

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES

Thursday, 14th November, 2024

Present: Cllr Mrs A S Oakley (Chair), Cllr L Athwal (Vice-Chair), Cllr T Bishop, Cllr C Brown, Cllr R I B Cannon, Cllr D A S Davis, Cllr P M Hickmott, Cllr M A J Hood, Cllr F A Hoskins, Cllr D W King, Cllr J R S Lark (substitute), Cllr A Mehmet, Cllr R W G Oliver(substitute), Cllr W E Palmer, Cllr M R Rhodes (substitute), Cllr D Thornewell and Cllr C J Williams

Cllrs A G Bennison, R P Betts, J Clokey, M A Coffin, D Keers, R V Roud, Mrs M Tatton, M Taylor and K B Tanner* were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

(*participated via MS Teams)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs S Bell (Vice-Chair), A Cope and S A Hudson.

PART 1 - PUBLIC

OS 24/46 NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Notification of substitute members were recorded as set out below:

- Cllr Lark substituted for Cllr Hudson
- Cllr Oliver substituted for Cllr Cope
- Cllr Rhodes substituted for Cllr Bell

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.

OS 24/47 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

OS 24/48 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the ordinary and extraordinary meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 11 and 26 September 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

MATTERS FOR CORPORATE MONITORING

OS 24/49 KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The report provided data on Key Performance Indicators for the period July – September 2024 (quarter 2) that were aligned to the Corporate Strategy 2023-27 and monitored on a quarterly or annual basis

This data was a key tool in assessing performance management, helped to deliver positive change and provided Members with an insight into areas where the Borough Council was performing well and areas that needed greater focus.

Members welcomed the reductions in reported victim-based crime and staff vacancies and the increases in MyAccount registrations and the percentage of calls handled by Customer Services.

It was also noted that although social media engagement had dropped slightly during quarter 2, a summer marketing campaign had generated significant activity on third party sites and social channels. Reference was made to the increase in sickness absence medically signed off and no specific patterns to this growth had been identified other than an aging workforce.

With regard to proposed changes in reviewing performance management, as outlined at previous meetings of the Scrutiny Select Committees, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and supported by the Cabinet, it was suggested that the revised reporting mechanism be shared outside of the meeting so that the Committee was aware of their future role in reviewing performance.

RESOLVED: That the positive and negative trends identified in the report be noted.

MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE CABINET

OS 24/50 REVIEW OF TONBRIDGE COMMUNITY FORUM AND PARISH PARTNERSHIP PANEL

Following a review of the operation of the Tonbridge Community Forum, as recommended by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the report of the Chief Executive set out a number of options for consideration.

Due regard was given to the views of existing members of the Forum on the current venue, style and format of the meetings as detailed in Annex 2. It was evident that there was a preference for in-person meetings with greater input from community groups and a more collaborative approach.

The Chair and Vice-Chair of the Forum expressed a preference for meetings of the Forum to be held at Tonbridge Methodist Church as room hire was reasonably priced, compared to the Angel Centre, and included audio equipment which avoided the requirement for an external provider.

It was noted that community groups had expressed a desire for a 'dedicated open discussion' to provide an opportunity for all members to discuss and respond to matters to ensure an equal distribution of views between Borough Councillors, County Councillors and community representatives. Whilst this was supported in principle, it was also recognised that topics should continue to be raised in advance to assist with effective agenda planning. There was also opportunity to raise other matters under Any Other Business.

***RECOMMENDED:** That

- (1) the venue for Tonbridge Community Forum be moved to Tonbridge Methodist Church on a trial basis for all meetings in 2025;
- (2) all Meetings of the Tonbridge Community Forum be held in person on a trial basis in 2025;
- (3) following a topic or item raised at Tonbridge Community Forum a section should be dedicated to open discussion to provide an opportunity for all members to discuss and respond to the matter;
- (4) initial responses in relation to the operation of the Parish Partnership Panel be shared at a future meeting of the Parish Partnership Panel to allow all members additional opportunity to discuss and consider options for this meeting.

MATTERS FOR INFORMATION

OS 24/51 AGILE UPDATE

Members were provided with an update on the progress being made on the implementation of the Agile software system. The report of the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health also responded to queries raised by Councillors regarding lessons learnt and how to ensure the software was fully embedded post 'go live'.

The Committee noted the progress to date, the way forward, the financial and value for money considerations and the risk assessment as detailed in the report. A number of matters remained outstanding and whilst there had been a renewed commitment from Agile to resolve these issues, it was anticipated that there would be significant pressures on staff capacity in monitoring, escalating, testing and implementing solutions and modules.

There was now a timescale imperative for this work to be concluded as the previous operating system would not be available after the end of March 2025. As many mitigation measures as possible were being explored.

A Post Implementation Review of the APAS (built environment) was being concluded and a similar exercise would be carried out for the other implementations in the Agile programme. These would be reported to the Borough Council's Audit Committee in due course.

There was in-depth discussion on a number of issues including the functionality of the Land Terrier application, the difficulties experienced by residents and councillors in navigating planning applications, the formatting of the weekly list of planning applications, the impact on service delivery and the increased pressure on staff. Concern was also expressed at the performance of the contractor, the overall cost of the project and the significant risk related to implementation and embedding by the end of March 2025.

These concerns and queries were noted by the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health and responses would be provided out of meeting and/or shared with relevant Officers.

In conclusion, the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health offered to liaise with the Chair of the Committee and consider a Member User Group to canvass feedback on the Agile functionality. An interim update report would also be provided, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Housing, in advance of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in April 2025, when a further update report would be presented. Members requested that the Head of IT be asked to attend this meeting.

OS 24/52 RECORD OF DECISIONS TAKEN BY THE EXECUTIVE

The decisions taken by the Cabinet and Cabinet Members during September and October 2024 were presented for information and noted by the Committee.

OS 24/53 NOTICE OF FORTHCOMING KEY DECISIONS

The Notice setting out the Key Decisions anticipated to taken during November and December 2024 was presented for information. It was also noted that the Notice was subject to change if adjustments were necessary to the reporting timetable.

It was confirmed that a discussion on a potential Procurement Strategy was scheduled for the meeting of Cabinet on 10 December 2024 following consideration by the Finance, Regeneration and Property Scrutiny Select Committee.

OS 24/54 WORK PROGRAMME

The Work Programme setting out potential matters to be scrutinised during 2024/25 was noted. Members were invited to suggest future items by liaising with the Chair of the Committee.

In advance of the meeting in January which focused on budget setting, the Chair invited all Members to consider potential saving and income generating opportunities and asked that ideas be shared as soon as possible out of meeting.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE**OS 24/55 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

There were no items considered in private.

The meeting ended at 8.30 pm