

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY SELECT COMMITTEE

MINUTES

Wednesday, 5th February, 2025

Present: Cllr S A Hudson (Chair), Cllr K S Tunstall (Vice-Chair), Cllr A G Bennison, Cllr S Crisp, Cllr R W Dalton, Cllr Mrs T Dean, Cllr F A Hoskins, Cllr J R S Lark, Cllr A McDermott, Cllr W E Palmer, Cllr Stacey Pilgrim, Cllr M R Rhodes and Cllr Mrs M Tatton

Cllrs R P Betts, M D Boughton*, M A Coffin, D A S Davis*, D Harman*, P M Hickmott, M A J Hood, D Keers and K B Tanner* were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

(*participated via MS Teams)

CE 25/1 NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no substitute members for this meeting.

CE 25/2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

CE 25/3 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the notes of the meeting of the Communities and Environment Scrutiny Select Committee held on 6 November 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE CABINET

CE 25/4 WASTE SERVICES CONTRACT - STRATEGIC APPROACH TO SERVICE PROVISION

Consideration was given to a number of commissioning options for the future delivery of the Borough Council's Waste Services Contract, which was currently delivered in partnership with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and provided household waste and recycling collection services as well as street cleansing throughout Tonbridge and Malling.

An external industry consultant had provided a detailed costed report assessing the options and which considered changes in interest rates, reduction in CPI, current market conditions, pay rates and specifically the anticipated annual operating costs of each commissioning option and their relative strengths and weaknesses. A summary was provided

at paragraph 10.6 with the full detailed report attached as a restricted Annex 1 due to its commercial sensitivity.

Due regard was given to the commissioning options report, the partnership arrangement with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, the financial and value for money considerations and the legal implications. The risks, advantages and disadvantages associated with contracting out, direct service ownership and LATco were given careful consideration.

The report also drew attention to the modelled financial figures within the restricted Annex 1 which highlighted that service costs, regardless of which commissioning option was selected, would be significantly higher than the current costs. An increase in such costs was factored into the Medium-Term Financial Strategy from 1 April 2027 onward with an increase of £2.4m. It was noted that even the lowest costs highlighted exceeded the financial allocation and would need to be considered through either service reductions, increased charges or an increase in the Borough Council's savings target (or a contribution of all three).

A further report on the contract specification, preferred procurement route, length of contract, timescale and the evaluation criteria for the contract award would be considered at the next meeting of the Communities and Environment Scrutiny Select Committee.

Particular reference was made to the uncertainty arising from the Government's intention to re-organise local government and drive devolution. However, it was important that the Borough Council continued to operate business as usual to ensure that there was no interruption to service. Members were assured that the Borough Council would continue to explore all options arising from any re-organisation and establishment of a unitary authority.

The strong and effective working relationship with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council was recognised and the continuation of the partnership arrangement was supported.

***RECOMMENDED:** That

- (1) the Borough Council remained in partnership with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council for the delivery of the provision of the household waste and recycling collection and street cleansing service;
- (2) the contracting out model remained the Borough Council's preferred commissioning model for the delivery of the provision of the household waste and recycling collection and street cleansing services; and

- (3) a further report be presented to this Committee to allow for the consideration of key service specification issues and the proposed procurement process for the delivery of the provision of the household waste and recycling collection and street cleansing services.

***Recommended to Cabinet**

CE 25/5 COMMUNITY ENERGY ASSESSMENT AND STRATEGY

Consideration was given to a proposal to engage Community Energy South (CES) to undertake an assessment of community energy potential and develop a strategy for Tonbridge and Malling.

Community energy referred to the delivery of community-led renewable energy, energy demand reduction and energy supply projects. From an energy section perspective, community energy helped to balance supply and demand at a local level, reduced transmission losses, increased resilience and helped tackle fuel poverty and high energy bills.

Members were advised that community energy projects were uniquely placed to engage local people, businesses and education in decarbonisation and energy efficiency, increasing skills and training and contributing to the changes in consumer behaviour required for the transition to Net Zero. Although there were active climate change and community groups across the Borough it was currently unknown what the potential might be for community energy or how opportunities could be developed. It was also reported that existing community energy project groups in the Borough had indicated that support earlier in identifying and delivering projects and understanding the process would have been extremely helpful.

CES had developed a five step multi-year Pathways Programme with Step 1 being the undertaking of an assessment to inform the development of a community energy strategy. This first step would cost in the region of £22,250 and could be funded using the revenue budget for climate change initiatives allocation from the Climate Change Reserve as detailed in 7.1 of the report. It was expected that there would not be any longer-term financial commitment from the Borough Council as community groups that initiated projects would be responsible for funding them.

There was in-depth discussion on the merits of supporting community energy, the engagement of an external provider to undertake an assessment and whether this proposal represented value for money. Members also queried whether other ways of communicating and promoting community energy should be considered.

On the grounds that there was confusion around community energy and the role of the Borough Council and an external assessor, Cllr Lark proposed that a decision on this matter be deferred so that Community Energy South could be invited to a meeting of the Communities and Environment Scrutiny Select Committee to explain what the Step 1 funding would provide and how this would benefit residents. This was seconded by Cllr Dalton and supported by the majority of the Committee.

DEFERRED: For the following reason

- (1) Community Energy South be invited to a meeting of the Communities and Environment Scrutiny Select Committee to explain what the Step 1 funding would provide and how this would benefit residents and community groups.

**CE 25/6 HAYSDEN COUNTRY PARK MANAGEMENT PLAN -
CONSULTATION DRAFT**

(Decision Notice D250006MEM)

The report presented a draft Management Plan for Haysden Country Park for the next five-year period and gave details of a proposed public consultation process.

A number of points were raised and noted by Officers in respect of signage, cycle routes, chemical usage and cultural controls and further detail would be provided outside of the meeting.

Finally, it was noted that whilst the Haysden Country Park Users Panel no longer had physical meetings the members received regular updates and information via newsletters which was their preferred method of communication.

Following consideration by the Communities and Environment Scrutiny Select Committee, the Cabinet Member for Community Services

RECOMMENDED*: That

- (1) the draft Haysden Country Park Management Plan 2025-29, (attached at Annex 1) be circulated for public consultation as outlined in the report; and
- (2) following public consultation, the final Plan be brought forward to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Select Committee for consideration.

***Decision taken by Cabinet Member for Community Services**

CE 25/7 CORPORATE COMPLAINTS POLICY REVIEW

The report proposed the adoption of a new Corporate Complaints Policy which had been updated to reflect changes to the recommended handling of complaints by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

Adopting a new Policy would ensure that the Borough Council was able to respond efficiently to the needs of local residents, enable complaints to be resolved promptly and to identify and drive service improvements. If the Policy was adopted training for staff on the new processes would be delivered during April and May 2025.

***RECOMMENDED:** That

- (1) the new Corporate Complaints Policy (attached at Annex 3) be adopted; and
- (2) the new Corporate Complaints Policy be implemented from June 2025.

***Recommended to Cabinet**

MATTERS SUBMITTED FOR INFORMATION

CE 25/8 WORK PROGRAMME 2025

The Work Programme setting out potential matters to be scrutinised was attached for information. Members were invited to suggest future matters by liaising with the Chair of the Committee.

A potential item in respect of older persons in the Borough would be discussed with the Scrutiny Officer.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE

CE 25/9 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no matters considered in private.

The meeting ended at 8.45 pm