

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

FINANCE, INNOVATION AND PROPERTY ADVISORY BOARD

Wednesday, 15th September, 2021

Present: Cllr M C Base (Chairman), Cllr R I B Cannon (Vice-Chairman), Cllr T Bishop, Cllr G C Bridge, Cllr C Brown, Cllr A E Clark, Cllr M O Davis, Cllr M R Rhodes, Cllr H S Rogers and Cllr F G Tombolis

(Note: As Councillors R W Dalton and K King were unable to attend in person and participated via MS Teams they were unable to vote on any matters).

Councillors Mrs J A Anderson, V M C Branson, M A Coffin, F A Hoskins, J R S Lark and K B Tanner 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.

Councillors Mrs P A Bates, R P Betts, M D Boughton, Mrs T Dean, S A Hudson, D Keers, Mrs A S Oakley and J L Sergison were also present in the Council Chamber pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors L J O'Toole and Mrs M Tatton.

PART 1 - PUBLIC

FIP 21/44 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor T Bishop declared an Other Significant Interest in the Applications for Discretionary Rate Relief as he was a Borough Council appointee to the Tonbridge and Malling Leisure Trust. He withdrew from the meeting during consideration of the item and took no part in the discussion and voting thereon. Councillor M Davis declared an Other Significant Interest in the same item as he was also a Borough Council appointee to the Tonbridge and Malling Leisure Trust. In addition, he advised that his firm acted for two other organisations applying for rate relief. He withdrew from the meeting during consideration of the item and took no part in the discussion and voting thereon.

FIP 21/45 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the notes of the meeting of the Finance, Innovation and Property Advisory Board held on 21 July 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE CABINET

**FIP 21/46 CAPITAL PROGRAMME POST IMPLEMENTATION REVIEW
MONITORING**

(Decision Notice D210086MEM)

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation identified post implementation reviews carried out since the meeting of the Advisory Board in September 2020 (attached at Annex 1) and provided details of the capital plan schemes due for review (attached at Annex 3). A post implementation review in respect of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) Software was also set out for consideration.

RECOMMENDED: That the post implementation scheme in respect of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) Software, as set out at Annex 2 of the report, be approved.

FIP 21/47 CUSTOMER SERVICES - CORPORATE CALL CENTRE

(Decision Notice D210087MEM)

Following the success of a pilot model, the report of the Director of Central Services and Deputy Chief Executive set out proposals for the establishment of a corporate call centre. These proposals would facilitate delivery of the Borough Council's digital strategy and reflected the 'One Council' theme.

Prior to the implementation of any call centre model there would be further work on understanding customer requirements, structuring and assigning resources within the Customer Service team and identifying and clarifying potential efficiency savings for each service area.

Approval was sought for a one number contact for the public in line with the digital strategy, with all calls feeding through the one number and into the switchboard as opposed to being disseminated to back offices and individual officers directly as was the current process. A multimedia telephony system had been purchased which would allow for efficiencies to be made and the initial efficiency savings of using BOT were currently being identified across each service area.

RECOMMENDED: That the corporate call centre model be adopted in principle, subject to Management Team continuing to work towards ensuring that any costs were paid for through efficiency savings within the Council.

FIP 21/48 SPECIAL EXPENSES CONSULTATION

The report of the Borough Council's Management Team provided details of responses to a public consultation regarding potential adjustments to the Special Expenses Policy.

Consideration was given as to whether the cost of the non-strategic public conveniences in Tonbridge and Christmas lights should be included in the Policy. Particular reference was made to the appropriate weight that should be given to the consultation responses.

Members recognised that the majority of those using the public conveniences would unlikely be local residents but also accepted that there needed to be consistency across the Borough.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) the Special Expenses Policy should be updated to include non-strategic public conveniences which are located in Tonbridge; and
- (2) the Special Expenses Policy should not be updated to include Christmas lighting.

***Referred to Council**

FIP 21/49 FINANCIAL PLANNING AND CONTROL

(Decision Notice D210088MEM)

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation brought together information on the three key budget areas of salaries, major operational income streams and investment income. The performance of these key budget areas, together with approved variations to the revenue budget and areas identified through revenue budget monitoring were summarised to provide an indicative overall budget position for the year. The report also provided an update on capital expenditure and variations that had been agreed in relation to the capital plan.

Attention was drawn to the fact that the projected funding gap had widened to that reported to the Cabinet in July, which represented a significant and challenging financial position for the Borough Council.

Members were also advised that the projected net adverse variance of £65,500 did not include the income foregone as a result of the suspension of the garden waste service costed at around £85,000 per month.

RECOMMENDED: That it be noted that, as at the end of July 2021, the projected overall outturn position for the year 2021/22 was a net adverse variance of £65,500 when compared to the budget set in February 2021.

FIP 21/50 APPLICATIONS FOR DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF

(Decision Notice D210089MEM)

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation gave details of renewal applications and new applications for discretionary rate relief together with amendments to previous awards. Since the last meeting of the Advisory Board, there had been one new application for rate relief from the Tonbridge and Malling Leisure Trust which Members were asked to consider.

Particular attention was brought to the Council's own financial position, which remained challenging and it was 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. Members were therefore asked to consider that, when writing to the organisations concerned, it would be prudent to advise 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.

Members were made aware of an error in paragraph 1.3.4 of the report, whereby it was incorrectly stated that the property was used as the Leisure Trust's head office, when in fact it was for the provision of outdoor sporting facilities.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) in respect of the reapplications for relief (as set out at Annex 2) discretionary rate relief be awarded with effect from 1 July 2021 and time limited to 31 March 2023;
- (2) in respect of the renewal application for 1st Ditton Scout Group, the award of 20% discretionary relief be amended to show no time limit;
- (3) in respect of the renewal application for K Sports Management Ltd, the award of 90% discretionary relief be amended to 70% discretionary relief for the period 1 July 2021 and time limited to 31 March 2023; and
- (4) in respect of the application for Tonbridge and Malling Leisure Trust, discretionary rate relief of 20% be awarded with effect from 1 July 2021 and time limited to 31 March 2023.

FIP 21/51 RURAL RATE RELIEF - RURAL SETTLEMENT LIST

(Decision Notice D210090)

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation informed Members of the requirement to review the Borough Council's rural settlement list and recommended that the current list should be retained unaltered for the financial year 2022/23. The locations and boundaries of each rural settlement were illustrated in a map (attached at Annex 1).

RECOMMENDED: That the current rural settlement list (as set out at Annex 1 to the report) remain in force for 2022/23.

FIP 21/52 RIVER LAWN, TONBRIDGE

The joint report of the Leader, Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change and the Director of Central Services and Deputy Chief Executive provided an update on the proposed disposal of open space at River Lawn, Tonbridge.

Careful consideration was given to a number of options for the site and whether the previously approved sale of the land should be progressed. It was reported that the non-delivery of the proposed sale would have a detrimental impact on the Savings and Transformation Strategy and the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Members recognised the difficult financial position faced by the Borough Council but on balance were minded not to continue with the proposed sale of the open space at River Lawn. Members requested that a further report be submitted to a future meeting of the Street Scene and Environment Services Advisory Board to consider options for the longer-term use of the land (including the option to rewild the site) and in order that the Advisory Board may consider whether to continue with the objection to the public rights of way application.

RECOMMENDED: That the proposed sale of the open space land at River Lawn Road be discontinued.

***Referred to Cabinet**

MATTERS SUBMITTED FOR INFORMATION

FIP 21/53 REVENUE AND BENEFITS UPDATE

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation detailed recent developments in respect of council tax, business rates, council tax reduction and housing benefits.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE

FIP 21/54 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 21/55 PEMBURY ROAD OPTIONS

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

The report of the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health provided an update on the recent procurement of four properties in Tonbridge for conversion to temporary accommodation.

Careful consideration was given to the options set out in the report with particular attention given to the financial and value for money implications as a result of anticipated additional costs above the approved budget.

RECOMMENDED: That Option 1 presented in the report be recommended as the preferred option to Cabinet and Council.

***Referred to Council**

FIP 21/56 DEBTS FOR WRITE OFF

(Decision Notice D210091MEM)

(Reason: LGA 1972 Sch 12A Paragraph 2 – Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual)

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation sought approval for the writing-off of debts that were considered to be irrecoverable.

RECOMMENDED: That the four items shown in the schedule of amounts over £5,000 (as set out at Annex 1) totalling £49,422.00 be written off for the reason stated within the schedule.

The meeting ended at 10.00 pm