Park Path Improvements	P05FH		60		
(b) Leybourne Lakes Country Park Facility Improvements Less Grants & Developer Contributions	P05FF	34 (34)	707 (707)		
Sub-total		0	0	0	
Total Open Spaces to Summary		0	60	0	

**CAPITAL PLAN MONITORING STATEMENT 2021/22 TO 30 JUNE 2021**  
**STREET SCENE, LEISURE & TECHNICAL SERVICES**

	Code	Expenditure To 31/03/21	2021/22 Including Prior Year Slippage	2021/22 Actual to 30 June 2021	Notes
		£'000	£'000	£'000	
<b>Car Parking</b>					
(a) Existing Car Parks Improvement Rolling Programme Less Grants & Contributions	P01AB	n/a	30		
Sub-total			30	0	
(b) Car Parking Improvement Works	P01AD	8	202		
Total Car Parking to Summary		8	232	0	
<b>Transportation</b>					
(c) Electric Vehicle Charging Points Less Grants & Contributions	P01EA		120 (80)		New scheme added CHAB 25 May 2021.
Total Transportation to Summary		0	40	0	
<b>Land Drainage / Flood Defence</b>					
(d) Leigh FSA Enhancement Contribution	P01HV		500		
Total Land Drainage / Flood Defence to Summary		0	500	0	



**CAPITAL PLAN MONITORING STATEMENT 2021/22 TO 30 JUNE 2021**  
**CORPORATE**

	Expenditure To 31/03/21	2021/22 Including Prior Year Slippage	2021/22 Actual to 30 June 2021
	£'000	£'000	£'000
<b>Capital Plan Schemes</b>			
Information Technology Initiatives	87	131	2
Other schemes	0	59	0
Sub-total	87	190	2
<b>Capital Renewals</b>	n/a	410	6
Total Corporate	87	600	8

**CAPITAL PLAN MONITORING STATEMENT 2021/22 TO 30 JUNE 2021**  
**CORPORATE**

	Code	Expenditure To 31/03/21	2021/22 Including Prior Year Slippage	2021/22 Actual to 30 June 2021	Notes
		£'000	£'000	£'000	
<b>Information Technology Initiatives</b>					
(a) General IT Developments	P06DA	n/a	30		
(b) Revenues and Benefits IT Digital Solution	P06EW	5	15		
(c) CMS Website Solution	P06EX	82	58	2	
(d) Hybrid Meetings	P06ER		28		New scheme added Cabinet 2 June 2021.
Total Information Technology Initiatives to Summary		87	131	2	
<b>Other Schemes</b>					
(e) Electric / Hybrid Pool Car	P06EZ		24		
(f) TMLT Telephony Capital Grant	P06EP		35		New scheme added FIPAB 19 May 2021.
Total Other Schemes to Summary		0	59	0	



**TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**FINANCE, INNOVATION & PROPERTY ADVISORY BOARD**

**21 July 2021**

**Report of the Director of Central Services & Deputy Chief Executive**

**Part 1- Public**

**Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision**

**1 CUSTOMER SERVICES**

**This report asks Members to consider proposals for the future opening hours and operation of Customer Services**

**1.1 Background - Pre-pandemic**

**Kings Hill**

- 1.1.1 Kings Hill reception operated a drop-in service to residents for council Services Monday to Friday, facilitating support for the payment kiosk, and providing a Meet & Greet facility for visitors to the building who were attending meetings.
- 1.1.2 The drop-in service to residents required that advisors were on duty at the reception counters waiting for a resident to walk in for advice, this ultimately created an environment where advisors are not always serving a resident and will be sitting around unutilised and therefore not an effective use of their time/resource.
- 1.1.3 In between customers, advisors would be responding to webchat enquiries or answering the switchboard. The challenge for this business model is that visitors attending receptions are listening in on confidential discussions with another resident.
- 1.1.4 The Current Call Centre Pilot moves the Customer Services advisors away from the front line, focusing on customer service delivery dealing with multiple service enquiries from one person during one call. This has resulted in a more efficient and effective service delivery.

**Tonbridge Castle**

- 1.1.5 The Castle operated a drop-in service to residents for council services Monday to Friday along with facilitating support for the payment kiosk. In addition, Monday to Sunday advisors also provided services to support Tourism, Shop, Castle

attraction, conference and meetings, as well as running educational workshops and guided tours.

## **1.2 During lockdown**

- 1.2.1 As both receptions closed to the public during lockdown, freeing up advisors from reception duties, which has allowed the team/teams to answer calls from back offices as part of the Call Centre Pilot.
- 1.2.2 As restrictions eased, and in discussion with the Business Continuity Planning Group and the Health and Safety Officer, risk assessments were developed to reopen the reception areas at both Council Offices.
- 1.2.3 Portable Desk screens and personal protective equipment (PPE) was put in place to optimise the safety of any staff and visitors to reception.
- 1.2.4 Any public visiting reception had to book an appointment, with all people wishing to make an appointment screened through a series of COVID-19 health questions.
- 1.2.5 As the kiosk has been closed during lockdown and not available for members of the public to use, this had further cut down footfall to the reception areas. Ultimately there was no “drop in” footfall to receptions at all, thus ensuring safe distancing measures could be controlled and adhered to.
- 1.2.6 The only appointments that have been booked in during this time have been for “proof of life” appointments and homelessness. As a result, the Customer Service Advisors presence at the Kings Hill office was scaled back to just Monday and Fridays, to complement the times when Licensing Officers met their applicants who needed to be seen in person for security checks while processing driver badges.
- 1.2.7 The operation at Tonbridge Castle this was scaled back to a Thursday and Friday, to support one advisor who was unable to work from home. It is fair to say that advisors have been fully able to resolve enquiries from residents over the phone thereby not needing to bring them into a reception point.

## **1.3 Gateway partners**

- 1.3.1 The Interim Gateway & Customer Services Manager is in discussion with all Gateway partners to question what their proposed return to Gateway will look like. Some organisations, like Citizens Advice in North and West Kent, use mainly older people, and they do not want an immediate return to the Castle face to face service, instead, they will adopt a phased approach and have intimated, that they will move to an appointment service only moving forward and not the drop-in service they provided prior to the pandemic.
- 1.3.2 Smaller organisations who use one of the counters, or meeting room less frequently, predominantly used an appointment only model prior to lockdown.

### Summary of current Gateway Partners

Gateway Partner	Pre-Covid delivery model	New delivery model
Blue Badge Assessments	Appointment only	Appointment only
Blue Badge Application Assist	Appointment only	Appointment only
NHS stop smoking	Appointment only	Appointment only
Kent Supported Employment	Appointment only	Appointment only
Pension Wise	Appointment only	Appointment only
CAB NWK	Appointment & drop it	Phase 1 – Phone service only
CAB NWK	Appointment & drop it	Phase 2 – Appointment only
CGL	Appointment only	No information provided to date
Hi Kent	Drop in	No information provided to date
Victim Support	Drop in	No information provided to date

#### 1.4 Other authorities

- 1.4.1 As we move to leave the period of pandemic and government restrictions through the Road Map, meetings have been taking place with Kent Customer Services Managers to discuss how our services can return to our reception points and what they believed new service need will be.
- 1.4.2 Following these discussions, it is clear that they are all coming to the conclusion that the need for a drop-in face-to-face service, is potentially something more of a pre-covid model, and that residents' perceptions/requirements for support has changed during the pandemic.
- 1.4.3 This is extremely evident from the lack of appointments that have been needed by our residents in the past year to resolve their enquiries. Residents have adjusted/realised that their enquiries can be fully supported/resolved over the phone which in turn does not require them to journey out to a reception point for support but just pick up the phone from the comfort of their own home.
- 1.4.4 Within Kent, other Local Authorities, they are considering their options as the COVID-19 lockdown eases, and what interaction they intend to have with their residents, visitors and businesses.
- 1.4.5 This change in behaviour of Residents and Visitors to the Borough has helped feed into TMBC Digital Strategy, where, with new digital services more and more of the customer needs can be carried out on-line.

- 1.4.6 All authorities have embedded a more digital channel shift strategy into their Customer Services delivery model as we have ourselves. All residents who call, whilst being offered support, are also advised that they can transact themselves through our online services, including their own online Revenues & Benefits Citizens Access account where they can view their live accounts and notify of changes to their circumstances without the need to engage with the authority on a one-to-one basis. They can effectively do this 24/7 as opposed to our opening times of Monday to Friday.

## 1.5 Visitors to Council offices

Kings Hill	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
18/19	3,851	3,804	3,117	3,264	3,212	2,952	3,568	2,987	2,014	2,929	2,439	3,167
19/20	3,038	3,293	2,642	3,481	2,721	3,140	3,747	2,887	2,005	2,575	2,477	1,864

Castle	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
18/19	3,014	3,110	3,269	3,194	3,444	2,845	2,925	2,448	1,980	1,955	1,900	2,242
19/20	3,072	2,961	3,003	3,180	2,680	4,156	4,964	3,557	2,369	2,823	2,220	878

- 1.5.1 We have worked extremely hard to upskill our advisors, so that we are able to resolve 80-90% of resident's enquiries at first point of contact. This has resulted in residents having a greater assurance when they call, resulting in the fact they do not need to visit the offices, but we can action their enquiry there and then.
- 1.5.2 First point of resolution is what Customer Services are striving for with each caller.
- 1.5.3 Since the Customer Services receptions were reopened for people to be seen on an appointment basis, the number of appointments has been as follows.

w/c	July 2020	Aug 2020	Sept 2020	Oct 2020	Nov 2020	Dec 2020	Jan 2021	Feb 2021	Mar 2021	Apr 2021	Total
Customer Service Appointments	11	6	9	7	9	11	6	12	5	10	89
Licensing Appointments	30	21	24	18	13	5	5	0	0	18	134
Cemetery	7	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8

Appoint ments											
------------------	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

1.5.4 In respect of Customer Services appointments of the 89 provided, 86 of these have been for Proof of Life. Proof of Life appointments are for resident to continue to claim their foreign pension.

1.5.5 The 3 appointments for statutory council services were as follows:

- Parking Services Enquiry – Attended as problems with their online account
- Homelessness Support – This individual did not attend for their appointment
- Revenues Enquiry – This individual did not attend for their appointment

1.5.6 This is ultimately due to Customer Services resolving the resident's enquiry without the need for an appointment to be provided. Whilst it is fair to say that as we move out of lockdown, we can enable customer services to see our more vulnerable residents. It is recommended that we control how this contact is made to enable us to use our resources in the most efficient manner.

## 1.6 Opening times

1.6.1 Should we move to appointment service model within our receptions it gives greater opportunity to align our phone and reception opening times.

1.6.2 We currently resource our phone lines from 08:30 hours to 17:00 Monday – Friday, whereas the majority of other authorities have already moved to 09:00 hours.

1.6.3 By moving the opening time of the switchboard to 9:00 hours, would allow you to focus your resource on the busiest times of the day as opposed to bringing advisors in early, when calls are very few.

1.6.4 After analysing all calls taken between 08:30 hours and 09:00 hours in the morning the following data was recorded:

Month	Total Calls Received	Calls 08:30 – 09:00	%
November 2019	17,706	766	4%
December 2019	11,243	508	5%
January 2020	15,746	549	3%
February 2020	12,923	539	4%
March 2020	14,642	606	4%

April 2020	11,145	320	3%
May 2020	10,531	339	3%
June 2020	13,277	463	3%
July 2020	14,076	418	3%

1.6.5 To support our digital agenda and ensure we can adequately resource our reception and phone services, as other authorities have done, we are proposing to align our opening / contact times, so that both reception points and our phones open at the same times to also allow our resources to focus on the busiest times of the day for resident contact.

## 1.7 Payments

1.7.1 The Council operates two kiosks (one at each site) that are used to take cash and card payments for Council Tax, Business Rates and other fees and charges made by the Council.

1.7.2 The table below gives the total amount of funds received through these kiosks for the year prior to lockdown.

Payment for	Payment by Cash			Payment by Card		
	Amount £	Individual Ref	Transactions	Amount £	Individual Ref	Transactions
Council Tax	669,147	1,063	5,779	522,286	1,025	3,207
Car Parking Penalty Charge Notices	4,273	117	118	8,220	241	243
Planning Applications	783	2	5	5,657	1	30
Invoices	13,751	73	187	12,939	80	139
Business Rates	4,518	4	5	10,702	6	8
Other income	63,543	43	896	222,237	31	2,570
<b>Totals</b>	<b>756,015</b>	<b>1,302</b>	<b>6,990</b>	<b>782,042</b>	<b>1,384</b>	<b>6,197</b>

1.7.3 Following the lockdown these transactions moved to other methods either Direct Debit, online card payments or cheques.

1.7.4 The Kiosks are currently rented on an annual basis and cost around £9,000 per annum, to this the Council is required to pay for additional items such as note and coin readers. When the Treasury issues new bank notes and coins, these are normally around £900 for both kiosks, and till rolls for receipts costing around £100 per annum.

1.7.5 In addition to this the council requires cash collection facilities to transfer the cash to the Council's banking facility, this is a weekly collection costing £37.00 per week.

- 1.7.6 This means that excluding the note readers the Kiosks cost around £11,000 per annum to operate.
- 1.7.7 Other councils in the county operate additional payment facilities for those wishing to pay cash through shop facilities, such as Paypoint and post office counters. Enquiries have been made to these providers to establish the cost of setting these up. To date, only one, Paypoint have provided the necessary information to assess the costs.
- 1.7.8 Paypoint's transactional cost to the Council is 34p per transaction and a one off set up fee of £10,000. This provides a bar code on council documentation that will be recognised by any facility (normally shops, garages etc.) who can take paypoint payments. Although initially this facility would only be offered to council taxpayers who wish to pay by cash and have no other means of payment, if the transaction levels for 2019/20 were repeated the annual running cost would be in the region of £2,500 a revenue saving of £8,500 against the current cost of operations.
- 1.7.9 The £10,000 set fee could be financed from the invest to save reserve and would create a break-even point within two years of operation.
- 1.7.10 Due the contractual arrangements with KPR the council have given notice, subject to member approved, to cease the operation of the Kiosks no later than the beginning of September 2021 as no refunds are issued for part year operations.

## **1.8 Legal Implications**

- 1.8.1 None arising from this report.

## **1.9 Financial and Value for Money Considerations**

- 1.9.1 As set out above.

## **1.10 Equality Impact Assessment**

- 1.10.1 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

## **1.11 Policy Considerations**

- 1.11.1 Asset Management

- 1.11.2 Healthy Lifestyles

## **1.12 Recommendations**

- 1.12.1 It is **RECOMMENDED** that:

- 1.12.2 The customer services operation moves from a drop-in reception service at both the Kings Hill and Castle reception points to a triaged pre booked appointment service;
- 1.12.3 The reception and call centre opening times are changed to 09:00 hours to 17:00 hours Monday to Thursday and 09:00 hours to 16:30 hours on Friday, aligning with Tonbridge Castle, which already operate these hours;
- 1.12.4 The KPR self service kiosks are removed and the Council instead moves to a bar coded bill for those more vulnerable residents who are unable to pay through digital / phone methods

Background papers:

contact: Anthony Garnett

Nil

Adrian Stanfield  
Director of Central Services & Deputy Chief Executive

## TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

### FINANCE, INNOVATION and PROPERTY ADVISORY BOARD

21 July 2021

#### Report of the Director of Finance and Transformation

#### Part 1- Public

#### Matters for Information

### 1 DIGITAL STRATEGY UPDATE

**A report updating Members on progress with the delivery of the Digital Strategy**

#### 1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 At its meeting on 17 July 2019, Members of the Advisory Board considered and supported a Digital Strategy to cover the period 2019 – 2023. Subsequently, the Strategy was approved by Cabinet and Full Council.

1.1.2 A copy of the Strategy is attached at **[Annex 1]** for reference. The five core digital principles are:

- 1) 'One Council'
- 2) An Efficient Workforce
- 3) Demand Management
- 4) Economic Growth; and
- 5) A 'Smart' Borough

1.1.3 The **mission** of our digital strategy is to deliver the priorities of the Council through challenge, innovation and transformation underpinned by technology. Members may also recall that the **vision** agreed is for TMBC to become an authority where the communities and businesses we serve are able to engage and transact with us seamlessly, irrespective of the services they access.

1.1.4 As we are now half-way through the duration of the Digital Strategy, this report updates Members on progress achieved so far.

## 1.2 Progress

1.2.1 Over the last two years (June 2019 – June 2021) the council has made significant inroads into achieving its customer centric digital ambition. The following progress against the core principles are to be noted:

### ***One Council***

1.2.2 Single web platform & Customer portal

On 29 June 2021, the Council launched its new cloud-based single web platform along with a unified customer portal. Customers are now able to access multiple council services including, Council tax, Housing benefits, Waste management services, Planning information, Parking services and Democratic Services that is relevant to them via 'My Account'. The registration process is made intuitive and self-servable end to end, without any human interventions.

1.2.3 Inter departmental workflow

From June 2019 to February 2020, the Council commissioned Smarter Digital Services (SDS) within Tunbridge Wells Borough Council to map the business process of the majority of the frontline and back-office services within TMBC. The mapped processes are currently being re-engineered to improve the inter-departmental workflow based on the 'art of the possible' in terms of the Council's investment in new technologies and enterprise solutions. It is envisaged that the completion of this across the Council will take place over the remaining two years of the strategy (2021-2023)

1.2.4 Enterprise Business solutions

The Council has made good progress in embracing the enterprise business solutions strategy by way of introducing the new unified customer portal along with the adoption of the existing Information@work application as the enterprise document management system, and Total Mobile as the enterprise mobile working platform. We have also procured, and are currently in the process of implementing, 'Anywhere365' system as the enterprise contact management solution across all services. These solutions will help ensure that quality of service experienced by our residents and businesses are of high standard and consistent across all council services.

### ***Efficient workforce***

1.2.5 Mobilisation

The Council has taken some great initiative in mobilising its workforce over the last two years. This has been evident throughout the pandemic, where the majority the Council's services were able to function and meet its increasing operational and back-office demands. The further adaptation of the Total mobile

solution for end-to-end workflow management by our field-based officers will deliver efficiencies over the remainder of the digital strategy. This will also help the council adhere to GDPR compliance policies.

#### 1.2.6 Process automation & system integration

As part of the Business Process Reengineering, over the next two years (2021-23) we will be automating various transactional and administrative workflows across all our frontline and back-office services. This will involve integrating multiple lines of business and corporate systems to improve efficiency by employing the Six Sigma methodology in developing new processes.

#### ***Demand Management***

#### 1.2.7 Self-serve

Through the introduction of the new 'My Account' via the customer portal, the Council has enabled a number of its services to be capable of 'self-serve' by residents, businesses and visitors. Over the next quarter (July – September 2021) we will be enabling the 'My Account' to be accessed via an App on customers' mobile devices made available via Apple's Appstore and Google Playstore. Whilst enabling our customers to easily access their accounts simply through their biometrics scanners on their mobile devices, similar to the industry standard mobile banking applications, this will further enable the Council to maintain proactive communication and notification to keep the customers informed.

### **1.3 Legal Implications**

1.3.1 Procurement has been undertaken in accordance with all relevant legislation and good practice.

### **1.4 Financial and Value for Money Considerations**

1.4.1 The Invest to Save Reserve has provided opportunities to support the implementation of digital solutions as identified through the digital strategy. In addition, the Transformation reserve has also been used for some projects.

### **1.5 Risk Assessment**

1.5.1 The risk of not progressing the digital agenda is that the Council may not be providing services in the ways that our residents wish.

1.5.2 It has already been evident during the past 2 years that digital solutions can help to manage demand pressures and make limited resources/capacity go further.

**1.6 Policy Considerations**

1.6.1 Customer Contact

1.6.2 Human Resources

1.6.3 Communications

1.6.4 Community

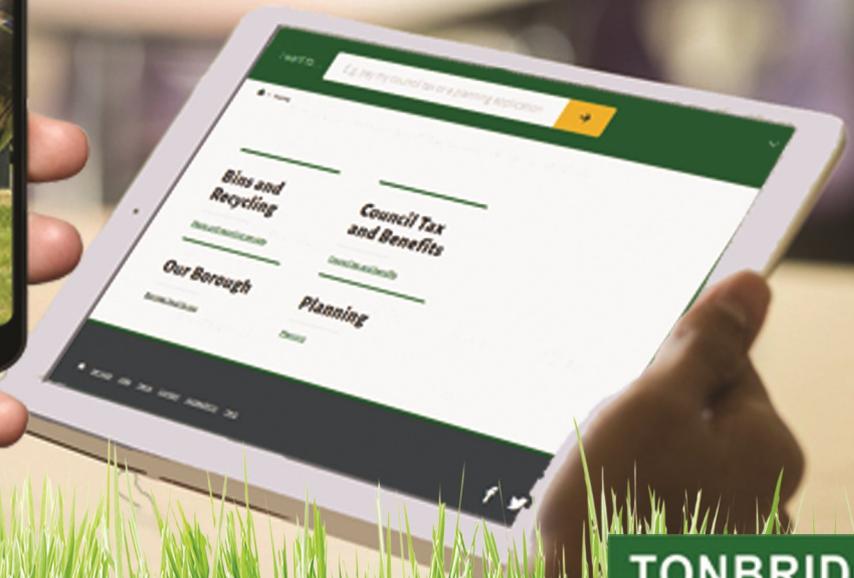
Background papers:

Nil

contact: Ganesh Thangarajah

Sharon Shelton  
Director of Finance and Transformation

# Digital Strategy 2019-2023



# Foreword



**New technologies are developing all around us and the way we interact with each other is constantly changing. Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council wants to be at the forefront of this changing landscape, and the publication of this Digital Strategy launches our statement of intent to becoming a digital borough.**

**We want to ensure that our residents and businesses are able to take advantage of the digital opportunities that are available, accessing services and transacting with us seamlessly.**

**We want our councillors and staff to be able to work efficiently and effectively embracing the new technological advances, ensuring at all times that our communities are served in the best way we can.**

**We want to make ‘digital’ Tonbridge and Malling a smarter place to live and work, and I am delighted to launch this Digital Strategy.**



**Cllr Martin Coffin**  
**Cabinet Member for Finance, Innovation & Property**  
**and Deputy Leader**



In order to use Council funding as cost effectively as possible, and to face the challenges of meeting increasing public service demand with diminishing resources, embracing the Digital platform as the key engagement channel has now become an essential requirement for Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council in meeting its customer expectations.

Where necessary we will mobilise our workforce with technology to provide a more responsive in field service, thus reducing the waiting times for our customers. Working with our partnering authorities within Kent, we will harness the latest technology to offer a proactive service, which will seek to prevent and respond to needs in ways that were not previously possible.

This Digital Strategy sets out the core priorities that we will be embracing to transform the Council's services through the 'Digital Transformation Programme'. In addition, where beneficial, we will use innovative technologies such as 5G, Internet of Things' (IoT), 'and Artificial Intelligence (AI) Robotics to further improve the environment and the lives of our residents.



# Key Drivers

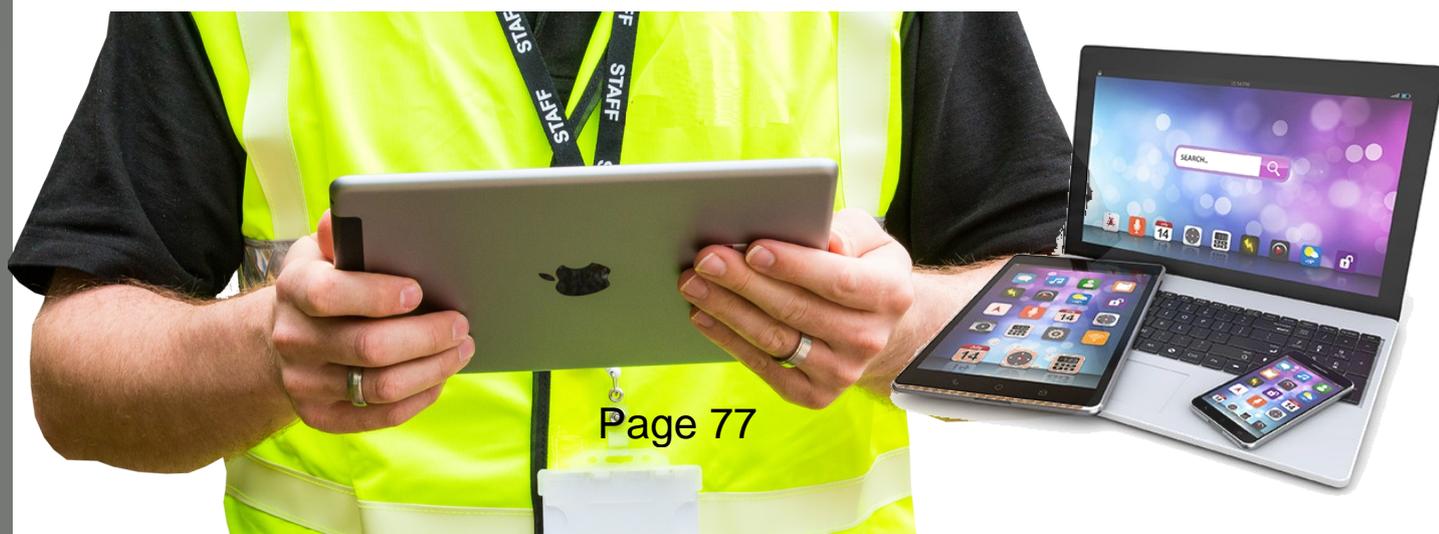
Over recent years the term ‘Digital Transformation’ has become synonymous with an injection of technology into organisations, often without the focus on either the challenges they face or the outcomes expected. For TMBC it is not simply about using state of the art technology. It is about improving and sustaining the quality of service provided to our residents and businesses, whilst meeting the current operational and financial challenges and preparing for the future demands.

Our residents expect the Council to solve the complexities and make public services intuitive and convenient. This involves overcoming varying challenges for the Council. Like all local authorities, TMBC also face a growing public demand for services, and financial constraints. Hence, developing and adopting a ‘Digital Strategy’ has now become essential in sustaining the Council services. This includes supporting fundamental change in our Council’s service operations, enabled by digital transformation.

Whilst being customer-centric, our ‘Digital Strategy’ focuses on the following eight key drivers for the Borough over the next four years:

## Evolution of customer expectations

Over the years our residents have become accustomed to the convenience of using technologies in their day to day life, where products and services are accessible simpler and faster. The digitally matured leading organisations are providing varying services, be it banking, grocery and gift shopping or the delivery of entertainment streamed to a multiplicity of devices, doing so on-demand and with relative ease. Our customers are also used to receiving truly personalised services that are joined up and integrated with other related services in ways that make sense to them. In addition the devolution and localism will only drive this expectation harder, as residents expect deeper integration across services such as Housing, Council Tax & Benefits, Planning, Parking, Environmental Health.



## Increasing service demand

Due to multiple contributing factors from population growth to a number of central government policies coming in to force in recent years, there has been a steady increase in public service demands for local authorities across the country. The demands range from tackling the increase in homelessness to adhering to the new compliance policies impacting multiple disciplines of services across the Council.

## Diminishing resources

The public sector funding cuts are widely acknowledged as the primary challenge and in some cases a key risk faced by local authorities and residents alike. According to the Local Government Association (LGA) the local government funding cuts are set to reach as much as 60 percent by 2020, from the 2010 baseline.

## The 'Green' agenda

Increasingly with the '[Climate Change Emergency Motion](#)', local authorities are facing challenges in meeting their responsibilities with regard to the national and the local green agenda . For example, making a positive contribution towards tackling the cause and effect of climate change and to lead on and promote, encourage and provide opportunities for healthy living.

## Work life balance for staff

Over last decade, local authorities across the country have undergone significant reduction in head counts across Council services. At Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, reduction in workforce capacity over the past 6 to 7 years have exceeded £1m. In addition, as highlighted above, it is widely acknowledged that the demands on local government public services have increased in recent years with the trend indicating further increases in the future. Such increased demand coupled with diminishing resources often put the strain on our staff in meeting Service Level Agreements and customer expectations. Hence, the work life balance becomes a key concern for the Council, both in terms of staff wellbeing and sustaining the levels and quality of services provided.



## Disconnected communities

The cost and impacts of disconnected communities has been highlighted in a new study by the [Eden Project Communities](#). It is reported that disconnected communities could be costing the economy £32 billion every year. Also, according to the research, conducted by the Centre for Economics and Business Research, neighbourliness achieved through connected communities already delivers substantial economic benefits to UK society, representing an annual saving of £23.8 billion in total. Therefore, it is imperative for TMBC to leverage technology to achieve community engagement through local investment and in partnership with leading network and internet service providers.

## Loss of resilience in the local economy

There is increasing pressure on the Council to incentivise and help grow the local economy by supporting and promoting the local businesses. According to [‘the local democracy think tank’](#), *“When there is low or low quality employment, Councils are at the front line, dealing with the negative outcomes this produces – poor health and mental health, social isolation, homelessness and poverty. At the same time Councils may see their funding constrained as Council tax relief and housing benefit rise, and there is a greater strain on their services.*

*It has therefore always been in local government’s interests to keep their local economy healthy as a key way of serving their residents and creating resilient places that promote wellbeing.”*

## Changing technological landscape

Local authorities are faced with challenges in meeting customer expectations, which are often based on service standards they experience as a norm. The prolonged lack of investment in technological architecture, along with the constraints of the monolithic systems, driven by service silos are key contributors to the stagnation and degradation of public services. Hence, it is essential for the Council to keep up with the changing technological landscape to meet current and future service demands.



# Digital Objective

## Mission:

To deliver on the priorities of Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council through challenge, innovation and transformation, underpinned by technology

## Vision:

To become an authority where the communities and businesses we serve are able to engage and transact with us responsively and seamlessly, irrespective of the services they access



# Digital Strategic Priorities

In designing our digital services we will be adopting the [Government Digital Services' \(GDS\) design principles](#) as guidelines. Hence, our priorities will be primarily focused around our customer needs and the sustainability of the quality of service across the authority for all services. The Council will ensure that the digital services are designed to cater for the demographic cohort of the Council's population, ranging from ['Traditionalists' to 'Generation Z' \(aka iGen\)](#).

Over the next four years (2019 to 2023) we will be embracing five priorities as part of the core digital agenda for TMBC. These are 'One Council', 'Efficient Workforce', 'Demand Management', 'Economic Growth' and 'Smart Borough'



# One Council

We will ensure that our customers experience a seamless and end-to-end service when engaging with the Council, irrespective of the discipline of service they require. This experience will be underpinned and delivered through technological solutions and approaches that will enable us to operate as 'One Council'. Our frontline services will adopt the '[Digital by default](#)' service standard, where customers could transact with multiple Council services via a single customer portal, accessible securely on the electronic devices that they use in their day-to-day life.

## Single web platform & customer portal

In order to provide an Amazon-like, seamless, consistent in quality of service and personalised experience to our residents and businesses, we will be adopting a single Content Management System (CMS) across the Council's statutory and commercial services. This will allow the customers to access all Council services via a secure unified customer portal with single sign-on, either via the web or through an app on their mobile devices.

## Inter departmental workflow

We will provide our customers joined up and intuitive public services through automated inter departmental workflow enabled by information sharing across multiple services in compliance with the relevant legislation (i.e.GDPR). Sharing information will bring a wide range of benefits to customers and reduce their duplication of efforts in engaging with various Council services in silos, such as Waste Management, Parking, Planning, Council Tax, Housing Benefits, Business Rates, Environmental Protection and Health Services.



## Enterprise business solutions

The 'One Council' concept will be underpinned by adopting an enterprise technical architecture, which can serve multiple customer facing services. Therefore, natively enabling the consistency in quality of customer service experience amongst all frontline services. The enterprise solutions will involve streamlining of multiple facets of customer facing business processes catered via corporate systems such as Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, Customer portal, Mobile workforce management system, Payment system, Document management system.

## Systems consolidation

In addition to the above, where necessary, we will consolidate systems that currently serve the same purpose for various frontline services within the Council. As a result further improving the consistency in the customer experience and eliminating the duplication of investment and reducing the running costs for the Council.



# Efficient Workforce

Whilst making our frontline services more intuitive and responsive, we will ensure that our staff are equipped with technology that will enable them to be more efficient and their working practices are aligned to take advantage of the art of the possible in terms of innovation. Therefore, providing our customers a more responsive service, whilst significantly reducing the back office administration efforts. Furthermore, this will significantly contribute towards the Council's 'Green' agenda through eliminated internal and external paper-work and reduced travelling.

## Mobilisation

We will embed our mobile working solution into the business processes of our in-field officers to provide an enterprise solution that can be rapidly deployed to their field of work, irrespective of the line-of-business systems their discipline of service uses. This will enable us to:

- Cut down on paper-based administration – with an intuitive application and easy-to-use forms, paperwork is reduced, re-typing information is eliminated and information is stored securely
- Greater workforce capacity - increase field service capacity and unlock essential staff time that can then be used to focus on key frontline services
- Simplified access to information – access to all relevant job information and field data via a single mobile source
- Improve service level performance – deliver a more responsive, efficient workforce to improve SLA performance
- Deliver compliance – ensure processes are adhered to and the correct information is captured to maintain compliance with legislation
- Increase employee satisfaction – with smarter scheduling and intuitive mobile workforce management, field staff enjoy an improved work / life balance
- Reduce costs - minimise organisation overheads through improved processes, reduced travel and pressure on administration

In addition, our internal IT staff will be trained to develop and deploy solutions. This will help us sustain and minimise the design and development costs, whilst enabling the services to exploit the art of the possible in line with their business demands.



## Process automation

We will ensure that all of our business process are aligned and automated where possible to make our customer engagement effortless. This will help increase efficiency in business processes, improve effectiveness of service delivery, enable inter-departmental joined-up services and accessibility to multiple inter-dependent public services for our residents and businesses.

## System integration

By adopting an enterprise architecture and working closely with our application vendors, we will integrate our systems environment using pre-built Application Programming Interface (API) connectors to create a 'push/pull' data feed between the frontline and back-office systems. This will further enhance our customer's experience of digital services, as the information will be constantly updated amongst all relevant systems through a single interaction. This will also enable our staff in ensuring that they always have the most current and applicable information to hand to deliver the best customer service.

## Investment in Staff

This Digital strategy will hold the Council's staff at the heart of it, as they play a primary role in serving and improving the lives of our customers. We will empower our staff with the most appropriate and robust technology, along with the required skills to perform to the best of their ability more efficiently. This will enable them to focus all their efforts on the qualitative aspects of the service delivery, where they add the most value to our residents and the businesses. This will also be an enabler in helping them to achieve optimum work life balance through the gained efficiency.

## Agile Organisation

By embracing 'Digital by Default' approach, we will aim to improve our organisational agility within Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council and become early adopters of progressive legislations driven by technological advances. For example, in earnest of the forthcoming reform to annual [electoral registration canvassing](#) by Electoral Commission in 2020, we are getting ourselves ready to adopt 'e-canvassing' as soon as the legislation is in place. This will help alleviate the current inflexible and inefficient paper based approach, and allow the Electoral Registration Officers to prioritise their limited resources on addresses where there has been change.



# Demand Management

As part of the primary focus of this Digital Strategy, we will ensure that all our business processes and technological solutions are aligned towards switching from the traditional 'meeting demand' approach to a 'managing demand' approach. By adopting this approach, we will change the nature of the Council's role and relationship with our customers. The demand management process will involve providing our customers with solutions that helps alleviate the current demands that are preventable and the demands that are caused by resource capacity to meet their needs and thereby better manage the demand on our public services.

According to the [Local Government Association \(LGA\)](#), *“Demand management is an approach to achieving efficiencies that reaches beyond the boundary of the organisation. By changing the nature of the Council's role and relationship with customers, local authorities are seeking alternative mechanisms to meet customer needs and thereby better manage demand. Changing behaviours – of frontline practitioners, managers and customers– often features as a critical enabler of demand management.”*

## Self-serve

We will enable and encourage our customers to engage with the Council through the digital media. This is already in practice amongst many of our residents currently engaging with the Council-tax and Housing benefit services, as well as ordering garden waste bins. Our customers will be able to engage with multiple Council services either via using an app on their smart-phones or via the Council's website. This will enable our residents to easily switch from one service to the other (i.e. Council-tax, Parking, Planning, Waste, Environmental Health) via a single customer portal rather than having to call or email the Council. As a result the Council will receive richer information and residents are able to report issues at a time that is convenient to them.



## Predictive Analytics

Whilst the 'Self-serve' approach helps with the customer engagement demand, the predictive analysis of our data will provide our services with insights into the preventable demand. In accordance with GDPR guidelines, business intelligence derived through the collective data available, will help create forecasts by integrating data mining, machine learning, statistical modelling, and other data technology. We will use predictive analytics to address the demands that are preventable through foresight.

## Active performance monitoring

Through the use of active reporting and monitoring technologies, we will ensure that the Council's performance is managed on an active basis rather than being measured and reported retrospectively (i.e. weekly, monthly, quarterly or annually). This will be achieved via providing the relevant operational managers with dashboard facilities to monitor their performance indicators actively for the services and staff. This will help our services to become more responsive in terms managing the changing demands through efficient management of available resources.

## Outcome focused

We will ensure that the adoption of Demand Management approach within the organisation is outcome focused in terms of the Council's statutory services and the relevant commercial services. Whilst we will employ technology to improve customer and staff experience by reducing demand on statutory services such as Council-tax, Housing Benefits, Waste management, planning, etc., we will ensure that technology is used to promote the Council's commercial services to generate income and encourage healthy living amongst our residents.



# Economic Growth

The Council, through its digital agenda along with the investment in its infrastructure and website, will endeavour to support and improve local economic growth. We will look to exploit the changing trends of the consumer market, where most shopping is now done online, as an opportunity, rather than a threat to the local economy. As a result, encouraging our local businesses, entrepreneurs and start-ups to establish and flourish and contribute to employment and development of the borough.

## Promotion of local businesses

Much is made of the impact that the internet is having on our town centres – especially in terms of shopping and banking habits – and the struggle for these centres to evolve from being purely retail spaces. There are also remendous opportunities to use digital technologies to improve how people enjoy and experience what such places have to offer. By embracing digital in planning and providing for its uptake, the Council will help boost the way local town centres (and the activities that take place within them) are promoted, accessed, used, organised and understood. In doing so, places can gain a commercial advantage and become a key building block of wider tourism promotion too.

## Supply chain linkages (B2B)

It is widely acknowledged that keeping supply chains local has significant benefits for the borough. Enabled by technology, the Council will make efforts to ensure that it helps to retain money within the local economy. It will reduce the chance of supply chain reductions, tend to be more sustainable and also make products more brandable. However, much of the time, businesses aren't aware of the other fantastic enterprises on their doorstep. A great way to address this issue is through the use of digital technology to create local links and stimulate that awareness. We will make efforts to establish an innovative local business directory that gives businesses an opportunity to raise their own profile, but also find out what businesses locally could supply them with, such as the goods or services they require, or that they could supply to.



## Income generation

As part of the digital strategy, the Council will look to the potential opportunities of generating income through our own commercial property portfolio of buildings and street furniture for small cell 5G rollouts via leading internet service providers within the market. This will in turn ensure that the borough is better connected digitally for our residents and businesses. This approach will also enable us to improve visitor experience at places such as Tonbridge Castle and Country Parks. Opportunities will also emerge from the digital strategy to generate potential income via provision of a 'Mobile Working solution' as a service (SaaS) or a Platform (PaaS) under a shared services arrangement to other interested local authorities with similar disciplines of services as us.

## Partnership working

We will work closely in partnership with other Kent authorities via Kent Connects, Kent Public Service Network (KPSN) and Smarter Digital Services (SDS) to deliver on the digital agenda for TMBC. We have already commissioned SDS to facilitate our business process mapping and reengineering workshops for our frontline services. We will also seek to develop wider partnerships with market leading cloud hosting service providers to achieve a more robust and improved frontline service availability for our customers.



# Smart Borough

The Council aspires to become a 'Smart Borough', where we will use our digital infrastructure to coordinate and manage our assets through increased connectivity and sharing of data and information. To achieve this we will ensure the provision of an open data platform and a targeted and joined-up approach to developing a smart grid of connectivity across the borough through IoT sensors. This approach will enable the Council, residents, partners and businesses to access and use data to develop proactive solutions to social issues including planning, transport, energy, health and community safety, as well as opening up unlimited new commercial opportunities as a test bed for developers.

## Engaged Communities

Through the investment in our digital platforms we will develop and encourage community engagement, where people are embedded within local networks of social support; in which social isolation is reduced and people experience greater wellbeing and other benefits from the better understanding, mobilisation and growth of resilience in their neighbourhoods.

## Digital Inclusion

Tonbridge and Malling generally has a good broadband infrastructure, with just around 1% considered digitally excluded due the area not meeting the required minimum 2 Mbps connectivity for streaming services. Through work that the Council is supporting and endorsing through its Borough Economic Regeneration Strategy, these smaller pockets of digitally excluded communities are being supported and enabled. One such example is the national broadband voucher scheme, which enables customers who would not normally be supported through commercial development of enhanced broadband infrastructure.

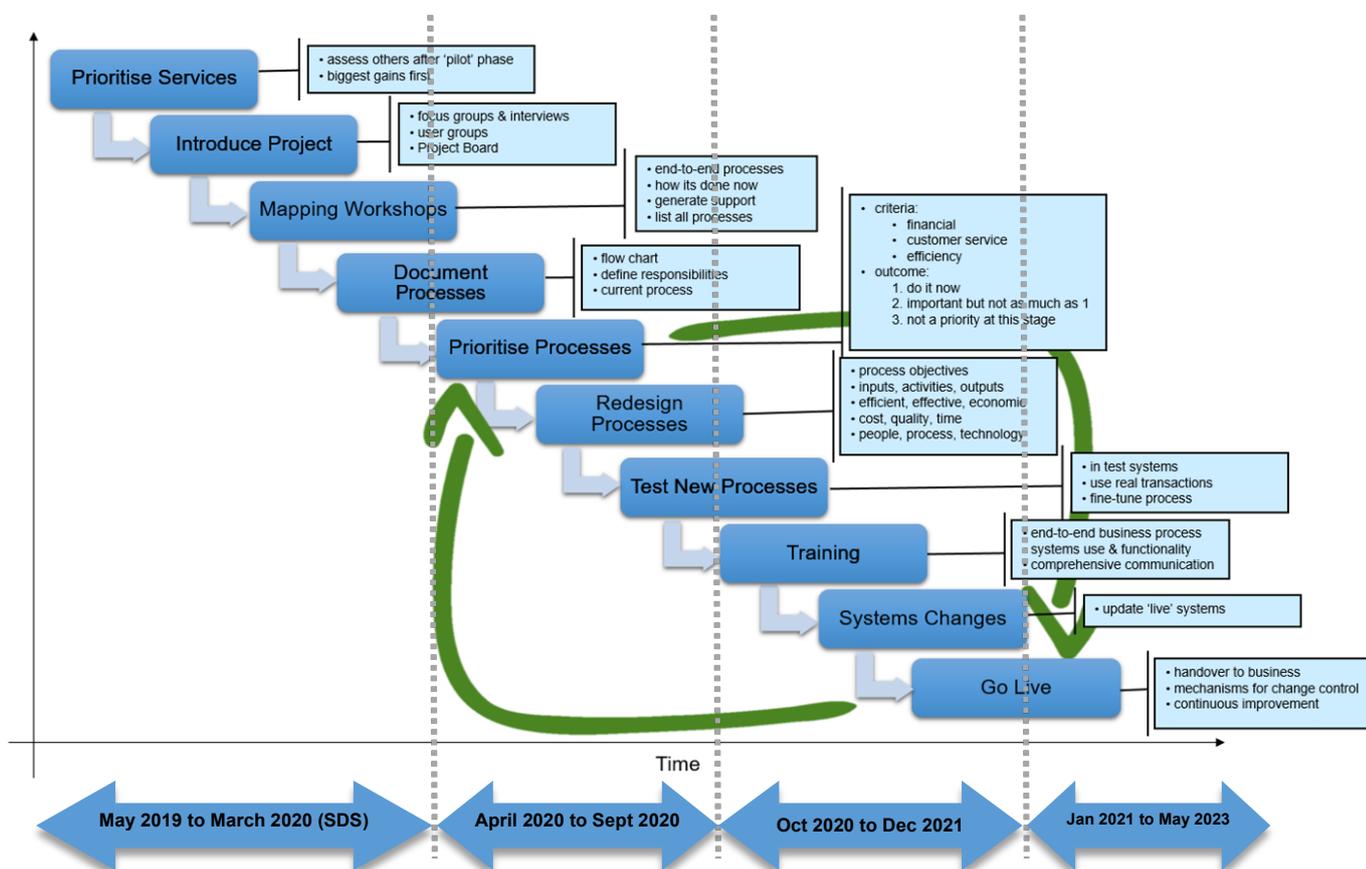


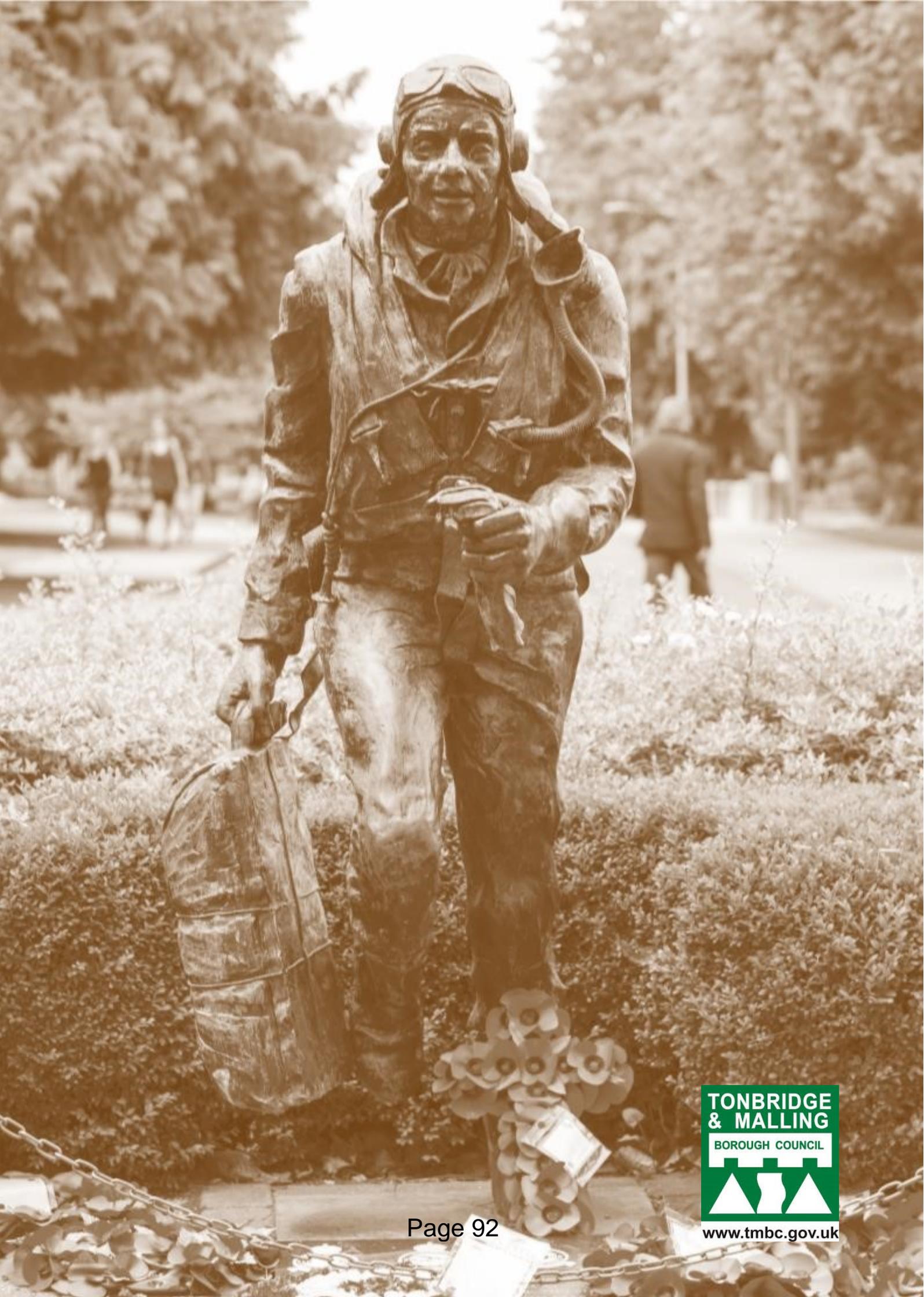
# Digital Transformation Approach

In preparation of adopting this strategy over the next four years (2019 to 2023), the Council has already instigated a detailed review of current business processes and the technologies that are being used to underpin them within all of our key services. The business process review will be prioritised and managed as illustrated in the diagram below.

The outcome of the business process review will determine the technological changes required along with the new re-engineered business process to achieve the mission and vision of this Digital strategy. We will be adopting [Six Sigma](#) as the methodology for business process reengineering and Agile as the methodology for software solutions development and implementation process.

The business process review is expected to be completed by the end of this financial year (March 2020), followed by process reengineering, solution development and testing. Based on a successful user acceptance testing by the relevant process owners, we expect the rollout of the solutions to take place from January 2021 to May 2023. However, should there be any quick wins identified during the 'Business Process Review' workshops, then those projects will be prioritised to be delivered at the earliest.





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## TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

### FINANCE, INNOVATION and PROPERTY ADVISORY BOARD

21 July 2021

#### Report of the Director of Finance and Transformation

#### Part 1- Public

#### Matters for Information

### 1 IT INFRASTRUCTURE UPDATE

**A report updating Members on progress with the upgrade of IT infrastructure**

#### 1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 The IT strategy was initially approved by Members in June 2018 to cover the four year period 2018 to 2022.
- 1.1.2 At its meeting on 6 January 2021, Members of the Advisory Board considered and supported a 'refresh' of the Strategy, extending its life until 2023. **[Annex 1]** sets out the latest refresh of the Strategy.
- 1.1.3 Over the last two to three years since adopting the IT strategy, the Council has made significant progress and achievements against the objectives set out. Many of the achievements became the catalyst for the Council and its staff being able to continue to provide public services to its residents and businesses during the pandemic since March 2020 and to date. These excellent 'foundations' have enabled the proposals regarding a new approach to working for staff for the future to be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 1.1.4 This report updates on some of the projects that have been undertaken during the last few months. Members will recall my reports over the past 12 months regarding disaster recovery and business continuity in respect of our IT infrastructure, and I am pleased to say that the work undertaken will strengthen our position significantly in this regard.

#### 1.2 Progress

- 1.2.1 In line with the primary focus of the IT strategy, in underpinning the Council's business demand for robust and highly available IT Infrastructure, IT Services are currently in the process of migrating the data centre from Gibson building to Microsoft Azure cloud. The following progress have been made thus far since the last update provided to Members:

- 1) A strategic partnership has been formed with Microsoft to enable the council's aspiration to improve customer experience whilst achieving greater operational and financial efficiencies across frontline and back office services;
- 2) Microsoft has made the cloud migration project viable to the council by funding 100% of the migration professional costs for TMBC (\$69,800 USD equivalent to £50,488) via its Azure Migration Program (AMP);
- 3) Migration of the data centre started in May 2021, and we have already moved 43% of the servers (47 servers out of the 109), aiming to complete the migration by September 2021;
- 4) The on-premises email system has been migrated to cloud-based Microsoft Exchange Online;
- 5) We are in the process of migrating our on-premises Skype for Business telephony system to a Teams Cloud based system;
- 6) The new website has been created and hosted within our Azure cloud-based environment, providing higher availability and more responsive experience to the visitors;
- 7) Hybrid meetings are being deployed throughout the Council to enable greater accessibility to meetings both internally and externally. Thus, enabling the organisation to consider the potential of adopting long-term flexible/remote working for council staff.

### **1.3 Benefits realisation**

1.3.1 Migrations and creations of systems in a cloud-based environment will give us the following benefits:

- No reliance on a physical building to store our systems.
- No maintenance overhead for the data centre physical environment or physical servers.
- Savings of energy consumption, reducing the Councils Carbon footprint by at least 33 thousand Kilo tons of CO2 per year.
- High availability of critical systems:
  - Improved access to Council services for the residents of Tonbridge & Malling due to higher availability of services and the increased access to self-service.
  - Creating a better work life balance for staff by enabling flexible working.

## **1.4 Legal Implications**

1.4.1 Procurement has been undertaken in accordance with all relevant legislation and good practice.

## **1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations**

1.5.1 Projects are funded from Capital Renewals or specific IT budgets.

## **1.6 Risk Assessment**

1.6.1 The Council and its staff are reliant on IT systems for the delivery of services. In addition, with the promotion of digitally enabled services to the public, it is imperative that the availability of the systems involved are maintained at a higher level around the clock. As the reliance on IT systems becomes even greater, the migration to cloud services in line with the IT and Digital Strategy will reduce risk to our service.

1.6.2 Corporate strategies, goals and priorities need to align and support each other. The IT Strategy will support the activities and goals set by the Council. Without a clearly defined strategy we may not be able to prioritise our resources correctly, leading to missed opportunities to improve service delivery and reduce costs.

## **1.7 Policy Considerations**

1.7.1 Customer Contact

1.7.2 Business Continuity/Resilience

1.7.3 Procurement

1.7.4 Asset Management

Background papers:

Nil

contact: Ganesh Thangarajah

Sharon Shelton  
Director of Finance and Transformation

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# Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council IT Strategy 2018 – 2023

Revised: December 2020

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# 1. Introduction

- 1.1. This strategy details at a high level how we can apply and develop Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to underpin the delivery of the Corporate Strategy, our Savings and Transformation plan and service improvement by enabling change and driving forward efficiencies.
- 1.2. This strategy is a statement of our aims and objectives which will be used as the framework within which we can operate and is to form the basis for making future decisions. It also sets the scene for future joint working and collaboration with partner organisations through links to the Kent wide Public Services ICT Strategy.
- 1.3. The extremely rapid pace of change and development of ICT means we have to be constantly identifying opportunities for further improvements. As with any strategy this document will be kept under review and updated to reflect internal and external drivers for change over the next 3 years.
- 1.4. The IT Strategy will support the vision, values and priorities detailed in Corporate Strategy 2020-2023, namely:

**Vision:** To continue to be a financially sustainable Council with strong leadership that delivers valued services, a commitment to delivering innovation and change to meet the needs of our Borough

**Values & Priorities:**

- Achieving Efficiency
- Embracing Effective Partnership Working
- Valuing our environment and encouraging sustainable growth
- Innovation

- 1.5. The IT Strategy will also support the objectives set out in the Savings & Transformation Strategy 2018/19 – 2020/21, which are:
  - To deliver sufficient savings in order to bridge the funding gap identified in the Council's MTFS, and to deliver those savings as quickly as possible in order to minimise risk to the Council's finances.
  - To direct resources in line with the principles of the Council's Corporate Strategy
  - To maintain the Council's reputation of good front line service provision
  - To adopt a 'mixed' approach to addressing the funding gap through a series of 'themes'.
  - To be open to accept 'cultural' change/transformation in the ways we work and offer services to the public in order to release efficiencies and savings
  - To engage, as appropriate, with stakeholders when determining how savings will be achieved
- 1.6. Whilst the IT Strategy will cover a number of areas of business transformation and customer service from a technology standpoint, Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council should give consideration to developing a number of complimentary corporate strategies and to ensure a corporate change culture is embedded within the organisation.
- 1.7. The Roadmap section of the policy collates the action points which are referenced within the main text. These are given an AP reference. Some of the action points are discrete

items whereas others will trigger a project or series of projects. As this is a living document, the projects will be documented here as they arise.

## 2. Current Position

- 2.1. The previous IT Strategy (2014-2017) set out “deliverables” that were expected over the lifetime of the strategy. The following key areas of the strategy were identified and acknowledged as underdeveloped at the inception of this IT Strategy (2018-2022). The table below highlights the progress made over the last two years of the strategy.

<b>We said (2014-2017)</b>	<b>We did (2018-2020)</b>
Guiding and supporting staff in the acquisition and use of digital skills through a comprehensive assessment and training programme.	We have established and adopted a new device policy and enabled staff with digital knowledge and skills to work more flexibly and efficiently. We have also provided mandatory Cyber security awareness courses to all staff in ensuring that the organisation and its data are kept and processed securely, and protected against malware, ransomware, social engineering and phishing threats.
Review and challenge business processes throughout the organisation and implement workflow and document management where appropriate.	We have established a Digital Strategy (2019-2023) and are currently carrying out end-to-end business process mapping and re-engineering across the council’s services. 60% of the business process mapping have already been completed. We are currently re-engineering the mapped processes and have identified several opportunities to automate key workflows in Back-office administration efforts across the council and are in discussions with the respective services.
Facilitate new business processes, business models and business moments by the appropriate use of technology.	We have also implemented a mobile working platform to enable our frontline and field-based officers to carry out their primary on-field duties more efficiently, without having to duplicate their efforts in the office.

## 3. Aims & Ambitions

- 3.1. During the course of this strategy, we will examine the business systems that we use and how we use them. By and large we are still users of legacy business applications. Systems with a single use and operating as a silo. Using data as a strategic asset and liberating it from these silos is a key goal. Better use of the data we own will help inform business decisions and the setting of priorities arising from the Savings and Transformation Strategy.
- 3.2. If we are to get the most out of the data assets we own, then we have to ensure that the quality of data is sufficient for it to be used. We know that the current quality level is extremely variable, so we will aim to improve this by a combination of factors including the establishment of a data quality policy (AP1) and implementation of master data management (AP2). This will ensure that we have an authoritative source of clean customer

information in the same way that we have for properties with the Local Land and Property Gazetteer. This will help us to comply with Article 5 of the GDPR which states that data should be accurate and, where necessary, kept up to date. Before any new use of data takes place, Privacy Impact Assessments will be undertaken.

- 3.3. Business change will be a large cultural challenge for the Council. We will need to provide an adequate level of support and resources to ensure we benefit from change rather than resist it (AP3). These is a key requirement for robust project management as part of this process.
- 3.4. The Savings and Transformation Strategy has a number of themes and saving targets to be delivered during the lifetime of this IT Strategy. Examples where Information Technology projects can assist are described in the table below:

Theme	Example of assistive Information Technology
Income Generation & Cost Recovery	Data analysis identifying new opportunities for income and providing a holistic view for cost and debt recovery
In-Service Efficiencies	Better use of technology for service delivery, such as automated workflows and avoidance of double data entry
Service Change & Reduction	Full review of business processes across the organisation to identify candidates for technology led business process re-engineering
Contracts	Reduce the cost of large legacy-based IT system contracts and replace them with commodity platform alternatives which carry out common functions such as customer management, fulfilment, payments, notifications, and workforce planning
Organisation Structure Change	Provide effective communications and collaboration tools to enable work to be conducted any time at any place

- 3.5. Work is already underway with the Virtual Desktop Infrastructure project to introduce a wider number of tools and options for workers to get their jobs done. Reviews of service areas across the Council is informing us how to equip a flexible workforce. This work will continue.
- 3.6. The website continues to be our main focus for doing business with the Council. Since the previous website overhaul in 2015, expectations and technology have moved on. The next iteration of the website will take this into consideration. Our objective is to make online the best way of receiving services for the customer and the council.

## 4. Strategic Objectives

### 4.1. Customers

- Understanding how customers interact with the website is an important factor in developing a user experience that will encourage repeated use. We will continue to use Google Analytics to benchmark website performance and user requirements and feed this

information into a website development plan (AP4).

- We will continue to work with external partners (such as Smarter Digital Services at Tunbridge Wells) to conduct user testing, draw on the experience of others and to participate in joint projects of benefit.
- Development of our online services is an evolutionary process that continually iterates on improvements. Customer opinion is important in this so more opportunities will be built into the customer journey to ask for their views on how well a service is delivered (AP5). This will be crucial information that can be used within the website development plan and the corporate Transformation and Savings plan.
- Improvements will be required to business processes in order to align them better with digital services. Automated tasks such as notifications, enquiry responses and service fulfilment should be considered and existing processes challenged where a more streamlined alternative is available (AP6).
- Close working is required with the Customer Services Team in order to capture and understand key metrics of customer contact. This information can be used to help prioritise the work in the website development programme (AP7).

## 4.2. Staff

- Over the last few years our workforce have been demanding more flexibility and choice in the digital tools used to deliver their service. By introducing Skype for Business on the telephony side, and Virtual Desktop Infrastructure on the IT Service Delivery side, we have the foundations of meeting this demand. We will build upon these developments and closely liaise with service departments on the best mix of IT tools for their use. Offering more staff focussed apps will also drive-in service efficiencies (AP8).
- Current legacy business applications are very specialist and duplicate common processes across the organisation, leading to fragmentation and different ways of doing the same thing. We will aim to increase the flexibility and resilience of the organisation by consolidating common processes across services which will help break down information silos (AP9). Candidates for this will include payments, case management, and order fulfilment.
- All projects will be run in adherence to the 'Agile' project management principles. Where it involves IT system development and implementation, we will adopt the project structure consisting of the following roles and responsibilities:

Project Sponsors	Senior officer and members responsible for driving forward the overall programme
Project Manager	Making sure the components of the project remain on track and are delivered within the budget allocation. Key role in communicating progress to all stakeholders.

Digital Lead	Responsible for content, user journeys, branding and consistency of the transformation service being delivered.
IT Lead	Making sure the technical elements are integrating and providing the desired outcome.
Business Process Analyst	Able to pick apart the components of a current service we deliver and reconstruct that in a “digital first” manner.
Service Managers and Service Users	A willingness to improve the way we deliver services and come forward with ideas and suggestions of their own to include within the projects.
Transformation Officer Study Group	Keeping the wider organisation informed and consulted on the overall transformation programme

### 4.3. Members

- It is important that members understand the journey that we are on with digital technology and use the relevant IT tools effectively to conduct their own business for the Council. We will ensure that members are regularly trained in digital technologies via training sessions (AP10). Members will be canvassed on areas of interest and a training programme will be put into place.
- We will ensure that Members are provided with suitable equipment and software to work in a digital way (AP11).

### 4.4. Partners

- Partnerships exist within many service areas including IT and provide the opportunity for joint projects, co-location and delivery of services. We will continue to work with partners to ensure the opportunities presented by these working relationships can be maximised to help drive down costs and improve service delivery.

### 4.5. IT Infrastructure

- We will challenge our legacy infrastructure and business systems with more agile alternatives (AP12). We will be adopting a “cloud first” approach to our IT infrastructure, primarily to cater for the ever-growing business demand for digital engagement via online services. This will enable our Business systems and Digital services to be and more resilient and highly available to our staff, residents, and businesses. In the long-term, this will also drive down the overhead costs associated with the current on premise solutions. When evaluating potential solutions, the preference for cloud services will be taken in the following order to ensure economic viability:
  1. Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS)
  2. Software as a Service (SaaS)
  3. Platform as a Service (PaaS)

## 4.6. Information Security

- Keeping our organisation safe online is a key priority and is one of the top risk management activities undertaken by the Council. The approach to information security is maturing across the local government sector and top-level responsibility for this risk is required at both Management Team and Member level (AP13). In addition to keeping pace with emerging the threats on a technical basis, we will also put in place the governance structure and procedures so that our security posture and risks can be evaluated corporately.
- We will ensure that the basics of information security are being done well. This includes:
  - maintaining firewalls & content filters
  - using up to date anti-virus
  - promoting good password practice & identity management of users
  - patching software to keep it up to date
  - not using out of date and unsupported software
  - effective monitoring of our environment for anomalous behaviour
- We will maintain compliance with regulatory frameworks such as the Public Service Network Code of Connection (PSN CoCo) and Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI-DSS).
- We will also obtain certification on Cyber Essentials (AP14) which is a publicly recognised standard set up by the National Cyber Security Centre. This is a voluntary programme but will provide re-assurance to our customers and partners that we are managing the information security risk effectively.

## 4.7. Business Continuity & Disaster Recovery

- The Councils Business Continuity Plan and Disaster Recovery Plan will continue to evolve and take on board changes arising from this strategy (AP15).
- As a minimum we will ensure that the Council can continue to provide its statutory services in times of emergency or disaster.
- We will also ensure that the Council has the IT services it requires to carry out its duties as required by the Civil Contingencies Act 2004.

## 5. Roadmap

5.1. The following is a list of actions and milestones from the IT Strategy.

Ref	Description	Timeline	Priority	Status
AP1	Establish data quality policy	2019	High	Complete (IG)
AP2	Implement Master Data Management to create an authoritative customer record	2019	High	Active
AP3	Work with Personnel and other services to embrace a culture of change	Throughout life of strategy	Medium	Active
AP4	Formalise website development plan	2018	High	Complete
AP5	Seek customer views on completion of website transactions	2019	Medium	Complete
AP6	Comprehensive business process reviews across services to identify conversion to digital processes and highlight automation opportunities	Throughout life of strategy	High	Active 60% Complete
AP7	Capture and analyse key customer contact metrics across all channels	2019	Medium	Active
AP8	Ongoing dialog with service areas to determine the best digital tools for the job	Throughout life of strategy	Medium	Active
AP9	Consolidation of common business processes between systems	2020-2021	Medium	Active
AP10	Regular technology training sessions for Members	Annually	Medium	Active
AP11	Ensure Members are equipped with hardware and software to participate in paperless Council meetings	Throughout life of strategy	Medium	Active Up to date
AP12	Challenge continued use of legacy business systems vs. cloud-based alternatives	2020-2021	Medium	Active
AP13	Establish a lead representative for Information Security at officer (Management Team) and Member level	2018	High	Complete
AP14	Ensure that basics of Information Security are done well, regulatory compliance on Information Security is maintained, and obtain Cyber Essentials certification	Throughout life of strategy	High	Active Up to date
AP15	Evolve the Business Continuity and Disaster recovery plans in line with business changes	Throughout life of strategy	Medium	Active Up to date

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## TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

### FINANCE, INNOVATION and PROPERTY ADVISORY BOARD

21 July 2021

#### Report of the Director of Finance and Transformation

#### Part 1- Public

#### Matters for Information

### 1 REVENUES AND BENEFITS UPDATE REPORT

**A report detailing recent developments in respect of council tax, business rates, council tax reduction and housing benefits.**

#### 1.1 Collection of council tax and business rates

- 1.1.1 As at 31 March 2021, the final collection rate for council tax, for the year 2020/21, was 97.88%. This was below the target set for the financial year (98%). The final collection rate for 2019/20 was 98.48%.
- 1.1.2 As at 31 March 2021, the final collection rate for business rates, for the year 2020/21, was 97.28%. This was below the target set for the financial year (98.5%). The final collection rate for 2019/20 was 99.43%.
- 1.1.3 The impact on our ability to recover unpaid debts was unprecedented last year, so it is a great achievement to have collected as much as we did. It is understood that council tax collection nationally was down on the previous year by 1 to 2%. and business rates collection down by anything up to 8%.
- 1.1.4 I am pleased to advise that the Magistrates' Courts have re-opened, and the first liability orders were obtained on 25 May. The next hearing is scheduled for 30 July; however, we have not been advised of any other hearings at present. We will continue to press the Magistrates' Court on this matter to ensure we are able to recover unpaid amounts in a timely manner.
- 1.1.5 Since the introduction of the council tax reduction scheme in 2013/14, the working age taxpayers in receipt of support have been charged £14.6M. By the end of 2020/21, £13.3M has been collected, approximately 91%. In respect of 2020/21, the collection rate for working age taxpayers had improved by 2% compared to 2019/20; this is undoubtedly due to the COVID-19 hardship fund which entitled these taxpayers to a £150 discount. With the discount reducing to £50 for 2021/22, there may be a negative impact on the amount we collect this year; however, early indications are favourable with the collection rates getting towards pre-Covid levels.

- 1.1.6 Despite not being able to undertake any significant recovery action, previous year council tax arrears reduced by approximately £925,000 in the last financial year (compared to £800,000 in 2019/20).
- 1.1.7 The number of recovery notices issued in 2020/21 is shown at **ANNEX 1**. With £100 costs being applied to a summons, Members will see that we lost a significant amount of income due to the Magistrates' Court being unable to offer us any hearing dates.
- 1.1.8 In respect of business rates, the 2020/21 financial year will surely go down in memory! New discounts were introduced along with umpteen grant schemes (mentioned in a separate report), always at short notice and with the expectation that payments would be made quickly. This was in addition to doing the 'normal' day job!
- 1.1.9 I am sure Members will agree with me that, with limited resource, we have achieved everything that was thrown at us and managed to support our local businesses through these extremely difficult times. It is also heartening to see that the majority of businesses that were not entitled to Government support still managed to maintain their business rate payments through the year, resulting in a very satisfactory collection rate.
- 1.1.10 With things hopefully returning to some sort of normality this year, I am hopeful that we can start to clawback the arrears and return to our historically high collection rates.
- 1.1.11 As at 30 June 2021, the collection rate for council tax stood at 27.02%. For the same period in the year 2020/21, the collection rate was 26.35% (27.06% in 2019/20).
- 1.1.12 As at 30 June 2021, the collection rate for business rates stood at 27.96%. For the same period in the year 2020/21, the collection rate was 26.82% (30.59% in 2019/20).

## **1.2 Relief Schemes**

- 1.2.1 On 25 March, the Government announced plans to provide an additional business rates support package worth £1.5 billion to support business in England affected by Covid 19 but which were outside of the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors.
- 1.2.2 Details of the announcement are available at:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/business-rates-relief-boosted-with-new-15-billion-pot>.
- 1.2.3 At the time of writing this report, further details on the scheme had not been provided. A new policy and application process will be required once guidance has been received.

1.2.4 The Expanded Retail Discount that was introduced at the start of the pandemic has changed from 1 July 2021. Previously giving eligible businesses 100% relief, the amount has dropped to 66%; initial indications would suggest that businesses have managed to absorb this reduction in support but there may be some impact on collection for the remainder of this financial year.

### **1.3 Performance and Workload of the Benefits Service**

1.3.1 New claims for housing benefit and council tax reduction are taking on average around 13 days to process, however most are dealt with between two and three working days. It is only those few needing further information or clarification where it may take longer.

1.3.2 The number of households receiving assistance with housing benefit continues to fall, now standing at 4229. This is a drop of 105 since 1 April 2021 and is primarily due to the numbers switching to Universal Credit. In March 2020 the number of households we help with housing benefit was down to 4950, 2900 of which were working age, the number of working age claims is now 2270.

1.3.3 Numbers of households getting help with council tax reduction has gradually reduced over the past 12 months following the peak in claims around the start of the pandemic. The number currently stands at 6700. Analysis shows there are potentially many households in the Borough that may have entitlement to council tax reduction but have not made claims. Work on this is ongoing, particularly now we have restarted recovery processes for council tax debt.

1.3.4 The number of discretionary housing payment applications continues to rise each month. Again, this is anticipated as debt recovery, particularly rent arrears, restarts and Government protections come to an end.

### **1.4 Temporary Accommodation Administration**

1.4.1 As the numbers of households placed in temporary accommodation has increased over the last two years, the emphasis to find efficient ways to invoice and recover charges to these clients has become more apparent.

1.4.2 The recovery team within the Revenues & Benefits Service has taken on work from Exchequer and Housing Services to enable the end to end process to be handled by one team. The process has been streamlined, developing the use of IT, to enable the quick and accurate issue of invoices. The work started in March, coinciding with the Service's restructuring and is progressing well, further work is planned, together with the Housing Service, aimed at maximising our income recovery while safeguarding those vulnerable households.

## **1.5 Self Isolation Payments**

- 1.5.1 The self isolation payment support scheme provides a fixed payment of £500 for anyone on a low income instructed to self isolate due to covid contact where the result would be a loss of pay through inability to work.
- 1.5.2 The scheme was recently extended to parents of children having to self isolate, where the parent could not work, having to stay home to look after a child.
- 1.5.3 Since the Scheme started in September 2020, we have received almost 1,000 applications. Numbers were low to start, peaked around December / January, then tailed off since March.
- 1.5.4 Over the last three weeks numbers started to rise, rapidly increasing once more. This does not come as a surprise. We anticipate numbers to continue growing, probably until rules around self isolation are relaxed, currently planned for August. Although funding for the administration of these payments is met by Government, resourcing the service to meet the fluctuation of demand proves challenging. Payment targets are three days from receipt of a completed application, which at times is difficult to meet. Due to the application criteria and access to verify benefit information, administration of the self isolation payments sits best with the team responsible for benefits payments. Assessment of payments is certainly helped by a knowledge of benefits, adding to the pressure of the team. Some temporary agency worker assistance has been used but again, this proves challenging over to the fluctuation of work.

## **1.6 Legal Implications**

- 1.6.1 Nil.

## **1.7 Financial and Value for Money Considerations**

## **1.8 Risk Assessment**

- 1.8.1 Nil.

## **1.9 Equality Impact Assessment**

- 1.9.1 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users at this point.

## **1.10 Policy Considerations**

- 1.10.1 Community
- 1.10.2 Customer Contact

Background papers:

1. In respect of the collection of council tax and business rates, data held within Financial Services.

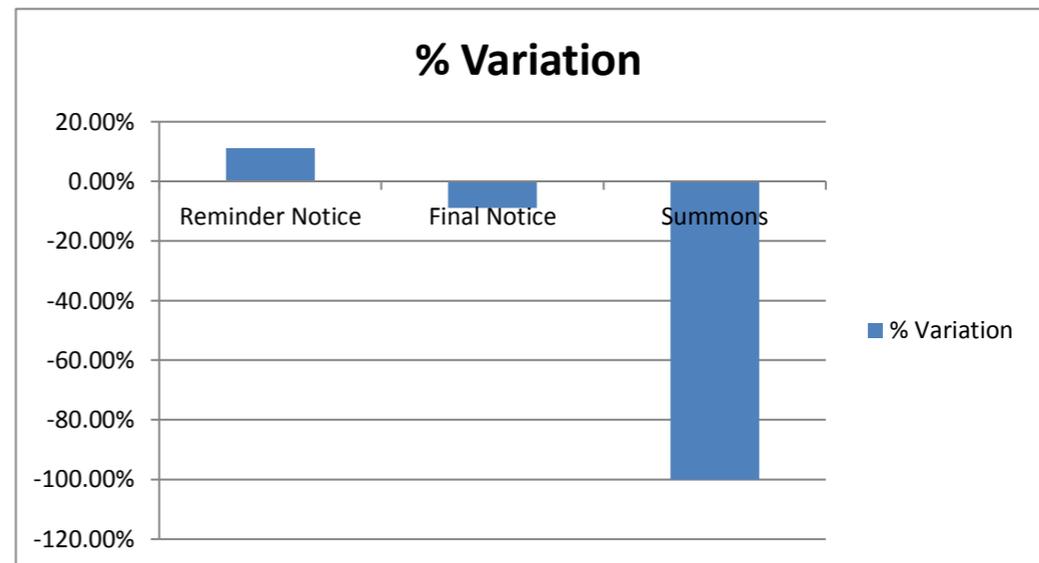
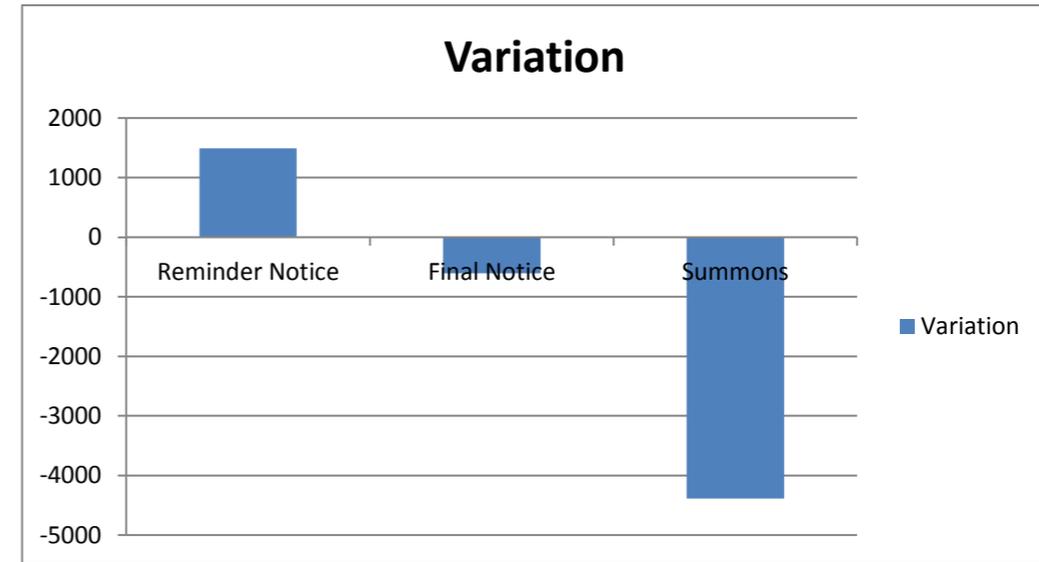
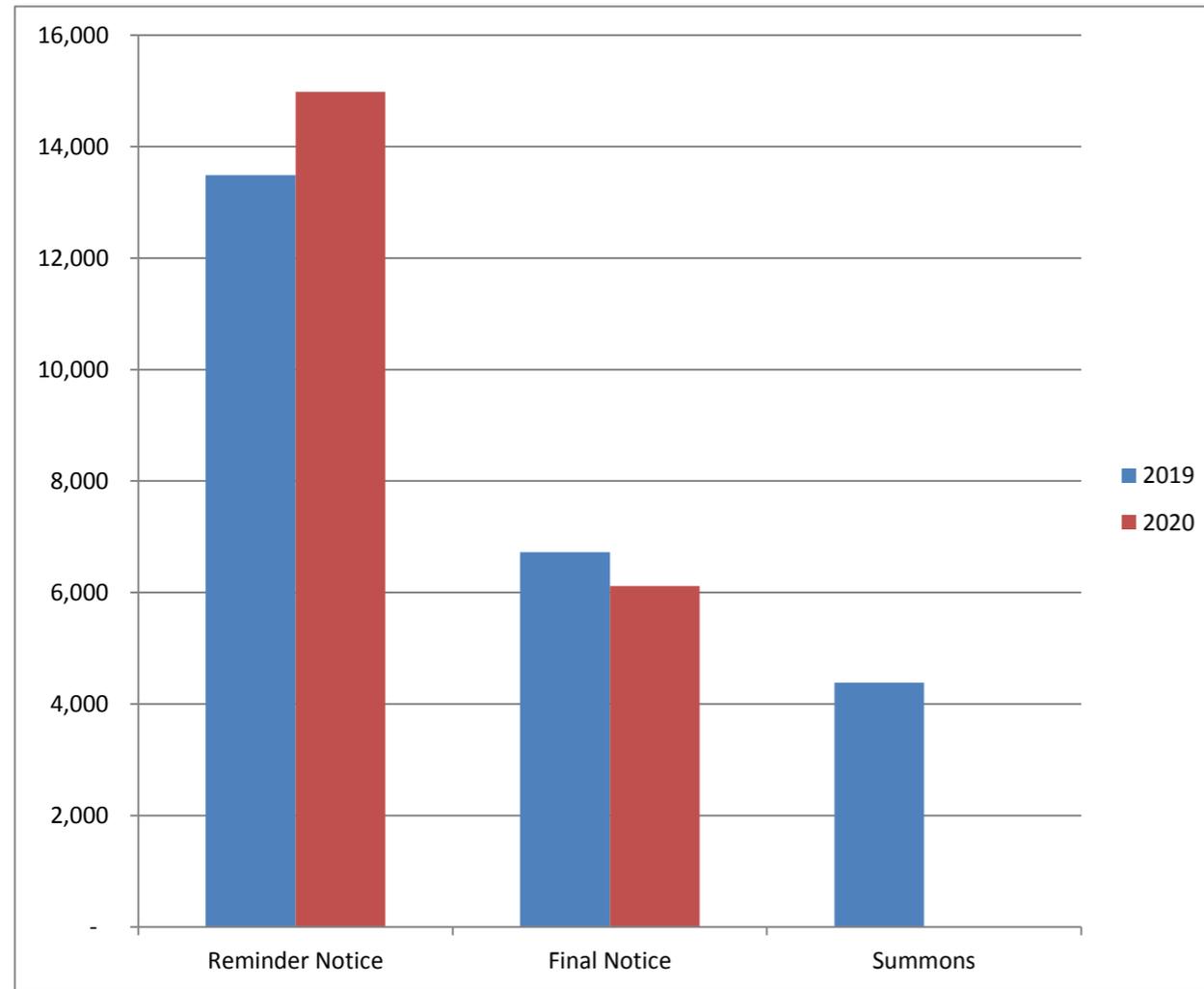
contact: Glen Pritchard  
01732 876146  
Andrew Rosevear  
01732 876143

Sharon Shelton  
Director of Finance and Transformation

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	Reminder Notice	Final Notice	Summons	Total
2019	13,488	6,721	4,386	24,595
2020	14,982	6,117	-	21,099
<b>Variation</b>	<b>1494</b>	<b>-604</b>	<b>-4386</b>	<b>-3496</b>
<b>% Variation</b>	<b>11.08%</b>	<b>-8.99%</b>	<b>-100.00%</b>	<b>-14.21%</b>

**ANNEX 1**



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## TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

### FINANCE, INNOVATION and PROPERTY ADVISORY BOARD

21 July 2021

#### Report of the Director of Finance and Transformation

#### Part 1- Public

#### Matters for Information

### 1 **BUSINESS GRANTS SCHEMES**

**A report detailing the Government schemes that have assisted businesses and charities affected by the COVID-19 lockdown.**

#### 1.1 **Background**

1.1.1 I reported to the Advisory Board in January with details of the multitude of business grant schemes that had been in place for businesses during the period of local restrictions from November 2020.

1.1.2 Since then, the Local Restriction Support Grant (LRSG) scheme was initially extended for the period from 5 January 2021 to 15 February 2021 and then for the period from 16 February 2021 to 31 March 2021.

1.1.3 A one-off top up grant called the 'Closed Businesses Lockdown Payment' was also introduced to provide more funding for all businesses mandated to close during national restrictions. This was paid alongside the LRSG award for the period 16 February 2021 to 31 March 2021.

1.1.4 This report further sets out the grant schemes introduced since local restrictions ended and gives an overview of the total amount of funding awarded by the Council.

#### 1.2 **Restart Grant Scheme**

1.2.1 On 3 March 2021, Government announced the introduction of grant support for non-essential retail, hospitality, accommodation, leisure, personal care and gym businesses in England from 1 April 2021 to help them reopen safely.

1.2.2 This 'Restart Grant' scheme offered one-off grants of up to £6,000 to non-essential retail business premises and up to £18,000 to hospitality, accommodation, leisure, personal care and gym business premises.

1.2.3 Applications for these grants closed on 30 June 2021, with any outstanding claims needing to be processed by 31 July 2021. It is anticipated that all eligible claims will have been paid by the meeting of this Board.

### **1.3 Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG)**

1.3.1 Since November 2020, the Borough Council has received £3,816,982 of discretionary funding to support our local businesses, chiefly through the use of grants. The funding rounds that have been delivered by the Borough Council through the ARG have been designed to work alongside and complement the Local Restrictions Support Grant and Restart Grant schemes, in order to create a fair level of support to businesses in the Borough.

1.3.2 Whilst the original deadline for spending this ARG funding was March 2022, in February 2021, Central Government announced that it would need to be spent by the end of June 2021 (subsequently extended to the end of July 2021). Any Local Authority that did not do so would not receive any further ARG funding (top-up funding). Meeting this new deadline at short notice obviously had quite a substantial impact on workloads during the first half of 2021.

1.3.3 Overall, the Borough Council launched a number of funding rounds in order to distribute this funding to local businesses most in need of funding support, as expediently as possible. The following list sets out the funding rounds and the amount of funding allocated:

- 17 November – 16 December 2020: £461,182 of funding distributed
- 05 January – 21 January 2021: £269,773 of funding distributed
- 02 February – 05 March 2021: £2,243,382 of funding distributed
- 21 April – 10 May 2021: £872,518 of funding distributed
- Total - £3,846,855 of funding distributed.

1.3.4 Each round had slightly different eligibility criteria in response to Government guidance and the need to align sensibly with other available funding streams. The most recent round in April-May 2021 was badged as Round 1 of the ARG (Discretionary) Restart Grant Fund in order to complement the mandatory Restart Grants Scheme as set out in section 1.2.

1.3.5 In total, over 1,300 individual grant payments were made to our businesses over the course of November 2020 – May 2021.

1.3.6 Our ARG funding had all been allocated by May 2021, with final payments being made in early June 2021. Having successfully spent the ARG allocation, the Borough Council has now applied for a top-up, and will receive an additional £1.054m in July 2021 to deliver further discretionary grant support in the period up

to March 2022. The slight overspend on the initial ARG allocation will be met by this top-up funding, with the remaining funding being predominantly used in two main ways:

- A Round 2 of the ARG (Discretionary) Restart Grants during July-August 2021.
- A top-up supplement to businesses that have successfully applied for Restart Grant Funding, but are in sectors that are still struggling due to Covid-19 restrictions. A policy for this top-up is currently being developed but, subject to member approval, is likely to prioritise businesses in the leisure, events and travel and tourism sectors, and businesses that supply these businesses. This top-up would be administered after Round 2 of the ARG (Discretionary) Restart Grants scheme has been completed.

## 1.4 Funding

1.4.1 In addition to the discretionary funding mentioned above, the total amount of **mandatory** grant funding awarded since March 2020 to date totals £31,788,888.

1.4.2 This is broken down as follows:

- Lockdown 1 £19,195,000
- Lockdown 2 £1,910,335
- Lockdown 3 £6,186,865
- Restart £4,496,688

1.4.3 Implementing these grants has placed a huge burden on the officers involved, and work will continue for the remainder of this financial year with additional ARG funding to be spent and MHCLG, HMRC and BEIS continuing to send numerous statistical returns and post payment assurance reports.

1.4.4 I am pleased to advise that, despite the considerable pressure that has been put upon us, we have come through successfully so far, with the 'normal' work still relatively up to date!

## 1.5 Legal Implications

1.5.1 Nil.

## 1.6 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.6.1 Central government will fully reimburse Local Authorities, in line with guidance and the grant offer letter, for the cost of the grant (using a grant under section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003).

**1.7 Risk Assessment**

1.7.1 The Government will not accept deliberate manipulation and fraud - and any business caught falsifying their records to gain additional grant money will face prosecution and any funding issued will be subject to claw back, as may any grants paid in error.

**1.8 Policy Considerations**

1.8.1 Community

Background papers:

Nil

contact: Glen Pritchard  
01732 876146

Jeremy Whittaker  
01732 876011

Sharon Shelton  
Director of Finance and Transformation

# Agenda Item 12

Any other items which the Chairman decides are urgent due to special circumstances and of which notice has been given to the Chief Executive.

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# Agenda Item 13

The Chairman to move that the press and public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting during consideration of any items the publication of which would disclose exempt information.

**ANY REPORTS APPEARING AFTER THIS PAGE CONTAIN EXEMPT  
INFORMATION**

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# Agenda Item 16

Any other items which the Chairman decides are urgent due to special circumstances and of which notice has been given to the Chief Executive.

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