

## TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

### FINANCE, INNOVATION AND PROPERTY ADVISORY BOARD

Wednesday, 3rd January, 2018

**Present:** Cllr S M King (Chairman), Cllr T Bishop, Cllr J L Botten, Cllr V M C Branson, Cllr Mrs B A Brown, Cllr T I B Cannon, Cllr M O Davis, Cllr R D Lancaster, Cllr A K Sullivan and Cllr F G Tombolis

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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors B W Walker (Vice-Chairman), Mrs S Bell, R P Betts and Miss J L Sergison

#### PART 1 - PUBLIC

##### **FIP 18/1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor N Heslop declared an Other Significant Interest in the item on Tonbridge Castle - Review of Fees and Charges in respect of concessionary users of the Council Chamber on the grounds of membership of the Board of the Bridge Trust. He withdrew from the meeting during consideration of this matter.

In the interests of transparency, Councillor R Lancaster advised that he was an employee of Fidelity International which was referred to in the Revenue Estimates item in the context of the impact on business rates of its plans to close the Hildenborough office. He also stated that his wife was an employee of the Citizens Advice Bureau, a concessionary user of the Tonbridge Castle Council Chamber.

##### **FIP 18/2 MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:** That the notes of the meeting of the Finance, Innovation and Property Advisory Board held on 20 September 2017 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

With reference to Minute FIP 17/30, it was noted that the report back on the option of offering no council tax discount on empty properties was likely to be presented in around 12 months' time.

#### MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE CABINET

##### **FIP 18/3 REVENUE ESTIMATES 2018/19**

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 Cabinet and Council in the preparation of the budget within the context of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 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 8 February and thereafter by the Council at its Budget meeting.

The report set out the framework for considering the estimates in terms of the MTFS together with a number of Service specific issues. The report indicated the factors to be taken into account when updating the MTFS and referred to the Savings and Transformation Strategy (STS) which provided a structure and focus for addressing the significant financial challenge facing the Council. Progress was reported on savings achieved and it was noted that the MTFS would continue to be updated as more information became available and the targets and timescales within the STS would be revisited and realigned with the latest projected funding gap during the budget setting process.

The Director of Finance and Transformation introduced the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement including the Council's acceptance of the multi-year settlement to 2019/20. Members were advised that the Secretary of State had increased the threshold for triggering a referendum on council tax increase to the higher of 3% or £5. The favourable position regarding New Homes Bonus funding in 2018/19 was explained and reference made to the successful outcome of the Kent and Medway authorities' bid for pilot status in respect of 100% business rates retention.

Alongside the provisional settlement, the Secretary of State had announced a technical consultation entitled "Fair funding review: a review of relative needs and resources". In view of the timescales involved and the programming of meetings, it was suggested that delegated authority be given for a response to be made.

**RECOMMENDED:** That

- (1) the draft Revenue Estimates contained in the Booklet be endorsed for consideration by the Cabinet at its special meeting on 8 February 2018;
- (2) the Savings and Transformation Strategy be updated to reflect the latest projected funding gap as part of the budget setting process; and
- (3) delegated authority be given to the Director of Finance and Transformation, in liaison with the Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Innovation and Property, to respond to the technical

consultation entitled “Fair funding review: a review of relative needs and resources”.

**\*Referred to Cabinet**

#### **FIP 18/4 CAPITAL PLAN REVIEW 2017/18**

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 schemes for addition to List C, some existing List C schemes for deletion or evaluation 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.

Particular reference was made to the reduction of £50,000 in the Council’s funding of Disabled Facility Grants arising from a review of spending and associated government grant funding. It was noted that this would contribute towards the savings target.

**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 be endorsed and the contribution to the savings target as a result of the reassessment of Disabled Facility Grant funding noted;
- (2) the amendment of List C as detailed in paragraph 1.5.3 of the report;
- (3) the selection of those List C schemes shown in paragraph 1.6.4 of the report for evaluation or further evaluation as appropriate, including the Haysden Country Park Sewage Treatment Facility for fast track evaluation;
- (4) the transfer of the schemes listed in paragraph 1.7.4 of the report from List C to List B; and
- (5) the draft Capital Strategy as set out at Annex 5 to the report be endorsed for adoption and publication on the Council’s website.

**\*Referred to Cabinet**

#### **FIP 18/5 REVIEW OF FEES AND CHARGES 2018/2019**

The report of the Management Team brought forward for consideration as part of the Budget setting process for 2018/19 proposals in respect of those fees and charges that were the responsibility of the Cabinet Member for Finance, Innovation and Property or not reported elsewhere.

**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 scale of fees for local land charges searches and enquiries set out at Annex 1 to the report be adopted with effect from 1 January 2018;
- (3) the current photocopying charges 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;
- (4) the fee schedule for street naming and numbering set out in section 1.6 of the report be adopted with effect from 1 April 2018; and
- (5) the amount of council tax and business rate Court costs recharged remain as set out at paragraph 1.7.2 of the report for the 2018/19 financial year.

**\*Referred to Cabinet**

**FIP 18/6 TONBRIDGE CASTLE - REVIEW OF FEES AND CHARGES**

The report of the Director of Central Services and Monitoring Officer presented a comprehensive review of fees and charges in respect of the variety of services and functions delivered at Tonbridge Castle and made recommendations to increase revenue streams from a number of different areas.

**RECOMMENDED:** That

- (1) the new pricing model for the Castle Tour at Tonbridge Castle be approved as set out at paragraph 1.4.10 of the report;
- (2) the new pricing model for Schoolchildren Educational Workshops at Tonbridge Castle be approved as set out at paragraph 1.5 of the report;
- (3) the new pricing model for Weddings at Tonbridge Castle be approved as set out at paragraph 1.6.2 of the report;
- (4) authority be delegated to the Director of Central Services and Monitoring Officer for a 12 month trial period to depart from the fixed fee structure at paragraph 1.6.2 of the report where he considers that it is in the financial interests of the Council to do so in a particular case;

- (5) the new pricing model for entries into the Wedding Diary at Tonbridge Castle be approved as set out at paragraph 1.6.6 of the report;
- (6) the list of concessionary users of the Tonbridge Castle Council Chamber set out at Annex 2 to the report and the rate of discount, if any, to be given to any booking by an approved concessionary user be reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
- (7) the new model for hiring out the Council Chamber at Tonbridge Castle be approved as set out at paragraph 1.8.3 of the report;
- (8) the Director of Central Services and Monitoring Officer be authorised to agree Gate House fee charges for special events; and
- (9) authority be delegated to the Director of Central Services and Monitoring Officer to negotiate and agree fees with parties wishing to use Tonbridge Castle for filming purposes.  
**\*Referred to Cabinet**

#### **FIP 18/7 APPLICATIONS FOR DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF**

Decision Notice D180001MEM

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

**RECOMMENDED:** That the new applications for discretionary rate relief be determined as follows:

- (1) 1<sup>st</sup> Ditton Scout Group, R/O 18 New Road, Ditton – 20% discretionary rate relief be awarded, back dated to 1 April 2017 and time limited to 31 March 2019;
- (2) Carers First, 146A High Street, Tonbridge – 20% discretionary rate relief be awarded, backdated to 13 May 2017 and time limited to 31 March 2019; and
- (3) St Benedict's Centre, 52 Swan Street, West Malling – no discretionary rate relief be granted.

**FIP 18/8 RURAL RATE RELIEF - RURAL SETTLEMENT LIST**

Decision Notice D180002MEM

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 be amended to include a new rural settlement for the financial year 2018/19.

**RECOMMENDED:** That the rural settlement list be amended to include a new settlement for Peter's Village, as shown on the map at Annex 1 to the report, and the amended list remain in force for the year 2018/19.

**FIP 18/9 REVENUE AND BENEFITS SHARED SERVICE**

Decision Notice D180003MEM

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation advised that Gravesham Borough Council had decided not to proceed with the Revenue and Benefits Shared Service. However, it was noted that the IT digital and transformation plan for the service would continue to be progressed as set out in the Capital Plan (Minute C 17/56 refers).

**RECOMMENDED:** That it be noted that:

- (1) at Gravesham Borough Council's behest the Shared Service for Revenue and Benefits will not be progressed;
- (2) existing secondment agreements for the Revenue and Benefits Manager and Principal Revenues Officer will continue as is the current practice;
- (3) the planned IT and digital transformation initiatives in respect of this service will continue to be progressed; and
- (4) the Capital Plan has been updated accordingly.

**FIP 18/10 PROCUREMENT STRATEGY**

Decision Notice D180004MEM

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation presented an updated Procurement Strategy for consideration and endorsement. The Strategy provided a framework to ensure the application of good procurement practice throughout the organisation and delivery of cost effective and efficient services.

**RECOMMENDED:** That the updated Procurement Strategy set out at Annex 1 to the report be endorsed.

**MATTERS SUBMITTED FOR INFORMATION**

**FIP 18/11 IT STRATEGY UPDATE**

The report provided an update on the significant progress of projects within the current IT Strategy over the period 2014 to 2017. It was noted that the next strategy for 2018 to 2022 would build on those IT infrastructure improvements with the aim of improving staff efficiency and providing the foundations for effective business transformation and enhanced customer service. It was anticipated that a draft of the new strategy would be presented at the next meeting of the Advisory Board.

**FIP 18/12 REVENUES AND BENEFITS UPDATE**

The report gave details of recent developments in respect of council tax, business rates, council tax reduction and housing benefits. An update was given on implementation of the three new business rate relief schemes, announcements in the Chancellor's Autumn Budget, including changes to Universal Credit, and the performance and workload of the Benefits Service. It was noted that the Council would continue to administer all housing benefit claims until November 2018 at the earliest.

**MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE**

**FIP 18/13 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 18/14 DEBTS FOR WRITE OFF**

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

Decision Notice D180005MEM

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 20 items shown in the schedule of amounts over £1,000, totalling £66,119.15 be written-off for the reasons stated within the schedule.

**FIP 18/15 BANKING AND MERCHANT ACQUIRER SERVICES CONTRACTS**

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

Decision Notice D180006MEM

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation gave details of the approach taken in progressing new Banking and Merchant Acquirer Services contracts.

**RECOMMENDED:** That the progress made in renegotiating both the banking and merchant services contracts be noted and authority be delegated to the Director of Finance and Transformation, in liaison with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Innovation and Property, to finalise the negotiations.

The meeting ended at 9.33 pm