

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

FINANCE, REGENERATION AND PROPERTY SCRUTINY SELECT COMMITTEE

MINUTES

Tuesday, 16th September, 2025

Present: Cllr D Harman (Chair), Cllr M R Rhodes (Vice-Chair), Cllr A G Bennison, Cllr T Bishop, Cllr P Boxall, Cllr R I B Cannon, Cllr L Chapman, Cllr F A Hoskins (substitute), Cllr W E Palmer, Cllr B A Parry, Cllr S Pilgrim, Cllr K B Tanner and Cllr C J Williams

In attendance: Cllrs Mrs S Bell*, M D Boughton and D Keers* were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

(*participated via MS Teams)

An apology for absence was received from Councillor J Clokey

PART 1 - PUBLIC

FRP 25/27 NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Notification of substitute members were recorded as set out below:

- Cllr F Hoskins substitute for Cllr J Clokey

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 25/28 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

FRP 25/29 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the notes of the meeting of the Finance, Regeneration and Property Scrutiny Select Committee held on 22 July 2025 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

MATTERS SUBMITTED FOR INFORMATION

FRP 25/30 JULY 2025 BUDGETARY CONTROL, SAVINGS AND CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

In accordance with the Borough Council's Financial Procedure Rules, the Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer informed Members of the

current financial position to the end of July 2025 and provided an update on the current progress towards the achievement of the savings target for 2026/27.

Attention was drawn to an underspend of £92,050 in salaries due to vacancies above the budgeted position; an increase of £148,702 on the revenue budget due to additional reserve contributions and additional grants; a small under recovery of income for Development Control and Land Charges of £5,553 as a result of being offset by parking income; and the details in investment income as set out in paragraphs 3.6.1 to 3.6.2 of the report.

As at the end of July 2025 a number of areas had been identified as variations to the original budget estimates. These were detailed in paragraphs 3.7.1 to 3.7.6 of the report and resulted in a current net favourable variance of £729,645 as at the end of July.

Reference was made to the savings target of £600,000 to be achieved by the time the budget for 2026/27 was set. In addition, a milestone of saving a minimum of £300,000 by summer 2025, to feed into the budget setting process for 2026/27 had been set. An outturn review of expenditure and income against current budgets had been undertaken. The results were summarised in 5.4 of the report and illustrated that there was a shortfall. However, if an overprovision of inflation for the Waste Services Contract, which was considered an ongoing reduction in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), was factored in, the revised savings total came to £302,500.

Reference was made to the savings target for 2026/27 and Members were advised of positive progress on achieving the milestone of 'saving a minimum of £300,000 by summer 2025 to feed into the budget setting process for 2026/27'. An exercise reviewing previous and current budgets had identified £182,500 in savings, which when supplemented by lower-than-expected inflation on waste contracts, brought total identified savings to £302,500.

Finally, Members were provided with a broader overview of financial successes and pressures under the Cabinet Member for Finance portfolio and noted the achievement of savings targets and ongoing budgetary challenges. The Borough Councils strong financial performance including fully audited accounts, high rates of Council Tax and Business Rates collection (97.93% and 99.29% respectively, which was the highest in Kent) and successful leveraging of over £1.5 million in external grant funding for carbon reduction projects at leisure facilities was highlighted.

Members expressed concern in respect of the significant financial challenges represented by temporary accommodation and were pleased to note a reduction in clients. The efforts to move individuals into more

cost-effective housing, such as council owned property and away from expensive overnight accommodation, and the factors contributing to continued overspend despite these improvements were noted.

Clarification was also sought on the Leisure Trust utility support payments and car parking arrangements. It was confirmed that utility support was linked to energy price inflation and was expected to decrease. Further reductions were anticipated if energy prices stabilised. The Leisure Trust had also budgeted for the parking arrangements for its members and this was now reflected in their budget estimates.

FRP 25/31 CONSULTATION PAPERS - RESPONSES

Members reviewed and noted the responses submitted by the Borough Council in respect of the Fair Funding and Council Tax System Modernisation consultations (attached at Annexes 1 and 2).

The consultation in respect of Fair Funding had insufficient detail to predict the impact on the Borough Council, although significant changes to the Borough Council's funding was expected. Further detail was likely to be provided as part of the provisional local government settlement for 2026/27 in November. It did indicate that the overall level of Council funding, known as 'core spending, would increase by 2.6% over the next three years to 2028/29. However, this included increases in council tax which had been assumed to occur at the level proposed for capping and meant that Council Tax as a proportion of 'core spending' would increase over the spending period. A potential negative impact on district/borough funding as a consequence of resources being directed towards social care and children's services was noted.

With regard to the Council Tax consultation the Borough Councils response had supported the retention of the 10-month statutory instalment plan on the grounds of maintaining flexibility for residents, addressed the proposal to redefine the severely mentally impaired disregard and noted that the main barrier was GP certification. It was reported that the majority of neighbouring authorities in Kent and the professional body in revenue and benefits also supported the retention of the 10-month instalment for Council Tax.

Finally, it was noted that there was no time limit for retrospective Council Tax banding appeals and this could create significant operation and financial challenges if refunds were required for changes dating back to the introduction of Council Tax in 1993. The Borough Council supported introducing a six-year limit.

FRP 25/32 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 2026/2027 by liaising with the Chair of the Committee and the Scrutiny Officer.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE

FRP 25/33 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no items considered in private.

The meeting ended at 8.11 pm