

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 11th March, 2026

Present: Cllr M R Rhodes (Chair), Cllr A McDermott (Vice-Chair), Cllr B Banks, Cllr K Barton, Cllr J Clokey, Cllr D A S Davis, Cllr B A Parry, Cllr R V Roud, Cllr K B Tanner and Cllr R P Betts (substitute).

An apology for absence was received from Councillor L Chapman.

PART 1 - PUBLIC

GP 26/1 NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Notification of a substitute member was recorded as set out below:

- Councillor R Betts substituted for Councillor L Chapman

In accordance with Council Procedure Rules 17.5 to 17.9 this Councillor had the same rights as the ordinary member of the committee for whom they were substituting.

GP 26/2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

GP 26/3 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting of the General Purposes Committee held on 21 January 2026 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

MATTERS FOR DECISION UNDER DELEGATED POWERS

GP 26/4 STANSTED PARISH COUNCIL COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW

The report of the Chief Executive set out a request received from Stansted Parish Council for a Community Governance Review to consider increasing the number of Parish Councillors from seven to nine. The request, appended as Annex 1 to the report, followed a resolution of the Parish Council and referred to increasing workloads, use of committees and succession planning as key reasons for seeking additional Councillor capacity. The electorate of Stansted Parish Council as at 2 March 2026 was recorded as 452.

The Committee noted that Community Governance Reviews were undertaken in accordance with the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and the Local Government Act 1972, and that the General Purposes Committee had delegated authority to determine whether such a review should be undertaken. Reference was made to national guidance and to the Aston Business School model for parish representation, which indicated that for a parish with an electorate of fewer than 500 electors an optimum council size would normally be between five and eight Councillors.

Comparative information on Parish Councillor numbers elsewhere in the Borough was provided in Annex 2 to the report. The Committee had regard to the fact that all seats on Stansted Parish Council were filled at the last parish elections and to the explanations given by the Parish Council.

Members considered the proposed timetable and methodology for the Community Governance Review, including publication of Terms of Reference, an initial consultation with residents and stakeholders, the preparation and publication of draft recommendations and the formulation of final recommendations with a view to implementation at the Parish Council elections in May 2027. The consultation arrangements set out in paragraph 5.1 of the report included the use of an online survey, letters to electors, direct communication with stakeholders, press releases, social media, local publicity and the availability of paper copies in the locality.

The financial implications were noted, with the £600 cost of the consultation exercise, to be funded from the General Revenue Reserve.

The Chair proposed, seconded by Councillor McDermott (Vice-Chair) and the Committee unanimously

RESOLVED: That

- (1) a Community Governance Review be undertaken to ascertain whether residents of Stansted wished for the number of Parish Councillors to be increased from seven to nine;
- (2) the budget of £600, funded from the General Revenue Reserve, be approved;
- (3) the draft timetable, as set out in Annex 3, be approved;
- (4) the Terms of Reference, as set out in Annex 4, be approved; and
- (5) the consultation process as set out in paragraph 5.1, be approved.

MATTERS SUBMITTED FOR INFORMATION**GP 26/5 GENDER PAY GAP REPORT 2025**

The report of the Director of Central Services and Deputy Chief Executive summarised the legislative context of gender pay gap reporting and incorporated the outcomes of the Borough Council's gender pay gap analysis for 2024-25. The Committee noted that the Council was required to publish annual gender pay gap data in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017 and that the latest data would be published on the Council's website by 30 March 2026.

Over the past twelve months, both the mean and median gender pay gaps had decreased by 0.02% and 0.41% respectively, when compared to the previous year. Despite these marginal improvements, the overall gender pay gap had largely remained unchanged. It was noteworthy, however, that there had been an increase in the proportion of male employees within the upper quartile.

The analysis suggested that the extent of the gender pay gap was primarily attributable to the lower number of men occupying the lowest graded positions within the Council. Furthermore, several council services were contracted out, and these roles, often lower graded, were predominantly filled by men. This arrangement might contribute to the Council's gender pay gap being higher than that observed in comparable councils across Kent.

Members questioned the extent to which the Borough Council's decision to align the Real Living Wage to the lowest spinal column point in 2025 might influence future gender pay gap figures. Officers clarified that the published figures related to the workforce position as at 31 March 2025 and therefore preceded the period in which the Council's lowest spinal column point was temporarily aligned with the Real Living Wage, and that any impact of that decision would be reflected in subsequent reporting years.

Members expressed differing views on the value of the gender pay gap. Some Members commented that, provided that the role attracted appropriate remuneration and recruitment was based on merit, the headline figures were of limited relevance, whilst other Members emphasised the importance of monitoring the gender pay gap as a means of identifying structural barriers and informing actions such as flexible working arrangements, menopause support and wider equality initiatives.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE**GP 26/6 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

The Chairman moved, it was seconded and

RESOLVED: That as public discussion would disclose exempt information, the following matters be considered in private.

PART 2 - PRIVATE**MATTERS FOR DECISION UNDER DELEGATED POWERS****GP 26/7 ESTABLISHMENT REPORT**

(Reason: LGA 1972 – Sch 12A Paragraph 2 – Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual)

The report set out for Members' approval a number of establishment changes recommended by the Borough Council's Management Team. Members noted that, in accordance with adopted conventions, all of the savings/costs referred to in the report reflected the salary at the top of scale/grade plus associated on costs.

In addition, Members noted a number of changes and updates to the Establishment since the last meeting of the Committee, as outlined in Section 5 of the report.

The Chair proposed, seconded by Councillor McDermott (Vice-Chair) and the Committee unanimously

RESOLVED: That

- (1) four full time, Housing Allocations Officer posts be permanently established from 1 April 2026 at scale 5/6;
- (2) the Parking Manager post be regraded from M8 to M7 from 12 March 2026;
- (3) the Accountancy Assistant post be regraded from scale 4 to scale 5/6, and the post title be redesignated to Finance Officer from 1 April 2026; and
- (4) the fixed term Safeguarding Officer post be permanently established at 18.5 hours per week from 1 April 2026.

The meeting ended at 7.56 pm