

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, 15 November 2022

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

Officers in Attendance: Lee Colyer (Director of Finance, Policy and Development (Section 151 Officer)), Jane Fineman (Head of Finance and Procurement), Pamela Grover-Morgan (Performance and Governance Manager), David Candlin (Head of Economic Development and Property) and Caroline Britt (Democratic Services Officer), Ben Garland (JIRP Panel).

Other Members in Attendance: Councillors Ellis and Warne

APOLOGIES

FG50/22 There were no apologies.

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

FG51/22 There were no disclosable pecuniary or other significant interests declared at the meeting.

NOTIFICATION OF PERSONS WISHING TO SPEAK

FG52/22 There were no visiting Members or members of the public who had registered to speak.

MINUTES OF THE MEETING DATED 11 OCTOBER 2022

FG53/22 No amendments were proposed.

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting dated 11 October 2022 be approved as a correct record.

FORWARD PLAN AS AT 7 NOVEMBER 2022

FG54/22 No amendments were proposed.

RESOLVED – That the Forward Plan as at 7 November 2022 be noted.

***JIRP REVIEW PAPER**

FG55/22 Lee Colyer, Director of Finance, Policy and Development introduced the report set out in the agenda. Ben Garland from JIRP Panel provided a brief summary of the report.

Discussion and questions from Members included the following:

- The review exercise started in July 2022 with the report being finalised in October/November.
- When considering the level of special responsibility allowance, the

panel reviewed other authorities and if the mean average was higher then the recommendation to TWBC was to raise the level of allowance to a similar amount. This was the reason for the recommendation for the Overview and Scrutiny special responsibility allowance to be raised from £2,000 to £2,500.

- Member's allowance of £5,500 came into effect in 2016. This amount remained in line with other Councils so the recommendation was that this remained unchanged. However, for future years, it was recommended the allowance was indexed linked in line with Council staff pay increases.
- Special responsibility allowance was paid in addition to the basic Members allowance.
- The Opposition Group Leader recommended allowance was £5,500 and would be paid only if the Opposition Leader was not in Cabinet (i.e. they would not receive both the Cabinet allowance and the Opposition Leader allowance). In total therefore, they would receive the Members allowance of £5,500 plus the Opposition Leader allowance of £5,500.
- The method used for setting allowances was by comparative analysis. The panel looked at groups of Councils to ensure that there was parity within the group.
- Workload levels did not form part of the assessment process.
- From discussions, it was determined there was a higher burden of workload for the Chair of Planning which was why it was held at its current level of £5,500. The amount was also comparable with other Councils.
- In terms of the Opposition Group Leader the amount was set in part due to a historic anomaly where previously you could be in Cabinet but also receive an Opposition Leader allowance. This had now been removed and the amount was now comparable with other Councils.
- The panel must assess the allowances as per the current composition. They could not predict what changes may or may not occur as a result of any changes to the boundaries or to the number of Councillors.
- The decision on what allowances were appropriate rested with Full Council. As such, if a review took place and boundaries changed, the Council could request a reassessment of allowances.
- There was concern that the drop in allowances was untenable and would not be allowed in other sectors.
- It was suggested that there should be no change in the schedule of allowances, that they remained fixed until the Council determined otherwise – i.e. that they didn't rise in line with increases given to Council staff (indexation).
- There was recognition that TWBC were slightly out of sync with other Councils and so there was a need to readdress the balance.
- In terms of the level of allowances, there was support for the level recommended for the Leader and for Cabinet. However, it was proposed that the Chair of Planning and the Leader of the Opposition should be on £4,000 (rather than £5,500), all other Committee Chairs should be on £2,000, with Co-optees receiving £1,000 (rather than £800). It was suggested this would provide a much better balance and better represented the level of contributions made.
- The report acknowledged the social contribution made by Councillors. The recommended changes would not achieve a great deal and therefore they should remain unchanged.
- It was confirmed that Councillors could only receive one Special

Responsibility Allowance.

- It was suggested that the £275 per Member Group Leader's allowance should be dropped. The rest should be held until 2024.
- The recommendation to Cabinet should be Option A – to keep the current scheme.

RESOLVED – That Option A (To Keep the Current Scheme) of the Report be recommended to Cabinet.

DRAFT BUDGET 2023/24 & MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY UPDATE

FG56/22 Lee Colyer, Director of Finance, Policy and Development introduced the report set out in the agenda.

Discussion and questions from Members included the following:

- Each of the Portfolio Holders were currently in discussion with officer groups to find savings and/or increase revenue within their Portfolios.
- The Council were already going some way to reduce the deficit and it was hoped this would continue in subsequent years.

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

FEES AND CHARGES 2023/24

FG57/22 Jane Fineman – Head of Finance, Procurement and Parking introduced the report set out in the agenda.

Discussion and questions from Members included the following:

- Car Park payment machines were all now card only payments. The car park in Southborough was the last car park to have a card only payment machine installed. Once familiar with the machines, it should become easier to navigate. There was an issue with the lighting which the Council agreed to investigate.
- It was unfortunate that there was little expenditure available for marketing the Community Centres within the Borough. It would be helpful to have some resources available as they were a valuable Community resource.

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

CAPITAL MANAGEMENT REPORT QUARTER 2

FG58/22 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.

REVENUE MANAGEMENT REPORT QUARTER 2

FG59/22 Jane Fineman, Head of Finance, Procurement and Parking introduced the report set out in the agenda.

Discussion and questions from Members included the following:

- The Council were carrying a lot of vacancies and recruitment continued to be very challenging.
- There were many occasions where a vacancy had been advertised on more than one occasion, but had received no applicants.
- The Council were looking at different options, e.g. restructuring jobs to help try and attract applicants.
- Details related to business rate collections were not available at the meeting but could be reverted after the meeting.
- Targets for business rates were difficult to forecast as businesses could choose to settle at different times during the year. Figures could also be distorted due to the payment of Government Grants. Appeals were also a factor.
- The Council's process for recovery of business rates was robust and would ensure that any monies owed would be recovered.
- Due to financial pressures the maintenance budget was limited to an amount that was affordable.
- The budget dealt with both major and minor maintenance demands e.g. Crescent Road car park, Royal Victoria Place shopping centre refurbishment work.
- The Asset Management Plan included how the maintenance budget would be used.
- There was also an option to bid for capital investment for major maintenance requests/requirements.
- The grant volatility reserve was created a while ago when the revenue grant was taken away. The Council started to put away the New Homes Bonus so that if it was ever removed, or if there was a need to move money should the Government change the way the grant money was paid, the volatility reserve would give the Council the means to do this.
- Due to Covid the way in the which the Government gave discounts changed significantly. The Government gave the Council a lot of money up front (currently about £6.9m) and this was put in the volatility reserve. Some of the money had to be returned to Government (March 2023), but some was Council money that would be used to balance the budget.

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

TREASURY AND PRUDENTIAL INDICATOR MANAGEMENT REPORT - QUARTER 2

FG60/22 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.

CALCULATION OF THE COUNCIL TAX BASE

FG61/22 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 on 1 December.
- The calculation was prescriptive, the details of which were laid out in the Statutory Instrument with no scope to vary.
- The report would be published on 1 December and presented to Cabinet on 8 December 2022.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

PERFORMANCE SUMMARY QUARTER 2

FG62/22 Pamela Grover-Morgan, Performance and Governance Manager introduced the report set out in the agenda.

Discussion and questions from Members included the following:

- It was noted that an updated version of the report and appendices had been produced and would be made available after the meeting. The updated information formed the basis of the presentation to Members.
- It was made clear, the report referred to the indicator or measure of performance that was performing or underperforming, not the efforts of staff who were certainly not underperforming, but who all worked incredibly hard under difficult circumstances.
- As an example, an appeal relating to a housing matter was being held up because the Planning Inspectorate in Bristol had not yet allocated an inspector, and this had been since February 2022.

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

COMPLAINTS SUMMARY QUARTERS 1 & 2

FG63/22 Pamela Grover- Morgan, Performance and Governance Manager introduced the report set out in the agenda.

Discussion and questions from Members included the following:

- Clarification was provided when comparing comparable periods – the comparisons compared period 1 of 2021/22 with period one of 2022/23.
- It was noted there was an error in paragraph 2.18, it should read that was an 'increase' not decrease. The associated graph also needed to be amended. This would be corrected for Cabinet.

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

DRAFT ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN 2023/24

FG64/22 David Candlin, Head of Economic Development and Property introduced the report set out in the agenda.

Discussion and questions from Members included the following:

- The Crescent Road car park underwent a major refurbishment of the main structure relatively recently. Providing the car park continued to be maintained it should remain operational for another 50 years.
- Similarly, providing the other multi-storey car parks were maintained they should all have a significant life span.
- The revenue received from car parks would help cover the costs to ensure they were adequately and appropriately maintained.
- The increased maintenance costs at the Tunbridge Wells sports centre was due both to the age of the building and the need to replace the systems within which were coming to the end of their life span. Leisure centres were not cheap to operate, especially in terms of energy use and the fabric of the buildings.
- The current total maintenance budget was about £1m. The Council could usefully spend about £2m to £2.5m per year. The money therefore had to be carefully managed to ensure all the Council's assets were maintained to an acceptable level.
- It was noted that the planned maintenance plan was based on a 10 year projection. For example, in terms of a roof, the Council would make an assessment on its projected life span. If the life span of the roof exceeded that projection, then the plan would be adjusted accordingly. The plan was fluid and reviewed according to need.

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

URGENT BUSINESS

FG65/22 There was no urgent business.

DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

FG66/22 The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday 24 January 2023 at 6:30pm.

NOTES:

The meeting concluded at 8.10 pm.