

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

PARISH PARTNERSHIP PANEL

Thursday, 13th November, 2008

Present: Cllr M S Worrall (Chairman), Cllr N J Heslop (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Mrs J A Anderson, Cllr M A C Balfour, Cllr Mrs S J Boakes, Cllr R W Dalton, Cllr Mrs E M Holland, Cllr Mrs S L Luck, Cllr Miss A Moloney, Cllr B D Stone and Cllr Mrs C J Woodger.

Councillors Aikman, Baldock, Coffin, Mrs English, Homewood, Luker, Mrs Murray and Miss Sergison were also in attendance.

Together with representatives from Aylesford, Borough Green, Ditton, East Malling and Larkfield, Hadlow, Hildenborough, Kings Hill, Leybourne, Mereworth, Platt, Trottiscliffe, Watringbury and West Malling Parish Councils and Snodland Town Council.

Apologies for absence were received from Kent County Councillors Mrs Dagger and Rowe and Ightham Parish Council.

PART 1 - PUBLIC

**PP
08/034** **MINUTES**

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 11 September 2008 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**PP
08/035** **UPDATE ON ANY ACTION IDENTIFIED IN THE LAST MINUTES**

Further to Minute PP 08/004 of the meeting on 6 March 2008 relating to the Parish Charter, the Chairman advised that the final version had been formally adopted by the Borough Council and would be commended to all parish councils for their adoption. It was anticipated that the Cabinet Members for Community Development and Community Safety would visit parish councils for signing of the document to formalise the good working partnership between the parish councils and the Borough Council.

**PP
08/036** **POLICE LIAISON.**

The Chairman outlined recent changes to the local police structure, advising that Chief Inspector T Thomas had been promoted to temporary Superintendent and Area Commander. The Panel expressed gratitude for his appearances at the Parish Partnership Panel meetings and for his contribution and guidance on community and partnership policing and wished him well for the future.

The Chairman welcomed Acting Chief Inspector Pate who would be attending the Parish Partnership Panel in future. He expressed his wish to carry on the good work implemented by his predecessor and explained his background and experience in the police. He highlighted the tactical aspect and the fair but firm approach adopted by Kent Police and appreciated by residents.

Chief Inspector Pate provided an overview of the achievements made in performance and the neighbourhood policing agenda.

Members were pleased to note a positive direction of travel and the continuing reduction in crime across the Borough. A 33.1% detection rate for all crime was reported with Kent Police recognising the need to improve. An increase in fraud and forgery was highlighted with the current economic climate considered a main contributory factor to this increase. Preventative measures were being explored and the situation monitored.

Recent operations were outlined and planned activity over the coming months summarised. This included Crime Prevention Roadshows; Alcohol Awareness Campaigns and Safer Winter Themes on Violence, Vehicle Crime and Burglary.

The Panel was advised that the Kent Police website on www.kent.police.uk enabled residents to find out their local officers' contact details.

East Malling and Larkfield Parish Council thanked Kent Police for their open and accessible approach during recent operations in the area which had kept the Parish and Borough Councils fully up to date. This had proved beneficial with residents and the wider community being reassured and was an excellent example of modern policing and effective partnership working.

Ditton Parish Council extended their thanks to Kent Police for their hard work and continued support during difficult recent circumstances in the parish.

**PP
08/037**

PACT PANELS

At the request of Hildenborough Parish Council Acting Chief Inspector Pate explained that PACT Panels were a police and communities based initiative promoting effective communication and partnership working. A successful pilot in which Tonbridge and Malling had been involved had led to the PACT process being set up. It was intended that PACT Panels would look at local issues important to them and how to tackle them.

Hildenborough Parish Council expressed disappointment at the number of external partners who actually attended PACT Panel meetings, as well as concerns that work was being duplicated by the parish council and the PACT panel. Acting Chief Inspector Pate was disappointed to learn of this experience and offered to review the

situation at Hildenborough and try to address it. He stressed that, although local police officers tended to drive the process, it was essential that other responsible agencies were involved. It was suggested that a lack of knowledge by local police officers of the respective roles and responsibilities of district and county authorities might be contributing to the problems.

Members were reminded that where these Panels had operated successfully the communities had benefited.

Wrotham Parish Council shared their positive experience of PACT Panels emphasising the importance of managing expectation, focussing on difficult issues and setting priorities. The Parish Council had found PACT useful and very effective but agreed it was important for other agencies to be present.

Acting Chief Inspector Pate shared the frustrations surrounding gaps in attendance as these concerns had been voiced by local community officers. He assured the Panel that work was in progress to try and resolve the matter.

**PP
08/038**

STREET LIGHTING MAINTENANCE CONTRACTS

The Panel discussed the implications around street lighting maintenance following notification that the current provider, EDF, was terminating all maintenance contracts from 31 March 2009. Members were advised that EDF's withdrawal provided parishes with the opportunity of exploring the market to see whether local firms could offer an effective service at reasonable costs. Parishes could also consider setting up a co-operative working arrangement with neighbouring parishes to share and reduce costs.

The Chief Engineer briefly outlined the maintenance service received by the Borough Council from a local contractor who provided an effective and quality service in maintaining the lights in the car parks. Following discussion it appeared that several parishes only had a limited stock of lights to maintain and the Borough Council offered to discuss extending their current contract to include these at cost to the parishes. This would be subject to negotiation with the contractor and further discussion with the parishes. An e-mail would be circulated to all parish councils outlining the proposal.

For those parishes with a larger number of lights to maintain it was recommended that they contact suitable accredited electrical contractors to ascertain what opportunities were available.

Concern was expressed at the apparent lack of maintenance contracts by some parishes and they were recommended to address this urgently.

Kent County Council was asked what advice they would be giving parishes on seeking maintenance contracts and whether they had a list of potential contractors that could be circulated. East Malling and Larkfield Parish Council advised that an e-mail had been circulated by the County Council seeking information on parish councils' lighting

stock and offering the possibility of assistance. Since it seemed that this correspondence had not been received by every parish council, the Community Liaison Manager was asked to investigate and forward the e-mail to all parish councils if possible. The Chairman suggested that Kent County Council officers be invited to the next Parish Partnership Panel meeting to offer further advice on how this issue could be addressed.

**PP
08/039**

THE GLOBAL FINANCIAL CRISIS AND ITS IMPACT ON THE BOROUGH COUNCIL'S BUDGET

The Chief Executive informed Members of how the current economic climate was impacting on the Borough Council's budget. Much of the authority's income was generated from fees and charges which had been affected by the financial downturn. The crisis had impacted significantly on planning application fees, land charges and building regulation fees. Car parking charges had been affected by raising fuel prices and leisure facilities by residents' reluctance to spend. The unpredictability surrounding utility costs was also causing concern.

Further complications had arisen with the default of an Icelandic loan. Members were assured that all correct procedures were being followed to protect the Borough Council's interest. It was hoped that the majority of the loan would be repaid due to the guarantee and promise of the Icelandic Government, although this was anticipated to be in the longer term.

Low interest rates were affecting returns on investment whilst inflation could continue to rise. It was necessary for the Borough Council to make substantial savings in the budget while continuing effective service delivery to residents. It was difficult to predict where these savings could be found as the situation was constantly changing, although it was unlikely that Council Tax would be raised.

The Panel were advised financial arrangements with parish councils were likely to be amended as the Borough Council was looking to restrict forthcoming capital expenditure and might be in the position of providing capital grant support every other year. It was appreciated that parish budgets were also under pressure and the Chief Executive advised that if grants could not be provided interest-free loans might be available. This idea was subject to discussion and agreement with the District Auditor.

It was noted that the Cabinet and Council would discuss this further before a final decision was made.

The Chairman emphasised the Borough Council's intention and desire to maintain its relationship with the parishes but it was important to retain the integrity and excellent services of the authority.

**PP
08/040**

ABOUT THE BOROUGH - KEY FACTS AND RESIDENTS VIEWS

Members received a presentation from the Improvement and Development Officer which provided key facts about the Borough. Tonbridge and Malling was a generally affluent area with low levels of unemployment and good household income levels although there were pockets of relative deprivation. The Panel was pleased to note that 70% of residents were satisfied with Tonbridge and Malling as a place to live.

Residents' top priorities for improvement, taken from the 2005 survey, were cleaner streets and public areas, less traffic congestion, lower levels of anti-social behaviour, facilities and activities for teenagers, lower level of crime, affordable housing, local bus services and flood prevention. Members were advised that these priorities were included in the Community Strategy and that a similar survey from 2008 was currently being analysed.

The Panel was advised that it was difficult to predict how the current economic climate could impact on residents' views in the future but Members were encouraged by the current satisfaction levels.

The Chairman thanked the Improvement and Development Officer for a superb presentation and encouraged Members to take a copy of the full Borough Profile document.

The Panel was advised that the Borough Profile had been undertaken following the Strategic Assessment of the Community Safety Partnership. The Chief Constable had been highly impressed with that document and the excellent analytic work done. The Borough Council was pleased that this document had been acknowledged as an example of best practice. Feedback from the parishes for future updates to the Profile was welcomed.

At the request of the Chairman copies of the presentation would be circulated with the Minutes.

**PP
08/041**

STREET SCENE - A FOCUS ON ENFORCEMENT

The Head of Waste and Street Scene Services outlined changes designed to strengthen delivery of street scene services. Cleanliness of streets had been identified as an important priority to residents in recent surveys. Although standards of cleanliness within the Borough were very good a strengthening of the enforcement role would help counter problems with litter.

Members were advised that a new Clean Borough team had been established with responsibility for looking at the problem of litter 'hot spot' areas. The partnership working with other agencies, including the police, PCSOs and other enforcement officers as well as colleagues in other services to tackle a wide range of problems was highlighted as

an effective tool to addressing this problem. Parishes were invited to recommend any 'hot spot' areas they thought should be tackled. The importance of enforcing litter laws to help educate and change people's attitudes was recognised.

Members were advised that the Borough Council was working with Clean Kent Enforcement Team on tackling flytipping. The Head of Waste and Street Scene Services was pleased to report that several prosecutions were underway and a successful outcome had already been achieved with an offender fined £1,000. Members welcomed the flytipping prosecutions as these incidents impacted on the environment.

The problem of flyposting was discussed with the Panel being advised that Kent Highways Service had a 'hot spot' team that would go out and remove posters. This was an ongoing issue and would be discussed further with Kent County Council.

Ditton Parish Council raised the question of amenity tips and whether the Allington incinerator site could be considered as a potential location. The Head of Waste and Street Scene Services reminded the Panel that one of the Borough Council's key priorities was to secure an amenity tip in the borough and this issue would be pursued.

Snodland Town Council thanked the Street Scene team for all the hard work undertaken in Snodland recently.

**PP
08/042**

STANDARDS BOARD UPDATE

Members were advised that this update would be provided at a future meeting of the Panel. The item was deferred as the Chief Solicitor had been engaged on other Council business.

**PP
08/043**

COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW

The Chief Executive advised the Panel of the Borough Council's intention to undertake a Community Governance Review of parish arrangements. This was in response to the need to address specific boundary issues identified by some parishes. In addition the opportunity would be taken to consider the level of membership of parish councils that were currently constituted with fewer members than recommended by National Association of Parish Councils guidelines.

Members were assured that a full consultation would take place and it was anticipated that the new arrangements would be in place by 2011.

**PP
08/044**

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT - PUBLICATION SCHEME

The Chief Executive advised the Panel that parish councils were required by law to adopt a new publication scheme under the Freedom of Information Act. This needed to be adopted by 1 January 2009 and information published in accordance with that scheme.

**PP
08/045**

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL SERVICES UPDATE

The Kent County Council Community Liaison Manager, Loic Flory, provided an update which would be circulated with the Minutes and invited questions from the Panel none of which were forthcoming. Parishes were invited to suggest issues for future meetings.

Members appreciated the updated information on interim management arrangements in the Children's Family and Education and the Environment and Regeneration Directorates and asked if it was possible to have a structure chart for Kent Highway Services, providing contact names and details. Mr Flory recommended the Kent County Council website but would enquire as to whether hard copy information was available.

The meeting ended at 2150 hours