

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

FINANCE, REGENERATION AND PROPERTY SCRUTINY SELECT COMMITTEE

MINUTES

Tuesday, 17th February, 2026

Present: Cllr D Harman (Chair), Cllr M R Rhodes (Vice-Chair), Cllr A G Bennison, Cllr G C Bridge (substitute), Cllr R I B Cannon, Cllr L Chapman, Cllr J Clokey, Cllr W E Palmer, Cllr B A Parry, Cllr S Pilgrim, Cllr K B Tanner and Cllr C J Williams

In Attendance: Cllrs Mrs S Bell*, R P Betts, M D Boughton*, P M Hickmott, M A J Hood, D Keers*, A Mehmet and Mrs A S Oakley* were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

(*participated via MS Teams)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors T Bishop and P Boxall

PART 1 - PUBLIC

FRP 26/1 NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Notification of substitute members were recorded as set out below:

- Cllr Bridge substitute for Cllr Bishop

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 26/2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

FRP 26/3 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the notes of the meeting of the Finance, Regeneration and Property Scrutiny Select Committee held on 16 September 2025 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

MATTERS SUBMITTED FOR INFORMATION

**FRP 26/4 CABINET MEMBER REPORT - INFRASTRUCTURE AND
TONBRIDGE REGENERATION**

The Cabinet Member for Infrastructure and Tonbridge Regeneration provided an overview of activities undertaken over the past 12 months and set out the plan for delivery in the coming year.

Members welcomed the approach taken to encourage all infrastructure providers to respond to the Local Plan Consultation, supported the concerns raised with South East Water about their ability to meet the demands of new development and ensuring sufficient water supply; noted ongoing discussions with the Integrated Care Board to secure improved delivery of health facilities in the Borough and noted the commencement of officer level meetings with KCC Highways to review the specification for highways work so it adequately responded to concerns raised by communities.

With regard to Tonbridge regeneration, good progress continued to be made on the East of the High Street Masterplan and public engagement on the Angel Centre replacement was currently taking place in advance of a planning application being submitted. It was indicated that, whilst the replacement of the Angel Centre was the first step in the wider regeneration proposals for Tonbridge, the East of the High Street Masterplan would continue to be monitored to assess financial viability.

**FRP 26/5 CABINET MEMBER REPORT - ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND
PROPERTY**

Members were provided with an overview of the economic development and property-related activities undertaken over the past 12 months and the plan for delivery for the coming year was noted.

Particular reference was made to successful Shopfront and Vacant Unit Improvement, Green Business and West Kent Rural Grant Schemes which supported local communities and businesses.

A wide range of activities supporting the Borough Council's Corporate Strategy had been progressed and included renewables and energy efficiency measures at the leisure facilities; consolidation of the offices in Gibson Building East and the provision of directly owned temporary accommodation. Members were pleased to note that planning permission for a modular housing scheme at Blue Bell Hill for use as temporary accommodation had been granted.

Finally, the challenge in identifying further carbon offset and energy efficiency measures for the medium/long-term were recognised, although a number of options continued to be explored.

FRP 26/6 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

The report of the Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer provided details of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) which supported the budget for 2026/27 and covered the period from April 2026 to March 2036.

Members were pleased to note that the savings target of £600,000 set by Council in February 2025 had been exceeded. In addition, the reductions in expenditure and increased income had been reflected in the 2026/27 estimates, as detailed in 5.2 of the report. Details arising from the Fair Funding Review and Business Rates Reset provisionally announced in December 2025 had also been incorporated into the budget.

The budget proposal to Council allowed for a Band D Council Tax of £252.65 and a total Borough precept of £13,812,921.

Particular reference was made to the final MTFS Projection for 2026/27 which showed that a balanced position was achieved in year 10, with a contribution to the General Revenue Reserve of £318,00 and General Revenue Reserve balance of £4.8m in 2023/26 and meeting the objectives set in paragraph 3.5

To achieve these results a zero-funding gap had been identified and it was decided that a Savings and Transformation Strategy would not be produced for 2026/27, although this could be revisited if the financial position changed.

Members were advised that the final local government finance settlement had been confirmed. Whilst there was no fundamental impact on the proposed budget for 2026/27, there would be a reduction of £173,000 in 2027/28 resulting in a change to the General Revenue Reserve which would reduce to £4.6M (from £4.8M).

Finally, a number of assumptions had been made in completing the MTFS and detailed explanations provided in 6.1 – 6.31 of the report were noted. However, these included council tax increases, inflation rates, local government reorganisation, the replacement Angel Centre and the Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing Contract.

FRP 26/7 TONBRIDGE SWIMMING POOL BOILER REPLACEMENT

The report provided information on efforts to replace the end-of-life gas boilers at Tonbridge Swimming Pool.

Design engineers had conducted a feasibility study on a range of options, all of which included to a greater or lesser extent air or ground source heat pumps. The capital expenditure and estimated impact on

running costs was also estimated and a summary of the options was provided at 6.1 of the report.

Due to the considerable costs associated with all of the options outlined in the report, the fact that these would need to be funded by the Borough Council and that the boilers needed to be replaced to avoid potential significant disruption and a loss of income claim from the Leisure Trust, it was recognised that a scheme to replace the end-of-life boilers on a like for like basis represented best value for money.

Members expressed disappointment that efforts to decarbonise the building were not financially viable but acknowledged that modern technology would be more efficient than the now 30-year-old current boilers. It was noted that newer technologies would result in reduced gas usage, lower cost and CO2 emissions and an increased efficiency of around 20-30% could potentially be achieved with modern boilers operating at over 90%. Details of the carbon reduction expected for the new high-efficiency gas boilers would be clarified once the specification was known.

Finally, it was recognised that including energy efficient measures in a newly designed facility, such as the replacement Angel Centre, was simpler than trying to retrofit an older building constrained by space.

FRP 26/8 WORK PROGRAMME 2026

The Work Programme setting out matters to be scrutinised during the next year was attached for information. Members were invited to suggest matters for 2026/27 by liaison with the Chair of the Committee and the Scrutiny Officer.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE

FRP 26/9 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no items considered in private.

The meeting ended at 8.40 pm