

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 Wednesday, 8 June 2022

Present: Councillor Andrew Hickey (Chair)
Councillors Hayward (Vice-Chair), Brice, Dawlings, Goodship, Hall, Knight, 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), Jane Clarke (Head of Policy and Governance), Claudette Valmond (Head of Legal Partnership and Interim Monitoring Officer) and Caroline Britt (Democratic Services Officer)

Other Members in Attendance: Councillors

APOLOGIES

FG1/22 No apologies were received. Councillor Holden was not present.

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

FG2/22 There were no disclosable pecuniary or other significant interests declared at the meeting.

NOTIFICATION OF PERSONS WISHING TO SPEAK

FG3/22 There were no visiting Members or members of the public who had registered to speak.

MINUTES OF THE MEETING DATED 1 MARCH 2022

FG4/22 No amendments were proposed.

RESOLVED - That the minutes dated 1 march 2022 be approved as a correct record.

STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER

FG5/22 Lee Colyer, Director of Finance, Policy and Development introduced the report set out in the agenda.

Discussion and questions from Members included the following:

- Since the report had been written the Bank of England had issued their monetary policy report. The report gave a pessimistic picture going forward which included inflation rising to 10%, recession and the economy taking a downturn.
- The risk register was a live document and could therefore be updated as necessary. This applied to any of the scenarios included in the report.
- Since writing the report the accounts had been closed but there had been an improvement in the Council's position over the medium term (Scenario 4) and this would continue to be monitored.

- The success of the Amelia Scott (Scenario 9) could be measured in terms of footfall, whilst it was early days, there had been an increase in footfall in the town. There had also been an increase in the number of shops opening/reopening.
- As more data became available, the better able the Council would be to measure the success of the Amelia Scott.

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

ANNUAL REPORT ON THE USE OF RIPA

FG6/22 Claudette Valmond, Interim Head of Legal Partnership introduced the report set out in the agenda.

Discussion and questions from Members included the following:

- The authorising officers were the Chief Executive (William Benson), the Director of Finance, Policy and Development (Lee Colyer), the Director of Change and Communities (Paul Taylor) and the Head of Housing, Health and Environment (Gary Stevenson).
- The use of RIPA for cases of Council Tax Fraud e.g. misuse of the single occupancy discount would be dependent on the facts and would be dealt with on a case by case basis.

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

CAPITAL MANAGEMENT REPORT - QUARTER 4

FG7/22 Jane Fineman, Head of Finance, Procurement and Parking introduced the report set out in the agenda.

Discussion and questions from Members included the following:

- Details of the funding received from SELEP (South East Local Enterprise Partnership) for the Weald Leisure Centre and the Council Depot at North Farm were included in the Quarter 3 report.

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

REVENUE MANAGEMENT REPORT - QUARTER 4

FG8/22 Jane Fineman, Head of Finance, Procurement and Parking introduced the report set out in the agenda.

Discussion and questions from Members included the following:

- Central Government provided funding to help those who were eligible for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme. All money received had been distributed.
- The Grant awarded by Central Government in relation to the increase in energy costs was not a Council Tax rebate, it was an energy rebate of £150 to be given to those residents in Housing Bands A-D who paid

Council Tax.

- The preferred mechanism for payment was via direct debit as the Council already had the details for those who used this method of payment to pay their Council Tax. This accounted for approximately 22,000 residents.
- Just over 9,000 residents did not pay their Council Tax by direct debit so an alternative method of payment had to be organised. The Council put together an application form and to date approximately 4,000 residents had now submitted their claims to the Council.
- Of the 4,000 claims received, 3,400 had now received the £150 payment. Provided the bank account details had been verified, the money would have been paid into the residents account. Where the bank details could not be verified, the £150 had been taken off their Council Tax account.
- A draft proposal for the new Government discretionary scheme had been put together but it would be for Members to agree. Details would be disseminated shortly.
- Reserves were steadily declining. This was because over the last couple of years there had been little or no capital receipts and as such, the Council was using its Reserves to fund its Capital Programme.
- Going back over the last 5 years or so, back in 2018/19, surplus reserves stood at approximately £25m, it dipped a little but recovered and was slightly higher in 2021/22. The current figure was about £4m.
- The interest being received on unused S106 money was minimal – 0.1%. It was not ringfenced for S106 use only.
- In order to maximise opportunities to increase the level of capital available the Council was putting its surplus cash into short term, risk free investments.
- Consideration could be given to ringfence the interest received from S106 money. It would then be a decision for Cabinet.
- Business rates write offs were usually the result of companies going into liquidation.
- Savings due to employee costs were due to problems with recruiting. The Council were endeavouring to recruit but in a buoyant employment market with very competitive salaries being offered, the Council were struggling to attract applicants. Going forward, forecasting staffing costs had become very difficult.
- One measure to address this might be to offer higher salaries, but this would be a decision for Management Board.

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

TREASURY AND PRUDENTIAL INDICATOR MANAGEMENT REPORT - QUARTER 4

FG9/22 Jane Fineman, Head of Finance, Procurement and Parking introduced the report as set out in the agenda.

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

PERFORMANCE SUMMARY QUARTER 4

FG10/22 Jane Clarke, Head of Policy and Governance introduced the report as set out in the agenda.

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

COMPLAINTS SUMMARY QUARTERS 3 & 4

FG11/22 Jane Clarke, Head of Policy and Governance introduced the report set out in the agenda.

Discussion and questions from Members included the following:

- The Council would continue to endeavour to try and meet its 90% target of responding the complaints within the prescribed timescale but with the continuing staffing problems the Council were currently experiencing, this would be unlikely in the short term.
- Informal resolutions that would resolve complaints quickly and efficiently would help the Council meet targets going forward.

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

URGENT BUSINESS

FG12/22 There was no urgent business.

DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

FG13/22 The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday 12 July 2022.

NOTES:

The meeting concluded at 7.30 pm.