



TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE SERVICES

Chief Executive
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NB - This agenda contains proposals, recommendations and options. These do not represent Council policy or decisions until they have received proper consideration through the full decision making process.

Contact: Democratic Services
committee.services@tmbc.gov.uk

8 September 2025

To: MEMBERS OF THE FINANCE, REGENERATION AND PROPERTY
SCRUTINY SELECT COMMITTEE
(Copies to all Members of the Council)

Dear Sir/Madam

Your attendance is requested at a meeting of the Finance, Regeneration and Property Scrutiny Select Committee to be held in the Council Chamber, Gibson Drive, Kings Hill on Tuesday, 16th September, 2025 commencing at 7.30 pm.

Members of the Committee are required to attend in person. Other Members may attend in person or participate online via MS Teams.

Information on how to observe the meeting will be published on the Council's website.

Yours faithfully

DAMIAN ROBERTS

Chief Executive

A G E N D A

1. Guidance for the Conduct of Meetings

5 - 8

PART 1 - PUBLIC

2. Apologies for Absence
3. Notification of Substitute Members 9 - 10
4. Declarations of interest 11 - 12

Members are reminded of their obligation under the Council's Code of Conduct to disclose any Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and Other Significant Interests in any matter(s) to be considered or being considered at the meeting. These are explained in the Code of Conduct on the Council's website at [Code of conduct for members – Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council \(tmbc.gov.uk\)](https://www.tmbc.gov.uk/code-of-conduct-for-members).

Members in any doubt about such declarations are advised to contact Legal or Democratic Services in advance of the meeting.

5. Minutes 13 - 18

To confirm as a correct record the Notes of the meeting of the Finance, Regeneration and Property Scrutiny Select Committee held on 22 July 2025

Matters submitted for Information

6. July 2025 Budgetary Control, Savings and Cabinet Member Update 19 - 32

In accordance with the Council's Financial Procedure Rules this report informs Members of the current financial position to the end of July 2025 for the 2025/26 Financial Year, provides an update to members on the current progress for the achievement of the savings target to be achieved for the budget set 2026/27 and an update of the Cabinet Member report on activity for the 2024/25 financial year.

7. Consultation Papers - Responses 33 - 54

This report gives members the details of the submissions made in respect of two financial consultations that have taken place over the summer months, Fair Funding and Council Tax System modernisation.

8. Work Programme 2025/26 55 - 56

The Work Programme setting out matters to be scrutinised during 2025/26 is attached for information. Members can suggest future items by liaising with the Chair of the Committee.

9. Urgent items 57 - 58

Any other items which the Chairman decides are urgent due to special circumstances and of which notice has been given to the Chief Executive.

Matters for consideration in Private

10. Exclusion of Press and Public 59 - 60

The Chairman to move that the press and public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting during consideration of any items the publication of which would disclose exempt information.

PART 2 - PRIVATE

11. Urgent items 61 - 62

Any other items which the Chairman decides are urgent due to special circumstances and of which notice has been given to the Chief Executive.

MEMBERSHIP

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 J Clokey

Cllr W E Palmer
Cllr B A Parry
Cllr S Pilgrim
Cllr K B Tanner
Cllr C J Williams

GUIDANCE ON HOW MEETINGS WILL BE CONDUCTED

- (1) Most of the Borough Council meetings are livestreamed, unless there is exempt or confidential business being discussed, giving residents the opportunity to see decision making in action. These can be watched via our YouTube channel. When it is not possible to livestream meetings they are recorded and uploaded as soon as possible:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCPp-IJISNgoF-ugSzxiAPfw/featured>

- (2) There are no fire drills planned during the time a meeting is being held. For the benefit of those in the meeting room, the fire alarm is a long continuous bell and the exits are via the doors used to enter the room. An officer on site will lead any evacuation.
- (3) Should you need this agenda or any of the reports in a different format, or have any other queries concerning the meeting, please contact Democratic Services on committee.services@tmbc.gov.uk in the first instance.

Attendance:

- Members of the Committee are required to attend in person and be present in the meeting room. Only these Members are able to move/ second or amend motions, and vote.
- Other Members of the Council can join via MS Teams and can take part in any discussion and ask questions, when invited to do so by the Chair, but cannot move/ second or amend motions or vote on any matters. Members participating remotely are reminded that this does not count towards their formal committee attendance.
- Occasionally, Members of the Committee are unable to attend in person and may join via MS Teams in the same way as other Members. However, they are unable to move/ second or amend motions or vote on any matters if they are not present in the meeting room. As with other Members joining via MS Teams, this does not count towards their formal committee attendance.
- Officers can participate in person or online.

- Members of the public addressing an Area Planning Committee should attend in person. However, arrangements to participate online can be considered in certain circumstances. Please contact committee.services@tmhc.gov.uk for further information.

Before formal proceedings start there will be a sound check of Members/Officers in the room. This is done as a roll call and confirms attendance of voting Members.

Ground Rules:

The meeting will operate under the following ground rules:

- Members in the Chamber should indicate to speak in the usual way and use the fixed microphones in front of them. These need to be switched on when speaking or comments will not be heard by those participating online. Please switch off microphones when not speaking.
- If there any technical issues the meeting will be adjourned to try and rectify them. If this is not possible there are a number of options that can be taken to enable the meeting to continue. These will be explained if it becomes necessary.

For those Members participating online:

- please request to speak using the 'chat or hand raised function';
- please turn off cameras and microphones when not speaking;
- please do not use the 'chat function' for other matters as comments can be seen by all;
- Members may wish to blur the background on their camera using the facility on Microsoft teams.
- Please avoid distractions and general chat if not addressing the meeting
- Please remember to turn off or silence mobile phones

Voting:

Voting may be undertaken by way of a roll call and each Member should verbally respond For, Against, Abstain. The vote will be noted and announced by the Democratic Services Officer.

Alternatively, votes may be taken by general affirmation if it seems that there is agreement amongst Members. The Chairman will announce the outcome of the vote for those participating and viewing online.

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Finance, Regeneration and Property Scrutiny Select Committee – Substitute Members (if required)					
	Conservative	Liberal Democratic	Green	Ind. Kent Alliance	Labour
1	Chris Brown	Garry Bridge	Lee Athwal		Paul Hickmott
2	Roger Dalton	Trudy Dean	Kath Barton		
3	Dave Davis	Frani Hoskins	Steve Crisp		
4	Sarah Hudson	Roger Roud	Anna Cope		
5	James Lark	David Thornewell	Mark Hood		
Members of Cabinet cannot be appointed as a substitute to this Committee					

May 2025

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Declarations of interest

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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

Finance, Regeneration and Property Scrutiny Select Committee

16 September 2025

Part 1 - Public

Matters for Information



Cabinet Member Martin Coffin - Deputy Leader; and Cabinet Member for Finance, Waste and Technical Services;

Responsible Officer Paul Worden – Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer;

Report Author Paul Worden – Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer

July 2025 Budgetary Control, Savings and Cabinet Member Update

1 **Summary and Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 In accordance with the Council's Financial Procedure Rules this report informs Members of the current financial position to the end of July 2025 for the 2025/26 Financial Year, provides an update to members on the current progress for the achievement of the savings target to be achieved for the budget set 2026/27 and an update of the Cabinet Member report on activity for the 2024/25 financial year.

2 **Corporate Strategy Priority Area**

- 2.1 Efficient services for all our residents, maintaining an effective council.
- 2.2 The reporting of budgetary control demonstrates governance and control of the Council's financial resources.

3 **2025/26 Budgetary Control**

- 3.1 As with standard financial practice the finance team have undertaken a review of the major areas of financial impact for the authority.
- 3.2 In February 2025 the Council set a revenue budget of £13,188,568 with a contribution to the General Revenue Reserve of £20,792 giving a Council tax requirement of £13,209,360.
- 3.3 Since setting the Budget in February, a number of Cabinet and Committee decisions have been taken. These decisions have been detailed in full in **[Annex 1]** to this report and currently amount to **£680,597**. However, after additional

reserve contributions and additional grants the net effect on the revenue budget is an increase of **£148,702**.

- 3.4 Salaries Monitoring – appended at **[Annex 2]** is the budgetary control statement against the proportional budget for July 2025. Cabinet will **note** the underspend against the original budget allowing for any changes identified in Annex 1. The current position is an underspend of £92,050, primarily due to vacancies above the budgeted position.
- 3.5 Income Monitoring - appended for information at **[Annex 3]** is the budgetary control statement covering income, fees, and charges from the major income streams. The current position shows a small under recovery of income of £5,553 against the current proportioned estimate. This is as a result of under recovery of income for Development Control and Land Charges being offset by parking income. The variation between short and long Stay Car parking is because of how the estimate were set following the charge increases that occurred in August last year and will be reviewed as revised estimate stage.
- 3.6 Investment Income – due to the reporting of long term investments the details surrounding core and cashflow investments is given in paragraphs 3.6.1 and 3.6.2 below:
 - 3.6.1 Core Funds – as at the end of July 2025, core funds stood at £33m representing an increase of £2.83m when compared to the position on 31 March 2025. Income generated from these investments amount to £471,300, delivering an average return of 4.62%. This has resulted in a negative variance of £24,000 against the original estimate for the same period, however, this was fully offset by increased income from cash flow investments. It is expected that core investments will reduce as the need for cashflow in the current year increases to commence capital project works.
 - 3.6.2 Cashflow funds – as at the end of July 2025, cashflow funds stood at £20.19m representing an increase of £1.47m when compared to the position on 31 March 2025. Income generated from these investments amount to £368,900, delivering an average return of 4.37%. This has resulted in a positive variance of £140,300 against the original estimate for the same period.
- 3.7 As of the end of July the following areas have been identified as variations to the original estimate:-
 - 3.7.1 Inflation on Refuse, Recycling and Street Cleansing Contract – At the time the budget was set the inflationary increase included within the base estimate was a 3.5% increase. The actual increase was 1.07% meaning that the budget is overstated by approximately £120,000. It is proposed to adjust the budget down to this revised level.

- 3.7.2 Business Rates Multiplier Under Indexation Grant – The Council receives grant awards above those contained in the Final Local Government Settlement for 2025/26 of around £288,000. This information is based upon the Government Return submission made in the final stages of the estimates preparation and was not confirmed until after the budget had been set.
- 3.7.3 Tonbridge and Malling Leisure Trust – Utility Support Payments. The outturn for 2024/25 included an adjustment for the final quarter and reconciliation of the full year balance. The Trust have now provided this reconciliation showing the amount due was £32,000 less than recorded in the 2024/25 accounts and will be adjusted accordingly against the current estimate.
- 3.7.4 Temporary Accommodation for Homelessness Clients – This was highlighted last year, and Members are advised that client numbers at the end of July were 122 compared to the May position of 129 clients noted earlier in this report. The 2025/26 budget was set with a long term reduction to 120 clients by the end of the year. As at the end of July, there is an overspend against profiled budget of circa £60,000 and therefore if the current client numbers and placements were not to change the predicted overspend against the original budget by year end would be £180,000. Efforts continue by the Housing team to reduce both client numbers and overnight costs and increasing the costs recovered to the levels estimated.
- 3.7.5 The Director of Street Scene, Leisure and Technical Services has identified two additional overspends arising from a water leak at the Racecourse Ground and essential grounds maintenance works surrounding the rebutment at the Castle amounting to £57,300.
- 3.7.6 Recent updates for 'Polluter Pays' grants for Waste services have indicated an increase in the award of £352,850 compared to the original allocation. These funds are used to cover the cost of waste and recycling collection caused by the disposal of packaging.
- 3.8 Revenue Budgetary Control Summary – The table below summaries the result of information shared above.

Description	Budget to July £	Actual to July £	Variance £
Salaries Monitoring Statement	4,839,300	4,747,250	(92,050)
Income Monitoring Statement	(2,782,900)	(2,777,347)	5,553
Treasury Management	(723,900)	(840,200)	(116,300)
Approved Variations to the Revenue Budget		148,702	148,702
Revenue Budgetary Control		(675,550)	(675,550)
Net Variance	1,332,500	602,855	(729,645)

Figures in brackets represent a favourable variance

- 3.9 Members will note from the table that there is a current net favourable variance of £729,645 as at the end of July. This includes the full year amounts shown in section 3.83.7 above.

4 Business Rates Monitoring

- 4.1 In February 2025 the Council agreed a capital budget for 2025/26 of £10.2m.
- 4.2 Spend to the end of July 2025, was £607,000, but Members are reminded that the larger projects including Temporary Accommodation & Resettlement Scheme, and Gibson East Refurbishment, make up a significant proportion of the agreed budget. Further updates will be shared with Members in due course.

5 Savings Target for 2026/27

- 5.1 The MTFS agreed in February 2025 had a funding gap of £2.8m, this target was broken down into 4 tranches £600k to be achieved by the time the budget is set in February 2026 for the 2026/27 Budget.

- 5.2 The Annual Service Delivery plan the following objective under reference 13.5

Undertake a base budget review across all services to identify contributions towards in-year saving and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2026/27.

In addition to this it has the following milestone

Initial report on options to save a minimum of £300,000 by summer 2025, to feed into the budget setting process for 2026/27.

- 5.3 As part of this review services were asked to undertake an outturn review of expenditure and income against their current budget where there have been areas of consistent underspend or over recovery against the estimates for prior years.
- 5.4 The results have been summarised in the table below;

	Expenditure Reduction £	Income Generation £	Total £
Street Scene Leisure and Technical Services	30,650	86,000	116,650
Central Services and Executive Services	8,600		8,600
Finance and Transformation Services	35,700	20,000	55,700
Planning, Environmental Health and Housing Services	1,550		1,550
Total	76,500	106,000	182,500

- 5.5 The items identified range from reductions in purchases, changes to the cash collection arrangements from car park, changes to IT budgets and changes in procedures in methods of collection within Council Tax and Business Rates.
- 5.6 Whilst the total above falls short of the (minimum) £300k target set under the milestone above, once you add the overprovision of inflation for the Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing Contract, as reported in paragraph 3.7.1 which is considered an ongoing reduction for the MTFS, the revised total comes to £302,500 meeting the milestone total.
- 5.7 Since undertaking this exercise, the Chief Executive and former Director of Finance and Transformation have met with all Service Directors and Budget holders to identify further savings that could be made in both the remainder of this year and for the other remaining savings tranches within the MTFS.
- 5.8 These areas of savings are currently being collated and will be then discussed further with both Directors and Cabinet Members as part of the budget processes in November 2025 for the 2026/27 financial year and the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

6 Cabinet Member Update

- 6.1 Each Scrutiny Select Committee receives a report from their Cabinet Member on the achievements arising under their remit from the prior year.
- 6.2 For the areas of Finance these were.
- Obtaining £1.5m of grant funding to assist with Capital Projects to reduce carbon emissions at the Councils Leisure facilities.
 - The council was one of 77 authorities, out of 459 audited bodies, that had their 2024/05 accounts fully audited and signed off by the end of January 2025.

- Produced and approved a balanced budget for the 2025/26 financial year.
- Provided over £275,000 in housing support funds to external parties to assist low income households.
- Paid over £23.7m in Housing Benefits to an average of 2,900 households during 2024/25.
- Paid over 99.7% of the 6,024 invoices processed with 30 days of receipt.
- Collected 97.93% of the £121.8m of council tax due for the 2024/25 year, being the highest collection rate within Kent Billing Authorities.
- Collected 99.29% of the £72m of business rates due for the 2024/25 year, being the highest collection rate within Kent Billing Authorities.
- Successful recruitment to the Head of Finance Role and smooth handover
- Appointment to the Head of Revenues and Benefits role.
- Provided Financial details to assist with the Local Government Reorganisation submission for the Government's 28 November submission deadline
- Responded to consultations on Fair Funding and Council Tax reform.
- Provided Budget Monitoring information to Members covering major areas of income and expenditure.
- Achieved an investment return of 4.67% compared to a benchmark average of other Local Authorities of 4.56%
- Commenced a Base Budget Review to assist with the longer term funding gap as set out in the MTFS set in February
- Commenced a review of earmarked reserves in order to assess additional funds for corporate priority projects.

7 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

7.1 As set out above.

8 Risk Assessment

8.1 Budgetary control is a prerequisite of good financial management, financial planning and control and needs to be kept under review to ensure it remains effective and relevant.

8.2 Homelessness and Planning Appeals currently present the greatest challenges to the approved budgets and are being monitored carefully.

9 Legal Implications

9.1 This report fulfils the requirement of the Local Government Act 2003 which places a statutory duty on the authority to monitor income and expenditure against

budget and to act if overspends or shortfalls in income emerge. If monitoring establishes that the budget situation has deteriorated, authorities are required to take such action as they consider necessary. This might include action to reduce spending in the rest of the year, to increase income or to finance all or part of the shortfall from reserves.

10 Consultation and Communications

10.1 None

11 Implementation

11.1 Budgetary control is ongoing so no implementation issues.

11.2 The savings identified will be incorporated into the budget set for 2026/27

Background Papers	None
Annexes	Annex 1 – Member Decisions Annex 2 – Salary Monitoring Annex 3 – Income Monitoring

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Decision Notices with budget implications
Period Ending July 2025
2025/26 Financial Year

Decision Note Reference	Cabinet Member / Officer	Decision Notice Title	Brief description of decision made	Date of Decision	Revenue Impact	Capital Impact	Financed from Reserves? Y/N	Financed from Grant Y/N
Non-Salaries					£	£		
D250040MEM	Cabinet Member for Community Services	Anti-Social Behaviour Enforcement Team	The cost of four Officers, working in two pairs across the borough from Wednesday 7 May 2025 until Sunday 2 November 2025. Funding is made up from £37,000 to support further community initiatives in 2025/26, as agreed by Cabinet on 10 December 2024 and £45,000 from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund 2025/26.	16/04/2025	82,000	0	N	Y
D240121MEM	Cabinet Member for Finance & Housing	Hoarding Work within Housing	Consideration was given to the provision of a Hoarding Co-ordinator service for residents of Tonbridge and Malling and associated clearance and clean-up works. This to be funded via the disabled facilities grant element of the Better Care Fund (BCF). The decision notice is for £30k for a hoarding co-ordinator and £15k for a clean and clearance budget – all to be funded from the better care fund (DFG), along the same lines as the previous co-ordinator/shared support we currently fund.	03/12/2024	45,000	0	N	Y
	Full Council	Recruitment of Head of Finance	Appointment of a specialist recruitment search and selection partner, following an appropriate procurement process, to manage the process of the of the search and selection of the Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer post.	13/05/2025	25,000	0	N	N
	Full Council	Tonbridge Town Centre Community Governance review	Budget for the conduct of the Community Governance Review to be funded through a supplementary estimate from the General Revenue Reserve.	13/05/2025	12,000	0	N	N
	Cabinet	The Government's Local Government Reorganisation Programme	An initial budget of up to £10,000 funded from the Transformation Reserve to help fund the preliminary financial and technical data analysis and evidence base that had been necessary to inform this work, be agreed.	19/03/2025	10,000	0	Y	N
250080CAB	Cabinet	Planning Advisory Service (PAS) Peer Challenge Review	The funding for the Peer Challenge at a cost of between £18-22k be approved, with the funding to be drawn from the Transformation Reserve.	30/06/2025	22,000	0	Y	N
D250081CAB	Cabinet	Council Banking and Merchant Acquirer Services Contract	The cost of £4,000 for the review of the Council's banking Contract be funded from the Budget Stabilisation Reserve	30/09/2025	4,000	0	Y	N
					200,000	0		
Salaries								
D250005MEM	Cabinet Member for Finance and Housing	Staffing - Housing Solutions Team	Sickness cover and backfill arrangement	30/01/2025	6,641	0	Y	
GP25/15	General Purposes Committee	Establishment Report	Planning Officer - regrade	12/03/2025	4,028	0	N	
GP25/15	General Purposes Committee	Establishment Report	Planning Enforcement Manager - regrade	12/03/2025	7,646	0	N	
GP25/15	General Purposes Committee	Establishment Report	Temporary Accommodation Welfare Officer	12/03/2025	29,547	0	N	
D250025MEM	Cabinet Member for Finance and Housing	Housing Solutions - Extension of Contracts	Housing Allocation Assistants / Move on Officer	13/03/2025	57,586	0	Y	
D250026MEM	Cabinet Member for Planning	Recruitment of a Six-month Temporary Contractor Senior Planning Officer	Temporary Contractor Senior Planning Officer	14/03/2025	55,944	0	Y	
D250028MEM	Cabinet Member for Finance and Housing	Housing Improvement Team – Extension of Temporary Resource	Temporary agency resource	20/03/2025	10,500	0	Y	
GP25/19	General Purposes Committee	Establishment Report	Director of Finance - Deletion of post	12/05/2025	(90,283)	0	N	
GP25/19	General Purposes Committee	Establishment Report	Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer - New post	12/05/2025	85,742	0	N	
GP25/19	General Purposes Committee	Establishment Report	Ring fenced savings - 12 months	12/05/2025	4,541	0	N	
GP25/24	General Purposes Committee	Establishment Report	Revenue & Benefits Officer / Overpayment Recovery Assistant - change in hours	11/06/2025	(839)	0	N	
GP25/24	General Purposes Committee	Establishment Report	Housing Solutions Manager - regrade	11/06/2025	5,735	0	N	
GP25/24	General Purposes Committee	Establishment Report	Housing Allocations Team Leader - regrade	11/06/2025	6,837	0	N	
GP25/24	General Purposes Committee	Establishment Report	Housing Allocation Officer - regrade	11/06/2025	9,562	0	N	
GP25/24	General Purposes Committee	Establishment Report	Housing Allocation Officer - regrade	11/06/2025	6,347	0	Y	
GP25/24	General Purposes Committee	Establishment Report	Contracts and Procurement Lawyer - increased hours	11/06/2025	27,781	0	N	
GP25/24	General Purposes Committee	Establishment Report	Resilience Officer - increased hours / regrade	11/06/2025	21,405	0	N	
D250048CAB	Cabinet	Housing Staffing	Extension of 4 x Housing Allocation Officers and 2 x additional posts for one year + Overtime for 16 weeks	03/06/2025	189,777	0	Y	
D250018CAB	Cabinet	Local Plan Budget Proposal	Additional temporary agency resource included in budget proposal	04/03/2025	42,100	0	Y	
					480,597	0		
Total Growth/(Saving)					680,597	0		
Funded from Reserves					(404,895)	0		
Funded from Additional Grant					(127,000)	0		
MTFP Impact					148,702	0		

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Salaries Budgetary Control Monitoring Statement

Annex 2

Period Ending July 2025**2025/26 Financial Year**

Service	Annual Budget As amended £	2025/26		Above (Below) Budget (b - a) £
		Budget to end of July (a) £	Actual to end of July (b) £	
Central				
Administration & Property	1,207,350	402,450	393,700	(8,750)
Legal	739,250	240,250	254,800	14,550
HR & Customer Services	856,300	285,450	258,550	(26,900)
Executive	712,950	246,550	230,600	(15,950)
Finance & Transformation				
Finance	2,049,700	684,750	679,900	(4,850)
Information Technology	1,301,950	433,950	436,500	2,550
Planning, Housing & Environmental Health				
Environmental Health & Housing	2,371,750	768,150	760,200	(7,950)
Planning	3,001,500	1,019,100	981,650	(37,450)
Street Scene, Leisure & Technical	2,425,200	806,650	726,200	(80,450)
Sub-total	14,665,950	4,887,300	4,722,100	(165,200)
Non-budgeted spend on recruitment & other expenses to the end of July				34,800
Budgeted ring-fenced sum to the end of July				0
Adjustments for expenditure funded from reserves or grants				(9,650)
Budgeted management savings to the end of July				48,000
Above / (Below) Budget				(92,050)

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Income Budgetary Control Monitoring Statement

Annex 3

Period Ended July 2025**2025/26 Financial Year**

Service	Annual Budget £	2025/26		(Above) Below Budget (b - a) £
		Budget to end of July (a) £	Actual to end of July (b) £	
Central				
Land Charges	(224,000)	(81,500)	(62,579)	18,921
Licensing	(374,850)	(116,600)	(111,934)	4,666
Sub-Total	(598,850)	(198,100)	(174,513)	23,587
Planning, Housing & Environmental Health				
Planning Applications	(1,169,950)	(390,000)	(335,335)	54,665
Building Regulations	(341,550)	(113,850)	(128,234)	(14,384)
Sub-Total	(1,511,500)	(503,850)	(463,569)	40,281
Street Scene, Leisure & Technical				
Garden Waste Collection	(1,753,400)	(656,050)	(655,979)	71
Recycling Performance Payment	(628,000)	0	0	0
Bulky Refuse Collection	(165,600)	(55,200)	(56,303)	(1,103)
Tonbridge Cemetery	(151,050)	(42,350)	(42,457)	(107)
Short Stay Car Parking	(2,150,000)	(716,650)	(683,334)	33,316
Long Stay Car Parking	(780,000)	(260,000)	(351,667)	(91,667)
Penalty Charge Notices	(700,000)	(233,350)	(170,016)	63,334
Car Parks Season Tickets	(112,000)	(37,350)	(58,147)	(20,797)
Residents Parking Permits	(145,000)	(48,350)	(73,020)	(24,670)
Haysden Country Park Parking	(95,000)	(31,650)	(48,343)	(16,693)
Sub-Total	(6,680,050)	(2,080,950)	(2,139,265)	(58,315)
Grand Total	(8,790,400)	(2,782,900)	(2,777,347)	5,553

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Finance, Regeneration and Property Scrutiny Select Committee

16 September 2025

Part 1 - Public

Matters for Information



Cabinet Member Martin Coffin - Deputy Leader; and Cabinet Member for Finance, Waste and Technical Services;

Responsible Officer Paul Worden – Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer;

Report Author Paul Worden – Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer and William Waight –Revenues and Benefits Manager

Consultation Paper Responses

1 **Summary and Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 This report gives members the details of the submissions made in respect of two financial consultations that have taken place over the summer months, Fair Funding and Council Tax System modernisation.

2 **Corporate Strategy Priority Area**

- 2.1 Efficient services for all our residents, maintaining an effective council.
- 2.2 Government funding, through grant and retained Business Rates and Council Tax are the major sources of income to the Council as a whole. Major changes in the levels provided or ability to collect these funds will have a significant financial impact on the authority.

3 **Fair Funding 2.0**

- 3.1 On the 20th June the Government announces a consultation seeking views on the approach to Local Government Funding from the 2026/27 financial year. The consultation paper ran to some 126 pages and can be found using the following link:https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/688237662b6fd60b7c161009/Version_14_For_publication_Fair_Funding_Review_2.0.pdf
- 3.2 The consultation lasted for 6 weeks with a submission date of 15th August, **[Annex 1]** to this report gives the submitted response which was agreed by the Cabinet Member for Finance, Waste and Technical Services

- 3.3 The consultation lacks detail on individual authorities, this is expected to be given in the provisional settlement for 2026/27 in late November, but it does explain that the overall level of Council funding, known as Core Spending, will increase by 2.6% over the next three years to 2028/29. However, this includes increases in council tax which have been assumed to occur at the level proposed for capping e.g., 3% for District Councils and 5% for others. This means that Council Tax as a proportion of Core Spending will increase over the spending period.

Changes to grant income streams

- 3.4 In calculating the funding arrangements, the government has announced that no authority will receive zero government support, whilst this could be considered good news, they have also given details of several grants that are likely to be 'rolled into' the core spending, reducing the number of grants being paid to local authorities. The paper gives the details of the grants being considered but only New Homes Bonus, Homelessness Prevention/Rough Sleeper Grant and Discretionary Housing Payments.
- 3.5 Since the inception of New Homes Bonus, because of increasing housing stock by 8,000 or 16% since 2010/11, the Council has received significant levels of funds from this scheme, albeit reduced in more recent years, specifically using the grant to support the revenue budget. The Government sees this grant as a disincentive and has decided that the 2025/26 financial year will be the last year of the program. The grant funding, some £290m nationally, will be rolled into the core funding.
- 3.6 The proposals are to consolidate several grants into a single Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Grant, with temporary accommodation grant being subsumed into Revenue Support Grant (RSG) allocation for the authority to be distributed on the basis on Settlement Funding Assessment for Homelessness. Using the Government overall calculations this element is expected to be in the region of £400,000.
- 3.7 The council receives £158,698 Discretionary Housing Payments Grant in 2025/26. These funds are used to allow make payments to top up housing benefit costs for those assessed in need and are utilised fully by the Council. There is no information on how these funds will be distributed in the longer term.

Changes to needs assessment

- 3.8 The consultation then goes on to discuss needs assessment where Temporary Accommodation has now been recognised as an issue, making up 1.4% of national and 10.3% of lower tier expenditure and the inclusion of a specific formula for this area will have a meaningful impact on allocations for lower tier authorities.

- 3.9 There are also added changes to the area cost adjustment to include the costs of local labour markets and business rates valuations.

Business Rates and Council Tax

- 3.10 The calculation of assumed council tax income will be assessed to exclude discretionary schemes awarded by local authorities but will apply a national collection rate for income, this should serve the council well as we have a higher than average rate.
- 3.11 Very little is said about the business rates resets and how these could impact onto local areas other than the Government considers that the reset is overdue. In terms of Tonbridge and Malling this could result in some of the recent gains achieved on Business rates income being tapered over the spending period.

Multi-year Settlement

- 3.12 Finally, in to give local authorities greater certainty the settlement will announce the funding levels for three years through to 2028/29 and the effects Local Government Reorganisation will be addressed within the funding models.

4 Council Tax Consultation

- 4.1 Members may remember that on 22 July 2025 at this committee, it was reported that a consultation had been launched by the government seeking view on proposals to modernise the Council Tax system.
- 4.2 Full details can be viewed at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/modernising-and-improving-the-administration-of-council-tax/modernising-and-improving-the-administration-of-council-tax#background>
- 4.3 The proposals were regarding changes to the ten-month statutory instalment plan, modernising council tax disregards and removing barriers to application, extending the timeline for enforcement of debts and capping summons/liability order costs.
- 4.4 A response has been formulated and subsequently shared with and agreed by the Cabinet Member for Finance, Waste and Technical Services. The response is available for information at **[ANNEX 2]**.
- 4.5 The deadline for submission of the response was 12 September 2025, which was after date this report was written so if there are any updates to the proposed submission, these will be provided verbally during the committee meeting.

5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 5.1 As this report concerns the response to consultations any implications are given in the report and annexes.

6 Risk Assessment

6.1 None identified at this stage.

7 Legal Implications

7.1 No legal implications from making the responses.

8 Cross Cutting Issues

8.1 Equalities and Diversity

8.1.1 These are the responsibility of the consulting Government Department.

Background Papers	Links are contained in the report
Annexes	Annex 1 – Response to Fair Funding 2.0 Annex 2 – Response to Council Tax Modernisation.

Question 1. What are your views on the updated SFA resulting in zero allocations, and the use of mitigations to avoid zero allocations?

This should not happen, it is unfair the local authority funding support should solely be the responsibility of the local Council Tax and Rate Payer.

In addition, the lower tier authority formulae contains several areas of key functions of Local Authority which are, often, subject to major variation. Waste Collection is often the largest area of lower tier spend that is not majorly supported by either grant or fees and charges and has seen major changes in both labour and fuel costs in recent years. The aggregation of this area into the overall lower tier formula could result in distortions in the share of this funding in future years.

Question 2. Do you agree with how the government proposes to determine the Council of the Isles of Scilly's Settlement Funding Assessment?

No view

Question 3. Do you agree with the government's plans to simplify the grant landscape?

Agree

Whilst the simplification of grants is welcome, service delivery uses these specific grant allocations for the planning of service delivery. With the rolling into the Settlement Funding Allocation, changes could result in difficult decisions if need has risen by more than the core funding allows.

Question 4. Do you agree with the formulae for individual services the government proposes to include?

disagree

The separation of Homelessness is welcomed but would ask that recognition is given to the home counties who are in direct competition for the provision of this service with London Boroughs who receive higher funding for accommodation whilst deferring other needs such as schooling to the location the family has been transferred to. In addition to this we would ask that there is no detrimental impact on Homelessness grants in that this is a major area of growth for district councils due to economic conditions and our competition with London Borough has resulted in higher than inflation growth in charges and higher demand for services.

In addition to this the areas of major spend with lower tier authorities has not been adequately addressed in that these costs are more subject to matters other than inflation.

We would also ask that the foundation blocks/data being used to calculate these allocations must be kept up to date using the latest Government returns rather than projections.

Question 5. Do you agree with the areas of need the government proposes to no longer include in the assessment through the Foundation Formula?

Neither agree nor disagree

Whilst this is not a current issue for the Council, the potential inheritance of larger debt balances from the creation of unitary authorities has not been addressed.

Question 6. Do you agree with the government's approach to calculating the control total shares for the relative needs formulae?

Neither agree nor disagree

It is felt that the consultation does not provide sufficient evidence to give an opinion at this stage but would ask that the methodology does use the most up to date information from Government returns on actual expenditure incurred.

Question 7. Do you agree with the Labour Cost Adjustment (LCA) and Rates Cost Adjustment (RCA) equations set out in this chapter?

Agree

Question 8. What are your views on the proposed approach to the Area Cost Adjustment (ACA)?

Agree with proposed approach

Question 9. Do you agree or disagree with the inclusion of the Remoteness Adjustment?

Neither agree nor disagree

With no worked examples this is difficult to assess.

Question 10. Do you agree with the government's proposal to set a notional Council Tax level at the national average level, to achieve the objective of full equalisation?

Agree

Question 11. Do you agree with the government's proposal to fully include the impact of mandatory discounts and exemptions in the measure of taxbase?

Agree

Question 12. Do you agree with the government's proposal to use statistical methods to proxy for the impact of Working Age Local Council Tax Support in the measure of taxbase?

Agree

Question 13. What are your views on the proposed statistical approach to proxy for the impact of Working Age Local Council Tax Support?

Unable to provide any opinion due to lack of information on this proposal

Question 14. Do you agree with the government's proposal to assume that authorities make no use of their discretionary discount and premium schemes in the measure of taxbase?

Agree

Question 15. Do you agree with the government's proposal to apply a uniform Council Tax collection rate assumption to all authorities?

Agree

However, these should be adjusted at times where national impacts, such as cost of living issues, could result in lower collection rates.

Question 16. Do you agree with the government's proposal to split or allocate the resource adjustment in multi-tier areas according to the average share in council tax receipts in multi-tier areas?

Agree

Suggest further work be carried out on areas containing Special Expenses and Drainage Board Levies as these form part of council tax used for referendum purposes, and in the case of the latter the authority has no control over the increases incurred.

Question 17. Noting a potential trade-off of an increased levy charged on business rate growth for some local authorities, do you agree that the level of Safety Net protection should increase for 2026-27?

Disagree

The safety net protection needs to be protected but not at the costs of higher risk being placed on a small number of local authorities

Question 18. Do you agree with the government's proposal to end the New Homes Bonus in the LGFS from 2026-27 and return the funding currently allocated to the Bonus to the core Settlement, distributed via the updated Settlement Funding Assessment?

Disagree

The council has benefited from the new homes bonus since its inception, the funds are used to support the base budget, particularly around some elements of one off costs incurred through property growth. The removal and subsequent replacement of this grant is likely to have a negative impact on the Councils finances.

Question 19. What measures could the government use to incentivise local authorities to specifically support affordable and sub-market housing?

Better funding or legislation to Councils to allow greater pressure on developers to contribute mandatory levels of affordable housing to support LHA's of RSL's.

Question 20. Are there any further flexibilities that you think could support local decision-making during the transitional period?

Not at this stage

Question 21. What are the safeguards that would need to go alongside any additional flexibilities?

None at this stage

Question 22. Do you agree or disagree that we should move local authorities to their updated allocations over the three-year multi-year Settlement?

Agree

Subject to phased approach

Question 23. Do you agree or disagree that we should use a funding floor to protect as many local authorities' income as possible, at flat cash in each year of the Settlement?

Agree

- (i) *Funding levels should be subject to a minimum guarantee such as CPI/RPI or Wage inflation.*

Question 24. Do you agree or disagree with including projections on residential population?

Disagree

Question 25. Do you agree or disagree with including projections on Council Tax level?

Disagree

Question 26. Do you agree or disagree with including projections on Council Tax base?

Disagree

Question 27. Please provide any additional information, including any explanation or evidence for your response and any views on technical delivery. If you agree, what is your preferred method of projecting residential population, Council Tax level and Council Tax base?

Current projection methods are a one size fits all, there should be greater use of information from returns made such as CTR1, these are more update and localised to the needs of the area.

Question 28. Do you agree with the above approach to determining allocations for areas which reorganise into a single unitary authority along existing geographic boundaries?

Agree

Question 29. Do you agree that, where areas are reorganising into multiple new unitary authorities, they should agree a proposal for the division of existing funding locally based on any guidance set out by central government?

Agree

Question 30. Do you agree that the government should work to reduce unnecessary or disproportionate burden created by statutory duties?

Agree

The consideration of the area of impact are as follows;

- *Freedom of information and subject access requests, specifically where there are requested for area of revenue generation for third parties.*
- *The costs of speculative Planning appeals.*
- *Publication of notices within Local Newspapers rather than on Council Website.*
- *Requirements of Accounts and Audit Inspection were considered necessary by Internation Audit Standards, but have no financial impact on the Council's financial standing or performance.*

Question 31. Do you agree with the proposed framework outlined at paragraph 11.2.3 for assessing whether a fee should be changed?

Disagree

Greater freedoms are required for local setting of fees and charges the move to national setting does not encourage areas for local democracy.

Question 32. The government invites views from respondents on how best to balance the need to maintain fee values and the original policy intent of the fee whilst minimising cost of living impacts for service users.

Service users should be charged for full price of service at a local rather than national level.

Question 33. Do you agree that the measures above provide an effective balance between protecting charge payers from excessive increases, while providing authorities with greater control over local revenue raising?

Neither agree nor disagree

Full cost recharging but over an average period.

Question 34. Do you agree that we should take action to update fees before exploring options to devolve certain fees to local government in the longer term?

Neither agree nor disagree

We accept that this burden will pass to Local Authorities but would ask that the transfer is made as soon as possible.

Question 35. Do you agree or disagree that these are the right Relative Needs Indicators? Are there any other Relative Needs Indicators we should consider? Note that we will not be able to add additional indicators for a 2026-27 update.

Agree

Question 36. Do you agree or disagree with including population projections in the ASC formula, when published, that have been rebased using Census 2021 data?

No view

Question 37. Do you agree or disagree with our proposal to include a Low-Income Adjustment (LIA) for the older adults component of the ASC RNF model?

No view

Question 38. Do you agree or disagree that the overall ASC RNF should combine the two component allocation shares using weights derived from the national ASC net current expenditure data on younger and older adults (in this case 2023 to 2024)?

No view

Question 39. Do you agree that ethnicity should be removed as a variable in the CYPS formula?

No view

Question 40. Do you agree overall that the new formula represents an accurate assessment of need for children and family services?

No view

Question 41. Do you believe that the components of daytime population inflow should be weighted to reflect their relative impact on demand for services?

Agree

Question 42. Do you agree with/have any comments on the design of the Foundation Formula?

Agree

Question 43. Do you agree with/have any comments on the design of the Fire and Rescue Formula?

No view

Question 44. Do you agree with/have any comments on the design of the formula for Highways Maintenance?

No view

Question 45. Do you agree with/have any comments on the design of the formula for Home-to-School-Transport?

No view

Question 46. Do you have any views on the potential impacts of the proposals in this consultation on persons who share a protected characteristic?

None

Question 1: Do you agree with changing the default bill instalments from 10 months to 12 months? Why/why not?

Response:

No. While extending instalments to 12 months may appear to offer smoother payments, the current system already allows taxpayers to opt into 12-month instalments if they prefer. The majority of taxpayers are satisfied with the 10-month schedule and value the two-month break in February and March to manage other financial commitments. Changing the default risks disrupting a system that works well for most, for minimal gain.

Question 2: If the government were to move to 12-month instalments by default, do you agree taxpayers should be able to request to pay in 10-monthly payments? Why/why not?

Response:

Yes. If the default were changed, it is essential that taxpayers retain the ability to opt for 10-month instalments. Many residents prefer the current structure and rely on the two-month break for budgeting. Removing this choice would reduce flexibility and could cause unnecessary financial strain for some households.

Question 3: What impacts, if any, do you think this change will have on local authorities' cash flow and ability to pay precepting authorities?

Response:

The impact on cash flow would be significant. Extending instalments to 12 months reduces monthly income, which could affect the authority's ability to meet statutory payment obligations to preceptors. For example, a council collecting £100 million annually would see a monthly reduction of around £1.7 million. This would increase the need for financial diligence to ensure sufficient funds are available to meet statutory obligations. If mandated, this change would constitute a new burden and should be recognised and compensated by central government.

Question 4: Do you feel you have a good understanding of how council tax revenue is used by your local authority?

Response:

Yes.

Question 5: Do you agree further information should be provided on how council tax is spent? Why/Why not? How should this information be presented?

Response:

We believe the information is already available, but accessibility could be improved. A practical enhancement would be to mandate a direct link to the relevant finance or budget webpages on the reverse of the council tax demand notice, rather than in supplementary materials. This would improve visibility without adding complexity or cost.

Question 6: Do you feel you have a good understanding of the support offered by your council and how to claim this? How might this be improved?

Response:

While councils provide information on available support, the process can be complex for some residents. Improvements could include clearer signposting on council websites, simplified application processes, and proactive communication during billing and recovery stages.

Question 7: What further information, if any, do you think would be helpful to see on this support? How should this be presented?

Response:

It would be helpful to include a summary of available support schemes directly on the accompanying information, with clear instructions on how to apply. This should be written in plain language and include contact details for further assistance. Digital accessibility should be balanced with printed materials to ensure inclusion.

Question 8: Do you agree with the proposed new name and definition of the disregard, as set out above? Why/Why not?

Response:

We do not believe the current name of the Severe Mental Impairment (SMI) disregard is a major barrier to uptake. The real challenges lie in the eligibility criteria and the requirement for medical certification, which can be difficult to obtain due to GP availability. Renaming alone will not address these barriers.

Question 9: What are your views on whether the proposed definition is consistent with the existing eligibility for the disregard?

Response:

Any new definition must be carefully considered to ensure it aligns with existing eligibility and does not increase the administrative burden on local authorities. The current criteria already require certification and benefit entitlement, and any changes should aim to simplify access without creating additional complexity.

Question 10: Do you agree with the government's proposal to modernise the criteria for disregards? Why/why not?**Response:**

Yes, we broadly agree that some aspects of the disregard criteria could benefit from modernisation. The current system generally works well, but there are areas where updates are overdue. For example, the **apprentice disregard** is based on an outdated earnings threshold (£195 per week), which excludes most modern apprentices. A more effective approach would be to allow apprentices to access **Council Tax Support**, aligning them with other low-income groups.

Similarly, the **student disregard** should be updated to explicitly include **Open University students**, who were not prevalent when the original legislation was drafted.

Question 11: Are there any specific disregards you think should be reviewed or updated?**Response:**

Yes:

- **Apprentice disregard:** The earnings threshold is outdated and excludes most apprentices. This disregard should either be updated or replaced with access to Council Tax Support.
- **Student disregard:** Should be revised to explicitly include Open University and other distance learning students.

Question 12: Do you agree with the government's proposal to improve efficiency in council tax billing? Why/why not?**Response:**

We agree that efficiency improvements are worth exploring, but caution against defaulting to **e-billing**, which could exclude digitally vulnerable residents and create administrative challenges. Councils already offer e-billing as an option, and uptake can be improved through better promotion.

Question 13: What changes do you think could be made to improve efficiency in council tax billing?

Response:

Practical and low-cost improvements could include:

- **Opt-in e-billing with stronger promotion** via websites, portals, and printed materials.
- **Improved back-end automation** to streamline billing and reduce manual processing. This could be enhanced further with government financial support.

Question 14: Do you agree with the government's proposal to improve the process for challenging council tax bandings? Why/why not?

Response:

Yes, but the proposal does not go far enough. The **core issue** is the use of property valuations from **1 April 1991**, which makes the system opaque and difficult for taxpayers to understand. A **full council tax revaluation** is long overdue and should be considered alongside improvements to the challenge process.

Question 15: What changes do you think could be made to improve the process for challenging council tax bandings?

Response:

- Introduce a **council tax revaluation** to reflect current property values.
- Make **banding criteria publicly accessible online**, without requiring portal logins.
- Allow taxpayers to compare their property with similar ones transparently.
- Introduce a **time limit** for retrospective appeals (e.g. six years) to protect local authority finances.

Question 16: Do you agree with the government's proposal to improve the process for collecting and enforcing council tax? Why/why not?

Response:

No. The proposals risk undermining effective collection and enforcement. Councils already use discretion and flexibility to support struggling taxpayers. Extending the time before a full-year bill is issued or capping liability order costs would **delay**

engagement, increase arrears, and reduce recovery rates. Enforcement agents are used as a last resort and are trained to assess vulnerability.

Question 17: What changes do you think could be made to improve the process for collecting and enforcing council tax?

Response:

- **Fast-track access to HMRC data** to enable quicker attachment of earnings.
- Improve **public understanding** of the recovery process and timelines.
- Support councils with **digital tools** to streamline engagement and payment arrangements.
- Avoid changes that remove flexibility or delay enforcement, as these harm both taxpayers and local authority finances.

Question 18: Do you agree with the government's proposal to increase the time before councils can request a full year's bill? Why/why not?

Response:

No. Increasing the time before councils can request a full-year bill would have a catastrophic impact on collection and enforcement. Council tax is a statutory tax and must be treated as a priority debt. Councils already have discretion to offer extended payment plans where appropriate, and many taxpayers engage with authorities after receiving reminders. Extending the timeline would simply give non-payers more time to avoid payment, not help those genuinely struggling.

Question 19: What impacts, if any, do you think this change will have on local authorities' ability to collect council tax?

Response:

This change would undermine recovery processes, increase arrears, and reduce engagement. Councils know their tax base and already delay reminders by around 14 days, followed by a statutory 7-day period. Many taxpayers only respond at later stages — some not until enforcement agents are involved. Extending the timeline would push people further into debt and reduce the effectiveness of recovery tools.

Question 20: Do you agree with the government's proposal to cap the costs charged on households in seeking liability orders for debts? Why/why not?

Response:

No. Capping costs may appear helpful to taxpayers, but it risks undermining the enforcement process and shifting the financial burden onto councils. Liability order costs are already modest and reflect the administrative effort involved. Councils do not pursue enforcement lightly and use agents only after all other options are exhausted. Enforcement agents are trained to assess vulnerability and return cases where appropriate.

Question 21: What impacts, if any, do you think this change will have on local authorities' ability to enforce council tax debts?**Response:**

Capping costs would reduce the deterrent effect of enforcement and could encourage avoidance. It would also increase the financial burden on councils, who would need to absorb the shortfall. This could lead to reduced resources for supporting vulnerable taxpayers and managing complex cases. The current system already includes safeguards and discretion — further restrictions would be counterproductive.

Question 22: Are there any further steps councils should take before being able to charge a full year's bill?**Response:**

Councils already take extensive steps before issuing a full-year bill. They offer alternative payment plans, recalculate instalments, and engage with taxpayers at multiple stages. The flexibility to do this is partly due to the current 10-month instalment structure. Moving to 12 months would remove this buffer and reduce councils' ability to help struggling taxpayers. Additional steps are unnecessary and risk duplicating existing good practice.

Question 23: Are there any further steps councils should take before being able to seek a liability order?**Response:**

Councils already follow a structured and fair process before seeking liability orders. This includes reminders, opportunities to engage, and offers of payment arrangements. The idea that councils rush to enforcement is misinformed and unfair. Councils use discretion appropriately. Further mandated steps would add bureaucracy without improving outcomes.

Question 24: Are there any further steps councils should take before being able to instruct enforcement agents?

Response:

Enforcement agents are used only as a last resort, after all other recovery methods have been exhausted. Councils already assess vulnerability and return cases where appropriate. The current system works well and includes safeguards. Additional steps would delay recovery and increase arrears, particularly among those who choose not to engage until enforcement begins.

Question 25: Do you agree with the government’s proposal to introduce welfare checks before enforcement action is taken? Why/why not?

Response:

We are cautious about this proposal. Councils already carry out informal welfare assessments and use discretion when dealing with vulnerable taxpayers. Enforcement agents are trained to identify vulnerability and return cases to the council where appropriate. The term “welfare checks” is vague and could imply a formalised process that duplicates existing efforts or adds unnecessary administrative burden. Councils know their communities and are already doing what works — any new requirement must be clearly defined and proportionate. Carrying out welfare checks would increase the cost of collection and would require additional government financial support.

Question 26: What should a welfare check involve? Who should carry it out?

Response:

If welfare checks are to be introduced, they should be:

- **Light-touch and proportionate**, not a formalised or resource-intensive process.
- **Conducted by council staff or enforcement agents**, who already have experience in identifying vulnerability.
- **Focused on engagement**, offering payment arrangements or signposting to support services.

It is essential that any new process does not delay enforcement unnecessarily or increase costs for councils.

Question 27: Do you agree with the government’s proposal to improve access to debt advice and support for households struggling to pay council tax? Why/why not?

Response:

Yes, improving access to debt advice is a positive step. Councils already work with advice agencies and signpost support, but additional resources and clearer pathways would help. However, this must be done in a way that complements existing local arrangements and does not create duplication or confusion.

Question 28: What changes do you think could be made to improve access to debt advice and support for households struggling to pay council tax?

Response:

- **Clear signposting** on council tax bills and websites.
- **Partnerships with local advice agencies** and voluntary sector organisations.
- **Funding for outreach and engagement**, particularly for digitally excluded or hard-to-reach groups.
- **Integration with Council Tax Support schemes**, so that advice and financial assistance are offered together.

Question 29: Do you agree with the government’s proposal to improve data sharing between councils and central government to support council tax collection and enforcement? Why/why not?

Response:

Yes. Improved data sharing — particularly access to **HMRC employment data** — would significantly enhance councils’ ability to recover debts through attachment of earnings. This would reduce reliance on enforcement agents and improve outcomes for both councils and taxpayers. However, safeguards must be in place to ensure data is used appropriately and securely.

Question 30: What changes do you think could be made to improve data sharing between councils and central government to support council tax collection and enforcement?

Response:

- **Fast-track access to HMRC data** for attachment of earnings and tracing non-payers.
- **Secure data-sharing protocols** to protect personal information.

Question 31: What are your views on ways enforcement could better reflect the needs of those in financial or other hardship?

Response:

Enforcement already reflects the needs of those in hardship through existing safeguards. Enforcement agents are trained to identify vulnerability and return cases to councils where appropriate. Councils also offer payment arrangements and reassess instalments when taxpayers engage. Rather than introducing new layers of process, the focus should be on **supporting early engagement**, maintaining **flexibility**, and ensuring **discretion remains with local authorities**, who know their communities best.

Question 32: What are your suggestions on alternative or additional measures to ensure council tax is paid?

Response:

- **Improved access to HMRC data** to enable quicker and more effective attachment of earnings.
- **Better public education** on council tax as a priority debt and the consequences of non-payment.
- **Streamlined digital engagement tools** to make it easier for taxpayers to manage their accounts and set up arrangements.
- **Early intervention and outreach**, particularly for those who miss initial payments, to prevent escalation.

Question 33: What are your views on the current methods available to councils to collect council tax?

Response:

The current methods are broadly effective and include a range of tools that allow councils to balance enforcement with support. Councils use reminders, summonses,

liability orders, and enforcement agents — but only after other options have been exhausted. The system is flexible and allows for discretion, which is essential for dealing with diverse taxpayer circumstances. Any changes should enhance, not restrict, these capabilities.

Question 34: How else do you think council tax could be efficiently and fairly collected?

Response:

Efficiency and fairness can be improved through:

- **Better data sharing** between councils and central government.
- **Investment in automation and digital systems** to reduce manual processing.
- **Maintaining flexibility in instalment structures**, such as retaining the 10-month default to allow recalculations.
- **Supporting early engagement** with taxpayers through clear communication and accessible support.

Question 35: Do you have any views on anything else related to council tax administration which has not been covered in this consultation and call for evidence?

Response:

Yes. The most pressing issue not addressed is the need for a **council tax revaluation**. The current system is based on property values from 1991, which is outdated and increasingly difficult to justify. A revaluation would improve transparency, fairness, and public confidence. Additionally, the **banding structure** should be reviewed, including the potential for more bands at the higher end and adjustments to band proportions.

Question 36: Do you have any views on whether any of the proposed changes in the consultation will have any disproportionate impacts on any particular groups with protected characteristics compared to others?

Response:

Yes. Proposals such as default e-billing and extended enforcement timelines could disproportionately affect:

- **Digitally excluded individuals**, including older residents and those with disabilities.

- **Low-income households**, who may fall further into arrears if enforcement is delayed.
- **People with mental health conditions**, who may struggle to engage with complex or delayed processes.

Any changes must be assessed through robust equality impact assessments and include safeguards to protect vulnerable groups.

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FINANCE, REGENERATION AND PROPERTY SCRUTINY SELECT COMMITTEE – UPCOMING MATTERS

2025-26

C=Council; CAB = Cabinet; DEL = Delegated to Committee; INFO = matters for information. Cabinet are responsible for ALL Key Decisions (KD). Some Non-Key Decisions (NKD) can be taken by Cabinet Members outside of the meeting.

Added by DS and date; Added by Scrutiny Officer and date

DECISION (TITLE)	DESCRIPTION	C/CAB/ DEL/INFO	KD/NKD	CAB MEMBER DN Y/N	PART 1 OR 2	MEETING DATE	OFFICER IN PERSON ATTENDANCE Y/N
Review of Fees and Charges 2025/26		CAB	KD	N		18 November 2025	
Cabinet Member report	Regeneration/Property – Cllr R Betts; Tonbridge Regeneration – Cllr A Mehmet	Info					
Matters Arising from Services in between cycles (to be identified):							
Work Programme	Standing item	Info					
						17 February 2026	
Matters Arising from Services in between cycles (to be identified):							
Work Programme	Standing item	Info					
Future items to be scheduled for scrutiny: To be identified							

Annual updates in respect of the following Outside Bodies to be scheduled during 2025/26:

- Lower Medway Internal Drainage Board; Upper Medway Internal Drainage Board **early 2026**

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Agenda Item 9

Any other items which the Chairman decides are urgent due to special circumstances and of which notice has been given to the Chief Executive.

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The Chairman to move that the press and public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting during consideration of any items the publication of which would disclose exempt information.

**ANY REPORTS APPEARING AFTER THIS PAGE CONTAIN EXEMPT
INFORMATION**

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Any other items which the Chairman decides are urgent due to special circumstances and of which notice has been given to the Chief Executive.

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