

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

FINANCE, INNOVATION AND PROPERTY ADVISORY BOARD

Wednesday, 8th January, 2014

Present: Cllr A K Sullivan (Chairman), Cllr R Taylor (Vice-Chairman), Cllr J Atkins, Cllr T Bishop, Cllr M O Davis, Cllr D A S Davis, Cllr P J Homewood, Cllr S R J Jessel, Cllr Mrs F A Kemp, Cllr Miss A Moloney and Cllr C P Smith

Councillors Mrs J A Anderson, J A L Balcombe, O C Baldock, M A C Balfour, M A Coffin, D J Cure, N J Heslop, S M King, R D Lancaster, B J Luker, Mrs S Murray, M R Rhodes and H S Rogers were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.12.

PART 1 - PUBLIC

FIP 14/1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor M Davis declared an Other Significant Interest in the Application for Discretionary Rate Relief by Tonbridge and Malling Leisure Trust on the grounds of being a member of the Trust's Board and withdrew from the meeting during its consideration. He also indicated a potential interest in some items in the Capital Plan for the same reason.

FIP 14/2 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the notes of the meeting of the Finance, Innovation and Property Advisory Board held on 2 October 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE CABINET

FIP 14/3 REVENUE ESTIMATES 2014/15

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation referred to the responsibility of the Cabinet under the constitution for formulating initial proposals in respect of the budget. Reference was made to the role of the Advisory Board in assisting the Council and Cabinet in the preparation of the budget within the context of the Medium Term Financial Strategy and the Council's priorities. An outline was given of the process for referring the Advisory Board's recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee prior to consideration by the Cabinet on 4 February and thereafter by the Council at its Budget meeting.

The report set out the framework for considering the estimates in terms of the Medium Term Financial Strategy together with a number of service specific issues. Attention was drawn to the alteration of the format of the Estimates Booklet to mirror the composition of the new directorates following the corporate establishment changes.

The Director of Finance and Transformation drew attention to the key messages arising from the provisional local government finance settlement including the position regarding New Homes Bonus funding. The implications of implementing the Council Tax 'freeze' grant were discussed and concern expressed at the uncertainty in respect of the threshold set by the Secretary of State for local referenda to approve or veto council tax increases above a level which had yet to be notified.

Further to the report to the Advisory Board on 28 August 2013, Members were updated on the achievement of the first savings tranche of £1.1 million together with the issues which had a negative effect on the 'funding gap'. It was noted that the Medium Term Financial Strategy would continue to be updated during the budget cycle as more information became available.

RECOMMENDED: That


(1) the draft Revenue Estimates contained in the booklet be endorsed; and

(2) within the context of the financial pressures outlined in the report, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be requested to consider the draft Revenue Estimates contained in the booklet and make appropriate recommendations to the Cabinet for its special meeting on 4 February 2014.

FIP 14/4 CAPITAL PLAN REVIEW

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Finance and Transformation which reviewed the current position of the existing Capital Plan (List A). It also recommended new schemes for adding to List C, some existing List C schemes for deletion or evaluation over the coming year and schemes for inclusion on List B from those List C schemes previously selected for evaluation. Members were reminded that any aspirations in respect of capital schemes needed to be set within the context of the significant financial challenge facing the Council.

Attention was drawn to the effect of the increase in Disabled Facilities Grant in 2014/15 and the scrutiny review of Housing Assistance which were likely to result in the provisions being adjusted at the Cabinet meeting.

RECOMMENDED: That the following be endorsed for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 

- (1) the Capital Plan (List A) position as shown in Annex 2 to the report;
- (2) the amendment of List C as detailed in paragraph 1.5.1 of the report;
- (3) the selection for evaluation of those List C schemes shown in paragraph 1.6.3 of the report;
- (4) the transfer of the schemes listed in paragraph 1.7.3 of the report from List C to List B and in the case of the river wall, Wouldham scheme a specific earmarked reserve be established in the sum of £700,000 and this scheme sit outside the annual allowance of £320,000 with an implementation date for Capital Plan purposes of 2015/16; and
- (5) endorsement of the draft Capital Strategy, as set out at Annex 5 to the report, for adoption and publication on the Council's website.

FIP 14/5 APPLICATIONS FOR DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF

Decision Notice D140001MEM

The joint report of the Director of Finance and Transformation and Cabinet Member for Finance, Innovation and Property gave details of renewal applications for discretionary rate relief and new 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 reapplications for relief set out at Annex 2 to the report, 20% discretionary rate relief be awarded in each case with effect from 1 April 2013, time limited to 31 March 2015;
- (2) the new applications for discretionary rate relief be determined as follows:

Tonbridge and Malling Leisure Trust Facilities at 1-5 Martin Square, Larkfield; Larkfield Leisure Centre; Angel Centre, Tonbridge; Tonbridge Swimming Pool and Poult Wood Golf Centre – 20% discretionary relief be awarded as set out at Annex 3 to the report, time limited to 31 March 2015;

Think Twice Limited in respect of 17 Kings Hill Avenue and Suite 1, 35 Kings Hill Avenue, Kings Hill, West Malling – no discretionary relief be awarded; and

(3) in respect of the new application for rural rate relief for the Post Office at 30 Swan Street, West Malling, 40% discretionary relief be awarded time limited to 31 March 2015.

FIP 14/6 REVIEW OF FEES AND CHARGES 2014/15

The joint report of the Director of Finance and Transformation and Director of Central Services brought forward for consideration proposals in respect of those fees and charges which fell within the remit of the Cabinet Member for Finance, Innovation and Property and those where there was no appropriate Advisory Board.

RECOMMENDED: That

(1) in respect of the recovery of legal fees payable by third parties, the Council's fees continue to follow the Supreme Court guideline hourly rates as set out at paragraph 1.2.1 of the report;

(2) the proposed unchanged scale of fees for local land charges searches and enquiries set out at paragraph 1.3.5 of the report be adopted with effect from 1 April 2014; and

(3) the current photocopying charge of 10p (inclusive of VAT) for each page of the same document or additional copies of the same page plus postage as appropriate be retained.

FIP 14/7 REVIEW OF FEES FOR STREET NAMING AND NUMBERING SERVICES

Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Executive on a review of fees for Street Naming and Numbering services, responsibility for which had transferred to the GIS officer in IT Services.

RECOMMENDED: That the fee schedule for Street Naming and Numbering, as set out at Annex 2 to the report and summarised at paragraph 1.9.1 thereof, be adopted from 1 April 2014.

FIP 14/8 COUNCIL TAX AND BUSINESS RATES UPDATE REPORT

Decision Notice D140002MEM

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation gave details of recent developments in respect of council tax and business rates and recommended a change to the options available for the payment of council tax.

RECOMMENDED: That payment books no longer be produced for council tax payments.

[In accordance with Council Procedure Rule No 8.5 Councillor C Smith requested that his vote against the motion be recorded.]

FIP 14/9 EXTENSION OF INSURANCE ARRANGEMENTS

Decision Notice D140003MEM

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Finance and Transformation in respect of the extension of the Council's current insurance contract for a further three years.

RECOMMENDED: That the existing insurance arrangements with Zurich Municipal be extended for a period of three years to June 2017.

MATTERS SUBMITTED FOR INFORMATION

FIP 14/10 BENEFITS UPDATE

Members were advised of current issues arising in the benefits field including performance and workload of the Benefits Section and progress with various aspects of welfare reform. A copy of a letter from Lord Freud, Minister for Welfare Reform, was presented which set out the new timetable for the introduction of universal credit and the planned transfer of housing benefit claims to nationally administered pension credit. Details were also given of the discretionary housing payments scheme and the reasons for not making a bid for additional funding.

FIP 14/11 CHANCELLOR'S AUTUMN STATEMENT

The report provided an overview of the main issues affecting local authorities contained within the Chancellor's Autumn Statement. A copy of a letter to local authority leaders from the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government was annexed to the report, confirming that the Government would be fully refunding local authorities for the loss in revenue resulting from the changes to business rates.

FIP 14/12 INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY UPDATE REPORT

The report of the Chief Executive provided an update on a number of work streams being carried out by IT Services in support of the Council's Transformation Strategy. This included reference to Quick Response Codes, Resource Space, My Account, online forms and Modern.gov.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE

FIP 14/13 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 14/14 DEBTS FOR WRITE OFF (REASON: LGA 1972 SCH 12A PARA 2 - INFORMATION LIKELY TO REVEAL INFORMATION ABOUT AN INDIVIDUAL)

Decision Notice D140004MEM

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation recommended approval of the writing-off of debts considered to be irrecoverable. The circumstances surrounding one particular business rate debt were drawn to the attention of Members and discussed. 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 55 items shown in the schedule totalling £201,159.56 be written off for the reasons stated without adjustment.

FIP 14/15 PROPOSED NEW LEASES OF SHOP UNITS AT TWISDEN ROAD, EAST MALLING (REASON: LGA 1972 SCH 12A PARA 3 - FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON)

Decision Notice D140005MEM

The report of the Director of Central Services gave details of proposed terms and conditions for new leases on four premises located at Twisden Road, East Malling.

RECOMMENDED: That the new leases be offered on the terms outlined in the report.

FIP 14/16 PROPOSED LICENCE AGREEMENTS FOR CATERING AND FISHING ARRANGEMENTS AT LEYBOURNE LAKES COUNTRY PARK (REASON: LGA 1972 SCH 12A PARA 3 - FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON)

Decision Notice D140006MEM

Further to Decision No D130146MEM, the report of the Director of Central Services gave details of proposed licences for catering and fishing arrangements to be granted following the results of competitive

quotations.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) licences be granted to the two local fishing clubs as detailed in the report; and
- (2) on the results of the 'Best Quotations' exercise, the catering and main fishing licences be granted to the successful applicants on the basis set out in the report.

FIP 14/17 PROPOSALS FOR THE FUTURE OF TWO DISUSED PUBLIC CONVENIENCES (REASON: LGA 1972 SCH 12A PARA 3 - FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON)

Decision Notice D140007MEM

The report of the Director of Central Services referred to the decision to close the Council's public conveniences at Lamberts Yard and The Ridgeway, Tonbridge with effect from 1 April 2013 (Decision No D120156MEM). Consideration was given to the future options for the buildings.

RECOMMENDED: That the future of the disused public conveniences be progressed via public auction on the basis set out in the report.

The meeting ended at 9.48 pm