

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, 12 July 2022

**Present: Councillor Andrew Hickey (Chair)
Councillors Hayward (Vice-Chair), Brice, Dawlings, Goodship, Hall, Morton, Pound and Rogers**

Officers in Attendance: Lee Colyer (Director of Finance, Policy and Development (Section 151 Officer)), Jane Fineman (Head of Finance and Procurement), Zoe Kent (Interim Head of Revenues and Benefits), John Strachan, Claudette Valmond (Head of Legal Partnership and Interim Monitoring Officer) and Caroline Britt (Democratic Services Officer)

Other Members in Attendance: Councillors Chapelard, Bailey, Moon and Wakeman

APOLOGIES

FG14/22 Apologies were received from Councillor Knight. Councillor Holden was not present.

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

FG15/22 There were no disclosable pecuniary or other significant interests declared at the meeting.

NOTIFICATION OF PERSONS WISHING TO SPEAK

FG16/22 Mr Richard Barsley, member of the public had registered to speak on Agenda Item 7.

Councillors Atkins, Bailey, Moon and Wakeman had registered to speak on Agenda item 7.

MINUTES OF THE MEETING DATED 8 JUNE 2022

FG17/22 It was requested and agreed that the last sentence of bullet point 8, FG8/22 (Revenue Management Report Quarter 4) be corrected as follows:

“The minimum level of reserves are set by the Council at £4m”.

RESOLVED – That subject to the above correction, the minutes of the meeting dated 8 June 2022 be approved as a correct record.

FORWARD PLAN AS AT 28 JUNE 2022

FG18/22 No amendments were proposed.

RESOLVED – That the Forward Plan as at 28 June 2022 be noted.

IN-YEAR BUDGET REVIEW 2022/23

FG19/22 Lee Colyer, Director of Finance, Policy and Development introduced the report set out in the agenda.

Discussion and questions from Members included the following:

- Income from potential co-working had not been factored in when forecasting for 2022/23. Negotiations were ongoing regarding the work to the Town Hall. More confidence in deciding a timeframe for an income stream from any letting would be known once these negotiations had been finalised.
- Forecasting for car parking income included within the budget gap graph was on the existing base budget. As such, no assumptions had been made related to increase (or declining) usage.
- Retained business rate growth was also not included in the assumptions as it was not prudent to do so. Business rate growth was only truly known at the end of the financial year when the collection fund was reconciled and the Council knew the number of appeals that were either settled on running through the system. Once this exercise had been completed, the Council would be able to declare how much growth it had received from business rates, and the money put back into reserves.
- It was suggested that these items should be included in the forecast as they all had the potential to help deliver a revenue surplus for the Council by the end of the financial year.
- The first quarter of the financial year had only just been completed. The data was therefore not yet available to make any changes to forecast levels. However, reports were brought to Cabinet on a quarterly basis with the opportunity to revise the budget and the level of forecasting.
- It was suggested the figures for car parking revenue were increasing and were now approaching pre pandemic levels. If the figures for the first two months of this financial year were to continue for the whole year, the increase in revenue would be in the region of around £300k. A change in the level of fees at this stage would be premature.
- Measures that might affect the level of footfall within the town could have a detrimental effect on the town's recovery.
- The report sought agreement for officers to market test surplus Council assets (as referred to in section 2.13). Once this information had been obtained, a further report would be brought to Members so that a decision could be taken as to whether to dispose, redevelop or retain any or all of them.
- The assets listed had all previously been declared surplus.

A recorded vote was requested:

Cllr Brice – For
 Cllr Dawlings – Against
 Cllr Goodship Against
 Cllr Hall – For
 Cllr Morton - For

Cllr Pound - For
 Cllr Rogers - For
 Cllr Hayward - For
 Cllr Hickey - For

For – 7
 Against – 2
 Abstain – 0

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

SALES, FEES AND CHARGES (INCLUDING CAR PARKING) 2022/23

FG20/22 Jane Fineman, Head of Finance, Procurement and Parking introduced the report as set out in the agenda.

Registered Speakers:

Mr Richard Barsley – Member of the Public
 Cllr Rodney Atkins (statement read)
 Cllr Raymond Moon
 Cllr Matthew Bailey
 Cllr Suzanne Wakeman

Prior to this item being opened for discussion and questions, Councillor Hickey stated that he had set the agenda to fix the budget deficit this year. The budgeting process, due to start soon, would go through a full bottom up consultation process.

Discussion and questions from Members including the following:

- Parking enforcement in Paddock Wood during the pandemic had been difficult. Normally, two Civic Enforcements Officers (CEO's) would have been deployed in Paddock Wood and the surrounding areas. During the pandemic, the sharing of vehicles was prohibited and it was impractical to send two CEO's in separate cars. However, since June normal practice had resumed, with one CEO concentrating on the car park, the other on Commercial Road.
- If requested, additional enforcement was available.
- Footway parking adjacent to double yellow lines was something the Council could also enforce. Where no double yellow lines existed was currently a matter for the police. However, the Council were exploring with the police possible measures to help tackle this. Also discussions with Kent County Council were suggested about possible physical measures e.g. bollards, that would prevent footway parking.
- The current cashless system for car parking payments was leading edge but it was recognised, that due to the number of options available this could be confusing for customers. However, the method customers used tended to be an even split between the various options, so to remove one would be difficult to justify.
- To help simplify the procedure the Council were looking at different signing options.
- Car park use in Paddock Wood in relation to the number of hours stayed was broken down as follows (2021 figures):
 - o up to 1 hour = over 80,000
 - o up to 2 hours – 15,000
 - o up to 3 hours = 2,400
 - o up to 4 hours = 1,700
 - o up to 6 hours = 1,800
- Given the level of 1 hour users, this would be the best source of income for the Council. Increasing the charges for the longer stays would not generate sufficient income to cover the associated

- maintenance and enforcement costs.
- It was commented that Paddock Wood did not have any vacant shops, the only empty premises was currently under offer.
 - Car parking charges either using Ringo or the machines were the same.
 - Some Members could not support the increase in charges, especially given the earlier comments about not including the increased use of car parking in the forecasting. It was understood there were reasons for prudence due to the pandemic, but given the level of public opposition it would be better to wait until later in the year before introducing any price increases.
 - An internet campaign against Dunorlan charges had been going for about 48 hours already had 800 signatures which reinforced the view that increases should not be supported.
 - A lack of public consultation was also given as a reason the recommendations should not be supported.
 - It was noted that there were no parking charges in Cranbrook. The reason being that the Parish Council paid the business rates for the car park which neutralised the cost impact on TWBC. Perhaps something along these lines could be explored for Paddock Wood.
 - The introduction of parking charges at Dunorlan Park was premature and further discussions with interested parties should take place before any decision was taken. Councillor Pound proposed that Appendix E of the report (which provided details of the proposed charges for Dunorlan Park) be removed.
 - The Council was in contract for Grounds Maintenance, so it was contractually committed to Dunorlan Park for the term of the contract. The contract was indexed linked so the Council would have to bear the additional cost regardless of any decisions Members made on whether to introduce charging.

A recorded vote was requested:

Cllr Brice – For
 Cllr Dawlings – Against
 Cllr Goodship – Against
 Cllr Hall – For
 Cllr Morton – For

Cllr Pound - For
 Cllr Rogers - For
 Cllr Hayward - For
 Cllr Hayward - For

For = 7
 Against = 2
 Abstain = 0

RESOLVED – That Appendix E be removed from the recommendations. That subject to the removal of Appendix E, the recommendations to Cabinet as set out in the report be supported.

DRAFT COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME 2023/24

FG21/22 Zoe Kent, Interim Head of Mid Kent Revenues and Benefits Partnership introduced the report as set out in the agenda.

Discussion and questions from Members included the following:

- Figures for those in Band 1 who had defaulted on the 20% payment for last year were not available but details would be provided after the meeting.
- As at the end of June collection rates for benefit claimants was 26% and 28.95% for all residents.
- The collection rates for 2021/22 was 77.98%, for 2020/21 it was 88.92% and for 2019/20 it was 85.13%.
- A reduction from 20% to 15% in the total amount paid by benefit claimants would cost the tax payer a total of £652,000. TWBC would be liable for 10% of these costs i.e. £65k. The remainder of the cost would be passed on to the police, fire brigade and Kent County Council.
- Revenues and Benefits already worked with organisations including the Citizens' Advice Bureau in order to try and help those most in need.
- The Director of Finance had previously been asked to model what the cost would be to the Council if it were to pay 100% of the costs. It was agreed to provide Members with details. These were subsequently provided after the meeting as follows:

Authority	100% Scheme – Additional cost
KCC	£816,531
Police	£124,748
Fire	£45,363
Parishes	£34,022
TWBC	£113,407
Kent Taxpayers	£1,134,071

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

URGENT BUSINESS

FG22/22 There was no urgent business.

DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

FG23/22 The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday 6 September 2022 at 6:30pm.

NOTES:

The meeting concluded at 7.45 pm.