

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

FINANCE, REGENERATION AND PROPERTY SCRUTINY SELECT COMMITTEE

MINUTES

Tuesday, 22nd July, 2025

Present: Cllr D Harman (Chair), Cllr M R Rhodes (Vice-Chair), Cllr L Athwal (substitute), Cllr A G Bennison, Cllr T Bishop, Cllr P Boxall, Cllr L Chapman, Cllr J Clokey, Cllr D A S Davis (substitute), Cllr W E Palmer, Cllr S Pilgrim, Cllr S A Hudson (substitute) and Cllr C J Williams

Councillors Mrs S Bell, M D Boughton, M A Coffin and Mrs A S Oakley* were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

(*participated via MS Teams)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R I B Cannon, B A Parry and K B Tanner

PART 1 - PUBLIC

FRP 25/15 NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Notification of substitute members were recorded as set out below:

- Cllr L Athwal substituted for Cllr B Parry
- Cllr D Davis substituted for Cllr R Cannon
- Cllr S Hudson substituted for Cllr K Tanner

In accordance with Council Procedure Rules 17.5 to 17.9 these Councillors had the same rights as the ordinary member of the committee for whom they were substituting.

FRP 25/16 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

However, for reasons of transparency, Cllr Coffin advised that in relation to agenda item 6 (Outside Bodies Update – West Kent Partnership), he was the Director of Phoenix Fireworks, which had been a beneficiary of the West Kent Rural Grant Scheme.

FRP 25/17 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the notes of the meeting of the Finance, Regeneration and Property Scrutiny Select Committee held on 27 May 2025 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

FRP 25/18 OUTSIDE BODIES UPDATE - WEST KENT PARTNERSHIP

The report provided an overview of the West Kent Partnership, an economic partnership funded by Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, Sevenoaks District Council and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. A large amount of the work of the Partnership over the past 2-3 years had been on the delivery of UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural England Prosperity Fund initiatives, which included the West Kent Business Support Programme and the West Kent Rural Grants Scheme.

Following announcements by Government that both the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural England Prosperity Fund would be extended for a one year period, the West Kent Rural Grants Scheme and the West Kent Business Support Programme would continue in 2025/26.

MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE CABINET

FRP 25/19 DIGITAL & IT STRATEGY PROGRESS UPDATE

(Decision Notice D250091MEM)

The report provided an update on progress to date with regard to the Council's Digital and IT Strategy for the period 2023-2027.

Over the past two years, the Council had made significant progress in delivering its Digital and IT Strategy 2023-27. The focus had been on improving service delivery, strengthening cyber security, and enhancing the digital experience for residents and staff. The roadmap for the strategy was attached at Annex 1 to the report and a detailed list of projects was attached at Annex 2.

***RECOMMENDED:** That the progress made to date on the Council's Digital and IT Strategy since its adoption in May 2023, and the direction of travel, be noted.

***Decision taken by Cabinet Member**

MATTERS SUBMITTED FOR INFORMATION

FRP 25/20 LOWER MEDWAY INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD PROPOSED MERGER

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation advised that notice was formally given on 10 June 2025 of a formal merger between the Lower Medway Board and the North Kent Marshes Water Level Management Board. The consultation period closed on 10 July 2025. It was noted that the amalgamation would bring greater efficiency, enhanced resilience, improved service delivery and increased transparency and accountability.

FRP 25/21 2024/25 FINANCIAL OUTTURN AND MAY 2025 BUDGETARY REPORT

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation informed Members of the 2024/25 Financial Outturn and the current financial position to the end of May 2025 for the 2025/26 Financial Year.

A detailed revenue and capital outturn position for the year 2024/25 was provided in the Revenue and Capital Outturn Booklet attached at Annex 1. Members were pleased with the positive revenue position for 2024/25, reported as a contribution to the Borough Council's General Revenue Reserve of £109,493 after taking into account the additional reserve movements as set out in paragraph 3.13 of the report.

Details of the movements in reserve balances as at 31 March 2025 were set out in Annex 2 and a summary of decisions taken by Cabinet and Committees with budget implications since the revenue budget was approved by Council in February 2025 was attached at Annex 3.

Budgetary Control Monitoring Statements for Salaries and Incomes to end of May 2025 were attached for information at Annex 4 and Annex 5 respectively. The 2024/25 revenue budget position was summarised in paragraph 4.8 of the report, which reflected a favourable net variance of £291,052 as at the end of May 2025.

With regard to Business Rates monitoring, particular reference was made to the variation of £198,640 below the original estimate of an overall net income of £4,011,309, due to an increased level of empty properties and the awaited valuations of business properties adjacent to Junction 5 of the M20.

In terms of the Annual Service Delivery Plan and the MTFS Funding Gap, the Plan contained an objective to identify at least £300k of the current year's £600k savings target by the end of the summer 2026. Work with services was approaching completion to identify this target

and would be reported to the Finance, Regeneration and Property Scrutiny Select Committee in September 2025; and options for consideration to balance this year's target and the £2.2m ongoing targets in years beyond 2025/26 would be presented to Cabinet over the remainder of the financial year.

FRP 25/22 CONSULTATION - 'THE FAIR FUNDING REVIEW 2.0'

The report advised of the release of the Fair Funding Review consultation which was launched on 20 June 2025 and would close on 15 August 2025. It was noted that the consultation did not include provisional allocations at local authority level and it was envisaged that this indicative information would be available in the early Autumn through a policy statement and it was the Government's intention to implement funding changes in the 2026/27 local government finance settlement.

Officers would formulate a response to the consultation, in liaison with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Waste and Technical Services, and the submission would be completed before the deadline of 15 August 2025. Given the significance of the potential impact of the proposed changes, the response would be reported to the September meeting of the Scrutiny Select Committee.

FRP 25/23 CONSULTATION - MODERNISING AND IMPROVING THE ADMINISTRATION OF COUNCIL TAX

The report advised of the release of a consultation 'Modernising and improving the administration of council tax' which was launched on 20 June 2025 and which would close on 12 September 2025. Details of the proposals included in the consultation were set out in section 3.4 of the report.

Members discussed in particular the Government's proposal to change council tax billing from 10-months to 12-months by default to assist households in managing their finances. Although it was proposed that the ability for households to pay over 10 months would be maintained. Concern was raised regarding the potential impact on the Council's cashflow and the impact that the change would have on those who experience difficulties in managing their financial affairs.

Officers would formulate a response to the consultation, in liaison with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Waste and Technical Services and the final response would be submitted to the Scrutiny Select Committee in September 2025.

FRP 25/24 WORK PROGRAMME 2025/26

The Work Programme setting out matters to be scrutinised during the next year was attached for information. Members were invited to suggest future matters for 2025/26 by liaising with the Chair of the Committee and the Scrutiny Officer.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE

FRP 25/25 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

FRP 25/26 ANNUAL SENIOR INFORMATION RISK OWNER REPORT 2025-26

(Reasons: Part 2 Private – LGA 1972 Sch 12A Paragraph 3 – Finance or business affairs of any particular person)

The new Annual Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO) report for 2024/25 provided a comprehensive overview of the key activities, achievements, and challenges faced by the council over the past year. Through the report, the SIRO aimed to keep Members informed and engaged, ensuring transparency and accountability in all the Council's information security endeavours.

The Annual SIRO Report for 2024/25, attached at Annex 1 to the report, highlighted the Council's dedication to delivering efficient services for all residents whilst maintaining an effective council. By analysing the Council's strategic initiatives, operational performance and financial health, the report supported informed decision-making and continuous improvement.

***RECOMMENDED:** That

- (1) the annual report providing strategic oversight and assurance on organisational information risk and digital resilience be acknowledged;
- (2) the proposed investment in enhanced cybersecurity services be supported, and a procurement process be initiated accordingly;

- (3) the associated costs for incident response be covered using available grant funding; and
- (4) the ongoing operational costs for security monitoring be funded from existing reserves initially and incorporated into the core budget in future financial years.

***Recommendation to Cabinet**

The meeting ended at 8.52 pm