

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

FINANCE, INNOVATION AND PROPERTY ADVISORY BOARD

Wednesday, 24th September, 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 M O Davis, Cllr Mrs F A Kemp, Cllr Miss A Moloney, Cllr C P Smith and Cllr A K Sullivan

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

An apology for absence was received from Councillor S R J Jessel

PART 1 - PUBLIC

FIP 14/54 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

FIP 14/55 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the notes of the meeting of the Finance, Innovation and Property Advisory Board held on 23 July 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE CABINET

FIP 14/56 FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS WITH PARISH COUNCILS 2015/16

The joint report of the Director of Finance and Transformation and Cabinet Member for Finance, Innovation and Property gave details of proposed allocations to individual parish councils under the Scheme of Financial Arrangements with Parish Councils in accordance with the methodology agreed by the Council in 2013 following consultation with the Parish Partnership Panel. It was noted that this would result in the budget for the Scheme in 2015/16 increasing by 1.3%.

Members were advised that as a consequence of the transition to individual electoral registration, the basic allocation for 2015/16 had been calculated as a 1.3% increase over the 2014/15 basic allocation instead of as a rate per elector.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) the methodology outlined in the report be adopted in calculating the allocations to parish councils under the Scheme of Financial Arrangements with Parish Councils for the year 2015/16; and
- (2) parish councils be notified of their allocations as set out in Annex 1 to the report.

* **Referred to Cabinet**

**FIP 14/57 LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE SETTLEMENT 2015/16:
TECHNICAL CONSULTATION**

Decision Notice D140107MEM

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation gave details of a Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) consultation on the proposed changes to the illustrative 2015/16 Local Government Finance Settlement which had been published alongside the 2014/15 settlement. Since the return date for responses to the consultation was 25 September 2014, agreement had been obtained from the Leader, Cabinet Member for Finance, Innovation and Property and the Chairman of the Advisory Board to the suggested response set out at Annex 1 to the report.

Attention was also drawn to the DCLG's business rates retention scheme pooling prospectus together with an update on the position in Kent.

RECOMMENDED: That the response to the consultation, as previously agreed with the Leader of the Council, Cabinet Member for Finance, Innovation and Property and Chairman of the Finance, Innovation and Property Advisory Board, be endorsed.

FIP 14/58 FINANCIAL PLANNING AND CONTROL

Decision Notice D140108MEM

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 favourable variance of £43,350. 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 14/59 COUNCIL TAX DISCOUNTS

Further to Decision No D140088MEM, the report of the Director of Finance and Transformation gave details of the outcome of consultation on possible changes to certain council tax discounts from 1 April 2015. The report set out the financial implications of amending the level of discounts together with other non-financial considerations.

Considerable discussion ensued regarding the detrimental effect of long term empty properties in the Borough and the most appropriate levels of council tax discount to apply to encourage owners to bring them back into use. Reference was made to the particular circumstances arising from the widespread flooding earlier in the year in the context of any change to the discount for uninhabitable properties and those undergoing repair.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) the period of 100% discount for vacant and unfurnished properties be reduced from three months to two months with effect from 1 April 2015;
- (2) the current twelve months discount for uninhabitable properties and those undergoing repair be retained at 100% from 1 April 2015;
- (3) a premium of 50% be charged on properties that have been empty for longer than two years with effect from 1 April 2015.
* **Referred to Cabinet**

FIP 14/60 APPLICATIONS FOR DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF

Decision Notice D140109MEM

The joint report of the Director of Finance and Transformation and Cabinet Member for Finance, Innovation and Property gave details of a new application for rural rate relief which was considered in accordance with the previously agreed criteria for determining such applications.

RECOMMENDED: That the new application for rural rate relief be determined as follows:

Hadlow Superstore, 4-6 The Broadway, Hadlow – 80% discretionary relief be awarded, time-limited to 31 March 2015.

FIP 14/61 RURAL SETTLEMENT LIST

Decision Notice D140110MEM

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation referred to the requirement to review the Council's rural settlement list and recommended that the current list should be retained unaltered for the financial year 2015/16.

RECOMMENDED: That the current rural settlement list remain in force for the year 2015/16.

FIP 14/62 EXTENSION OF CASH COLLECTION CONTRACT

Decision Notice D140111MEM

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation indicated that the five year cash collection contract entered into by Canterbury City Council as lead authority on behalf of the 12 Kent district councils was due to expire in January 2015 with an option for two 12 month extensions. It was noted that the option to extend the contract for one year to 2016 was considered the best option by all 12 councils.

RECOMMENDED: That the decision to extend the Council's current Cash Collection Contract for a further year be endorsed.

FIP 14/63 IT STRATEGY

Decision Notice D140112MEM

The report of the Director of Finance and Transformation gave details of a proposed IT Strategy for the Council covering the period 2014-2017. The Strategy described how current and new technologies could assist with the Council's transformation agenda and help make improvements and efficiencies in processes and service delivery to the public and other customers. It was noted that the Strategy would be used as a framework for developing a delivery plan linking the transformation projects and improvements to the relevant technologies.

RECOMMENDED: That the IT Strategy for the period 2014-2017, as set out at Annex 1 to the report, be approved subject to the inclusion of specific reference to the overarching aim of improving service with no reduction in customer experience.

MATTERS SUBMITTED FOR INFORMATION

FIP 14/64 CAPITAL PROJECTS - POST IMPLEMENTATION REVIEWS

The joint report of the Director of Central Services and Director of Finance and Transformation provided an update on four Capital Plan post implementation reviews. These related to Improvements to Reception Areas at Gibson East, Kings Hill and Tonbridge Castle; Gibson Building West, Replacement of Heating Boilers and Circulatory Pipework; Health and Safety Improvements within Council Buildings; and Replacement Cash Receipting System.

FIP 14/65 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. It was noted that following the trial of a fast tracking process for benefits claims, performance had substantially improved.

FIP 14/66 COUNCIL TAX AND BUSINESS RATES UPDATE REPORT

The report gave details of recent developments in respect of council tax and business rates collection rates. To gauge the impact of the revised council tax reduction scheme the annex to the report set out a comparison between the number of recovery notices being issued in the current and previous financial years.

FIP 14/67 FRAUD PREVENTION UPDATE

The report provided an update on the performance of the corporate fraud prevention section for the period April to August 2014.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE

FIP 14/68 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 14/69 DEBTS FOR WRITE OFF

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

Decision Notice D140113MEM

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 19 items shown in the schedule of amounts over £1,000, totalling £89,335.13 be written-off for the reasons stated within the schedule.

FIP 14/70 PROPOSED TERMS FOR LEASE OF AMENITY LAND TO TONBRIDGE METHODIST CHURCH

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

Decision Notice D140114MEM

The report of the Director of Central Service gave details of proposed terms for the lease of amenity land to Tonbridge Methodist Church to provide safe pedestrian access from Hunt Road.

RECOMMENDED: That the terms proposed for a lease to the Tonbridge Methodist Church be approved as set out in the report.

FIP 14/71 PROPOSED NEW LEASE OF LAND TO REAR OF WILLOW LEA, TONBRIDGE AND APPROVAL OF DISPOSAL SCHEME

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

Decision Notice D140115MEM

The report of the Director of Central Services outlined the background to the grant of periodic tenancies of a strip of land to the rear of properties in Willow Lea, Tonbridge. Details were given of proposed terms and conditions of a new lease to one of the home owners.

Consideration was also given to a proposal to investigate with each agreement holder in Willow Lea the option of purchasing the land to the rear of their properties.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) a new lease be granted to the individual home owner in Willow Lea as detailed in the report (and corrected at the meeting), subject to investigation of whether any further legislation applies and the inclusion of a clause reserving a right of access to the Council; and
- (2) approval be given to proceed with the wider disposal scheme as set out in the report.

The meeting ended at 8.59 pm