

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL MEETING

MINUTES

Tuesday, 11th April, 2023

At the meeting of the Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council held in the Civic Suite, Gibson Building, Kings Hill, West Malling on Tuesday, 11th April, 2023

Present: Her Worship the Mayor (Councillor Mrs S Bell), the Deputy Mayor (Councillor J R S Lark), Cllr Mrs J A Anderson, Cllr M C Base, Cllr Mrs P A Bates, Cllr R P Betts, Cllr T Bishop, Cllr M D Boughton, Cllr V M C Branson, Cllr G C Bridge, Cllr C Brown, Cllr R I B Cannon, Cllr M A Coffin, Cllr A Cope, Cllr R W Dalton, Cllr D A S Davis, Cllr M O Davis, Cllr S M Hammond, Cllr D Harman, Cllr M A J Hood, Cllr F A Hoskins, Cllr S A Hudson, Cllr D Keers, Cllr Mrs F A Kemp, Cllr A Kennedy, Cllr D W King, Cllr D Lettington, Cllr B J Luker, Cllr P J Montague, Cllr Mrs A S Oakley, Cllr W E Palmer, Cllr M R Rhodes, Cllr R V Roud, Cllr J L Sergison, Cllr K B Tanner, Cllr Mrs M Tatton, Cllr M Taylor, Cllr Miss G E Thomas, Cllr F G Tombolis and Cllr C J Williams.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P Boxall, A E Clark, D J Cooper, Mrs T Dean, N Foyle, N J Heslop, A P J Keeley, Mrs R F Lettington, H S Rogers, T B Shaw and D Thornewell.

(Note: Councillors Cooper and Foyle were unable to attend in person but listened to the debate via MS Teams).

PART 1 - PUBLIC

C 23/26 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

C 23/27 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the proceedings of the meeting of the Council held on 21 February 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

C 23/28 MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor advised of a number of engagements attended since the last meeting of Council and made particular reference to the following civic and charity events:

- Charity Zumba Event at Larkfield Leisure Centre which had raised £1,060
- Valley Invicta Primary School at Kings Hill Opening of New Outside Area
- Annual Community Concert for Senior Citizens at Tonbridge School
- Unveiling of the Nations Table in the Nave at Rochester Cathedral
- Tonbridge Lions Club's Charter Night
- Heusenstamm Friendship Circles Dinner & AGM
- Mayor of Sevenoaks' International Women's Day Celebration Lunch
- Hillview School for Girls Dance Platform Event
- Tonbridge School's Reception & Concert
- Tonbridge Baptist Church Easter Crafts Session for Longmead Primary School
- TMBC's Tonbridge Jobs Fair and Snodland Jobs Fair
- Alzheimer/Dementia Drop in Centre Event at Spadework
- Visit to Cage Green Primary School
- The Declaration Ceremony of The High Sheriff of Kent
- LAMPS Production

Arrangements were being finalised for future civic and charity events and the following were noted:

- Mayor's Charity Afternoon Tea at Tonbridge School on 14 May 2023 (further details to follow)
- Annual Council – 17 May 2023

Finally, the Mayor thanked the Deputy Mayor for attending a number of events on their behalf.

C 23/29 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC PURSUANT TO COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE NO 5.6

No questions were received from members of the public pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 5.6.

C 23/30 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS PURSUANT TO COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE NO 5.5

No questions were received from Members pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 5.5.

C 23/31 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader delivered the following statement to the Council:

'Here we are, our final Council meeting of the 2019-2023 term of Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council. It has been a period in which this borough has changed beyond recognition and which I want to use my announcements tonight to reflect upon.

Four years ago, in May 2019, we all came here with a sense of purpose for what we wanted to achieve for our residents, ideas to make our towns and villages better. For some of us, who were elected for the first time in 2019, we had a clear vision of the change that we wished to make.

Then, in less than a year, the pandemic hit and everything changed. We saw this in our daily lives and also in our communities. As the local authority we had to take steps very quickly to make sure that day to day services did not grind to a halt.

I think we can all agree that Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council did an exceptional job through the pandemic. Whether it be making our borough safe again, providing millions of pounds of financial support to residents and businesses, or simply adapting our services to deal with the demands of the time. It was – in my opinion – a shining example of the role the public sector can play in co-ordinating and helping a borough, especially the most vulnerable.

The pandemic of course changed life for everyone, but it also made each of us reassess our priorities. The very way that we interact as a society has changed. We see this in the impact on some of our demand led services as well. We see tonnages in waste collections increase significantly and particularly during a period of lockdown, and yet demands for parking controls, for example, fall away particularly around stations. As a society I think we are still adapting to what the 'new normal' could be, and as a local authority, we have still got to do some adapting ourselves as well.

Reflecting on the pandemic, I cannot take any credit whatsoever for the leadership this Council provided, those thanks must go to my predecessor, Councillor Nicolas Heslop. It concluded an immensely successful 9 years as Leader and I am very sorry Councillor Heslop is standing down.

Councillor Heslop leads an illustrious list of members who won't be with us at Annual Council. I did a rough calculation earlier, and I reckon we are losing 212 years' worth of experience from Councillors in this Chamber next month, with 16 members not seeking re-election. This includes 4 former Mayors and decades of experience in the Cabinet or charring committees.

There is no doubt that the loss of so much experience in any organisation at one time presents a huge challenge for the council. So I would like to thank each and every member who is not seeking re-election for their contribution, however long you've been here. I know in my own group there are a lot of friends who are standing down who were very welcoming to me as a new member in 2019. I hope everyone is proud of all that they have achieved, however long they've been here, for their residents.

There will no doubt be others of us who are standing again who do not get re-elected on the 4th of May. I wish everyone the very best in their election campaigns. I for one hope to be here next month at Annual Council.

This means today could be my last Leader's Announcements. This will no doubt be the aim of all the opposition members, so I thought it useful to reflect on the 21 months I have held in the role, mainly so they know the state of play should they take over. It is fair to say that when I was elected 4 years ago I did not expect to be giving Leader's Announcements, until it actually happened I had not really prepared much for the role.

I did make a few pledges which I hope all members have seen that we stuck to. I said that we would develop policy more collaboratively, and I believe we have done just that. The regular Group Leaders meetings which did not happen before have been very useful and the Scrutiny Select Committees have given an opportunity for all members to set the agenda without being dominated by the Cabinet. I said the Council would modernise its practices and the report of the Corporate Peer Review in particular has helped us do that in so many ways.

As Leader I see my job set the strategic direction of the authority, and to lead from the front in delivery of high quality services. But this is not possible without an excellent team around me.

I'd like to thank all colleagues in the Conservative Group for placing their trust in me in July 2021, and for their loyalty, initiative and work ever since. It was a leap into the unknown for this Council and the Group to decide to elect the youngest and one of the newest members to lead it, but I do hope I have repaid that faith. To Councillors David Lettington and Martin Coffin who served brilliantly as Deputies and to all of those who served in Cabinet as well, I am very grateful for each of your leadership in your portfolios. To all of those who have chaired committees and contributed in any way, thank you for keeping me on my toes and for providing a leading role in policy formulation.

I'd like to thank all members across the Council for their support, encouragement and – on the whole – co-operation.

I've tried to be an outward looking Leader who spends as little time as possible in this building, and as much time as possible across Tonbridge and Malling. That is something I hoped to have achieved as well and I'm immensely grateful for the support of all residents up and down the borough during my tenure. I've been open, upfront and honest where there have been challenges and always gone out of my way to listen to the views of local people where issues arise.

There is also a group of people who deserve particular praise at this meeting, but seldom receive it. They are the officers of this Council. It is a competitive market and with regional recruitment and retention difficulties that we see in particular in some services and it does take a special type of commitment to work for a local authority. The temptation no doubt must be to head elsewhere, particularly when there is unfair criticism aimed at officers, which does happen on a daily basis from my experience as well.

The dedication of our officers is second to none. Everyone who I have worked closely with in the officer team has demonstrated this. I have been open to ideas and challenge privately, and I believe a strong mutual understanding and trust has developed. I hope all of the Management Team here tonight and their colleagues through their Service Management Teams and throughout the organisation would accept my thanks for all of the assistance they have provided to me, to the administration and to all members over that time, and obviously I hope to continue working with you after the election.

It is because of this that we have been able to deliver on the priorities of residents across Tonbridge and Malling. And there is so much we can be proud of together over the last 4 years.

Not only the millions distributed during the pandemic, but more recently the cost of living support. £25 million in housing benefit, £7 million in Council Tax support, £260,000 in low income vouchers, to name just three.

We have achieved this while remaining a debt free authority and keeping our council tax increase below inflation.

We've listened and brought people with us. To achieve thousands of responses to a Local Plan Regulation 18 consultation shows people are listening and want to be engaged. They heard our 'brownfield first' message and how this Council has spoken for people during this process.

At the start of this term we hadn't made any progress in dealing with Climate Change. Now look at us. A dedicated Cabinet Member who has run a carbon neutral business for over a decade, and an ambitious action plan that we are delivering.

We've installed electric charging points across the borough, planted thousands of trees, given green business grants to local businesses, put hundreds of PV panels on our buildings and were the first local authority in the South East to build its own eco-café at Leybourne Lakes.

This shows that we can be sustainable and support businesses. We've played a proactive role in developing Tonbridge Trade Park and working with the Arch Company to renovate Railway Approach in Tonbridge, we've secured the massive jobs boost at Panattoni Park in Aylesford to give thousands of local people the opportunity for local, skilled jobs.

We've supported the Leisure Trust through its most challenging times and seen regional and national accreditation for facilities at Larkfield Leisure Centre, Tonbridge Swimming Pool, Leybourne Lakes and Haysden Country Park. With our own award-winning parks Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, either directly or through the Leisure Trust, leads the way in maintenance and provision of Leisure Facilities and Open Spaces.

And, most importantly, we have delivered what I said was the top priority in July 2021 when I took over as Leader and seen a significant improvement in the waste collection service. Re-rounding later this year will make collections even more efficient and we've ramped up our enforcements on litter and fly-tipping, clamping down on those who damage our environment.

We have made an awful lot of progress in two years that we should all be proud of. It is why I am keen that we have the opportunity to lead for another 4 years and to do even more to support our communities.

The steps taken in the past 4 years and in the 2 since I became Leader have been significant. Whether it is with me at the helm or not, transformation will be a key and critical theme of this Council after the elections. All elected members and officers will need to think about this very carefully, and boldly. But we have shown we can do it and there is nothing to fear.

Can I reiterate my thanks to all of those members who are retiring for all the work they have done to serve their communities with distinction for so long, and can I wish all re-standing members the very best of luck with their election campaigns.'

The Leader's Announcements were available on the Borough Council's [YouTube channel](#).

MATTERS FOR DECISION**C 23/32 PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS 2023 - 2025**

The proposed programme of meetings for the municipal years 2023/24 and 2024/25 were presented for consideration and were attached as Annexes 1 and 2 respectively. Management Team, Senior Officers and Cabinet Members had been consulted on the proposed dates. Subject to any amendments identified by Members the programmes would be presented to Annual Council for endorsement.

It was the responsibility of the annual meeting of the Council to approve a programme of meetings for the coming year. However, it was considered sensible to present the programmes to this meeting to allow time for any proposed revisions to be made.

As a result of the local election on Thursday 4 May 2023 and the Coronation Bank Holiday on Monday 8 May 2023, there had been a number of changes to the programme previously agreed in 2022 and Members attention was drawn to the amendments as detailed in paragraph 1.1.2 of the report.

In addition, the budget setting cycle for 2024 was subject to confirmation of dates for Kent County Council, Kent Police and Kent Fire and Rescue Service budget meetings. Currently, the provisional Borough Council programme allowed for Cabinet on 11 February 2024 and Council on 18 February 2024 and remained subject to change.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the programme of meetings for 2023/24 (as set out in Annex 1) be approved and presented to Annual Council for endorsement; and
- (2) the draft programme of meetings for 2024/25 (as set out in Annex 2) be agreed, subject to final approval at Annual Council in May 2023.

C 23/33 ANIMAL LICENSING POLICY CONSULTATION

Item LA 23/4 referred from Licensing and Appeals Committee minutes of 28 March 2023.

RESOLVED: That the recommendations at Minute LA 23/4 be approved.

C 23/34 DECISIONS TAKEN UNDER EMERGENCY OR URGENCY PROVISIONS

Members noted that decision number D230019URG in respect of development management agency costs had been undertaken under urgency provisions as it was a departure from the Borough Council's adopted Budget and Policy Framework and in accordance with paragraph 4 of the Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules.

The reasons why this was considered an urgent decision were set out in the published Notice but related to maintaining service provision and performance.

C 23/35 SEALING OF DOCUMENTS

RESOLVED: That authority be given for the Common Seal of the Council to be affixed to any instrument to give effect to a decision of the Council incorporated into these Minutes and proceedings.

The meeting ended at 8.00 pm