

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES

Thursday, 22nd January, 2026

Present: Cllr Mrs A S Oakley (Chair), Cllr L Athwal (Vice-Chair), Cllr K B Tanner (Vice-Chair), Cllr Mrs S Bell, Cllr T Bishop, Cllr C Brown, Cllr R I B Cannon, Cllr A Cope, Cllr P M Hickmott, Cllr M A J Hood, Cllr F A Hoskins, Cllr S A Hudson, Cllr D W King, Cllr A McDermott, Cllr W E Palmer and Cllr M R Rhodes (substitute).

In attendance: Cllrs A G Bennison, M D Boughton, A Mehmet* and M Taylor were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

(*participated via MS Teams)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors L Chapman and D Thornewell

PART 1 - PUBLIC

OS 26/1 NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Notification of substitute members were recorded as set out below:

- Cllr M Rhodes substitute for Cllr L Chapman

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.

OS 26/2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

However, for reasons of transparency, Cllr Bishop advised that he was one of the Borough Council's appointments to the Board of the Tonbridge and Malling Leisure Trust who were referenced in Capital Plan Review 2025/26 (item 8). As this did not represent an Other Significant Interest on the grounds that the matter being discussed was for recommendation only and therefore not regarded as prejudicial, he remained in the meeting and participated in the discussion.

OS 26/3 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 13 November 2025 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE CABINET**OS 26/4 REVENUE ESTIMATES 2026/27**

The report of the Head of Finance and the Cabinet Member for Finance, Waste and Technical Services referred to the responsibility of the Cabinet under the Constitution for formulating initial draft proposals in respect of the Budget and explained that, under the Budget and Policy Framework, one of the responsibilities for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was to scrutinise the draft Estimates and, where appropriate, make recommendations to Cabinet.

In preparing the Estimates, due regard had been given to the Corporate Strategy and particular consideration given to the need to address a number of key issues including the provision of cost-effective temporary accommodation, the regeneration of Tonbridge, climate change initiatives, transformation to improve efficiency and effectiveness and delivery of the Local Plan.

Particular reference was made to the provisional local government finance settlement covering the 2026/28 to 2028/29 financial years. This was published on 17 December 2025 and incorporated changes to the Local Government Finances under the Fair Funding 2.0 and Business Rates Reset. A large number of previous grants issued under Section 31 of the Business Rates (Small Business, Retail Relief and Under Indexing) part of Homelessness Prevention Grant, National Insurance compensation and New Homes Bonus were now included in the settlement under Revenue Support Grant. However, the Funding Guarantee received over the last few years had also been included into the new Revenue Support Grant and the financial settlement covered the financial years April 2026 to March 2029 which was welcomed as it allowed greater financial planning in forthcoming years.

As part of the settlement the Government prepared a Core Spending Assessment to detail the resources available to the Borough Council as a whole. It was noted that Tonbridge and Malling saw the second highest reduction in its Core Spending Assessment for authorities in England. In addition, it was noted that this assessment included a notional amount for Council Tax Revenue to be raised by the authority. This was based upon the Council Tax and Taxbase for 2025/26 and allowed for the assumption that the Band D amount would increase in line with the referendum principles and taxbase increased based on a national average. This element, Council Tax, were removed for the purposes of comparisons between years.

Overall, this represented a decrease in funding to the Borough Council of 9.8% which amounted to circa £1.549m over the settlement period.

Attention was also drawn to the ability for district councils to increase council tax up to 3%, or £5 whichever was greater.

Further work had been undertaken to assess the recent changes associated with Business Rates revaluation and the calculation of the Income Base from the Retained Rates for the 2026/27 estimates. The Head of Finance confirmed that estimated returns to Central Government had been made placing the Council at the provisional baseline income of £3.362m.

Members were advised that, in accordance with the MTFS objectives, the annual contribution to the Revenue Reserve for Capital Schemes, excluding capital renewals, had previously been set at £250,000. However, given pending reorganisation it was felt that an increase to £500,000 per annum until 2028/29 was appropriate. In addition, the annual contribution to the Building Repairs Reserve to meet ongoing maintenance and repair obligations was set at £820,000 from 2026/27 onwards. This reflected an additional allowance for the Homelessness Properties operated by the Council. Further reviews might be required to keep a balance reserve position.

However, the future financial position remained uncertain and difficult to determine due to the current economic conditions, assumptions in respect of inflation and interest rates. The uncertainty and volatility surrounding local government finances and the potential effects of Local Government Reorganisation had not aided financial planning with an increased risk of significant variations compared to projections.

Careful consideration was given to the Revised Estimates for 2025/26 and the draft Revenue Estimates for 2026/27 (attached at Annex 1) within the context of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and the Council's priorities. Variations were detailed in Annex 1 and at 9.2 and 10.2 of the report.

Members sought clarification and reassurance on a number of areas including the capacity of the Valuation Office and the progress of regeneration projects within Tonbridge. There were no further recommendations in respect of the Revenue Estimates identified.

Finally, to support scrutiny of the Revenue Estimates information had been provided as to whether a service was mandatory or discretionary (attached at Annex 2) and this was welcomed by Members.

In closing, the Committee recorded appreciation to the Accountancy Team for their significant contribution in preparing the estimates for consideration.

Cllr Oakley proposed, Cllr Brown seconded and the Committee

***RECOMMENDED:** That the Revenue Estimates as drafted (attached at Annex 1) be endorsed for consideration by Cabinet at its special meeting on 10 February 2026.

***Recommended to Cabinet**

OS 26/5 CAPITAL PLAN REVIEW 2025/26

The report of the Head of Finance and Cabinet Member for Finance, Waste and Technical Services detailed proposals for the Capital Plan for the remainder of 2025/26 and 2026/27 and sought endorsement of recommendations to the Cabinet.

Members were reminded that the capital plan process provided a means of maintaining a pool (List C) from which schemes could be selected for evaluation and possible implementation. It also provided an opportunity to review the provisions for schemes which were already in the Capital Plan (List A).

It was explained that capital expenditure was currently funded from the revenue reserve for capital schemes, grants from government and other bodies, developer contributions and from capital receipts derived from the sale of assets. In some circumstances other earmarked reserves were used to fund in full or in part appropriate capital plan schemes. However, it was also noted that based on current approvals that from 2029/30 the Borough Council might need to borrow to fund such expenditure.

Proposals for List C which included the addition of 'fast track' schemes in respect of Tonbridge Farm Sportsground Improvements All Weather Pitch, Leybourne Lakes Country Park – Resurfacing Access Roads and Paths, Taddington Valley – Site Improvement Works, Water Safety Systems Installation for Swimming Pools and Innerva Suite – Angel Leisure Centre were outlined in 9.4 of the report. Funding arrangements and evaluated details for these schemes were set out in Annex 4 and 10.1 to 10.6 of the report.

In addition, to the five schemes identified for 'fast track', a further scheme concerning the boilers at Tonbridge Swimming Pool required consideration to enable a potential amendment to the current Boiler Scheme on List A to include this additional site. This scheme could be funded from the annual capital allowance of £500,000. There was no objection raised to amending the current List A scheme.

Careful consideration was given to the existing Capital Plan (List A) and List C (as detailed in Annexes 1 – 3) and officers responded to questions raised by Members related to the reduced budget provision of housing

assistance, capital receipts of the old Angel Leisure Centre and the scheme at Tonbridge Farm Sportsground.

In response the Committee was assured that housing assistance support was not being reduced but funded by Better Care Funding and every effort would be made to put capital receipts towards the replacement Angel Centre in due course. An offer to hold a Member briefing on the Tonbridge Farm Sportsground to better understand the project was welcomed. Other queries raised would be addressed out of meeting and if appropriate necessary adjustments to the schemes would be made.

Members recognised the significant financial implications in respect of a number of schemes and were reassured that the costs, risks, works and valuations associated with the projects would be carefully monitored. It was also commented that projects set out should be implemented as soon as possible in advance of local government organisation so that these could be started/completed if the Borough Council no longer existed.

Finally, the Committee recorded appreciation to Officers in Finance Services for their contribution in preparing both the Revenue Estimates and the Capital Plan.

***RECOMMENDED:** That

- (1) the current Capital Plan (List A) position (attached at Annex 1) be noted;
- (2) List C (attached at Annex 3) be amended by Cabinet as detailed in 8.3 of the report;
- (3) the transfer of the five fast-track evaluated schemes (shown in 9.4 and Annex 4) from List C to List B be commended to Cabinet for endorsement;
- (4) the remaining four List C schemes listed in 9.4 be selected for evaluation;
- (5) Cabinet endorse Capital Plan (List B) totalling £1.869m (detailed in Annex 2 and 11.3) transferring to List A, subject to the remaining finance being identified;
- (6) Cabinet be asked to update the Capital Plan (List A) position as recommended above; and
- (7) the Cabinet be invited to endorse the Capital Strategy (attached at Annex 5) for adoption by the Council and publication on the Council's website.

Recommended to Cabinet*OS 26/6 PROCUREMENT PARTNERSHIP - FORMAL REVIEW**

The report of the Director of Street Scene, Leisure and Technical Services reviewed the performance of the Mid-Kent Procurement Partnership since the Borough Council joined in May 2024 and sought comments in respect of the way forward.

Members were pleased to note that the Procurement Partnership had been very well received; an improvement in high quality procurement and contracting activity and the key actions for the Partnership in the next 12-18 months as detailed in the report.

Consideration was given to a number of options regarding the Procurement Partnership, as detailed in paragraph 8 of the report. Due regard was also given to the financial and value for money considerations, the assessment of risk and legal implications.

In recognition that membership of the Mid-Kent Procurement Partnership supported full compliance with relevant legislation and maintained an effective council, Cllr Oakley proposed, Cllr Cannon seconded and the Committee

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) Option 3 to continue with the Procurement Partnership with a further review in 4 years' time and ensuring that budget was made available to do so be commended to Cabinet for adoption.

OS 26/7 ANNUAL SERVICE DELIVERY PLAN 2026/27

The report of the Chief Executive and Leader of the Borough Council presented a Annual Service Delivery Plan for 2026/27. This was a performance management tool that set out the Borough Council's priority actions for the year, along with key milestones and targets that could be used to monitor when the organisation was on target with delivery.

Members reviewed the draft Annual Service Delivery Plan 2026/27 (attached at Annex 1) and a number of amendments, corrections and points of clarification were suggested. These would be reviewed by the Corporate Policy and Communities Manager in liaison with Services.

Particular reference was made to the replacement of the Penny Shelter in River Walk, Tonbridge following its accidental demolition by a street cleaning vehicle. As this was still to be resolved by the insurance company it was difficult to predict what funding would be required and whether there would be a requirement to replace 'like for like' if the Shelter was considered a heritage asset.

There was also detailed discussion in respect of Fixed Penalty Notices for fly tipping and the role of the contractor. There was general support for this to be discussed at a future meeting of the Communities and Environment Scrutiny Select Committee.

In recognition that without an effective performance management framework in place, the authority would not be able to identify any required improvements or achieve value for money, Cllr Bell proposed, Cllr McDermott seconded and the Committee

***RECOMMENDED:** That

- (1) the report be noted;
- (2) the draft Annual Service Delivery Plan 2026/27 (attached at Annex 1) be recommended to Cabinet for approval; and
- (3) any updated information addressing current gaps in information be considered during Quarter 1 reporting of the Annual Service Delivery Plan 2026/27.

***Recommended to Cabinet**

MATTERS FOR INFORMATION

OS 26/8 EMPTY HOMES UPDATE

Members were provided with an update on empty homes work and the current figures, trends, recent activities and the work of the Empty Homes Officer were noted.

It was reported that as at 16 December 2025 there were 995 empty properties across the borough. This included all properties from empty for one day through to long term empty properties. Unfortunately, the Borough Council had seen a 17.19% increase in the number of long-term vacant dwellings (empty for more than 6 months), which was slightly above the national average.

A positive direction with Clarion Housing Group voids was noted and Members were assured that the Borough Council were keeping a record of properties disposed by the housing provider.

OS 26/9 RECORD OF DECISIONS TAKEN BY THE EXECUTIVE

The decisions taken by the Cabinet and Cabinet Members during the period November to January 2025/26 were presented for information and noted by the Committee.

OS 26/10 NOTICE OF FORTHCOMING KEY DECISIONS

The Notice setting out Key Decisions anticipated to be taken during the period February to April 2026 was noted.

OS 26/11 WORK PROGRAMME

The Work Programme setting out potential matters to be scrutinised during 2026 was noted. Members were invited to suggest future items by liaising with the Chair of the Committee.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE**OS 26/12 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

There were no items considered in private.

The meeting ended at 9.56 pm