

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES

Thursday, 13th November, 2025

Present: Cllr Mrs A S Oakley (Chair), Cllr L Athwal (Vice-Chair), Cllr K B Tanner (Vice-Chair), Cllr Mrs S Bell, Cllr C Brown, Cllr R I B Cannon, Cllr L Chapman, Cllr A Cope, Cllr Mrs T Dean (substitute), Cllr P M Hickmott, Cllr M A J Hood, Cllr F A Hoskins, Cllr D W King, Cllr W E Palmer, Cllr R V Roud (substitute), Cllr K S Tunstall (substitute) and Cllr C J Williams (substitute).

Cllrs A G Bennison, M D Boughton, R P Betts*, D Keers*, M R Rhodes* and M Taylor* were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

(*participated via MS Teams)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors T Bishop, S A Hudson, A McDermott and D Thornewell

PART 1 - PUBLIC

OS 25/52 NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Notification of substitute members were recorded as set out below:

- Councillor T Dean substituted for Cllr Thornewell
- Councillor R Roud substituted for Cllr Bishop
- Councillor K Tunstall substituted for Councillor S Hudson
- Councillor C Williams substituted for Councillor A McDermott

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 25/53 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

OS 25/54 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 11 September 2025 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

OS 25/55 MOTION WITHOUT NOTICE

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 5.30 (c), the Chair proposed that the order of business in the agenda be changed to enable the representative of the Tonbridge and Malling Leisure Trust to withdraw before the anticipated significant debate on Local Government Reorganisation.

This was seconded by Cllr Tanner and supported by the Committee.

RESOLVED: That the order of the business in the agenda be changed and that the Tonbridge and Malling Leisure Trust Annual report be considered earlier in the meeting.

OS 25/56 TONBRIDGE AND MALLING LEISURE TRUST - ANNUAL REPORT

The Chief Executive of the Tonbridge and Malling Leisure Trust presented details of recent performance, outlined operational pressures and highlighted significant achievements and projects.

Achievements highlighted included over 1.3 million visits in 2024/25, notable swim school enrolments, increased health and fitness memberships and the leisure pass rebranding to priority cards, all of which contributed to increasing local engagement. There had also been charitable donations and support provided to Porchlight and Communigrow.

There had been significant investment in facility enhancements over the past two years and all surpluses had been reinvested locally due to the Trusts 'not for profit status'.

The valuable role of volunteers in supporting work at Leybourne Lakes Country Park, as well as community clubs, was recognised and Members recorded appreciation for their contribution.

In response to concerns about a lack of playing pitches, the Leisure Trust remained committed to exploring opportunities in liaison with the Borough Council.

MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE CABINET**OS 25/57 LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION - BUSINESS CASE SUBMISSION**

Following an interim submission to the Government by the 21 March 2025 deadline to propose the Borough Council's preferred geography for new Unitary Councils across Kent, the report of the Chief Executive set out the detailed evidence-based work subsequently undertaken on the business case to enable a submission to be made by the Borough

Council on the proposals for the Local Government Reorganisation to the Government by the 28 November 2025 deadline.

Particular attention was drawn to the business case for Option 3A, attached at Annex 3, which proposed a 3-unitary model with the West Kent authority comprising Tonbridge and Malling, Sevenoaks, Tunbridge Wells and Maidstone areas. Members noted that this option was potentially supported by five councils across Kent (the West Kent councils plus Folkstone and Hythe), although these Councils still had to complete their formal decision-making processes during November. The advantages of Option 3A, in comparison to Option 4B (a 4-unitary model), being the other option that had been broadly supported by councils in Kent and Medway area and developed by the Strategic Partner, KPMG, with the funding allocated by the Government, were outlined in Section 6 of the report.

Due regard was given to the financial and value for money considerations, risk assessment, legal implications and the Equalities Impact Assessment [Annex 4]. There was robust and detailed discussion on a number of areas including the impact on communities and parish/town councils, the operation of potential neighbourhood area committees and the importance of retaining localism and the role of elected and civic Mayors. Members expressed concern about the financial impact of local government reorganisation and the overall devolution timetable. Many of these issues would be for the new unitary authority to finalise but the need for a balanced approach to ensure financial stability was emphasised.

In recognition that the Borough Council had to submit a response to Government by 28 November 2025 and that option 3A offered the most efficient and least disruptive multi-unitary option for Kent, enabled long-term financial sustainability and reflected the position previously confirmed by Tonbridge and Malling at the interim submission to Government in March 2025, Cllr Oakley proposed, seconded by Cllr King and the majority of the Committee

RECOMMENDED*: That

- (1) the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the draft proposals for Local Government Reorganisation, be noted; and
- (2) based on the evidence set out in the business case (Annex 3), the 3 unitary model, Option 3a be submitted to the Government by the deadline of 28 November 2025 as the Borough Council's preferred option for Local Government Reorganisation.

***Recommended to Cabinet**

[In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 8.6, Cllrs Athwal, Cope and Hood asked that their vote against recommendation (2) be recorded in the Minutes.]

OS 25/58 ANNUAL SERVICE DELIVERY PLAN QUARTER 2 (2025/26) REPORTING

Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Executive and an update on the Annual Service Delivery Plan (ASDP) 2025/26, attached at Annex 1, which provided data on the performance of the Borough Council during Quarter 2 of 2025/26 in relation to the milestones and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) as set out in the ASDP 2025/26.

An overview of performance relating to the key activities in the ASDP for the period up to the end of September 2025 was set out in 5.1 of the report and an overview of status of the KPIs within the ASDP 2025/26 as of the end of Quarter 2 (end of September 2025) was set out in 6.1 of the report.

Members welcomed the positive progress made on the activities and KPIs RAG-rated Green while recognising further improvement works required for those currently rated Red, including the reasons behind the under-performance and mitigations being investigated to address the impacted areas, with particular reference made to CO2 emissions through council assets and activities and affordable housing. With regards to Private Rented Sector Offers, it was explained that the impact of significantly higher rent levels in the private sector remained challenging although the Housing Service remained committed to making positive progress in this area.

RECOMMENDED*: That

- (1) appreciation be recorded for the overall progress made during Quarter 2;
- (2) appreciation be recorded for the achievements made during Quarter 2; and
- (3) the areas needing focus be noted.

***Recommended to Cabinet**

MATTERS FOR INFORMATION

OS 25/59 OUTSIDE BODY UPDATE - WEST KENT HEALTH INTEGRATED CARE PARTNERSHIP ELECTED MEMBERS FORUM

The Borough Council's outside body representative to the West Kent Health Integrated Care Partnership (HCP) Elected Members Forum (Cllr Tanner) advised that the organisation brought together providers of

health and care including hospitals, community and mental health care providers, GPs, community and voluntary groups and social care to plan and deliver services for the people of West Kent.

The Partnership was also responsible for addressing health and care challenges and inequalities in the area. It was also expected that the West Kent HCP would become responsible for many of the duties currently delivered by the NHS Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board.

Recent activity included a new diagnostic centre in Maidstone, exploring options for robotic surgery, the acquisition of a private hospital in Tunbridge Wells and a review of maternity services in East Kent. However, the Forums main role currently was looking at role of the NHS in the longer-term and how to deliver better services and outcomes on reduced funding.

OS 25/60 RECORD OF DECISIONS TAKEN BY THE EXECUTIVE

The decisions taken by the Cabinet and Cabinet Members during September and October 2025 were presented for information and noted by the Committee.

OS 25/61 NOTICE OF FORTHCOMING KEY DECISIONS

The Notice setting out the Key Decisions anticipated to be taken during the period November 2025 to January 2026 was noted.

Reference was made to the annual process of setting fees and charges for the forthcoming year, with particular reference made to car parking charges in Tonbridge. Whilst there were no changes proposed to car parking charges, if Members had any proposals that they wanted to be considered, the Leader asked that these be set out in advance of the budget setting cycle in January 2026 so that these could be costed up.

OS 25/62 WORK PROGRAMME

The Work Programme setting out potential matters to be scrutinised during 2025/26 was noted. Members were invited to suggest future items by liaising with the Chair of the Committee.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE

OS 25/63 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no items considered in private.

The meeting ended at 9.16 pm