

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

FINANCE, INNOVATION AND PROPERTY ADVISORY BOARD

Wednesday, 18th September, 2019

Present: Cllr M C Base (Chairman), Cllr Miss G E Thomas (Vice-Chairman), Cllr G C Bridge, Cllr C Brown, Cllr R I B Cannon, Cllr M O Davis, Cllr K King, Cllr Mrs R F Lettington, Cllr K B Tanner, Cllr Mrs M Tatton, Cllr F G Tombolis and Cllr C J Williams

Councillors Mrs J A Anderson, Mrs P A Bates, V M C Branson, M A Coffin, N J Heslop, F A Hoskins, D Lettington, B J Luker, Mrs A S Oakley, W E Palmer, 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 T Bishop, J L Botten, A E Clark and H S Rogers

PART 1 - PUBLIC

FIP 19/32 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made in accordance with the Code of Conduct.

FIP 19/33 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the notes of the meeting of the Finance, Innovation and Property Advisory Board held on 17 July 2019 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE CABINET

FIP 19/34 REVIEW AND REPLACEMENT OF COUNCIL WEBSITE

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation provided an update on progress in developing a website specification in liaison with the Member working group agreed at the last meeting. Details were given of the initial findings of a number of customer engagement surveys together with a capital plan evaluation for the replacement of the website Content Management System.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) progress with the review and replacement of the website be noted;
- (2) the scheme be added to List A funded in full from the Transformation Reserve; and

- (3) the net increase in revenue costs be incorporated into the forthcoming Estimates process.

***Referred to Cabinet**

FIP 19/35 PURCHASE OF TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

Further to Minutes CB 18/25 and C 18/23, the joint report of the Director of Central Services and Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health updated the position on the purchase of premises for use as temporary accommodation and gave details of the current increasing requirement for such accommodation. A capital plan post implementation review was presented in relation to the earlier decision together with a capital plan evaluation for the purchase of further properties for temporary accommodation.

It was noted that the purchase of temporary accommodation provided a more cost-effective alternative than nightly paid accommodation and the aspiration remained to acquire property across the Borough where possible. Members requested that details of the management of the Council's existing property in Tonbridge and its impact on the well-being of the community be included in the update report to the next meeting of Communities and Housing Advisory Board.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) a sum of £1.5m be added to the Capital Plan for the purchase of property for temporary accommodation purposes funded in large part, if not in full, from the two reserves detailed at paragraph 1.3.3 of the report;
- (2) delegated authority be granted to the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health and Director of Central Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Cabinet Member for Finance, Innovation and Property, to progress the purchase of property for temporary accommodation purposes as outlined in the report; and
- (3) the post implementation review report set out at Annex 2 to the report be approved.

***Referred to Cabinet**

FIP 19/36 AMENDMENTS TO BUILDING CONTROL FEES

The report of the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health identified errors in the calculation of the Building Control fees for 2019/20 which had been approved by the Cabinet (Decision No D190012CAB refers). An updated and corrected fees table was presented for use during the remainder of the financial year.

RECOMMENDED: That the correct Building Control fees schedule for 2019/20, as set out at Annex 1 of the report, be adopted with effect from 1 November 2019.

***Referred to Cabinet**

FIP 19/37 FINANCIAL PLANNING AND CONTROL

Decision Notice D190066MEM

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 £375,250. 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.

It was noted that whilst the budget performance for the year was no cause for concern, over the medium term the position was worsening in respect of the projected funding gap. It was therefore considered that each advisory board and committee should be requested to identify opportunities for savings and transformation contributions over the budget cycle. To assist this process it was suggested that reports should identify whether services were mandatory or discretionary and the section on Financial and Value for Money Considerations be reinforced.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) it be noted that as at the end of August 2019, the projected overall outturn position is a net adverse variance of circa £375,250 after making an additional contribution to the revenue reserve for capital schemes of £466,000, when compared to the budget set in February 2019;
- (2) the worsening position in respect of the projected 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 which, as things stand, would give a funding gap higher than at the start of the year; and
- (3) it be recommended to Cabinet that each Advisory Board and Committee should be requested to identify and bring forward opportunities for savings and transformation contributions during this financial year for inclusion in the Medium Term Financial Strategy and Savings and Transformation Strategy.

FIP 19/38 DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF

Decision Notice D190067MEM

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation gave details of an application for hardship relief from Attachments Fostering Ltd in respect of their previous premises at The Cedars, Holborough Road, Snodland. Consideration was given to the circumstances leading to the application, including a timeline of events and financial information which was exempt under Paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 and set out in the private part of the agenda.

It was considered appropriate to award hardship relief for the period between January 2015 and March 2017 following which the Valuation Office Agency had reviewed and reduced the property's rateable value by a third.

RECOMMENDED: That an award of hardship relief be approved on the basis of a rebate of one third of the charge for the period January 2015 to March 2017 with a flexible arrangement for repaying the balance of the outstanding debt.

FIP 19/39 RURAL RATE RELIEF - RURAL SETTLEMENT LIST

Decision Notice D190068MEM

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation advised of the annual requirement to review the Council's rural settlement list and recommended that the current list be retained unaltered for the forthcoming financial year.

RECOMMENDED: That the current rural settlement list remain in force for the year 2020/21.

MATTERS SUBMITTED FOR INFORMATION

FIP 19/40 COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME 2010/21

Further to Decision No D190052MEM, the report provided an update on the review of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme including consultation arrangements, the three main proposed changes to the scheme and a first stage Equality Impact Assessment. It was noted that the consultation period would end on 4 November 2019 and efforts were being made to ensure a sufficiently representative response to be considered when finalising decisions in the next cycle of meetings.

FIP 19/41 REVENUE AND BENEFITS UPDATE

The report gave details of recent developments in respect of council tax, business rates, council tax reduction and housing benefits.

The Chairman reported that this was the last meeting of Mike Bytheway, Revenue and Benefits Manager, and thanks were recorded for his contribution to the Council.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE

FIP 19/42 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 19/43 DEBTS FOR WRITE OFF

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

Decision Notice D190069MEM

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 3 items shown in the schedule of amounts over £5,000, totalling £22,859.76 be written-off for the reasons stated within the schedule.

FIP 19/44 DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF - ANNEXES

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

Annexes 1 and 3 containing exempt information (Minute FIP 19/38 refers).

The meeting ended at 8.57 pm