

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES

Tuesday, 18th January, 2022

Present: Cllr M O Davis (Vice-Chairman in the Chair), Cllr Mrs A S Oakley (Vice-Chairman), Cllr C Brown, Cllr R I B Cannon, Cllr R W Dalton, Cllr M A J Hood, Cllr S A Hudson, Cllr Mrs F A Kemp, Cllr D W King, Cllr J R S Lark, Cllr H S Rogers and Cllr F G Tombolis.

(Note: As Councillors J L Botten, F A Hoskins and M Taylor were unable to attend in person and participated via MS Teams, they were unable to vote on any matters).

Councillors Mrs J A Anderson, Mrs P A Bates, Mrs S Bell, M D Boughton, D Harman, N J Heslop, D Keers, P J Montague, W E Palmer, M R Rhodes and K B Tanner participated via MS Teams and joined the discussion when invited to do so by the Chairman, in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 15.21.

Councillor A Cope was present in the Council Chamber pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

An apology for absence was received from Councillor J L Sergison (Chairman).

PART 1 - PUBLIC

OS 22/1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

OS 22/2 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 2 December 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE CABINET

OS 22/3 REVIEW OF COUNCILS PUBLIC HEALTH FUNCTION

The report of the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health set out options to amend the structure of the Borough Council's One You team in order to bring the cost of the service within the annual grant allocation received from Kent County Council.

The current structure and cost of the service was provided at Annex 1. Proposals for a revised staffing structure and cost were detailed in Annex 2.

Particular reference was made to the financial and value for money considerations which illustrated that the difference between the grant funding received from the County Council and the actual cost of the service meant that there was a funding gap of circa £35,000. It was explained that the overspend on public health had been funded via the Borough Council's public health reserve. Due to expenditure exceeding income and based on the latest estimates, without any changes to the service, it was expected that this reserve would be fully used during 2022/23.

The proposals for a revised structure would bring the service within the cost of the annual grant application and avoid budget growth.

RECOMMENDED: That

the proposal to revise the structure of the One You Service, as detailed in 1.3 of the report, to bring it within the annual Kent County Council grant allocation be endorsed.

***Referred to Cabinet**

OS 22/4 REVENUE ESTIMATES 2022/23

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation referred to the responsibility of the Cabinet under the Constitution for formulating initial draft proposals in respect of the Budget. Reference was made to the role of the Committee in assisting the Cabinet and the Council in preparation of the Budget for 2022/23 within the context of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and the Council's priorities.

Details were given of the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement and the position regarding New Homes Bonus funding. It was reported that the latter funding stream remained a subject of discussion, but it would not continue in its current form. It was likely that the scheme would either be withdrawn and not replaced or replaced, but where the funding stream and sum awarded was much reduced.

Members were advised that for the year 2022/23, a referendum would be triggered where council tax was increased by 2%, or more than 2% and more than £5. For the purposes of preparing the budget papers and updating the MTFS an increase of £5 in 2022/23 had been assumed and each year thereafter. In addition, it was proposed, that the 'annual capital allowance' currently set at £250,000 continued to be set at that level.

The report indicated the factors to be taken into account when updating the MTFS and referred to the Savings and Transformation Strategy (STS) which provided a structure and focus for addressing the significant financial challenge facing the Council. Progress was reported on savings achieved and it was noted that the MTFS would continue to be updated as more information became available and the targets and timescales within the STS would be revisited and realigned with the latest projected funding gap. The latest projected 'outstanding' funding gap was £2,350,000 including the initiative already built into the MTFS, the scaling back of office accommodation in the sum of £200,000.

Finally, reference was made to the recommendations of the Finance, Innovation and Property Advisory Board of 12 January that the Revenue Estimates contained in the Booklet (Annex 1) be endorsed and that Cabinet give serious consideration to bringing forth a detailed plan to address the funding gap.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) the draft Revenue Estimates contained in the Booklet (Annex 1) be endorsed and commended to the Cabinet for its meeting on 10 February 2022, subject to noting the additional recommendation arising from the Finance, Innovation and Property Advisory Board of 12 January 2022 that Cabinet gives serious consideration to bringing forth a detailed plan to address the funding gap;
- (2) Cabinet be invited to work with the Management Team to identify areas where significant savings could be made in order to meet the required annual savings; and
- (3) the Savings and Transformation Strategy be updated to reflect the latest projected 'outstanding' funding gap as part of the budget setting process.

***Referred to Cabinet**

OS 22/5 CAPITAL PLAN REVIEW 2021/22

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Finance and Transformation which set out progress on the 2021/22 Capital Plan Review and sought endorsement of recommendations to the Cabinet.

Members were reminded that the annual capital allowance was currently set at £250,000. It was noted that based on current projections, from 2028-29 the Borough Council might need to borrow to fund such expenditure.

Particular reference was made to the two schemes on List C (attached as Annex 3 to the report) recommended for fast track evaluation and in

turn, their addition to the Capital Plan; purchase of an Air Quality Monitor and Tonbridge Farm Sportsground Improvements.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) the recommendations to the Finance, Innovation and Property Advisory Board detailed at paragraph 1.3 of the report be endorsed; and
- (2) the Capital Strategy, as set out at Annex 5 to the report, be endorsed for adoption by Council and publication on the Council's website.

***Referred to Cabinet**

DECISIONS TAKEN BY THE COMMITTEE

OS 22/6 SCOPING REPORT - PLANNING ENFORCEMENT

The report of the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health presented options for a review of the existing Planning Enforcement Plan and associated practices.

It was proposed that the scope of the review should focus on the prioritisation of schemes, internal processes regarding case allocation and workflow management, the content of plan, communicating with complainants and updating on enforcement investigations.

RESOLVED: That the approach detailed in 1.3 of the report (and summarised above) to review and update the existing Planning Enforcement Plan be endorsed.

MATTERS FOR INFORMATION

OS 22/7 PEER CHALLENGE REVIEW

The report of the Chief Executive provided an update on the Local Government Association review which was due to take place from 25 January 2022. Members noted the Position Statement as attached at Annex 1.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE

OS 22/8 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no items considered in private.

The meeting ended at 9.18 pm