

**TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES**

**Wednesday, 24th January, 2024**

**Present:** Cllr M R Rhodes (Chair), Cllr M A Coffin (Vice-Chair), Cllr K Barton, Cllr A G Bennison, Cllr J Clokey, Cllr D A S Davis, Cllr A McDermott, Cllr B A Parry and Cllr K B Tanner

**In attendance:** Councillors P M Hickmott, M A J Hood and W E Palmer were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

**Virtual:** Councillors M D Boughton, R I B Cannon, R W Dalton, D Harman, S A Hudson, D Keers, D W King and Mrs A S Oakley participated via MS Teams in accordance with Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors B Banks and R V Roud.

**PART 1 - PUBLIC**

**GP 24/1 NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

There was no notification of substitute members received.

**GP 24/2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

**GP 24/3 MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the meeting of the General Purposes Committee held on 11 October 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE COUNCIL**

**GP 24/4 LOCALISM ACT - PAY POLICY**

The report of the Interim Chief Executive summarised the requirements of the Localism Act 2011 and presented an updated Pay Policy Statement for 2024/25 as set out in Annex 1 to the report.

Members noted that as there had not been many significant changes in the Borough Council's remuneration policy apart from the addition in

respect of the introduction of the Recruitment & Retention Market Supplement Policy in October 2023, the substantive content of the updated Pay Policy Statement in Annex 1 was nearly identical to the Borough Council's first Pay Policy Statement (adopted by the Council on 16 February 2012).

**RECOMMENDED\*:** That the Pay Policy set out in Annex 1 be commended for adoption at the next ordinary meeting of the Council.

**\*Referred to Council**

### **DECISIONS TAKEN UNDER DELEGATED POWERS**

#### **GP 24/5 PAY AWARD 2024/25**

The report of the Interim Chief Executive presented Members with five different options to consider in determining the pay award for employees for 2024/25, as set out in detail in 1.7 of the report.

Members noted that the Borough Council employees had a term in their contracts which read 'Salaries will be revised on 1 April each year by an amount determined by the Authority having regard to movements in the Retail Price Index, comparative pay settlements and prevailing economic conditions' and the Borough Council therefore determined its own pay awards and was not tied into the national process of collective bargaining. The Borough Council's current salary scales were attached at Annex 1 of the report and UNISON's pay claim for 2024/25 at Annex 2.

The Chair proposed and it was seconded that Council Procedure Rule No 10.11 be suspended, to allow representative of UNISON to address the Committee on behalf of its members, during which concern was raised in respect of the significant fluctuation in cost of living, with particular reference made to the below inflation pay rise and its impact on members of staff of all grades. Following the statement from UNISON, Council Procedure Rules were reapplied.

Particular attention was drawn to the significant rise of the National Living Wage (NLW) from 1 April 2024 as announced by the Government – a rise of 9.8% from £10.42 to £11.44 per hour, an increase of £1.02 per hour. It was acknowledged that the Borough Council had a legal obligation to not pay below the NLW and due regard was given to the impact of the NLW rise as detailed in 1.3 of the report.

During discussion, Member further noted that a budget provision of £600,500 had been made for pay award inflation within the Medium Term Financial Strategy. In order to address the pressures the Borough Council was facing both in response to the significant rise in the NLW and in recruitment and retention with particular reference made to M grade staff, Option 5 was identified as a preferable pay award option for

employees for 2024/25 and its financial implications were noted. Members recognised the importance of sufficient and appropriate remuneration in securing valuable employees for the Borough Council.

**RESOLVED:** That the Borough Council's current pay structure be maintained by applying a fixed monetary amount of £1,900 increase to all 'Local' grades (scale 2 to Senior Officer (SO)) staff and a flat rate increase of 5% to all Management grades (M grade) staff, with effect from 1 April 2024 (as set out in Option 5).

#### **GP 24/6 REVIEW OF WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY**

The report of the Interim Chief Executive advised of the outcome of the annual review of the Borough Council's Whistleblowing Policy following its consideration by the Audit Committee on 15 January 2024. A copy of the updated internal Whistleblowing Policy was attached at Annex 1 with the new Whistleblowing Procedure at Annex 2. In addition, to align with best practice, an external policy to be made available to support those working externally who might witness wrongdoing by officers and councillors, was attached at Annex 3.

**RESOLVED:** That the Whistleblowing Policy, as attached at Annex 1, and accompanying Whistleblowing Procedure and External Policy, as set out in Annexes 2 and 3 respectively, be approved.

#### **GP 24/7 REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES**

Following receipt of the final recommendations for the Constituency arrangements from the Boundary Commission for England, a Polling District & Polling Place Review had been undertaken to implement any necessary changes to Polling Districts/Places. The report of the Interim Chief Executive detailed the final proposals for the new constituency structure and the Polling Districts/Places/Stations under the new Constituency arrangements following a public consultation which ran from 1 December 2023 to 1 January 2024. A list of the final Polling Districts/Places in each constituency that covered the Borough was attached at Annexe 2 and a map showing the new constituencies and their final Polling Districts/Places at Annexe 3.

**RESOLVED:** That the new Polling District/Place structure as set out in the report and in Annexes 2 and 3, be agreed.

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

#### **GP 24/8 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****DECISIONS TAKEN UNDER DELEGATED POWERS****GP 24/9 ESTABLISHMENT REPORT**

(Reasons: LGA 1972 – Sch 12A Paragraph 1 and 2 – Information relating to an individual and information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual)

The report set out for Members' approval a number of establishment changes recommended by Management Team. Members noted that, in accordance with adopted conventions, all of the savings/costs referred to in the report reflected the salary at the top of the scale/grade plus associated on costs.

**RESOLVED:** That

- (1) the interim monthly allowance paid to the Head of Administrative & Property Services for undertaking the role of Interim Data Protection Officer, during the period 13 December 2023 to 14 May 2024, be noted;
- (2) the creation of a new full time, 3 year fixed term, Graduate Developer post on a career graded pay scale of scale 4-6, be approved with immediate effect;
- (3) the creation of a new permanent, full time, Property Project Officer on the SO grade, be approved with immediate effect;
- (4) the regrade of the Estates Surveyor (DA1104) post from an M9 to an M8, be approved with immediate effect;
- (5) the redesignation of the Leisure Services Officer, post DB0407, to Senior Events Officer, grade scale 6/SO, based within the new Events Team in Central Services with effect from 1 February 2024, be approved;
- (6) the redesignation of the Leisure Development Assistant, post DB0404, to an Assistant Events Officer post, grade 4, based within the new Events Team in Central Services with effect from 1 February 2024, be approved;
- (7) the redesignation of the Gateway and Customer Services Manager, post DB0351, to Tonbridge Castle, Events and Customer Service Manager, grade M7, with effect from 1 February 2024, be approved;
- (8) the redesignation of the Senior Customer Services Adviser, post DB0345, to Senior Customer Services and Castle Events

Coordinator, scale 5, with effect from 1 February 2024, be approved;

- (9) the redesignation of the Leisure Services Manager (Events & Partnerships), post DG0406, to Leisure Services Manager (Trust Management/Partnerships), grade M8, with effect from 1 February 2024, be approved;
- (10) the redesignation of the Senior Customer Service Adviser, post DB0308, to Customer Service Adviser, grade 2/3, with effect from 1 February 2024, be approved; and
- (11) the likely compensatory costs linked to the Council's policy on compensating staff for increased travel to work mileage due to a re-organisation, be noted.

The meeting ended at 8.28 pm