

TUNBRIDGE WELLS BOROUGH COUNCIL

FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE CABINET ADVISORY BOARD

MINUTES of the meeting held at the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Royal Tunbridge Wells, TN1 1RS, at 6.30 pm on Tuesday, 16 November 2021

Present: Councillor Tom Dawlings (Chairman)
Councillors Scott (Vice-Chairman), Holden, Simmons, Chapelard, Hickey, Goodship, Scholes and Knight

Officers in Attendance: Jane Fineman (Head of Finance and Procurement), Jane Clarke (Head of Policy and Governance), John Antoniadou (Estates Manager), Katie Exon (Corporate Property Manager), Claudette Valmond (Head of Legal Partnership and Interim Monitoring Officer) and Caroline Britt (Democratic Services Officer)

Other Members in Attendance:

APOLOGIES

FG48/21 Apologies were received from Councillors Everitt and Hall. Councillor Chapelard left the meeting at 7:30pm

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

FG49/21 There were no disclosable pecuniary or other significant interests declared at the meeting.

NOTIFICATION OF PERSONS WISHING TO SPEAK

FG50/21 There were no visiting Members or members of the public who had registered to speak.

MINUTES OF THE MEETING DATED 12 OCTOBER 2021

FG51/21 No amendments were proposed.

RESOLVED – That the minutes dated 12 October 2021 be approved as a correct record.

FORWARD PLAN AS AT 27 OCTOBER 2021

FG52/21 A request was made for information on a survey undertaken in respect of Electric Vehicles.

No amendments were proposed.

RESOLVED – The Forward Plan as at 27 October 2021 be noted.

FEEES AND CHARGES SETTING 2022/23

FG53/21 Jane Fineman, Head of Finance, Procurement and Parking introduced the report set out in the agenda.

Since publication of the agenda, it was reported that there was now provision to issue parking permits at the Torrington Road multi storey car park. The

proposed charges would be the same as for the other multi storey car parks, £1,050 for a 7 day permit and £840 for a 4 day permit.

Discussion and questions from Members included the following:

- New legislation meant fees received for local land charges searches income would be retained by the Central Government. The Council retained responsibility for providing the service, but would now not receive the income it generated. It would now go to The Land Registry.
- The LGA and Local Councils had made representation to retain the services and associated income but were not successful.
- Potential new revenue streams included charging for bulky waste (TWBC were the only Council in Kent that still offered free collections), and permit parking at the Torrington Road car park.
- Car parking charges were being held at the same levels as last year to support the town recover following the pandemic.
- The cost to either replace or maintain existing waste bins would be included as part of the revenue budget.
- The cost of new bins sold to developers for new properties were detailed as part of fees and charges.
- The £150 penalty for the unauthorised distribution of free printed matter was attributed to junk mail.
- There was a suggestion that an additional column could be included to show how the figures in Appendix D were divided e.g. daily rates, hourly rates, per event etc.
- The Medium Term Financial Strategy (para 2.2 refers) was agreed at Full Council in February 2021 and was the working assumption at that time. Circumstances had now changed and the economy had not recovered as quickly as previously thought. The report had therefore reflected this, as would the Draft Budget.
- The Council were aware of the reduction in income at the Crematorium and were now looking to see where improvements could be made. Staff shortages and the inability to recruit had also affected their ability to manage the competition.
- In addition, the death rate in the first quarter of this financial year was significantly lower than the 5-year average. The reason for this was due to lock down still being in place so people were not going out, but due to the vaccination programme, the deaths attributed to Covid had not occurred. The result being a much lower death rate across the Borough.

RESOLVED – That the recommendations as set out in the report and including the additional recommendation for parking permits at the Torrington Road car park be supported.

DRAFT BUDGET 2022/23 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

FG54/21 Lee Colyer, Director of Finance, Policy and Development introduced the report set out in the agenda.

Discussion and questions from Members included the following:

- Every year, the Council undertook a budget public consultation exercise. This set out the cost of all Council Services and asked where reductions should take place in order to balance the budget.

The public had consistently stated they would like to see savings in the cost of Councillors, Democratic Services and a reduction in the number of the Council's property assets.

- It was hoped the Local Government Financial Settlement would include something about the New Homes Bonus Scheme. The Government had indicated there would be a replacement scheme next year but to date no information had been given as to what the replacement scheme would be. It was however hoped that the Council it would get the final year next year.
- Due to the effects of the pandemic and unless the economy recovered to pre pandemic levels the Council would have to make fundamental adjustments to its finances.
- The level of income the Council currently received was not sufficient to fund all the services it currently provided. As such the Council needed to significantly reduce its level of expenditure in order to achieve a balanced budget over the medium term.
- The sum of £292k referred to in table 2.24 of the report referred to the cost of the Amelia Scott building becoming operational. The Council would be able to better determine what income could be generated by the Amelia Scott once it was open.
- It was hoped that the proposed improvements to the Town Hall would generate income.
- The purpose of setting out the details of the Medium Term Financial Strategy was to ensure that measures were taken to ensure that the Council was able to balance its budget and reserves were not fully depleted. The Council was fortunate that it had over £100m in property assets, it operated in a prosperous part of the country and it provided a wide range of diverse services that were way beyond the statutory requirements. This allowed the Council to take decisions that would bring the budget back within balance.
- Should the necessary measures not be taken the Council's reserves would run out in 2028/29. However it was the Council's responsibility that this did not occur and there were no plans going forward that the Council would run at a deficit.
- Other than due to the pandemic there was only one recollected time the Council had incurred unexpected costs and it became necessary to draw on its reserves. This was due to an unexpected reduction in the Council's Revenue Support Grant. This affected the budget in the short term, but over the medium term, financial savings and adjustments were made to ensure the budget returned to a balanced budget.
- The Council was an early adopter of digital transformation and over the last 5-years it had resulted in lower administrative costs. The Council would continue to look for digital opportunities and make savings where it could.
- The Council had endeavoured to ensure the budget was balanced but that it also helped support the town in its recovery following the pandemic. The demand for car parking was not yet known and it was therefore decided not to make any changes to the charges at this time.

RESOLVED – That the recommendations to Cabinet as set out in the report be supported.

CALCULATION OF COUNCIL TAX BASE

FG55/21 Jane Fineman, Head of Finance, Procurement and Parking provided a verbal update which included the following:

- Statute dictated that the calculation of the Council Tax Base must be calculated between the 1 December and 31 January. A report would come forward in time for the December Cabinet.
- However, preliminary numbers had shown that the Council would achieve its forecast for new properties. The forecast was for 647 new properties, to date there were 604 properties with a number of months still to go to the end of the financial year.
- There had been concern that that the number of people taking up the Council Tax Reduction Scheme would increase dramatically due to the pandemic. The situation had deteriorated over the Covid period, but had now recovered to pre-pandemic levels. This was good news and in terms of the forecast it meant that the Council had been able to take the reduction in the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for claimants back out of the tax base.
- The number of people claiming Single Persons Discount had gone up significantly over the last two years. The team were now working with Revenues and Benefits to try and establish exactly what the right numbers were.
- At the moment the Council was forecasting an increase in the Tax Base of 2.44%.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

REVENUE MANAGEMENT REPORT QUARTER 2

FG56/21 Jane Fineman, Head of Finance, Procurement and Parking introduced the report set out in the agenda.

Discussions and questions from Members included the following:

- It was noted that the staff transfers from the Theatre to Leisure was not a saving as the money was just moved from one area to another area of the Council.
- The suspension of the waste collection was due to HGV driver shortages.

RESOLVED – That the recommendations to Cabinet as set out in the report be supported.

CAPITAL MANAGEMENT REPORT QUARTER 2

FG57/21 Jane Fineman, Head of Finance, Procurement and Parking introduced the report as set out in the agenda.

Discussion and questions from Members included the following:

- It was noted that the substantial amount included in the report for affordable housing was very welcome.
- A breakdown of what was included in the 'Other external Contributions' (Appendix D) would be sent after the meeting.

RESOLVED – That the recommendations to Cabinet as set out in the report be supported.

TREASURY AND PRUDENTIAL INDICATOR MANAGEMENT REPORT QUARTER 2

FG58/21 Jane Fineman, Head of Finance, Procurement and Parking introduced the report set out in the agenda.

RESOLVED – That the recommendations to Cabinet as set out in the report be supported.

PERFORMANCE SUMMARY QUARTER 2

FG59/21 Jane Clarke, Head of Policy and Governance introduced the report set out in the agenda.

Discussion and questions from Members included the following:

- It was likely the reason for the under performance for the collection of national non-domestic rates (NNDR) was due to the end of the Government's payment holiday for businesses.
- The target had been reduced for this year, but the Council would be undertaking some further profiling of those targets. Revised targets should be in place for Quarter 3.

RESOLVED – That the recommendations to Cabinet as set out in the report be supported.

COMPLAINTS SUMMARY QUARTER 1 AND 2

FG60/21 Jane Clarke, Head of Policy and Governance introduced the report set out in the agenda.

RESOLVED – That the recommendations to Cabinet as set out in the report be supported.

DRAFT ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN 2022/23

FG61/21 John Antoniadou, Estates Manager introduced the report set out in the agenda.

Discussion and questions from Members included the following:

- The Investment part of the Asset Register included those properties which were income producing e.g. Colebrook Industrial Estate. The freehold was owned by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and leased to individual tenants.
- The Council continually looked for opportunities. At Colebrook Industrial Estate a piece of land had been identified and was currently under consideration.
- The only Industrial Estate owned by the Council was Colebrook. The Council was not currently looking at anything on Kingstanding Way.
- The Council was always open to looking at suitable potential investments.
- Details of how the Property Asset Oversight Panel (PAOP) will operate were still to be worked out. It was however noted that there

- should be as much transparency as possible.
- Carbon emissions were considered as part of any project undertaken by the Council.
 - The Council had recently submitted a bid for grant funding through Saalex – the decision was expected at the end of this year, early next year.

RESOLVED – That the recommendations to Cabinet as set out in the report be supported.

URGENT BUSINESS

FG62/21 There was no urgent business.

DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

FG63/21 The next meeting was scheduled for Tuesday 11 January 2022 at 6:30pm.

NOTES:

The meeting concluded at 8.00 pm.