

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

FINANCE, INNOVATION AND PROPERTY ADVISORY BOARD

Wednesday, 20th September, 2017

Present: Cllr S M King (Chairman), Cllr B W Walker (Vice-Chairman), Cllr R P Betts, Cllr T Bishop, Cllr V M C Branson, Cllr Mrs B A Brown, Cllr T I B Cannon, Cllr D J Cure, Cllr M O Davis, Cllr S R J Jessel, Cllr R D Lancaster, Cllr Miss J L Sergison and Cllr A K Sullivan

Councillors Mrs J A Anderson, O C Baldock, P F Bolt, M A Coffin, N J Heslop, D Lettington, B J Luker and T C Walker were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J L Botten and F G Tombolis

PART 1 - PUBLIC

FIP 17/28 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made in accordance with the Code of Conduct. However, in the interests of transparency Councillor Mrs B Brown indicated that she was a member of Snodland Town Council to which reference was made at paragraph 1.6.3 of the report on Financial Planning and Control.

FIP 17/29 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the notes of the meeting of the Finance, Innovation and Property Advisory Board held on 21 June 2017 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE CABINET

FIP 17/30 COUNCIL TAX DISCOUNT - EMPTY PROPERTIES

Decision Notice D170059MEM

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation gave details of a proposal to change the council tax empty property discount from 1 April 2018. It was noted that most other authorities in Kent had, or were committed to reducing the discount to one month or less. It was requested that the implications of offering no discount period be investigated in consultation with other relevant authorities with a view to considering that option in future.

RECOMMENDED: That the current period of two months 100% discount for vacant and unfurnished properties be reduced to one month with effect from 1 April 2018 and the experience of other authorities offering no discount period be investigated for report back and consideration of that option in due course.

FIP 17/31 FINANCIAL PLANNING AND CONTROL

Decision Notice D170060MEM

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 details of the variations agreed in relation to the revenue budget and areas identified through budget monitoring, summarised to provide an overall budget position for 2017/18 which showed a net favourable variance of £433,050.

However, reference was made to the projected funding gap and progress made towards meeting this year's savings target of £650,000. All Councillors were urged to attend the forthcoming finance briefing for Members when the significant financial challenge ahead would be discussed. An update was also given on capital expenditure and variations agreed in relation to the capital plan.

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

FIP 17/32 APPLICATIONS FOR DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF

Decision Notice D170061MEM

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation gave details of new applications for discretionary rural rate relief which were considered in accordance with the previously agreed criteria for determining such applications. Reference was made to the Government's expectation that the current award of 50% mandatory relief would be "topped up" to 100% pending the update of primary legislation.

Consideration was also given to a revised Discretionary Relief Policy which aimed to improve understanding for applicants and transparency for decisions taken whilst aligning with Gravesham Borough Council's policies for the future shared service.

RECOMMENDED: That:

- (1) the applications for discretionary rural rate relief be awarded as set out at Annex 2 to the report with effect from 1 April 2017 in respect of The Bell Inn, Golden Green and 18 April 2017 in

respect of Bourne Produce, East Peckham, and time limited to 31 March 2018; and

- (2) the new Discretionary Relief Policy 2018/19 set out at Annex 4 to the report be adopted from 1 April 2018 subject to deletion of the words “up to” from the headings on the first page.

MATTERS SUBMITTED FOR INFORMATION

FIP 17/33 REVENUE AND BENEFITS UPDATE

The report gave details of recent developments in respect of council tax, business rates, council tax reduction and housing benefits. A copy of the final Business Rates Relief Scheme agreed in accordance with Decision No D170042MEM was annexed to the report and an update given on the number of applications received and awards made for each relief.

Members were advised of the performance and workload of the Benefits Service and were pleased to note that for the first time a single figure average number of days for processing new claims had been achieved. Progress was also reported on preparations for the Revenue and Benefits shared service with Gravesham Borough Council.

FIP 17/34 CAPITAL PROGRAMME POST IMPLEMENTATION REVIEWS MONITORING REPORT

The report identified the post implementation reviews carried out since the meeting of the Advisory Board in July 2016 together with the capital plan schemes for which reviews were due or outstanding.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE

FIP 17/35 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 17/36 DEBTS FOR WRITE OFF

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

Decision Notice D170062MEM

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 18 items shown in the schedule of amounts over £1,000, totalling £111,216.37 be written-off for the reasons stated within the schedule.

The meeting ended at 8.46 pm