

TUNBRIDGE WELLS BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, duly convened and held
at the Council Chamber, Royal Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN1 1RS, at 6.30 pm
on Wednesday, 21 February 2018

PRESENT:

The Mayor Councillor Mrs Julia Soyke (Chairman)
Councillors Backhouse, Barrington-King, Dr Basu, Bland, Bulman, Chapelard,
Mrs Cobbold, Dawlings, Elliott, Hamilton, Hannam, Hastie, Heasman, Hill, Holden,
Huggett, Jukes, Lidstone, March, McDermott, Moore, Munn, Neve, Noakes, Nuttall,
Oakford, Podbury, Rankin, Reilly, Scholes, Simmons, Sloan, Stanyer, Stewart,
Mrs Thomas, Uddin, Weatherly, Williams and Woodward

IN ATTENDANCE: William Benson (Chief Executive), Patricia Narebor (Head of Legal Partnership) and Mathew Jefferys (Democratic Services and Elections Manager)

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

FC54/17 No declarations of pecuniary or significant other interest were made.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

FC55/17 Apologies were received from Councillors Dr Hall, Hills, Horwood, Jamil and Ms Palmer.

Councillors Gray and Lewis-Grey were not present.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

FC56/17 The Mayor noted that a written summary of her past and future engagements had been made available to Members

The Mayor invited members of The Kent College Gymnastics Academy to give a short display.

Councillor Jukes, as a follow up to his announcement at the meeting of Full Council on 6 December 2017 that Councillor Scholes would be the Mayor for the year 2019/20, described Councillor Scholes's experience, achievements and suitability for the role.

Councillor March announced arrangements for International Women's Day on 8 March 2018. She said that there would be a march from The Pantiles to the Town Hall and that the Mayor had invited people to come to the Council Chamber from 4.45pm until 6pm where a reception with inspirational women speakers would be held. Councillor March said that this was a non-political event and one of a number of commemorations being held across Royal Tunbridge Wells on this significant day. She added that entry to the Council Chamber would be by ticket on a first come first served basis.

There were no announcements by the Chief Executive.

THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

FC57/17 **RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the meetings dated 6 December 2017 be approved as a correct record.

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

FC58/17 The Mayor advised that there were four questions pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 8.

1. Question from Dr Robert Chris

“The response to many of the public comments on the consultation on the draft Civic Development Framework (CDF) was, where they referred specifically to the proposed civic development, that they were “not directly related to the purposes of the draft document, its structure, form and content.” They were referred to the civic development project team but ignored for the purposes of the draft CDF. Please identify where in the draft CDF or in the instructions available to the public about how to respond to the consultation, it was made clear for the benefit of prospective respondents:

- a) that comments must be “directly related to the purposes of the draft document, its structure, form and content” (“the criteria”);
- b) how the criteria would be interpreted.

Given that the draft CDF is concerned only with those sites affected by the proposed civic complex development, and that none of the many objections to the proposed civic development was treated as falling within the criteria:

- c) is this not sufficient empirical evidence to conclude that the consultation was significantly misleading and should be declared void and rerun with clearer instructions for the public on how to frame their responses so as to fall within the criteria?”

Answer from Councillor McDermott

“In carrying out the public consultation on the draft Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) it was made clear both on the consultation website portal and the paper response form that this was a consultation on the draft SPD document itself.

The relevant portal page referred to the consultation being in respect of a draft Civic Development Planning Framework SPD and referenced the relevant planning regulations. The same page gave details of a drop in session when officers would be available to answer questions regarding the consultation and draft document.

The relevant paper response form also identified the document the subject of the consultation and stated: this response form should be used to make comments on the draft Civic Development Planning Framework SPD. It was clear therefore what the subject of the consultation was and on what basis representations were invited.

The consultation invited responses to five questions on the document, four of which were on specific elements of the draft document and one of which was for any other comments. No criteria were set to exclude representations

however as with all consultations on specific subjects, in this case the draft SPD document, it is to be expected that representations made will be related and relevant to the subject itself and not to other matters.

It is not correct to state that the draft SPD document is concerned only with those sites affected by the proposed civic complex development. The document identifies a number of key sites in the town centre and gives commentary and guidance on each. Two of the sites relate to the proposed civic offices and new theatre.

The consultation was not misleading and is not void. All representations received were considered and reported, with an appendix to the reports setting out the representations in full. Where relevant and appropriate, revisions have been made to the draft document again set out in the reports."

Supplementary question from Dr Robert Chris

"Public don't seem to share that view. Will the Council now follow best practice from other council's around the country by providing comprehensive online guidance notes to those wishing to comment on planning applications and other forms of public consultation so that members of the public without specialist knowledge are better able to respond in ways that are likely to ensure their concerns are taken in to account?"

Answer from Councillor McDermott

"I have no idea, therefore I will write to you."

2. Question from Dr Robert Chris

"The draft Civic Development Framework states (Section 3.1) "The overall framework for the area has emerged in response to the Council's decision to relocate the theatre and council offices." Please explain how this does not amount to predetermination, rendering the entire consultation worthless."

Answer from Councillor McDermott

"The preparation of a Framework Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) was initiated and progressed having regard to previous criticism that key sites in the town centre were not being considered in a holistic way and that there was a lack of guidance to help shape development proposals that may come forward especially in respect of key listed buildings.

Contrary to some public comments the draft Framework SPD is not a policy making or site allocation document. The relevant local planning policies and allocations are set out in the Core Strategy and Site Allocations Plan.

In preparing the draft SPD the objective has been to achieve the right balance between acknowledging the existence of the civic project and what those proposals involve whilst at the same time providing guidance in a way that does not presume the outcome of any proposals, on any site, that are presented as planning applications.

As always it remains the case that any planning applications will be considered and determined on individual merit having appropriate regard to the weight of the adopted Development Plan policies and allocations."

Supplementary question from Dr Robert Chris

“Of the fourteen members of the Planning Committee on the 6 December, nine of them voted in favour of this development, one abstained and four voted against. Will Councillor Jukes ensure that in order to avoid any possible taint of pre-determination, that balance will be established in this committee by requiring five of those voting in favour of the proposals to not take part in the committees decision making on the Civic Complex development?”

Answer from Councillor McDermott

“Everyone on the Planning Committee makes there own decision. Everyone comes to a decision by listening to all the facts and all of them do not have predetermination already there when they come into the meeting. They listen, they listen to the facts and they make the decision from the facts. Unfortunately in this case for you the facts are nine were for it and four were against, I am sorry that’s the way it goes.”

3. Question from Dr Robert Chris

“The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) report on the Civic Complex Development states that the project does not provide value for money. “The scheme does not pass a financial value for money test in that the new income and charges will not cover the cost of the loan”. Does Councillor Jukes consider that the Portfolio Holder for Civic Development Communications has misrepresented this report in her public utterances by not referring to this concern, or is it his opinion that delivering value for money on a £90m project is not a priority for the Council and not something the public need be concerned about?”

Answer from Councillor Jukes

“The Portfolio Holder for Civic Development Communications has not misrepresented the report in public comments that she has given regarding the project. Indeed I would thank her for her contributions on behalf of the Council to provide clarity regarding the aims and objectives of the Civic Development.

The CIPFA report was published in full in the Full Council reports on the Civic Development so the view of CIPFA in its entirety is available for all members of the public to see. The CIPFA team were impressed by the Council and many aspects of our approach to the project, in particular:

- Vision;
- Ownership/Commitment;
- The retained architects, GVA are of high quality and are supplemented by an experienced in-house team;
- The quality and thoroughness of pre-tender work on delivering the build;
- Savings strategy – appears deliverable;
- Prudent financial planning approach; and
- The involvement and approach of the Director of Finance, Policy and Development.

As CIPFA state, the development overall is a place shaping cultural investment. I would however correct you as the CIPFA report actually states regarding value for money (in paragraph 8.1) “from a more narrow view of ‘economy’ ”.

Fortunately I and my colleagues view value for money in the wider contribution of cultural and business facilities for Tunbridge Wells, its people and its businesses as well as considering if it is the right thing for the Council to do. As a result we wish to ensure for this and future generations that Tunbridge Wells continues to be a visitor destination, benefit from top quality cultural facilities into the future, provide new business space with a development contributing to the wider economy and meet the demands of growth being placed on us.”

Supplementary question from Dr Robert Chris

“Value for money is a requirement placed on the Council by the government and it requires evidence based decision making. Could Councillor Jukes tell us where we can find the missing objective factual data that demonstrates that the proposed expenditure in preparation for the building of a 1200 seat receiving theatre with fixed format 19 century style auditorium is integral to the optimum needs of making Tunbridge Wells nationally recognised for its vibrant cultural provision by 2024.

When he answers this question, I ask him to be very careful about how he answers. I am not asking about evidence that the proposed theatre is feasible or that it would make some contribution to the cultural life of the borough. Value for money requires him to show that it is the optimal way of realising the cultural vision.”

Answer from Councillor Jukes

“Article 124 Local Government Act 1974 demands that this Council produces value for money. That is what we will achieve.”

4. Question from Dr Robert Chris

“I apologise to everyone here tonight for seeming a bit down but as Madam Mayor knows I had a bad reaction to my chemotherapy at 3 in the morning, and had planned to stay in bed all day but as a result of her intervention later today in refusing to allow me to appoint an alternate to ask these questions I had to turn out of my sick bed to come and do this. Madam Mayor, I am not sure who's interests you think you were serving by this arbitrary exercise of power but in the absence of a compelling explanation, shame on you.

In Hoopers’ lawyers’ objection to the planning application for the proposed civic complex, they note that statements in both the application and in the draft Civic Development Framework to the effect that the Council has engaged with key stakeholders is not true in that there has been no such engagement with Hoopers. This statement is at odds with assurances from Councillor Moore when asked about the progress of discussions concerning access to Hoopers car park when she has repeatedly said that “negotiations are ongoing”.

Would she tell us whether:

- a) Hoopers and their lawyers are being economical with the truth; or
- b) She has been economical with the truth; or
- c) She has been relying on others within the Council who have misinformed her.

In the event of c), please can she tell us who in the Council has repeatedly misinformed her.”

Answer from Councillor Moore

“First of all, Robert, you were told by this Council that we would reply to your questions in writing and that the responses to your questions would appear in the minutes if you were unable to attend. Furthermore, you asked for special parking space out-front and we provided that for you, so we have tried to accommodate you this evening.

Before I reply to these questions let the record show that I am really disappointed that the debate is being conducted in these terms. Your written submission of questions to us actually accuse me of lying, tonight you used the words “economical with the truth”. I do understand that there are different points of view but it is wholly inappropriate to make these kinds of allegations.

We have seen this kind of emotive and abusive discourse in public life at national level and frankly I am disappointed to see this now in our town. We can debate the facts and evidence without descending into deliberately personal and provocative attacks. It is disappointing to see the debate conducting in these terms.. You may have legitimate points to make but let us debate the issues. Of course I haven't lied.

As regards the first allegation (a) being made the Council is not in the position to comment on statements made by third parties regarding their commercial position.

As regards the second allegation (b), appropriate discussions have been held and will continue to be held with relevant parties in relation to site assembly. As such, the reference to the Portfolio Holder lying is inaccurate.

And as regards the third point, please note my response to the first two parts (a) and (b). The allegation is inaccurate.

You are entitled to your own opinion but not to your own facts.”

Supplementary question from Dr Robert Chris

“Councillor Moore I think you are being hypersensitive I wasn't accusing you of lying I was asking you a question.

Hoopers, Metro Property, BBC and Sainsbury's – the four businesses most affected by the proposal – say there has never been any engagement with any of them that amounts to a negotiation because none of the businesses has entered into a dialogue with the Council about delivering a shared objective.

Where has the misinformation about the non existent negotiation come from, the public and your fellow councillors deserve to know?”

Answer from Councillor Moore

“Let the record show that actually I find accusing me of being oversensitive yet another example of your misogyny. You are a bully and I am not threatened. I have not lied to the public and I am not lying to the council tonight.”

Dr Robert Chris objected to the accusation of misogyny. He added that he thought it was totally and utterly out of order and he would have made the same comments whatever gender Councillor Moore was.

Councillor Holden interjected to note that there was no formal concept of parliamentary language within the Constitution but he thought that the Council should have a sense of it and that this question in its written form should not have been allowed. He welcomed members of the public attending the meetings but urged the Mayor to rule out of order members of the public that put questions in those terms and engaged in a political discourse of a quite insulting kind.

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

FC59/17 The Mayor advised that there were seven questions pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 10.

1. Question from Councillor Munn

“The Council has committed to resettling ten households under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme between 2015 and 2020 and has so far accepted seven households. Has the Council considered committing itself to more than ten households as there has not been a conclusion to hostilities?”

Answer from Councillor Weatherly

“The Housing team has not considered assisting more than 10 Syrian refugee households before 2020 for two reasons:

1) We continue to see a high number of people approaching the Council because they are facing homelessness or are sleeping rough, this will increase in April 2018 with the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act. We also have around 1,000 households on our Housing Register who are waiting for an affordable housing association home. We have to balance the needs of those households alongside Syrian families.

2) The limited availability of privately rented accommodation – we use this kind of housing for our refugee families, so as not to increase demand on the housing stock – is unfortunately becoming increasingly difficult to secure in Tunbridge Wells and in other parts of the Borough.

Taking account of those factors, we feel that our offer to help 10 Syrian households is both reasonable and achievable.”

Supplementary question from Councillor Munn

“The officers involved in this scheme are to be applauded for their evident commitment to this scheme and to their success so far. Is there no way the council can explore an increase to the numbers being accepted?”

Answer from Councillor Weatherly

“We are not looking at this at this moment.”

2. Question from Councillor Chapelard

“With reference to the agenda for the Finance and Governance Cabinet Advisory Board of 9 January 2018, item 13: Acquisition of Properties in Royal Tunbridge Wells. Should councillors have been briefed that this work was going on before Full Council voted on item 10 at its 6 December 2017 meeting?”

Answer from Councillor Jukes

“Councillor Chapelard, thank you for the question. As you are well aware exempt report papers are published in advance with the rest of the agenda and available to elected Councillors to review. Our processes including engagement with Finance and Governance prior to Cabinet taking a decision provides adequate opportunity for Councillors to engage in the process.

As you will be well aware the Council has set up a property investment fund and the proposed purchase of the properties in question is from funding already agreed by the Council. As the report, which I remind you is commercially confidential, demonstrated the investment opportunity and Cabinet took the decision on the 1 February 2018 to progress with the investment opportunity. So the simple answer is no as the procedure followed is as per any investment opportunity within the budget already identified.”

Supplementary question from Councillor Chapelard

“Given the location of the properties in exempt item 13 of the Finance and Governance Cabinet Advisory Board on 9 January 2018 should Councillors not have been told that that work was in progress before that date?”

Answer from Councillor Jukes

“This is still a highly sensitive and confidentially commercial situation. The decision made was commercially right because it falls within the confines of the policy which has already been set down for audition of property which would give the council a good return on capital employed.”

3. Question from Councillor Lidstone

“Did Tunbridge Wells Borough Council consult current tenants of the Great Hall, such as the BBC, during the civic development proposal? If so, was their feedback included within the papers provided to Members?”

Answer from Councillor Moore

“Councillor Lidstone, thank you for the question. Yes we did meet directly with the BBC and also through our agents we have discussed the needs of the owners and tenants of the Great Hall Arcade. These negotiations are ongoing which includes car parking. You will be aware from reading the Stage 3 reports in the Members Room or from looking at the redacted Stage 3 reports that the Construction Management Plan sets out the delivery plan for the project and aims to address how any impacts associated with the proposed works will be mitigated.

The Construction Management Plan covers noise and vibration in sections 6.14 to 6.18) and air quality including dust pollution in sections 6.19 to 6.26

during the construction phases. Section 6.15 in both the Stage 3 reports and the document submitted as part of the planning application and specifically paragraph 6.15.3 highlights the BBC and the need for special measures. This paragraph even details the current broadcast schedule.

As you will be aware we have tried to provide as much information as possible to elected Councillors to ensure an informed decision could be made. And as early as the Stage 2 reports the initial Construction Management Plan (November 2016) available in the Members Room states that “Where relevant, other stakeholder imposed threshold values will also be complied with particularly in the case of buried utilities infrastructure, and vibration-sensitive equipment operating at BBC.”

So we are both keenly aware of the possible issues during construction that the BBC have raised and engaging as appropriate to address these issues.”

Supplementary question from Councillor Lidstone

“Can you give us your assurance that every effort will be made to avoid any existing businesses within The Great Hall leaving Tunbridge Wells?”

Answer from Councillor Moore

“Of course. I see my role going forward, trying to ensure we collaborate with businesses and members of the community so that we can deliver a successful project for the Borough of Tunbridge Wells.”

4. Question from Councillor Munn

“Given that unemployment in the Borough stands at only 0.9 per cent, how do you account for fact that child poverty after housing costs are included is as high as 30.85 per cent in Sherwood, 27.31 per cent in Broadwater, 24.72 percent in Hawkhurst and 20.28 per cent in Southborough and High Brooms?”

Answer from Councillor Weatherly

“The Borough is a popular place to live and work, figures quoted reflect the variation in family incomes and housing costs across the Borough. Overall, Tunbridge Wells has a very low rate of unemployment and the lowest rate of child poverty in Kent at 17.5 per cent.

One child in poverty is too many!

All agencies are working together to improve the health and wellbeing of our families in the Borough through, for example, the Local Children’s Partnership Group, the 0–25 Health and Wellbeing Board, housing advice, enabling affordable housing and a new Public Services Board that will help people into work, support people to increase levels of confidence through training and support to apply for a better paid position which in turn will increase family incomes and help reduce child poverty.”

Supplementary question from Councillor Munn

“Are you aware that this involves 397 children in my ward of Southborough and High Brooms and 494 in your Sherwood ward?”

Answer from Councillor Weatherly

"I am absolutely aware of that figure for Sherwood ward but was not aware of the figure for Southborough and High Brooms."

5. Question from Councillor Chapelard

"At a recent meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee the Portfolio Holder for Sustainability said that introducing a garden waste charge would lead to increased levels of garden waste recycling. What evidence does the Portfolio Holder have to substantiate such a claim?"

Answer from Councillor Basu

"During my Portfolio Holder update to the November meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee I explained that the new recycling and waste collection service in 2019 will improve our recycling. We will be introducing a glass collection service, collecting food waste separately and providing an opt in chargeable garden waste collection service."

Supplementary question from Councillor Chapelard

"You did specifically say that it would lead to increased levels of garden waste recycling where is the evidence for such a claim please?"

Answer from Councillor Basu

"I did listen to the recording as did a senior officer and I have just read you what I said."

6. Question from Councillor Lidstone

"The proposed A26 cycle route was put out to public consultation in late 2016, and 67 per cent of respondents were in favour of the plans, with only 24 per cent against. Why, after 15 months, have the plans gone back out to consultation?"

Answer from Councillor McDermott

"At the end of 2016, an initial consultation was undertaken on proposals to improve cycling infrastructure on the A26 between Royal Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge town centres. The response to the consultation was positive. However, a concern raised during the consultation was the lack of infrastructure proposed between Bidborough and Mabledon.

Further work has been undertaken and a second consultation is now underway on proposals for an additional phase of the route to include a shared use pedestrian/cycle facility on the eastern side of the A26 between the junction with Birchwood Avenue and Mabledon.

Consultation on the required Traffic Regulation Orders for the entire route will follow in the next few weeks. It is anticipated that work will start on Phase 1 of the route between Royal Tunbridge Wells town centre and the Speldhurst Road junction in the next few months."

Supplementary question from Councillor Lidstone

“In the initial proposals, a key part of this cycle route was the introduction of a 20 miles an hour zone in Southborough, this was a recommendation of the report however, in the latest consultation this had been removed, is this not also considered a material change from the consultation and if so why has attention not been drawn to this?”

Answer from Councillor McDermott

“I am not sure about the 20 mile per hour speed limit. If it is not there that is because it has been accepted.”

7. Question from Councillor Chapelard

“Has Tunbridge Wells Borough Council met with the bidders for the South Eastern rail franchise?”

Answer from Councillor McDermott

“At the request of the train operating companies, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) officers have met with 2 of the 3 prospective franchisees: Govia, parent company for current franchisee Southeastern; and Stagecoach.

At the meetings, TWBC outlined its priorities for the future of the franchise. These priorities had already been set out in the TWBC response to the Department for Transport’s consultation on the South Eastern Franchise, submitted last year. Many of these have been included in the final franchise specification.”

CIVIC DEVELOPMENT PLANNING FRAMEWORK SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT

FC60/17 Councillor McDermott introduced the report and moved the recommendations. He said that the new development was only part of this consultation and reminded Members that this report had been considered by the relevant Cabinet Advisory Board and the Cabinet.

Councillor Jukes seconded the motion.

Members voting against the motion: Councillors Bulman, Chapelard, Hill, Lidstone, Munn, Stewart and Williams.

RESOLVED –

1. That the consultation responses received in respect of the draft Civic Development Planning Framework Supplementary Planning Document be noted and published;
2. That the draft Civic Development Planning Framework Supplementary Planning Document be further updated by the revisions set out in Appendix A; and
3. That the revised draft Civic Development Planning Framework Supplementary Planning Document, as amended above, be approved and adopted to inform decision making, as a material planning consideration, in regard to planning applications.

ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN 2018/19

FC61/17 Councillor Jukes introduced the report and moved the recommendations. He commented that the annual housekeeping report was a positive one and congratulated the staff on the excellent job they were doing with the properties. He advised that the Council was making a surplus on its property management and that this was indicative of the policy started about five or six years ago. He added that The Draft Asset Management Plan was subject to public consultation from 8 December 2017 to 18 January 2018 and that no comments were received from the public during this consultation period.

Councillor McDermott seconded the motion.

Councillor Rankin said that there had been an issue with a council owned property in her Park ward which was not being maintained properly. She asked the appropriate department if they would paint and make good and they did so very promptly. She felt that in terms of asset management the council was responsibly dealing with properties and hoped that this would continue to be the case.

Councillor Williams said on Item 282 (page 248) Land Opposite 283 Upper Grosvenor Road Royal Tunbridge Wells Kent TN4 9EX that the removal of rubbish was promptly and efficiently dealt with by the council but that the proliferation of rats had not yet been concluded. He added that given the public health concerns he would be grateful for some comment from the Portfolio Holder on this public health nuisance.

Councillor Neve asked for written officer clarification on two items:

- 144 (page 227) Pavilion Grosvenor Recreation Ground Upper Grosvenor Road Royal Tunbridge Wells Kent TN1 2JB described as a Semi Derelict Corrugated Metal Shed. Councillor Neve said that the pavilion in that area had just been re-developed and certainly was not derelict.
- 154 (page 228) Changing Rooms Hilbert Recreation Ground Hilbert Road Royal Tunbridge Wells Kent TN1 Recreation described as a Detached Single Storey Building. Councillor Neve said that it was an Oast House.

Councillor Lidstone followed up Councillor Williams' point about the land at Upper Grosvenor Road. He said that the Council was repeating the cycle of clearing it up, putting fences up only for them to be knocked down and that there were rats. He felt that the council should be looking at this site as a priority.

RESOLVED –

1. That completion of the formal public consultation and results on the Draft Asset Management Plan 2018/19 be noted; and
2. That the Asset Management Plan 2018/19 be adopted.

BUDGET 2018/19 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY UPDATE

FC62/17 The Mayor exercised her discretion under Council Procedure Rules 13.4.2 and 13.4.4 to allow the mover of the motion and the group leaders to speak for more than ten minutes on this item, if they so wished.

Councillor Reilly introduced the report and moved the recommendations. He explained that the decisions about 2018/19 council budgets were being made in one of the most unstable political and economic environments experienced in recent times.

He continued that in the context of the widening gap between funding and demand, three significant funding pressures had been of concern to the council in setting the budget. They were general inflation in the cost of goods and services used by this council in delivering its services, additional unfunded legislative requirements and pressures arising from demographic change and consequent demand for service provision.

Councillor Reilly confirmed that the budget for the council was balanced for 2018/19 with no major reductions to frontline services and no use of the general reserve fund. This, he said, was despite a further reduction in the Revenue Support Grant of £202,000 to zero and a cut in government funding for New Homes Bonus of £302,000. The Council tax would increase by £4.98 for the whole year (i.e. 41 pence a month).

Councillor Reilly concluded that Cabinet had approved the draft budget for wider consultation on 6 December 2017 and that the report had been widely consulted on with presentations being made to groups representing communities in both the town and rural parts of the Borough.

Councillor Scholes seconded the motion and reserved his right to speak.

Councillor Williams sought to raise a Point of Information in respect of Councillor Reilly's introduction. William Benson, Chief Executive, said that there was no such thing as a point of information. He advised Councillor Williams that if there was something he wanted to elicit then he should include it in his contribution to the debate.

Councillor Hill, on behalf of the Labour group, thanked Lee Colyer, Director of Finance, Policy and Development, for his tireless efforts and professionalism in preparing and explaining the budget during a time of austerity and cuts to local government revenue but said that they would not be supporting it. She felt that by embarking on an expensive and extravagant £90 million building project the Council was focussing on the wrong priorities and not addressing the daily concerns of residents in towns and villages across the Borough.

Councillor Chapelard, on behalf of the Liberal Democrat group thanked Mr Colyer and the finance team. He welcomed the attempt to provide a balanced but said a properly balanced budget did not use reserves for capital projects. He warned members that the Council was using its reserves to pay for its day to day maintenance and at some point those reserves will run out and he asked what then? Councillor Chapelard also raised concerns that the council was using section 106 money to do routine maintenance to facilities rather than building much needed infrastructure. He concluded that he wished the council would address resident's priorities such as congestion, illegal levels of air pollution, improving infrastructure rather than on the civic development.

Councillor Holden was unimpressed by the opposition's offerings and commended the budget.

Councillor Backhouse reminded members that Councillor Reilly had said that front line services would not be cut.

Councillor Williams commented that 80 per cent of Councils doubted their financial stability and wondered whether Tunbridge Wells was one of them. He proposed an amendment to recommendation 1 with a view to expressly rule out a charge for green waste collection. William Benson, Chief Executive, advised that it would not be a valid amendment as it would have the effect of negating the motion, it would also have the effect of unbalancing the budget and the removal of one part must be accompanied by a commensurate change elsewhere. He invited Councillor Williams to revise the form of the amendment.

Councillor Scholes raised a point of order in that the green waste services did not form part of the 2018/19 budget and so could not be removed. Councillor Williams commented that the new service was due to be implemented with the new waste contract in March 2019. Mr Benson advised that as the service was not included in the report the amendment was not valid. He added that the procurement of the green waste service had not yet been undertaken and there would be a future opportunity to consider any such service as the procurement of the new contract would be subject to the Council's normal decision making processes.

Councillor Williams sought to clarify the particular decision making process as he believed that this was the last opportunity for the Full Council to influence the decision. Mr Benson, having consulted with the Monitoring Officer, advised that the proposed amendment was not pertinent to the business at hand. Councillor Williams commented that if the green waste service was not considered part of the forthcoming year's budget it must at least be relevant to the Medium Term Financial Strategy which formed part of the agenda item. The Monitoring Officer offered to provide further clarification following the meeting however the advice to the Mayor stood. The Mayor invited Councillor Williams to move on.

Councillor Williams wished to yield to allow Councillor Hannam to speak. The Mayor advised that this was not correct and he should continue with or conclude his speech.

Councillor Stewart queried the robustness of the medium term financial strategy and the figures for the increased share in business rates growth.

Councillor Barrington-King thought that this was one of the finest micro budgets he had witnessed especially in these adverse times.

Councillor Hannam asked that a member of the Cabinet would repeat the commitment made by the Leader and other members of the Cabinet in committee, that there would be a vote in Full Council on the imposition of charges on garden waste.

Councillor Bulman felt budget was like 'a Curates egg', good in parts. He suggested it was a short term budget for a short term situation, that it did aim to balance all the income and expenditure but questioned whether it went far enough and what provision the Council was making for the medium to long term.

Councillor Neve asked for each recommendation to be taken individually.

Councillor Scholes thought the budget was as good as the Council could do and advised that it was very difficult to do long term planning with all the short term changes that come from central government. He commended the budget as there were no cuts to major services.

In summing up Councillor Reilly addressed some of the points that had been raised during the debate. He confirmed that:

- the impact of waste contracts did not hit the financials until 2020/21;
- that there were no cuts to grants next year;
- that the increased share in business rates growth was not in the budget for next year; and
- negative support grants were coming to the end of a 4 year cycle and the council was waiting for a steer from the Secretary of State going forward.

The Mayor said that she had not heard anything within the debate that led her to believe that there was a need to disaggregate the recommendations and Councillor Neve did not provide a justification for this in his speech so she would take recommendations on page 249 en bloc.

Members voting in favour of the motion: The Mayor (Councillor Mrs Soyke), Councillors Backhouse, Barrington-King, Dr Basu, Bland, Mrs Cobbold, Dawlings, Elliott, Hamilton, Hannam, Hastie, Heasman, Holden, Huggett, Jukes, Mackonochie, March, McDermott, Moore, Neve, Noakes, Nuttall, Oakford, Podbury, Rankin, Reilly, Scholes, Simmons, Sloan, Stanyer, Mrs Thomas, Uddin, Weatherly and Woodward. (34)

Members voting against the motion: Councillors Chapelard, Hill and Munn. (3)

Members abstaining from voting: Councillors Bulman, Lidstone, Stewart and Williams. (4)

RESOLVED –

1. That Council approves the changes to the base budget along with the assumptions and approach set out throughout the report;
2. That Council approves the responses to the budget consultation in Appendix C;
3. That Council approves the rolling forward of the capital programme including net reserve based funding of £442,000 for new schemes listed within the report;
4. That Council approves the 2018/19 Pay Policy Statement set out in Appendix E; and
5. That Council approves an increase in the 'Basic Amount' of Council Tax of £4.98 for a Band D property.

COUNCIL TAX 2018/19

FC63/17 Councillor Reilly introduced the report and moved the recommendations. He explained that the purpose of this report was to enable the council to calculate the council tax for 2018/19. So following agreement to the 2018/19 budget reports an increase of £4.98 which is 3 per cent on the Borough Council's basic amount of council tax at Band B for 2018/19 was recommended. This would enable a balanced budget to be set.

Councillor Scholes seconded the motion and reserved his right to speak.

Councillor Lidstone commented that he was surprised to read on the 19 February 2018 that Kent County Council met on 20 February 2018 and had set their precept at £56 million. Councillor Lidstone asked to be assured that this was merely a typo in the report and that the decision on KCC precept was not pre determined.

In accordance with the relevant legislation regarding Full Council decisions on the setting of the council tax, a recorded vote was taken on the recommendations.

Members voting in favour of the motion: The Mayor (Councillor Mrs Soyke), Councillors Backhouse, Barrington-King, Dr Basu, Bland, Bulman, Mrs Cobbold, Dawlings, Elliott, Hamilton, Hannam, Hastie, Heasman, Hill, Holden, Huggett, Jukes, Lidstone, Mackonochie, March, McDermott, Moore, Munn, Neve, Noakes, Nuttall, Oakford, Podbury, Rankin, Reilly, Scholes, Simmons, Sloan, Stanyer, Stewart, Mrs Thomas, Uddin, Weatherly, Williams and Woodward. (40)

Members voting against the motion: Councillor Chapelard. (1)

RESOLVED – The detailed resolution is set out in the attached annexe.

TREASURY MANAGEMENT POLICY AND STRATEGY 2018/19

FC64/17 Councillor Reilly introduced the report and moved the recommendations. He explained that the report set out the authority's policies for managing investments and borrowing and he drew particular attention to:

- The Council's aims to achieve the optimum return on its investments commensurate with proper levels of scrutiny and liquidity.
- The risk appetite of this council was low in order to give priority to security of its investments.
- At its meeting of 6 December 2017 Full Council approved an amendment of the Treasury Management Policy and Strategy to increase the authorised limit for external debt and the operational boundary for external debt by £77 million to fund the new Civic Complex and theatre.
- This amendment has been reflected within the 2018/19 Treasury Management Policy and Strategy and both the Authorised Limit for External Debt and Operational Boundary for External Debt have been increased from £20 million to £97 million.
- The report had been supported by the Finance and Governance Cabinet Advisory Board on 9 January 2018.

Councillor Sloan seconded the motion and reserved his right to speak.

Councillor Stewart said that she would not be supporting this motion, as she did not support the project that the money would be going to finance and she thought it was irresponsible. She added that she was horrified that the authorised debt has been increased to £97 million and commented that if the risk appetite of the council was low, she could not imagine where the limit would be if the council had a medium appetite for risk.

Councillor Sloan endorsed the rigor applied by the Council in developing the treasury policy as well as the safeguards that were inherent in the strategy and its implementation.

Members voting against the motion: Councillors Bulman, Chapelard, Hannam, Hill, Lidstone, Munn, Stewart and Williams.

RESOLVED – That the Treasury Management Policy and Strategy 2018/19 be adopted.

URGENT BUSINESS

FC65/17 The Mayor confirmed there was no urgent business to consider within the provisions of Council Meetings Procedure 2.1.12.

COMMON SEAL OF THE COUNCIL

FC66/17 **RESOLVED** – That the Common Seal of the Council be affixed to any contract, minute, notice or other document arising out of the minutes or pursuant to any delegation, authority or power conferred by the Council.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

FC67/17 It was noted that the next meeting of the Full Council would take place on Wednesday 25 April 2018 at 6.30pm.

NOTE: The meeting concluded at 8.40 pm.