

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

MINUTES

Wednesday, 19th March, 2025

Present: Cllr M D Boughton (Chair), Cllr R P Betts, Cllr M A Coffin, Cllr D Keers, Cllr K B Tanner and Cllr M Taylor

In attendance: Councillors L Athwal, S Crisp, M A J Hood, Mrs A S Oakley and M R Rhodes were also present pursuant to Access to Information Rule No 23 and participated via MS Teams.

PART 1 - PUBLIC

CB 25/40 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

DECISIONS TAKEN IN ACCORDANCE WITH PART 3 OF THE CONSTITUTION

EXECUTIVE NON-KEY DECISIONS

CB 25/41 THE GOVERNMENT'S LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION PROGRAMME

(Decision Notice: D250027CAB)

The report of the Chief Executive sought approval of the Cabinet for the initial submission by the Borough Council in respect of a proposal for new Unitary Councils across Kent and Medway, as part of the Government's Local Government Reorganisation Programme.

As set out in a letter from the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution, attached at Annex 1, interim proposals for new Unitary Councils across Kent and Medway were invited to be submitted by 21 March 2025 with full proposals to follow by 28 November 2025.

A draft county-wide response had since been prepared with the input of all Council Leaders, which made it clear that there was consensus amongst Kent Council Leaders that there should be either three or four Unitary Councils within the geographic area currently covered by Kent County Council and Medway Unitary Council and the 12 Borough and District Councils contained therein. It was noted that the interim submission attached at Annex 2a to the report had received agreement

of all the Councils across Kent and Medway with Annex 2b having been agreed by many of those Councils too.

Members noted that following the interim submission, work would commence on a more detailed and systematic evaluation of potential unitary geographies ahead of the submission deadline for full proposals by 28 November 2025, with support to be procured via external partners to ensure that the evaluation of options was robust and the submission was independently evaluated.

Cabinet had due regard to the financial and value for money considerations, risk assessment and legal implications and noted that a budget needed to be agreed to commence the preliminary financial and technical work in order to prepare the evidence base. Other risks associated with financial resilience of the new Unitary Councils, challenge faced by the Government in delivering the programme within the ambitious timetable, uncertainty presented to staff, partners and contractors by these changes, and potential consequences for recruitment and retention during the transition were also noted by Members.

Finally, Members expressed their appreciation to the Chief Executive and the Deputy Chief Executive for the great efforts they made in progressing the Interim Plan in collaboration with colleagues across the Councils in Kent and Medway and in keeping all Members informed and engaged throughout the process. Efforts would continue to be focused on reaching a new structure aiming to secure delivery of high-quality services at the best value for money for residents across the borough.

Cllr Matt Boughton proposed, Cllr Martin Coffin seconded and the Cabinet

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the invitation from the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution to work with other councils in Kent to submit initial proposals for local government reorganisation by 21 March 2025 and final proposals by 28 November 2025, as set out in Annex 1, be noted;
- (2) the draft interim submission prepared in response to the Government's invitation, as set out in Annex 2a and Annex 2b, be agreed;
- (3) any final drafting changes that might be needed ahead of the submission deadline, be delegated to the Leader of the Borough Council;
- (4) an initial budget of up to £10,000 funded from the Transformation Reserve to help fund the preliminary financial and technical data

analysis and evidence base that had been necessary to inform this work, be agreed; and

- (5) the receipt of a further report to establish a budget to meet the costs associated with the transition to a new Unitary Council once this was known, including the cost of the work that would be required to meet the Government's 28 November 2025 deadline, be agreed.

CB 25/42 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no items considered in private.

The meeting ended at 7.44 pm