

# TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

11 June 2014

### Report of the Chief Executive

#### Part 1- Public

#### Delegated

### 1 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

To set out suggestions for further topics for review by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

#### 1.1 The Work Programme

1.1.1 There is a need to identify further topics for future review by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. As with many previous reviews, these new topics need to be carefully selected to ensure there is scope for each to generate positive outcomes and, where appropriate, help contribute to the Council's wider transformation agenda. In general terms, such reviews should aim to lead to recommendations for improved service delivery, and/or, given the need on-going requirements of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), to identify scope to make further financial savings.

1.1.2 Your Management Team has therefore carried out a thorough review of potential service areas that may be suitable for review and have also re-visited previous suggestions made by Members and ideas for financial savings made by staff.

1.1.3 On the basis of this review, two topics are now recommended by the Management Team for review by this Committee:

- A review of the capital plan renewals process;
- A review of the actions undertaken to return empty residential properties to active use.

#### 1.2 Capital Plan Renewals

1.2.1 Financial provision is currently made in the Council's Capital Plan to provide for the renewal of equipment over a rolling programme. Financial provision which is made is currently significant, amounting to an average £900K worth of provision each year covering renewals in planning and transportation services, environmental health services, leisure services and corporate services. Members

will be aware that the costs of these capital renewals are currently met from capital funds. However, with those funds now reducing over time, given the general financial constraints facing the Council, such renewals will need to be met via revenue funding in the future.

- 1.2.2 The focus for this review will therefore be on re-assessing the current assumptions being made about the 'life' of that equipment and the scale of risk which may arise if, for example, these assets are not always replaced on such a frequent basis. Detailed decisions on each item included on the Council's asset schedules will need to be made. There is also a need for the review to address the issue of budget accuracy and to ensure this is improved in future years. This is to avoid any significant underspends on capital renewals budgets as this has an adverse impact on the assumptions adopted in the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

### **1.3 Empty Properties**

- 1.3.1 The Borough Council works to ensure that empty private sector housing in the Borough is brought back into active residential use both to increase the stock of available housing and to address the negative impact empty houses can have on a locality. Kent County Council's 'No Use Empty' initiative is the primary means to help support owners of empty housing. This provides advice on matters such renovation issues, property letting and energy efficiency. Interest-free loans to owners may also be offered up to a maximum of £25,000 to assist with renovation costs.
- 1.3.2 Members will recall that the financial aspects involved in this topic were covered by a previous review undertaken by this Committee relating to Housing Assistance budgets. The Committee agreed a new set of priorities for this budget, including work to return empty homes into active use, and also recommended a revised capital funding programme to ensure this remained sustainable in the longer term. On that basis, this further review does not need to revisit these financial issues.
- 1.3.3 The suggested focus for this review will therefore be on:
- Assessing the scale of the empty homes problem in the borough and the issues which lead to properties becoming uninhabited
  - Reviewing the current caseload and the processes involved in addressing empty homes issues including use of available incentives and penalties
  - Reviewing the support which is currently in place, including that provided by the No Use Empty initiative
  - Assessing how successful current initiatives are in tackling the problem
  - Identifying the scope to review and improve the current approaches, if needed.

## 1.4 The Review Process

- 1.4.1 As with some previous reviews, the 'weight' of the two topics now suggested indicate that detailed analysis of the options available will need to be undertaken. On this basis, it is suggested that two informal Review Groups are established, each chaired by the two Vice-Chairmen. The following memberships are suggested:

Capital Plan Renewals Review Group: Cllr Trevor Robbins (Chairman), Cllrs Brown, Allison, Keeley, Mrs Pam Bates, Kemp, Sayer, Miss Sophie Shrubsole;  
Co-optees: Gordon Court and Derek Still.

Empty Homes Review Group: Cllr Liz Simpson (Chairman), Cllrs Cure, Mrs Jean Atkinson, Atkins, Miss Jessica Elks, Mrs Elizabeth Holland, King, Sarah Spence,  
Co-optees: David Thornewell, Paul Drury.

- 1.4.2 If any Members wish to change groups, then they are invited to contact Mark Raymond to discuss options.

## 1.5 Legal Implications

- 1.5.1 To be dealt with as part of each review.

## 1.6 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.6.1 As above.

## 1.7 Risk Assessment

- 1.7.1 As above.

## 1.8 Equality Impact Assessment

- 1.8.1 See 'Screening for equality impacts' table at end of report

## 1.9 Recommendations

- 1.9.1 That two Review Groups **ARE ESTABLISHED** to undertake reviews of the capital plan renewals process and of empty homes on the terms as set out above.

Background papers:

contact: Mark Raymond

Nil

Julie Beilby  
Chief Executive

| <b>Screening for equality impacts:</b>  |               |                                |
|---|---------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Question</b>   | <b>Answer</b> | <b>Explanation of impacts</b>  |
| a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community? | N/A           | This is a scoping report only. |
| b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality?   |               |                                |
| c. What steps are you taking to mitigate, reduce, avoid or minimise the impacts identified above?   |               |                                |

*In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above.*