

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

FINANCE, INNOVATION AND PROPERTY ADVISORY BOARD

Wednesday, 23rd July, 2014

Present: Cllr H S Rogers (Chairman), Cllr R Taylor (Vice-Chairman), Cllr J Atkins, Cllr O C Baldock, Cllr T Bishop, Cllr P F Bolt, Cllr D A S Davis, Cllr Mrs F A Kemp, Cllr Miss A Moloney and Cllr A K Sullivan

Councillors Mrs J A Anderson, J A L Balcombe, M A Coffin, N J Heslop, B J Luker and Mrs S Murray were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

An apology for absence was received from Councillor C P Smith

PART 1 - PUBLIC

FIP 14/39 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor M Coffin declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in the item on Council Tax Discounts on the grounds of being a landlord of residential and commercial property in the Borough. He also declared an Other Significant Interest in the item on Assignment of the Lease of Car Park at West Street, Wrotham as a member of the finance committee of Wrotham Parish Council. He withdrew from the meeting during consideration of both items.

FIP 14/40 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the notes of the meeting of the Finance, Innovation and Property Advisory Board held on 14 May 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE CABINET

FIP 14/41 FINANCIAL PLANNING AND CONTROL

Decision Notice D140087MEM

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 an update on the variations agreed in relation to the revenue budget and areas identified through budgetary control, summarised to provide an indicative overall budget position which showed a net adverse variance of £8,900. Progress was noted in relation to the identification of savings to meet the targets set in the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

An update was also given on capital expenditure and variations agreed in relation to the capital plan.

RECOMMENDED: That the contents of the report be noted and endorsed.

FIP 14/42 COUNCIL TAX DISCOUNTS

Decision Notice D140088MEM

Further to Decision No D130130CAB, consideration was given to whether there should be any change to certain council tax discounts with effect from 1 April 2015. The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation sought guidance on which discounts might be amended and whether a premium should be charged on long term empty properties to enable views to be obtained from residents and partners in order to ascertain any unintended consequences.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) the following guidance be given for the purposes of obtaining comments from residents, Registered Social Landlords and private landlords:
 - (i) for the financial year 2015/16 and beyond, the Council is minded to reduce the period of the vacant and unfurnished properties discount to two months and to reduce the discount for uninhabitable properties and those undergoing repair from the current rate of 100%, for example to 50%;
 - (ii) the Council is minded to charge a premium of 50% on properties empty for longer than two years; and
- (2) with reference to (1) above, the Director of Finance and Transformation be authorised to place relevant information on the Council's website seeking comments prior to the next meeting of the Advisory Board.

FIP 14/43 PROPOSED BUILDING CONTROL SHARED SERVICE

Decision Notice D140089MEM

Reference was made to Decision No D140069MEM approving in principle the establishment of a shared service arrangement with Sevenoaks District Council as the preferred option for future delivery of Building Control Services. The joint report of the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health and Director of Finance and Transformation gave an update on work undertaken on the further development of the proposals, providing a business case and dealing

with financial matters. It was noted that the proposed arrangement reflected the Council's transformation agenda and would deliver a number of benefits which were outlined in the report.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) the establishment of a shared Building Control Service, with the Administration base at Sevenoaks District Council, be approved and authority be delegated to the Director of Finance and Transformation and Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health to determine the detailed financial and service arrangements respectively;
- (2) on conclusion of (1) above, the Council enter into a Memorandum of Understanding to include the matters summarised at paragraph 1.5.1 of the report to the satisfaction of the Director of Central Services; and
- (3) a sum of £10,000 from the 'invest to save' reserve be allocated to support the initial implementation costs of the new shared service.

MATTERS SUBMITTED FOR INFORMATION

FIP 14/44 T&MBC WEBSITE DESIGN UPDATE

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation gave an update on the planned improvements to the Council's website which were designed to ensure that it remained fit for purpose as user preferences and technology changed. The focus for a redesign of the site was outlined involving simplicity, ease of access and assisting user requirements. Members received a demonstration of a concept providing a tool for users to navigate quickly and simply and which would be at the core of a wider redesign of the website. It was noted that the concept had been shared with staff and groups of external users drawn from subscribers to My Account and had received positive feedback. Further details of the redesign of the website would be reported back to the Advisory Board in due course.

FIP 14/45 BENEFITS UPDATE

Members were advised of current issues arising in the benefits field including performance and workload of the Benefits Service and progress with various aspects of welfare reform. A further update was given at the meeting on the reduction in number of days for handling new claims and changes in circumstances.

FIP 14/46 COUNCIL TAX AND BUSINESS RATES UPDATE

The report gave details of recent developments in respect of council tax and business rates including collection rates. It was noted that recovery work had increased substantially since the introduction of the council tax reduction scheme and the annex to the report set out a comparison between the number of recovery notices issued in 2013/14 and 2012/13.

FIP 14/47 CAPITAL PROGRAMME: POST IMPLEMENTATION REVIEWS MONITORING REPORT

The report identified the post implementation reviews carried out since the meeting of the Advisory Board in July 2013 and the capital plan schemes for which reviews were due.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE

FIP 14/48 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 14/49 DEBTS FOR WRITE OFF

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

Decision Notice D140090MEM

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation recommended 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 five items shown in the schedule of amounts over £1,000 totalling £36,220.54 be written-off for the reasons stated within the schedule.

FIP 14/50 RENT REVIEWS FOR SHOP UNITS, TWISDEN ROAD, EAST MALLING

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

Decision Notice D140091MEM

The report of the Director of Central Services gave details of proposed rent reviews for two shop units located in Twisden Road, East Malling.

RECOMMENDED: That the proposed rent reviews as detailed in the report be approved.

FIP 14/51 ASSIGNMENT OF LEASE OF CAR PARK AT WEST STREET, WROTHAM

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

Decision Notice D140092MEM

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Central Services regarding a proposal to assign the existing lease of a car park at West Street, Wrotham to Wrotham Parish Council.

RECOMMENDED: That the proposed assignment of lease as detailed in the report be approved.

FIP 14/52 LEASE FOR BUILDINGS INCLUDED IN GROUND MAINTENANCE CONTRACT

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

Decision Notice D140093MEM

The report of the Director of Central Services gave details of the proposed lease arrangements for three maintenance buildings included within the grounds maintenance contract.

RECOMMENDED: That the proposed new lease of the buildings as identified in the report be approved.

FIP 14/53 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENT

The Chairman indicated that this was the last meeting to be attended by Mr Paul Griffin, Revenue and Benefits Manager, before his retirement.

Members thanked Mr Griffin for his long and valued service to the Council and recorded their best wishes for the future.

The meeting ended at 9.23 pm