

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

FINANCE, REGENERATION AND PROPERTY SCRUTINY SELECT COMMITTEE

MINUTES

Tuesday, 17th September, 2024

Present: Cllr D Harman (Chair), Cllr A Mehmet (Vice-Chair), Cllr T Bishop, Cllr P Boxall, Cllr C Brown, Cllr R I B Cannon, Cllr J Clokey, Cllr B A Parry, Cllr R W G Oliver (substitute), Cllr M R Rhodes and Cllr C J Williams.

Cllrs K B Tanner, R P Betts, M A J Hood, M D Boughton and M A Coffin* were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

(*participated via MS Teams)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors L Athwal, W J Mallard and W E Palmer.

PART 1 - PUBLIC

FRP 24/9 NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Notification of substitute members were recorded as set out below:

- Cllr Oliver substitute for Cllr Athwal

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 24/10 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

However, for reasons of transparency Cllr Clokey reminded Members that in relation to agenda item 8 (Budgetary Control) he was employed by one of the companies who managed a multi asset fund which the Borough Council had invested in and was referenced in the report. As this did not represent either a Disclosable Pecuniary or Other Significant Interest there was no reason for Cllr Clokey to withdraw from the meeting.

FRP 24/11 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the notes of the meeting of the Finance, Regeneration and Property Scrutiny Select Committee held on 12 March 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

MATTERS FOR CORPORATE MONITORING

FRP 24/12 CORPORATE KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The report of the Chief Executive provided data on Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that were aligned to the Corporate Strategy 2024-2027 and monitored on a quarterly basis. The data provided related to the period up to the end of June 2024 and aimed to provide analysis about the performance of the Borough Council and support its improvement.

Members noted a number of positive trends in respect of outstanding debt, unemployment, leisure centres and progress on the Tonbridge Town Centre Regeneration Project and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Conversely, income monitoring data showed that in Quarter 1 income was below profile.

Particular reference was made to the importance of regularly reviewing processes and data in respect of performance management to ensure that they were fit for purpose in supporting improvement within the organisation. Consideration would be given to streamlining the reporting process for KPIs, reducing the number of KPIs reported with a focus on those that most closely aligned to the Corporate Strategy and best measured performance and introducing an annual portfolio holder report at Scrutiny Select Committees setting out achievements, challenges and future plans.

Concern was expressed that changes to the reporting of performance management could lead to Members having less oversight of the current position. The Chair committed to requesting that specific KPIs be retained if Members of the Committee set their preferences out in writing. There was also a commitment to share the complete list of current KPIs to assist Members in identifying those indicators they wished to retain.

Finally, there was a request to include targets as well as indicators of trends in the report to better illustrate the progress/position of the Borough Council. There was also a commitment to improve accessibility by including shapes to show upward and downward trends.

RESOLVED: That the positive and negative trends as set out in the report be noted.

MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE CABINET

FRP 24/13 CUSTOMER CONTACT CENTRE - ENHANCED FACILITIES

(Decision Notice D240095MEM)

Consideration was given to a proposal to enable automated webchat as an enhancement to the current Customer Contact system. The licences to enable this function could be funded from the Transformation Reserve.

Due regard was given to a detailed evaluation of the Anywhere365 Webchat and Bot Integration Project as set out in Annex 1.

It was anticipated that the enhanced facility would support the increasing expectations of customers for services 'out of hours' and free up staff time to deal with more complex calls from potentially more vulnerable and older residents.

In addition, it was recognised that there was potential for efficiency savings following the initial settling in period and further consolidation of other service areas into the centralised Contact Centre under the "One Council" ethos.

Members recognised that the introduction of automated webchat was an enhancement to the existing service and was not intended as a replacement to an in-person service. It was also noted that the webchat functionality would be accessed through the Borough Council's website that was built on Microsoft Azure secure-by-design infrastructure.

***RECOMMENDED:** That

- (1) the automated webchat functionality be enabled through the Customer Contact system; and
- (2) the cost of £9,408 for the additional Anywhere365 licences (until the end of the Anywhere365 contract) be funded from the Transformation Reserve.

***Decision of Cabinet Member for Finance and Housing**

MATTERS SUBMITTED FOR INFORMATION

FRP 24/14 JULY 2024 BUDGETARY CONTROL

Members received information on the current financial year position to the end of July 2024 and the position related to savings achieved since the budget was set in February 2024. The Director of Finance and Transformation was pleased to report an overall positive position and

that good progress was being made on identifying savings with the target of £305,000 to be achieved by April 2025 exceeded by circa £515,000 (based on full year effect).

However, particular reference was made to homelessness and temporary accommodation spend and Members were warned that if the client levels, cost of TA and debt recovery were to continue at the current levels until the end of the financial year without any mitigating intervention the overspend against the agreed budget would be in the region of £665,000. A number of strands were in progress to try to mitigate these costs. Members were also advised that the current significant costs of TA were being countered by the good performance of the Borough Councils investment and treasury funds.

Details of salary, income and investment income monitoring to end of July 2024 was set out in the report and noted by Members.

There was in-depth discussion on potential reasons for increasing homelessness and an acknowledgement that one of the ways to mitigate costs around temporary accommodation would be for the Borough Council to purchase, or have access to, its own properties.

Disappointment was also expressed at the delay of the Valuation Office in assessing the business rates values of some properties on the Panattoni Park. However, notification had recently been received confirming rateable values and this would be factored into future monitoring reports to Members.

Finally, it was noted that the Medium Term Financial Strategy was in the process of being reviewed and updated. The Director of Finance and Transformation would provide an update at the next meeting of the Scrutiny Select Committee following a report to Cabinet.

FRP 24/15 IDENTIFICATION OF SAVING OPTIONS

Members were invited to propose options for evaluation to assist in bridging the current funding gap identified in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy. Any proposals would be evaluated in the coming months as part of the budget setting process.

It was agreed that any ideas should be emailed to the Chair in the first instance.

FRP 24/16 WORK PROGRAMME 2024/25

The Work Programme setting out matters to be scrutinised during 2024/25 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 24/17 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no items considered in private.

The meeting ended at 8.28 pm