

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

MINUTES

Wednesday, 21st January, 2026

Present: Cllr M R Rhodes (Chair), Cllr A McDermott (Vice-Chair), Cllr B Banks, Cllr K Barton, Cllr J Clokey, Cllr D A S Davis, Cllr B A Parry, Cllr R V Roud, Cllr K B Tanner and Cllr M D Boughton (substitute)

In attendance: Councillors A G Bennison, P M Hickmott, M A Coffin*, Mrs A S Oakley* and W E Palmer* were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

(*participated via MS Teams)

An apology for absence was received from Councillor L Chapman.

PART 1 - PUBLIC

GP 26/1 NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Notification of substitute members were recorded as set out below:

- Councillor M Boughton substituted for Councillor L Chapman

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

GP 26/2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

GP 26/3 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting of the General Purposes Committee held on 8 October 2025 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE COUNCIL

GP 26/4 LOCALISM ACT - PAY POLICY

The report of the Director of Central Services and Deputy Chief Executive summarised the requirements of the Localism Act and

presented an updated Pay Policy Statement for 2026/27 as set out in Annex 1 to the report.

Members noted that as there had not been many significant changes in the Borough Council's remuneration policy, the substantive content of the updated Pay Policy Statement for 2026/27 was nearly identical to the Council's Pay Policy Statement for 2025/26. The key updates related to the actual pay received by staff, the pay multiple data and the number of officers in specific graded posts. Furthermore, a new section had been added to reflect the current Long Service Award scheme operated within the Council.

Reference was made to the factors that would be taken into consideration in setting an annual pay award, as outlined in Section 3 of the Pay Policy. It was proposed by Councillor Clokey and seconded by Councillor Banks that 'relevant official statistics and the Office for National Statistics (ONS) lead inflation index' be added alongside the inflation levels as one of the factors, and that a new factor of 'the level of Real Living Wage' also be included. It was explained that these factors would not bind the Borough Council but would require formal consideration in setting the annual pay award. Concern was raised that including the real living wage as a consideration could reduce the Council's flexibility in setting pay level locally, potentially leading to prescriptive outcomes and impacting its ability to address market conditions and recruitment challenges. Following a formal vote, both motions were lost with 6 Members voting against (including a casting vote of the Chair) and 5 Members voting in favour.

The Chair proposed, seconded by Councillor Davis, and the Committee

RECOMMENDED*: That

- (1) the Pay Policy set out in Annex 1 be commended for adoption at the Council meeting on 24 February 2026.

***Recommended to Council**

GP 26/5 PAY AWARD 2026/2027

The report of the Chief Executive provided Members with information to recommend to full Council, the Borough Council's pay award for employees for 2026/27.

The Chair proposed and it was seconded by Councillor Boughton and agreed unanimously by the Committee that Council Procedure Rule 10.11 be suspended, to allow a representative of UNISON to address the Committee on behalf of its members, during which concerns were raised regarding the long-term impact of inflation accumulated over the past years and the ongoing recruitment and retention challenges faced by the Borough Council. Furthermore, suggestion was made for the

Council to permanently adopt the Real Living Wage and attain the accreditation as a Real Living Wage employer. Following the statement from UNISON, Council Procedure Rules were reapplied.

Members noted that the Borough Council employees had a term in their contracts which read “Salaries will be revised on 1 April each year by an amount determined by the Authority having regard to movements in the Retail Price Index, comparative pay settlements and prevailing economic conditions” and the Borough Council therefore determined its own pay awards without being tied into the national process of collective bargaining. The Borough Council’s current salary scales were attached at Annex 1 of the report and UNISON’s pay claim for 2026/27 at Annex 2.

During discussion, Members were reminded of the acute recruitment and retention difficulties faced by the Borough Council, particularly for professional M grade roles. Additionally, the reasons why the suggested adoption of the Real Living Wage could not be supported were acknowledged. These included concerns about how it would affect the Council’s ability to recruit for entry-level positions, the need to maintain fair pay differentials across the pay scale, the importance of keeping flexibility in making local pay awards, and the substantial costs involved, especially in light of the recent government announcement of the provisional finance settlement which indicated a significant reduction in funding for the Council in the coming years. Moreover, the overall wider benefits of working for a local government compared to the private sector were also recognised.

The Chair proposed, seconded by Councillor McDermott, that a pay award of 4% be applied to all salary scales, with effect from 1 April 2026. Following a formal vote, the motion was carried with 5 Members voting in favour and 5 Members abstained from voting.

RECOMMENDED*: That

- (1) a pay award of 4% be commended to full Council for application to all salary scales, with effect from 1 April 2026.

***Recommended to Council**

MATTERS FOR DECISION UNDER DELEGATED POWERS

GP 26/6 MEMBER DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2026 - 2028

The report of the Director of Central Services and Deputy Chief Executive set out a new Member Development Strategy 2026 – 2028, developed to equip Members with the knowledge and skills required to fulfil their roles effectively with the aim of supporting the successful delivery of the Borough Council’s strategic priorities.

Following a Member survey undertaken in December 2025 and based on the feedback received, a draft Member Development Strategy had been prepared and was attached at Annex 1, focusing on five key priority areas as outlined in paragraph 5.6 of the report.

Members welcomed the introduction of the new Member Development Strategy, advocated for interactive training exercises and the use of external facilitators for regulatory topics, and emphasised the importance of benchmarking against other councils and tracking progress with training modules. It was noted that implementation of the Strategy would be monitored annually by the General Purposes Committee, with priority areas for 2026/27 scheduled to be considered by the Committee in March 2026.

Councillor Boughton proposed, seconded by Councillor Clokey, and the Committee unanimously

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the new Member Development Strategy 2026 – 2028, set out in Annex 1, be approved.

GP 26/7 DOMESTIC ABUSE HOUSING ALLIANCE ACCREDITATION - POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Consideration was given to a set of revised and new domestic abuse policies and procedures, developed to support staff members and residents as part of the work that the Borough Council were undertaking to tackle domestic abuse and working towards achieving the 'bronze' level of the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation scheme – a benchmark for Local Authorities and Housing Associations to respond to domestic abuse in the UK.

An updated draft of the Borough Council's Domestic Abuse Policy for Staff, setting out how the Council would identify signs of domestic abuse among staff and respond to disclosure and what support would be provided to staff members experiencing domestic abuse, was attached at Annex 1, with an associated procedure for disclosing domestic abuse attached at Annex 2.

In addition, a set of policy and procedure had also been developed to support residents approaching the Borough Council's Housing Services for support with accommodation/housing advice, for reasons of domestic abuse, as set out in Annex 3 and Annex 4 respectively.

Members acknowledged the progress made by the Borough Council in aligning relevant policies and procedures with the DAHA standards and commented on the robustness of these measures.

The Chair proposed, seconded by Councillor Clokey, and the Committee unanimously

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Domestic Abuse Policy for Staff, attached at Annex 1, be approved and adopted;
- (2) the Domestic Abuse Procedure for Staff, attached at Annex 2, be approved and adopted;
- (3) the Resident's Domestic Abuse Policy, attached at Annex 3, be approved and adopted; and
- (4) the Resident's Domestic Abuse Procedure, attached at Annex 4, be approved and adopted.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE

GP 26/8 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 COUNCIL AND FOR DECISION UNDER DELEGATED POWERS

GP 26/9 ESTABLISHMENT REPORT

(Reason: LGA 1972 – Sch 12A Paragraph 2 – Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual)

The report set out for Members' approval a number of establishment changes recommended by the Borough Council's Management Team. Members noted that, in accordance with adopted conventions, all of the savings/costs referred to in the report reflected the salary at the top of the scale/grade plus associated on costs.

In addition, Members noted a number of changes and updates to the Establishment since the last meeting of the Committee, as outlined in Section 5 of the report.

The Chair proposed, seconded by Councillor McDermott, and the Committee unanimously

RESOLVED: That

- (1) post DC0103, Policy, Scrutiny & Communities Manager (M6) be redesignated to Corporate Policy & Communities Manager (M5) with effect from 22 January 2026;
- (2) post DR0403, Licensing Inspector (SO) be redesignated to Principal Licensing Officer (M9) with effect from 22 January 2026;
- (3) post DV0301, Environmental Protection Manager (M8) be deleted with effect from 22 January 2026;
- (4) a full-time Regulatory Services Manager post (M7/M6), be created with effect from 22 January 2026;
- (5) the Environmental Protection Manager be redeployed into the newly created Regulatory Services Manager post with effect from 22 January 2026;
- (6) the Planning, Housing and Environmental Health Directorate be renamed to Planning, Housing and Regulatory Services Directorate with effect from 22 January 2026;
- (7) post DG2098, Waste Contracts Officer, 30 hours (scale 6) be permanently established with effect from 22 January 2026; and
- (8) post DC0199, Economic Development Officer, 22.2 hours (scale 4/5) be permanently established with effect from 22 January 2026.

The Chair proposed, seconded by Councillor McDermott, and the Committee unanimously

RECOMMENDED*: That

- (1) a new, full-time, Information Governance Manager post, grade M8, be permanently established;
- (2) the hours of post DJ0318, Principal Planning Policy Officer (M8), be permanently increased from 32 to 37 hours per week; and
- (3) the hours of post DJ0319, Senior Planning Policy Officer (M9), be permanently increased from 30 to 37 hours per week.

***Recommended to Council**

The meeting ended at 9.00 pm