

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

FINANCE, INNOVATION AND PROPERTY ADVISORY BOARD

Wednesday, 17th July, 2019

Present: Cllr M C Base (Chairman), Cllr Miss G E Thomas (Vice-Chairman), Cllr T Bishop, Cllr G C Bridge, Cllr C Brown, Cllr R I B Cannon, Cllr A E Clark, Cllr M O Davis, Cllr K King, Cllr Mrs R F Lettington, Cllr H S Rogers, Cllr Mrs M Tatton and Cllr C J Williams

Councillors Mrs J A Anderson, R P Betts, V M C Branson, M A Coffin, M A J Hood, D Lettington, B J Luker, Mrs A S Oakley, M R Rhodes and J L Sergison were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J L Botten, K B Tanner and F G Tombolis

PART 1 - PUBLIC

FIP 19/20 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors T Bishop and M Davis declared Other Significant Interests in the items on Capital Programme Post Implementation Reviews and Larkfield Leisure Centre Mechanical, Electrical and Roofing Works on the grounds that they were the Council's appointees to the Tonbridge and Malling Leisure Trust and they withdrew from the meeting during consideration of those items.

FIP 19/21 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the notes of the meeting of the Finance, Innovation and Property Advisory Board held on 5 June 2019 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE CABINET

FIP 19/22 IT STRATEGY AND DIGITAL STRATEGY UPDATE

Further to Decision No D190001MEM, the Advisory Board received a presentation from the Head of IT on digital transformation together with some of the possible future aspirations to be established for the Borough. Consideration was given to a draft Digital Strategy for 2019 – 2013.

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation gave details of the purchase of mobile working software following consultation with the Leader, Cabinet Member for Finance, Innovation and Property, Chairman of the Advisory Board and Chairman and Vice-Chairmen of

the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. It was noted that the cost of £23,000 could be funded from the Invest to Save Reserve and a capital plan evaluation was set out at Annex 1 to the report.

Finally, progress was reported on the website review including the establishment of the Member Working Group and details given of plans for all Members to undertake online cyber security training.

Considerable discussion ensued and officers responded to Members' comments and questions.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) the draft Digital Strategy 2019 – 2013 be adopted;
- (2) the decision taken in liaison with the Members indicated in the report to proceed with the purchase of mobile working software funded from the Invest to Save Reserve be noted;
- (3) the Council be recommended to update the Capital Plan to include the mobile working software;
- (4) the progress in respect of the website review be noted; and
- (5) the need for all Members to undertake cyber security training be noted.

***Referred to Cabinet**

FIP 19/23 APPLICATIONS FOR DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF

Decision Notice D190051MEM

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

Reference was made to the agreed practice of advising organisations that there could be a reduction in the level of relief awarded in the future and to the requirement for organisations to reapply every two years with the exception of scout/guides groups which were regarded as “de minimis” in terms of the level of relief awarded.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) in respect of the re-application from Carers First, 146A High Street, Tonbridge – 20% discretionary rate relief be awarded for the period when the office was in use (1 April to 18 June 2019);

- (2) the new applications for discretionary rate relief be determined as follows:

Empathy Action, Unit 5a and 5b Cannon Bridge Works, Cannon Lane, Tonbridge – no discretionary rate relief be awarded; and

Hospice of Hope Romania Ltd, Unit 6 The Granary, Goblands Farm, Court Lane, Hadlow – no discretionary rate relief be awarded.

FIP 19/24 COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME 2020-21

Decision Notice D190052MEM

Further to Decision No D190040MEM, the report of the Director of Finance and Transformation provided an update on the review of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and a broad framework for progression towards consultation and adoption of the scheme by the Council in February 2020. It was proposed to consult on moving from a means tested reduction towards an income-banded discount scheme together with a number of other options. Consideration was given to a mechanism for finalising the consultation material in the tight timescale involved.

RECOMMENDED: That authority be delegated to the Director of Finance and Transformation to finalise consultation material and undertake the consultation in liaison with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Advisory Board and the Cabinet Member for Finance, Innovation and Property.

FIP 19/25 FINANCIAL PLANNING AND CONTROL

Decision Notice D190053MEM

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 indicative overall budget position for the year which showed a net adverse variance of £76,850.

Reference was made to the announcement that the Council had been awarded £150,000 as a result of the inclusion of Borough Green Gardens into the Government's Garden Communities Programme.

An update was given on capital expenditure and variations agreed in relation to the capital plan. The report also gave an update on the Savings and Transformation Strategy and funding gap.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) detailed decisions on expenditure in respect of the £150,000 funding awarded by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government for Borough Green Gardens be delegated to the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health;
- (2) it be noted that as at the end of June 2019, the projected overall outturn position is a net adverse variance of circa £77,000 when compared to the budget set in February 2019; and
- (3) the position in respect of the funding gap be noted together with the need over the coming months to identify and implement opportunities to deliver at least this year's savings and transformation contribution of £100,000.

FIP 19/26 CAPITAL PROGRAMME - POST IMPLEMENTATION REVIEWS MONITORING

Decision Notice D190054MEM

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation identified the post implementation reviews carried out since the meeting of the Advisory Board in September 2018 together with the capital plan schemes for which reviews were due. A post implementation review in respect of the Tonbridge and Malling Leisure Trust IT Infrastructure Capital Grant was also brought forward for consideration.

RECOMMENDED: That the post implementation review in respect of the Tonbridge and Malling Leisure Trust IT Infrastructure Capital Grant, as set out at Annex 2 to the report, be approved.

MATTERS SUBMITTED FOR INFORMATION

FIP 19/27 REVENUE AND BENEFITS UPDATE

The report gave details of recent developments in respect of council tax, business rates, council tax reduction and housing benefits. Members were pleased to note that the final collection rates for council tax and business rates in 2018/19 were again the highest in Kent.

An update was given on the performance and workload of the Benefits Service including the effects of the introduction of Universal Credit. Members were advised that the shared arrangement with Gravesham Borough Council for the management of the Revenues and Benefits function would be ending on 30 September 2019. Thanks were recorded to the Revenue and Benefits Manager for his contribution.

FIP 19/28 CIPFA FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT CODE CONSULTATION

The report provided an overview of a CIPFA consultation paper on a Financial Management Code designed to support good practice in financial management and assist local authorities in demonstrating their financial sustainability. It was noted that the principles on which the draft Code was based were already embedded at Tonbridge and Malling and a copy of the response to the consultation was annexed to the report.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE

FIP 19/29 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 19/30 LARKFIELD LEISURE CENTRE - MECHANICAL, ELECTRICAL AND ROOFING WORKS

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

Decision Notice D190055MEM

Further to Minute C 19/63, the report of the Management Team provided details of the risk assessed approach to the appointment of the contractor for the mechanical, electrical and roofing works at Larkfield Leisure Centre. An update was also given on a review of the loss of income claim and potential environmental improvements.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) based on the risk assessment outlined in the report Kier Construction Ltd be appointed as the contractor for the planned major programme of works at Larkfield Leisure Centre;
- (2) authority be granted to the Directors of Central Services and Finance and Transformation to appoint Kier Construction Ltd in accordance with the works programme, following agreement with the Cabinet Members for Finance, Innovation and Property and Community Services;
- (3) further consideration be given to the inclusion of clauses in the contract relating to the Council's 'step in' rights;

- (4) the Leisure Trust's revised estimated loss of income claim reported verbally at the meeting be noted; and
- (5) further evaluation be undertaken regarding the cost benefits of the potential installation of solar panels on to the Larkfield Leisure Centre sports hall roof.

FIP 19/31 DEBTS FOR WRITE OFF

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

Decision Notice D190056MEM

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 £5,000 which had been written-off in accordance with Financial Procedure Rule 18.2 together with cumulative totals of debts in the current and previous financial years and information on budgeted bad debt provision.

RECOMMENDED: That the three items shown in the schedule of amounts over £5,000, totalling £25,226.04 be written-off for the reasons stated within the schedule.

The meeting ended at 10.02 pm