

## **TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**Tuesday, 27th April, 2021**

**Present:** Cllr J L Sergison (Chairman), Cllr Mrs A S Oakley (Vice-Chairman), Cllr F G Tombolis (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Mrs J A Anderson, Cllr M C Base, Cllr T Bishop, Cllr J L Botten, Cllr M D Boughton, Cllr C Brown, Cllr R W Dalton, Cllr M O Davis, Cllr M A J Hood, Cllr D Keers, Cllr H S Rogers, Cllr M Taylor and Cllr Miss G E Thomas

Councillors Mrs P A Bates, Mrs S Bell, R P Betts, V M C Branson, A E Clark, M A Coffin, N J Heslop, F A Hoskins, S A Hudson, D W King, J R S Lark, D Lettington, P J Montague, W E Palmer, M R Rhodes, R V Roud, N G Stapleton and Mrs M Tatton were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

### **PART 1 - PUBLIC**

#### **OS 21/13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

### **MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE CABINET**

#### **OS 21/14 VIRTUAL MEETINGS**

The report of the Director of Central Services and Deputy Chief Executive provided an update on virtual meetings and asked Members to approve arrangements for the return to face to face meetings post 7 May 2021. Members were also invited to give consideration to the future streaming of Council meetings.

Members were advised that the judgement on the proceedings brought by Lawyers in Local Government (LLG), the Association of Democratic Services Officers (ADSO) and Hertfordshire County Council to allow virtual meetings to proceed past the 6 May 2021 was expected to be handed down from the High Court on the 28 April 2021. If the claim was unsuccessful, the default position was that the Council would be required to revert to a fully face to face meeting programme post 7 May 2021. To allow for the possibility that the pending judgement may allow for the continuation of remote meetings, the Director of Central Services and Deputy Chief Executive put forward the following amendments to the recommendations:

- a) In the event that the Borough Council is lawfully able to continue holding remote meetings (as a result of the proceedings brought by LLG/ ADSO/ Hertfordshire County Council) then all meetings shall continue to be held remotely until all social distancing restrictions due to coronavirus are removed or expire;
- b) In the event that the Borough Council is not lawfully able to continue holding remote meetings, the arrangements set out in the report for holding physical face to face meetings post 7 May 2021 are approved;
- c) The draft response to the 'Call for Evidence' at Annex 2 is approved;
- d) The Borough Council shall continue to livestream all Council meetings.

Members discussed the advantages and disadvantages of the continuation of virtual meetings, including the financial implications, health benefits, transparency and accessibility, logistical issues, voting rights and the consequence of a member's non-physical attendance at a meeting and the positive impact on the Climate Change Strategy.

**RECOMMENDED:** That

- (i) In the event that the Borough Council is lawfully able to continue holding remote meetings (as a result of the proceedings brought by LLG/ ADSO/ Hertfordshire County Council) then all meetings shall continue to be held remotely until all social distancing restrictions due to coronavirus are removed or expire;
- (ii) In the event that the Borough Council is not lawfully able to continue holding remote meetings, the arrangements set out in the report for holding physical face to face meetings post 7 May 2021 are approved;
- (iii) The draft response to the 'Call for Evidence' at Annex 2 is approved;
- (iv) The Borough Council shall continue to livestream all Council meetings.

**\*Referred to Cabinet**

**MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE**

**OS 21/15 REVIEW OF HOMEWORKING POLICY**

The report of the Director of Central Services and Deputy Chief Executive requested Members to undertake a fundamental review of the Council's existing Homeworking Policy (Annex 1) and presented for

member consideration a new policy in Annex 2, entitled Transitional Working Arrangements for Covid-19 Recovery.

Whilst introducing the report, the Director of Central Services and Deputy Chief Executive provided some context. The review of homeworking had looked at the feasibility of rationalising the Borough Council's office accommodation at the Gibson Building, with a view to increasing the amount of homeworking to support the Climate Change Strategy and reduce overheads, whilst being mindful of the work/life balance and the potential impact of staff of different working arrangements. It was noted that the government review of social distancing was not scheduled to be completed earlier than 21 June 2021 and that the recommended new transitional policy would be subject to continuous review and would take cognisance of emerging guidance from the Government as well as the development of key strategic Council policies.

During discussion, Members considered the benefits and potential detriments of homeworking, whilst recognising that the working from home option would be voluntary during the proposed transitional period. Members welcomed the involvement of trade union representation and employee consultation with regards to the trial transitional working arrangements and assurance was given that feedback from all staff would be considered.

**RECOMMENDED:** That

- (i) the transitional working arrangements for Covid-19 Recovery Policy and Procedure in Annex 2 attached to the report, be adopted; and
- (ii) budgetary provision of £15,000 is made for any property related costs associated with the transitional working arrangements, to be funded through the Building Repairs Reserve Expenditure plan, be approved.

**\*Referred to General Purposes Committee**

### **MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE**

#### **OS 21/16 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

There were no items considered in private.

#### **OS 21/17 URGENT ITEMS**

There were no urgent items of business.

The meeting ended at 8.34 pm