

TUNBRIDGE WELLS BOROUGH COUNCIL**CABINET**

MINUTES of the meeting held at the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Royal Tunbridge Wells, TN1 1RS, at 6.30 pm on Thursday, 22 June 2023

Present: Councillor Ben Chapelard (Chair)
Councillors Warne (Vice-Chair), Hall, Neville, Pound, Rutland and Sharratt

Officers in Attendance: Lee Colyer (Director of Finance, Policy and Development (Section 151 Officer)), Paul Taylor (Director of Change and Communities), Claudette Valmond (Head of Legal Partnership and Interim Monitoring Officer), Jane Fineman (Head of Finance and Procurement), Pamela Grover-Morgan (Performance and Governance Manager) and Caroline Britt (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

Other Members in Attendance:

LEADERS INTRODUCTION AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

CAB1/23 Councillor Ben Chapelard, Leader of the Council encouraged all residents to take part in the Resident's Survey. Residents had until 23 July to submit their views.

Councillor Hugo Pound, Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning announced that the Council had made offers to appoint three new Planning Enforcement Officers. This news was very welcome.

APOLOGIES

CAB2/23 Apologies were received from Councillor Fitzsimmons.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

CAB3/23 There were no disclosable pecuniary or other significant interests declared at the meeting.

NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS WISHING TO SPEAK

CAB4/23 There were no Visiting Members who had registered as wishing to speak.

MINUTES OF THE MEETING DATED 20 APRIL 2023

CAB5/23 Members reviewed the minutes. No amendments were proposed.

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting dated 20 April 2023 be approved as a correct record.

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

CAB6/23 There were no questions from members of the Council.

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

CAB7/23 Pursuant to Cabinet Procedure Rule 28.5, Mr Stewart Gledhill, Chairman of Save Capel had submitted the following questions:

Q1: Will the Council set out the pieces of work that are still to be completed to inform Members making the decision on the way forward for the Local Plan and now provide an updated timetable of the further steps to progress the examination through to adoption?

Councillor Pound responded “Council Officers, with support of consultants, are still undertaking a wide range of work in order to be able to put forward a development strategy that addresses the Inspector’s initial findings and, fundamentally, is regarded as being ‘sound’ in line with the NPPF.

This work is focussed on the three strategic matters that were put to the Council in the Inspector’s Initial Findings letter, namely Green Belt releases,, options for addressing issues raised on Tudeley Village, and the strategy for Paddock Wood and East Capel. To be clear, the Council is not testing or redrafting any other parts of the submitted Local Plan as the Inspector has not raised concerns or challenges about any other issues than these three.

Due to the complex inter-related and iterative nature of this work – including further flood risk modelling, masterplanning, transport assessments, infrastructure and viability reviews and site appraisals flowing from the further Green Belt work – the original timeframe which aimed for reporting this month has slipped. I have a fortnightly meeting with the Head of Planning and, obviously the Local Plan is a fixed agenda item. I am strongly of the view that this work should not be rushed nor that easy solutions should be jumped on. I have therefore confirmed with him that we will not be proposing any changes to members, which will go forward for public consultation until August at the earliest.

Notwithstanding this, officers are considering the three main options regarding Tudeley Village that were put to the Council in the Inspector’s Initial Findings letter – namely keeping the development in the Local Plan, significantly reducing it; removing it entirely. Officers will recommend on these options, and the Council will determine the matter, once the outstanding work is complete.”

Q2: Given this further delay, will the Council confirm that a comprehensive assessment of the full housing potential from the emerging Town Centre Plan and call for sites, together with an update of brownfield opportunities across the Borough, will be included in the modified Local Plan such that the garden village at Tudeley will be removed?

Councillor Pound responded “The Council has given careful consideration to the capacity for housing from brownfield and other windfall sites, specifically from Royal Tunbridge Wells town centre, in the preparation of the Local Plan. There is a bit of myth circulating that there are more, as yet untapped brownfield sites which the Council has failed to identify; that is not correct. Every available brownfield site in the Borough has been assessed and the Council, in partnership with existing owners, will continue to bring forward appropriate sites for development. Moreover, the Local Plan Inspector has not raised any concerns with the Council’s evidence in relation to any of these estimates, as presented in its relevant supporting papers and at the

Examination hearings in 2022.

Therefore, there is no basis currently for reviewing these estimates.

The Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Centre Plan is at a very early stage. The 'Call for Sites' process has only recently begun and runs until 21st July. Thereafter, officers will begin the assessment of the sites and their appropriateness for development as part of the drafting of the Town Centre Plan. It will then need to go through two rounds of public consultation and engagement with stakeholders, and an Examination process, and it is not expected to be adopted until Late 2025. Opportunities for residential development will be refined through this process.

Pending the Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Centre Plan reaching a more advanced stage, the current estimate for at least 150-200 dwellings provided for within the Pre-Submission Local Plan is regarded as appropriate. This figure may be reviewed in due course, if necessary, at the modification stage of the Borough Plan, but there is no basis for doing so at present or for some time.

The suggestion that an update brownfield assessment and the increased densification of the town centre alone could lead to the removal of the proposed site at the Tudeley Garden Village is not supportable and, to reiterate, the Inspector has raised no concerns about any of these estimates in his thorough examination of the issues."

CONSIDERATION OF THE FORWARD PLAN AS AT 13 JUNE 2023

CAB8/23 Members considered the plan. The following amendments were proposed:

- It was agreed that the Draft Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2024/25 be removed from the Forward Plan.

RESOLVED – That the Forward Plan as at 13 June 2023 be amended as detailed above.

APPOINTMENTS TO OUTSIDE BODIES

CAB9/23 Councillor Chapelard, Leader of the Council introduced the report set out in the agenda.

The report was taken as read.

RESOLVED –

1. That the nominated persons for the terms of office specified as set out in Appendix A be approved.
2. That appointments to the Commons Conservators for the period 22 June 2023 to 31 December 2023 be approved
3. That appointments to the Commons Conservators for the period 1 January 2024 to 31 December 2024 be approved.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure that the Borough Council maintains mutually beneficial relationships with organisations at a local, regional and

national level

PERFORMANCE SUMMARY QUARTER 4

CAB10/23 Councillor Christopher Hall, Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance introduced Pamela Grover-Morgan, Performance and Governance Manager who presented the report set out in the agenda.

Discussion and questions from Members included the following:

- There were no reports that were in red status, with only 5 out of the 29 KPI's currently underperforming. The reasons for this were known and were currently being addressed with development plans in place.
- Overall, this report was very welcomed.

RESOLVED –

1. That the summary of project performance over quarter four 2022/23 as at Appendix A be noted.
2. That the summary of service performance over quarter four 2022/23 as at Appendix B be noted; and
3. That the Recovery Plans for quarter four 2022/23 as at Appendices C-G be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To monitor the effectiveness of the Council's actions and plans to meet all of the objectives within the Five- Year Plan, highlight underperforming areas, and propose actions to remedy any underperformance to ensure the key objectives are met.

COMPLAINTS SUMMARY QUARTERS 3 AND 4

CAB11/23 Councillor Christopher Hall, Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance introduced Pamela Grover-Morgan, Performance and Governance Manager who presented the report set out in the agenda.

Discussion and questions from Members included the following:

- No concerns were raised at the Finance and Governance Cabinet Advisory Board.
- The team were congratulated on running the pilot during Quarter 3 which had had an effect of reducing the volume of complaints which got escalated to the next stage.
- How complaints were dealt with and resolved was very important to the credibility of the Council.

RESOLVED – That the summary of complaints over period two (October 2022 to March 2023) be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable Cabinet to understand the Council's current performance in relation to complaints handling.

CAPITAL MANAGEMENT REPORT QUARTER 4

CAB12/23 Councillor Christopher Hall, Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance introduced Jane Fineman, Head of Finance, Procurement and Parking who presented the report set out in the agenda.

Discussion and questions from Members included the following:

- The proposed additional recommendations were welcomed.
- The teams were congratulated by Members for the huge amount of work undertaken to secure funding for the Local Authority Housing Fund.
- TWBC working together with Central Government and Kent County Council to provide housing for refugees and in the future for the Borough was also very welcome.
- The upgrade to the amenity building at Cinder Hill was welcomed but it was disappointing that it would have a combi boiler rather than an air sourced heat pump.

RESOLVED –

1. That the unaudited actual gross and net expenditure for the year and the sources of finance as shown in Appendices B to D be noted.
2. That the proposed variations to the Capital programme, set out in notes 4.3 to 4.11 be approved.
3. That the proposed movement between years, set out in note 4.12 be approved.
4. That the inclusion of new schemes into the capital programme as set out in notes 4.13 to 4.15 be noted.
5. That TWBC take advantage of any funding opportunities to alleviate short term pressures and longer term housing pressures and that where possible, these funds are used to create a lasting legacy by providing a new and permanent supply of affordable housing be approved.
6. That external contributions to the Council's 'match-funding' requirements for the Local Authority Housing Fund Scheme are used to deliver the scheme with the Council's 'match-funding' from s106 developer funding re-allocated to deliver affordable housing be approved.
7. That the refurbishment of the four Crescent Road properties into 3-, 4- and 5-bedroom houses to provide short-term options for housing Ukrainian guests and longer-term affordable housing for UK Nationals be approved.
8. That the s151 Officer and the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing be delegated to allocate funds from the homes for Ukraine Programme, Local Authority Housing Fund and any other similar funding programmes or sources, and to source any necessary match-funding so as to

alleviate housing pressures in line with the above objectives and in the light of advice from the Council's Housing and Property teams be approved.

REASON FOR DECISION: Managing and forecasting capital expenditure effectively was vital in order to support all of the services provided by the Council.

REVENUE MANAGEMENT QUARTER 4

CAB13/23 Councillor Christopher Hall, Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance introduced Jane Fineman, Head of Finance, Procurement and Parking who presented the report set out in the agenda.

Discussion and questions from Members included the following:

- 2022/23 was a difficult year, but officers and Members had worked well together to take tough decisions.
- Decisions were taken at the right time to manage the Council's investments.
- The Council couldn't and shouldn't rely on the savings made due to the current staffing issues.
- The challenges remained, but Members would continue to look at income, expenses and a savings plan. In addition the Council's proposed asset disposals would be progressed.
- The ability to fund the Capital Programme was important and this was very welcomed news.
- A funding surplus due to staff shortages was unsustainable.
- The deficit for 2023/24 was still £943k so there was still work to be done.

RESOLVED –

1. That the unaudited actual revenue expenditure outturn and impact on reserves for the year ended 31 March 2023 be noted.
2. That the withdrawal from reserves of £944,000, to meet the budgeted deficit, will not be needed, and a sum of £18,000 will be transferred into the General Fund be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To show the actual expenditure on services compared to the revised budget for the period ending 31 March 2023, and the forecast outturn position, highlighting significant variances from the revised annual budget.

TREASURY AND PRUDENTIAL INDICATOR MANAGEMENT REPORT QUARTER 4

CAB14/23 Councillor Christopher Hall, Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance introduced Jane Fineman, Head of Finance, Procurement and Parking who presented the report set out in the agenda.

Discussion and questions from Members included the following:

- It was noted that the Council did not have a separate Treasury team and that all the work was undertaken by the Finance Team.

RESOLVED –

1. That the Treasury Management and Prudential Indicator position for 2022/23 be noted.
2. That the unaudited actual for investment and bank interest is £1,643,000, an increase of £1,198,000 from the approved budget of £445,000 and a further improvement of £48,000 from the Quarter 3 projection be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: Ensuring effective cash flow management is vital in order to support all the services provided by the Council. The interest received from investments is an important source of income in helping to set a balanced budget.

URGENT BUSINESS

CAB15/23 There was no urgent business.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

CAB16/23 The next meeting would be held on Thursday 27 July 2023 commencing at 6:30pm.

NOTES:

The meeting concluded at 7.20 pm.