

## TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

### FINANCE, REGENERATION AND PROPERTY SCRUTINY SELECT COMMITTEE

#### MINUTES

Tuesday, 14th November, 2023

**Present:** Cllr D Harman (Chair), Cllr C Brown (Vice-Chair), Cllr L Athwal, Cllr P Boxall, Cllr R I B Cannon, Cllr Mrs T Dean, Cllr W J Mallard, Cllr A Mehmet, Cllr W E Palmer, Cllr B A Parry, Cllr M R Rhodes, Cllr J Clokey (substitute) and Cllr J R S Lark (substitute)

**In attendance:** Councillors A G Bennison, R P Betts, G C Bridge, P M Hickmott, M A J Hood, F A Hoskins and D Keers were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

**Virtual:** Councillors Mrs S Bell, M D Boughton, M A Coffin, S Crisp, R W Dalton, D A S Davis, D W King, Mrs A S Oakley and K B Tanner participated via MS Teams in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 15.21.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors T Bishop and C J Williams.

#### PART 1 - PUBLIC

##### **FRP 23/24 NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Notification of substitute members were recorded as set out below:

- Councillor J Lark substituted for Councillor C Williams
- Councillor J Clokey substituted for Councillor T Bishop

In accordance with Council Procedure Rules 17.5 to 17.9 these Councillors had the same rights as the ordinary member of the committee for whom they were substituting.

##### **FRP 23/25 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

##### **FRP 23/26 MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:** That the notes of the meeting of the Finance, Regeneration and Property Scrutiny Select Committee held on 25 July 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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

### **FRP 23/27 FUTURE OF THE ANGEL CENTRE, TONBRIDGE**

Members' in-principle views were sought on the future of the existing Angel Centre building as part of the Borough Council's work to review its land and property assets in Tonbridge town centre.

Members recognised that, due to age, design and the changing nature of leisure provision, the Angel Centre had reached the point of requiring substantial investment in both plant and equipment and building fabric to remain fit for purpose in the long term. In addition, significant further investment would be required to reduce the carbon footprint of the building to achieve the Council's carbon neutral aspirations for its leisure facilities. From a cost saving perspective, actions needed to take place as soon as possible in view of the huge ongoing maintenance expenses.

It was emphasised by the Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Regeneration and Property that it was only a preference on the in-principle option that was sought from Members at this stage, which information would then be incorporated into the option appraisals to be developed by the consultant company MACE as part of their Phase 2 report, to be presented to the Committee for consideration at a future meeting.

Having regard to the operational, building fabric and climate change considerations, as well as views expressed by the Leisure Trust and the financial implications, Members noted the pros and cons of both refurbishment and new facility options respectively and took into account the legal implications set out in Annex 1.

**RECOMMENDED\*:** That

- (1) in principle, all options be kept on the table for the future of the leisure centre, including demolishing and rebuilding it elsewhere.

**\*Recommended to Cabinet**

### **FRP 23/28 REVIEW OF FEES AND CHARGES 2024/25**

The joint report of the Director of Central Services and the Director of Finance and Transformation set out the proposed fees and charges for the provision of services in respect of legal fees, photocopying, Street Naming and Numbering, local land charges searches and enquiries, Tonbridge Castle and recovering unpaid Council Tax debts from 1 April 2024.

In bringing forward the charging proposals for 2024/25 consideration had been given to a range of factors, including the Borough Council's overall

financial position, market position, trading patterns, the current rate of inflation and customer feedback, apart from which a set of guiding principles for the setting of fees and charges had also been taken into account and were summarised in 1.1.2 of the report.

A point of clarification/amendment was made in respect of 1.2.4 of the report, which should read "... In respect of the fees set out at 1.2.1 above, the Supreme Court guideline hourly rates may change from time to time, so it is therefore **RECOMMENDED** that the level of legal fees charged by the Council is in accordance with the applicable rates set out in the Supreme Court guidelines...".

Moreover, additional information was sought on the number of wedding ceremonies held in the Castle Chamber in the current financial year in order to ascertain whether there was any impact on the business by the fee increase from 2022/23 to 2023/24, although Members were reminded that there would normally be a lag in the data due to the advanced booking nature of wedding ceremonies.

**RECOMMENDED\*:** That

- (1) the proposed charges for legal costs, as set out in 1.2 of the report, be adopted with effect from 1 April 2024;
- (2) the current photocopying charges of £0.10 (inclusive of VAT) for each page of the same document or additional copies of the same page plus postage as appropriate, as set out in 1.3.4 of the report, be retained;
- (3) the proposed fee schedules for Street Naming and Numbering, as set out in 1.4 of the report, be adopted with effect from 1 April 2024, subject to clarification of the percentage of the proposed fee increase as indicated in 1.4.4 of the report;
- (4) the proposed scale of fees for local land charges searches and enquiries, as set out in Annex 1 and 1.5 of the report, be adopted with effect from 1 April 2024;
- (5) the proposed fees and charges for 2024/25 related to Tonbridge Castle, as set out in 1.6 of the report, be adopted with effect from 1 April 2024; and
- (6) the amount of costs charged in 2024/25 to recover unpaid Council Tax debts be increased from £100 to £110, as set out in 1.7 of the report, with effect from 1 April 2024.

**\*Recommended to Cabinet**

## **FRP 23/29 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2023 - 2027**

The report of the Chief Executive set out the proposed changes to the draft Economic Development Strategy 2023-2027 in light of the feedback received during the consultation exercise which was undertaken between 15 September and 13 October 2023.

Key amendments were summarised in 1.3.2 of the report and a revised draft of the Economic Development Strategy 2023-2027 was provided at Annex 1. Members' approval was sought on the adoption of the Strategy as amended.

Members welcomed the introduction of the revised Strategy and were advised that updates on progress of delivering the initiatives would be reported on a 6-monthly basis in the future.

**RECOMMENDED\*:** That

- (1) the report be noted; and
- (2) the revised Economic Development Strategy 2023-2027, as set out in Appendix 1, be approved, subject to the definition of the 'Markets' as in 'Programme of Town Centre Events and Markets' under the theme of 'Vibrant Town Centres' being added to the Action Plan to clarify its coverage of farmers' markets.

**\*Recommended to Cabinet**

## **MATTERS SUBMITTED FOR INFORMATION**

### **FRP 23/30 KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

Members received a list of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that were aligned to the priorities as identified in the adopted Corporate Strategy 2023-2027 and were relevant to the Committee. A baseline covering the period 2022/23 had for the most part been used, with the data for July to September 2023 representing the most up-to-date available statistics in most instances. In order to improve the effectiveness of KPI monitoring, trend analysis and targets had also been included in the KPIs provided at Appendix 1 and a number of the identified trends were highlighted in 1.1.5 of the report. The KPIs would be monitored on a quarterly-annual basis and would be made available on an ongoing basis.

With regard to benchmarking, it was noted that for those KPIs that were already being benchmarked, the benchmarking data would be added in the next cycle of reporting, and further work would be undertaken to build up benchmarking for the remaining KPIs.

**FRP 23/31 WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24**

The Work Programme setting out matters to be scrutinised during 2023/24 was attached for information. Members were invited to suggest future matters by liaising with the Chair of the Committee.

**MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE**

**FRP 23/32 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 SUBMITTED FOR INFORMATION**

**FRP 23/33 FUTURE OF THE ANGEL CENTRE, TONBRIDGE - ANNEX 1**

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

Members had regard to Annex 1 – Legal Implications, set out in Part 2 of the agenda, during consideration of the Future of the Angel Centre, Tonbridge (Minute FRP 23/27 refers).

**RESOLVED:** That the report be received and noted.

The meeting ended at 9.16 pm