

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

FINANCE, INNOVATION AND PROPERTY ADVISORY BOARD

Wednesday, 23rd September, 2015

Present: Cllr Mrs F A Kemp (Chairman), Cllr Mrs S Bell, Cllr R P Betts, Cllr T Bishop, Cllr T I B Cannon, Cllr D J Cure, Cllr M O Davis, Cllr D Lettington, Cllr L J O'Toole, Cllr Miss J L Sergison and Cllr A K Sullivan

Councillors Mrs J A Anderson, M A C Balfour, P F Bolt, M A Coffin, N J Heslop, B J Luker and S C Perry were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs B A Brown (Vice-Chairman), O C Baldock, J L Botten, R D Lancaster and B W Walker

PART 1 - PUBLIC

FIP 15/45 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

FIP 15/46 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the notes of the meeting of the Finance, Innovation and Property Advisory Board held on 22 July 2015 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE CABINET

FIP 15/47 FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS WITH PARISH COUNCILS 2016/17

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation gave details of proposed allocations to individual parish councils under the Scheme of Financial Arrangements with Parish Councils for 2016/17 in accordance with the methodology agreed by the Council in 2013 following consultation with the Parish Partnership Panel. It was noted that this would result in the allocations for the forthcoming year increasing by 0.4% with the calculation based on a return to a rate per elector after the transition to individual electoral registration.

Attention was drawn to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's programmed review of grants to the voluntary sector and other third parties, including funding for parish councils. It was considered appropriate to alert all parish councils to the potential for change in the way any funding might be allocated in the future, this matter having been

highlighted at the meeting of the Parish Partnership Panel on 10 September.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) the methodology outlined in the report be adopted in calculating the allocations to parish councils under the Scheme of Financial Arrangements with Parish Councils for the year 2016/17; and
- (2) parish councils be notified of their allocations as set out in Annex 1 to the report and be advised that 2016/17 could potentially be the last year in which the current methodology is employed.

* **Referred to Cabinet**

FIP 15/48 FINANCIAL PLANNING AND CONTROL

Decision Notice D150070MEM

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation provided information on the Council's key budget areas of salaries, major income streams and investment income. It also gave an update on the approved variations to the revenue budget and areas identified through budget monitoring, summarised to provide an indicative overall budget position for the year which showed a net adverse variance of £34,050.

An update was also given on capital expenditure and variations agreed in relation to the capital plan.

The improving position for the current financial year resulted from income streams performing above budget and negating the loss of recycling income following Aylesford Newsprint going into administration. However, looking beyond the current financial year, attention was drawn to the potential outcome of the Spending Review 2015 and the consequential impact on local government funding.

The Director of Finance and Transformation advised that the Medium Term Financial Strategy had recently been updated and a report would be presented to Cabinet on 7 October. Following discussion regarding the New Homes Bonus and the financial stability of local authorities in general, it was acknowledged that there were serious challenges and choices facing the Council in meeting its funding gap. The Director of Finance and Transformation indicated that benchmarking data might provide some guidance for councillors in assessing options and a Member suggested that a list of those services which the Council provided on a "discretionary" basis would be helpful in this regard.

RECOMMENDED: That the contents of the report be noted and endorsed.

FIP 15/49 APPLICATIONS FOR DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF

Decision Notice D150071MEM

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation gave details of new and renewal applications for discretionary rate relief and rural rate relief which were considered in accordance with the previously agreed criteria for determining such applications.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) in respect of the re-application for discretionary relief shown at Annex 3 to the report, 20% discretionary rate relief be awarded with effect from 1 April 2015 and time limited to 31 March 2017;
- (2) in respect of the re-application for rural rate relief shown at Annex 4 to the report, 80% discretionary rural rate relief be awarded time limited to 31 March 2017;
- (3) the new application for rural rate relief be determined as follows:

The Village Pantry Tea Rooms Project, 2 Forstal Road, Aylesford – 100% discretionary rural rate relief be awarded, time limited to 31 March 2017; and
- (4) the new application for discretionary rate relief be determined as follows:

all properties in the Borough occupied by Barclays Bank Plc, HSBC Bank Plc, Lloyds Banking Group and TSB Bank Plc – no discretionary relief be awarded.

FIP 15/50 RURAL RATE RELIEF - RURAL SETTLEMENT LIST

Decision Notice D150072MEM

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation referred to the requirement to review the Council's rural settlement list and recommended that the current list should be retained unaltered for the financial year 2016/17.

RECOMMENDED: That the current rural settlement list remain in force for the year 2016/17.

FIP 15/51 TONBRIDGE CASTLE GATEHOUSE CHARGES

Decision Notice D150073MEM

The report of the Director of Central Services recommended revised charges for the Tonbridge Castle Gatehouse attraction for implementation from 1 April 2016. The proposals took into account prevailing inflation figures, competitor charges and local market conditions.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) the proposed charges for Tonbridge Castle Gatehouse, as set out in the report, be approved for implementation from 1 April 2016; and
- (2) the charges be reflected in the appropriate tourism marketing material.

FIP 15/52 CAPITAL PLAN POST IMPLEMENTATION REVIEWS

Decision Notice D150074MEM

The joint report of the Director of Central Services and Director of Finance and Transformation presented post implementation reviews in respect of Christmas Lighting Capital Grants and Implementing Electronic Government which indicated successful implementation of the projects.

RECOMMENDED: That the post implementation reviews for the projects, as outlined in the report, be endorsed.

FIP 15/53 BENEFITS UPDATE AND COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation gave details of current issues in the benefits field including performance and workload of the Benefits Service, an update on Universal Credit and welfare reform budget changes.

Members were advised that the current three year Kent-wide agreement period for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme would expire at the end of 2015/16. In view of the national welfare changes taking place and the significant consultation process and timescale involved in a review of the scheme, it had been agreed with the major Kent precepting authorities that the current scheme should be rolled forward for another year. Agreement was therefore sought to “refresh” the existing Council Tax Reduction Scheme in preparation for the financial year 2016/17.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) the existing Council Tax Reduction Scheme be refreshed in readiness for the financial year 2016/17 and published on the Council's website; and
- (2) the Director of Finance and Transformation be authorised to enter into negotiations with Kent County Council and Kent District Council colleagues regarding a fundamental review of the scheme for 2017/18.

***Referred to Cabinet**

MATTERS SUBMITTED FOR INFORMATION

FIP 15/54 COUNCIL TAX AND BUSINESS RATES UPDATE

The report gave details of recent developments in respect of council tax and business rates including encouraging rates of collection and a reduction in the number of recovery notices issued. Reference was made to recent media interest in council tax recovery and Members were assured that the Council only used enforcement agents as a last resort when all other options had failed. Staff made every effort to negotiate with taxpayers in respect of payment arrangements, taking into account individual circumstances.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE

FIP 15/55 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

FIP 15/56 DEBTS FOR WRITE OFF

(LGA 1972 Sch 12A Paragraph 2 – Information likely to reveal information about an individual)

Decision Notice D150075MEM

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation sought approval of the writing-off of debts considered to be irrecoverable. Details were also given of debts under £1,000 which had been written-off in accordance with Financial Procedure Rule 17.2 together with

cumulative totals of debts in the current and previous financial years and information on budgeted bad debt provision.

RECOMMENDED: That the 9 items shown in the schedule of amounts over £1,000, totalling £24,892.04 be written-off for the reasons stated within the schedule.

**FIP 15/57 PROPOSED LICENCE FOR WORKS ON LAND ADJACENT TO
LARKSPUR CLOSE, EAST MALLING**

**(LGA 1972 Sch 12A Paragraph 3 – Financial or business affairs of
any particular person)**

Decision Notice D150076MEM

The report of the Director of Central Services gave details of a request for a licence for works to divert a sewer on land within the Council's ownership adjacent to Larkspur Close, East Malling to facilitate development of a new dwelling. Consideration was given to proposed terms and conditions for the licence.

RECOMMENDED: That the terms and conditions for the licence for works for the diversion of a sewer on land within the Council's ownership be approved as outlined in the report.

The meeting ended at 8.40 pm