

Tonbridge and Malling have set a balanced budget against a worsening financial position for many councils. We remain a debt free council and our finances whilst they could be better, are certainly among some of the best in the country.

We recently recruited a new Chief Exec upon the retirement of Julie Bielby who has been with the council most of her working life. She will be missed but we have found a top-quality replacement for her who starts in July (subject to full council agreement next week).

We have seen the number of full-time planning officers steadily rise to the point where we are nearly at correct numbers. This will enable more consistent dialogue with the same case officer from start to finish. We are also recruiting to bolster the current enforcement team.

You may be interested to know that we administer housing benefits to 3300 households and offer tax relief to 6500 households in the borough.

Our (and particularly Robins) commitment to tackling the climate issues have been given a boost in the budget with an allocation of £500k towards decarbonisation of the leisure centres. We currently have two significant grants awaiting an imminent decision, if successful this will accelerate our goal of carbon neutral TMBC leisure centres, the decision is due in the next week, fingers crossed.

Tonbridge pool is currently undergoing an installation of 150 PV panels with a capacity of 64kWh, with annual energy generation of around 65 MWh, this will massively reduce CO2 and also provide much needed energy security for the centre.



There will also be further rounds of the Green Business grants and West Kent Rural grant which support our valuable local companies and also community schemes, to date £40,000 for Green

grants and £125,000 for the Rural grants has been allocated. Phase 2 of the TMBC electric vehicle charging network has begun with an installation of an additional 60 chargers alongside the 35 chargers already installed.

For the following year we have created a community grant scheme with an allocation of £87k – more details will follow. We have recently also offered grants from a £60k pot towards greener businesses.

The local plan is continuing its progress with another consultation due to take place early in the Summer. It is a slow and difficult process but one which will be brought to your attention at the 'Reg. 18b' stage.

We are finding success in fining fly tippers and those who commission such removals. We will be tendering for an enhanced service in the summer, but meantime we continue to issue fines of up to £1000 for allowing unregistered clearance traders to take rubbish.

We have setup a community enforcement team who will be keeping a lid on antisocial behaviour throughout the borough. It is a six-month trial at present in order that we can assess its effectiveness.

The introduction of new, but unavoidable, software into the planning departments has been difficult. I'm pleased to say that we have moved from a red rating on the risk register to a lower grade. There is no doubt the introduction will be of greater benefit to the whole planning throughput – but it's been a struggle.

Kind regards

Cllr Martin Coffin & Cllr Robin Betts