

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

MINUTES

Wednesday, 10th June, 2026

Present: Cllr M R Rhodes (Chair), Cllr A McDermott (Vice-Chair), Cllr B Banks, Cllr K Barton, Cllr L Chapman, Cllr J Clokey, Cllr M A Coffin, Cllr R W Dalton, Cllr B A Parry and Cllr K B Tanner

Cllrs R P Betts, M A J Hood*, D W King 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 R V Roud.

PART 1 - PUBLIC

GP 26/17 NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no substitute Members.

GP 26/18 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

However, Cllr King who was in attendance and the subject of the request for a dispensation (agenda item 7) withdrew from the meeting at the relevant point after having made a personal statement and did not participate in the discussion.

GP 26/19 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting of the General Purposes Committee held on 11 March 2026 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

MATTERS FOR DECISION UNDER DELEGATED POWERS

GP 26/20 STANSTED PARISH COUNCIL COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW

Following a request from Stansted Parish Council to increase the number of parish councillors from 7 to 9 and agreement from the General Purposes Committee that a Community Governance Review

(CGR) be undertaken, a public consultation with residents was carried out between 16 March until 17 April 2026.

The report of the Chief Executive provided an overview of the responses received and advised that the public consultation had achieved a 6.4% response rate. Whilst this was low it compared favourably to other CGR consultations solely related to councillor numbers. It was reported that 82.7% of respondents agreed that Stansted Parish Council should increase councillor numbers from 7 to 9, 13.8% were not sure and only 3.5% felt that it shouldn't.

As there was no further consultation on the matter required, the next step in the process would be to notify Stansted Parish Council of the consultation outcome and the decision of the General Purposes Committee; notify key stakeholders and publish a Community Governance Review Order and notify relevant bodies as required by the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

The changes would take effect at the next scheduled Parish elections in May 2027.

In recognition that the proposals would contribute towards the efficient and effective delivery of local council services to the residents of Stansted Parish Council, Cllr Rhodes proposed, Cllr McDermott seconded and it was

RESOLVED: That an increase in the number of councillors at Stansted Parish Council from 7 to 9 be approved with effect from the next scheduled Parish elections in May 2027.

GP 26/21 REQUEST FOR DISPENSATION - COUNCILLOR D KING

Careful consideration was given to a request for a dispensation under section 33 of the Localism Act 2011 to enable Cllr D King to participate in meetings of the Borough Council, including the Housing and Planning Scrutiny Select Committee and full Council, where the Local Plan was under consideration and in meetings of the Planning Committee where any applications for development in respect of the site identified as T01 (land north east of Tonbridge) in the draft Local Plan were considered.

The report advised that under section 33 of the Localism Act, the Council may, on receipt of a written request to the Monitoring Officer, grant a dispensation to councillors and co-opted members relieving them from restrictions on participating, or participating further, or voting or further voting in meetings where consideration was being given to an item of business in which they had a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest.

The grounds for Cllr Kings request for a dispensation were set out in Annex 1. After making a public statement to provide context for the

request, Cllr King withdrew from the meeting and did not participate in any discussion.

Members were advised that, whilst Cllr King did not appear to have a disclosable pecuniary interest in relation to the site allocation in question, public perception, given the proximity of his home to the site, meant that the safest course was to seek a dispensation. The Monitoring Officer also advised that both independent persons, consulted on standards matters, had supported the view that granting a dispensation would be appropriate.

Due regard was given to the distinction between disclosable pecuniary/other significant interests and predetermination and concern was expressed that similar issues might arise for other Members, especially for those on the Planning Committee. All were reminded that dispensations could only be considered following a written application to the Monitoring Officer by an individual Member.

Following this advice a potential motion to grant 'all Members and Substitute Members of the Planning Committee a special dispensation to discuss and vote on planning applications which were very close to where they live' was withdrawn.

The Monitoring Officer further advised that any dispensation granted to Cllr King would only relate to disclosable pecuniary interests and the separate rules relating to predetermination would still apply. Any Members concerned about the proximity of their property to a development site should contact the Monitoring Officer for advice and, if appropriate, seek an individual dispensation.

In recognition that the granting of a dispensation would allow Cllr King to participate as a local ward member in meetings of the Council relating to a site in his ward that had been allocated for development in the draft Local Plan, Cllr Rhodes proposed, Cllr Dalton seconded and it was

RESOLVED: That:

- (1) the dispensation be granted to enable Cllr King to participate in meetings of the Borough Council where the Local Plan was under consideration or where any applications for development in respect of the site identified as T01 (land north east of Tonbridge) were under consideration; and
- (2) the dispensation remain in effect until the next scheduled Borough Council elections.

GP 26/22 ADOPTION OF NEW VOLUNTEERS POLICY AND CHANGES TO THE RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION POLICY

A new Volunteers Policy was presented for consideration and approval in response to addressing an internal audit recommendation. Revisions to the Recruitment and Selection Policy, to align recruitment practice with the Workforce Development Strategy was also presented.

The proposed Volunteers Policy established a consistent corporate framework for the management of volunteers across the organisation and recognised the important contribution made in supporting service delivery and enhancing community outcomes. The Policy introduced consistent expectations across all directorates and ensured that volunteer activity was appropriately governed, monitored and supported.

With regard to the Recruitment and Selection Policy, the key amendment allowed, in exceptional and objectively justified cases, for roles to be advertised on an internal-only basis, subject to the approval of Management Team. For example, those roles supporting internal development, succession planning and retention.

In addition, the revised Policy strengthened the approach to selection by clarifying that, except in exceptional and agreed circumstances, all final stage interviews must be conducted in person. This ensured robust assessment of candidates and supported a consistent, high-quality recruitment process.

Members welcomed the introduction of a Volunteers Policy as volunteering was an important means of supporting people, including those changing career or seeking to improve wellbeing through meaningful activity.

In relation to the Recruitment and Selection Policy, it was suggested that periodic reporting on instances where vacancies were limited to internal applicants would be helpful. It was also suggested that policy wording could be more technology-neutral so that it would not require further amendment if any of the Borough Councils software platforms changed.

In recognition that the adoption of the new Policy and updating the Recruitment and Selection Policy ensured that the Borough Council continued to provide a supportive and inclusive working environment for all, Cllr McDermott proposed, Cllr Banks seconded and it was

RESOLVED: That:

- (1) the Volunteers Policy be adopted; and
- (2) the revised Recruitment and Selection Policy be approved.

**GP 26/23 WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY PROGRESS UPDATE
2025-26**

The report of the Director of Central Services and Deputy Chief Executive provided an overview of the progress made during the first year of the Workforce Development Strategy 2025-2028; set out the delivery against the agreed Year 1 Priorities and highlighted key achievements in embedding the core behaviours.

Progress against the agreed Year 1 (2025/26) priorities was outlined and detailed in section 5 of the report and included the introduction of a revised appraisal approach, strengthened workforce processes and the promotion of employee wellbeing.

Building on the progress made during year one, a clear set of priorities had been identified for 2026/27 (as detailed in 5.28 of the report). There was a strong emphasis on preparing the workforce for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and supporting organisational change.

The importance of project management and leadership development in the context of LGR was recognised. Reference was made to the workforce age profile and disappointment was expressed at the lack of employees in the under-20 age group. Members were advised that this reflected wider challenges across local government which was not seen as an attractive career by young people. The Borough Council had sought to address this through apprenticeships and graduate internship and was attracting some staff in the 20-30 age range.

There was recognition of the challenges arising from remote working and hot-desking in respect of pastoral care and development opportunities and that regular informal review and feedback between management and staff remained essential. The Borough Council's work on providing consistent management training would reflect the skills required to manage in a more virtual environment.

In recognition that reassurance was provided that the Strategy was being effectively implemented, Cllr Rhodes proposed, Cllr Dalton seconded and it was

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the progress made in delivering the Year 1 Priorities of the Workforce Development Strategy 2025-28 be noted; and
- (2) the continued delivery of Year 2 Priorities, as set out in the Workforce Development Strategy, be endorsed.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE**GP 26/24 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

The Chairman moved, it was seconded by Cllr Chapman and

RESOLVED: That as public discussion would disclose exempt information, the following matters be considered in private.

PART 2 - PRIVATE**MATTERS FOR DECISION UNDER DELEGATED POWERS****GP 26/25 ESTABLISHMENT REPORT**

(Reasons: Part 2 – Private – LGA 1972 Sch 12A Paragraph 1 – Information relating to an individual)

The report set out for Members' approval several 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.

In recognition that reviews and amendments to the staffing structure were undertaken to identify opportunities for re-aligning operational best practice to ensure the continuation of the best possible services to residents and customers, Cllr Rhodes proposed, Cllr McDermott seconded and it was

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the regrade of the Office Superintendent post DA0502 from scale 4 to scale 5 be noted;
- (2) the regrade of the Financial Services Manager/Deputy 151 Officer post DF0003 from M5 to M4 be approved;
- (3) the deletion of the Principal Accountant (Capital and Treasury) post DF0202 be approved;
- (4) the deletion of the Principal Accountant (Revenue) post DF0215 be approved;

- (5) the creation of the Accountancy Services Manager post, M5, 37 hours be approved;
- (6) the creation of the Finance Assistant post, scale 3 / 4 37 hours be approved;
- (7) the redesignation of the Finance Officer post DF0213 to Accountant/Senior Accountant scale 5 -M9 be approved;
- (8) the deletion of the Administration Manager post DF0008 be approved;
- (9) the creation of a new Business Support Manager post, grade SO, 37 hours be approved; and
- (10) the re-designation of the Engineering Manager post DE0208 to Technical Services Manager and the regrade from M8 to M7 be approved.

The meeting ended at 8.40 pm