

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

TONBRIDGE FORUM

Monday, 24th November, 2008

Present: Cllr N J Heslop (Vice-Chairman in the Chair), Cllr A W Allison, Cllr Mrs J A Anderson, Cllr Ms J A Atkinson, Cllr O C Baldock, Cllr P F Bolt and Cllr Ms V Branson.

Councillor Court was also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

Members of the Forum:

Kent County Councillor G Horne MBE, The Bridge Trust, The Skinners Company, Society of Friends, Tonbridge Allotments and Gardens Association, Tonbridge Civic Society, Tonbridge Historical Society, Tonbridge Rotary Club and Tonbridge Sports Association.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Aikman, Dobson, Ms Spence and Worrall (Chairman) and Tonbridge District Scout Council and Tonbridge Music Club.

The Forum noted that the Chairman and Chief Executive were absent due to their commitment to attending a meeting of Kent Authorities.

ACTION
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PART 1 - PUBLIC

TF
08/025

MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on 1 September 2008 were received and agreed as a correct record of the proceedings.

TF
08/026

UPDATE ON ANY ACTION IDENTIFIED IN THE LAST MINUTES

Referring to Minute TF 08/021 of the meeting held on 1 September 2008 the Chairman congratulated the Tonbridge Lions on a successful Health Promotion event which had been well attended.

With reference to Minute TF 08/022 from the same meeting the Chairman took the opportunity of advising of Chief Inspector T Thomas's promotion to Area Commander.

The Forum expressed gratitude for his significant contribution to neighbourhood policing in Tonbridge and asked that these thanks be passed on to him.

Members also noted that PC Watts had been promoted to sergeant.

TF
08/027

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL SERVICES UPDATE

The Kent County Council Liaison Manager, Loic Flory, provided an update which would be circulated with the Minutes and invited questions from the Forum. The items included in the report related to Cold Calling Zones, Kent Health Watch, Kent Children's Trust, changes to management arrangements in the Environment and Regeneration and Children's Family and Education Directorates. Details of a footbridge over the Botany Stream were also outlined. Members were advised that due to the current economic climate the design of a similar replacement footbridge had recently commenced but a detailed programme for design and installation was not yet available.

In response to a question raised by a Borough Councillor, the Forum was advised that more signage would be visible advising lorries of a low bridge in Priory Road. It was hoped that this would reduce the number of vehicles getting stuck.

Kent County Councillor Horne acknowledged the sad circumstances surrounding the fatality in Hadlow Road. The accident was under investigation by Kent Police but the incident would be reviewed at the next meeting of the Joint Transportation Board.

TF
08/028

TONBRIDGE CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU

The Chairman advised that the meeting of the Forum had been devoted to voluntary organisations to give them the opportunity of explaining what services and activities they provided to the town. It was noted that the Volunteer Centre had been invited to participate but unfortunately were unable to attend this meeting.

Before the presentation Councillor Mrs Anderson reminded the Forum that she was the Chairman of the Citizens Advice Bureau.

The Chairman welcomed Angela Newey who outlined the role of the Tonbridge Citizens Advice Bureau explaining their responsibilities and services to residents.

The Tonbridge and District Citizens Advice bureau helped people resolve their legal, money and other problems by providing free, independent, confidential and impartial information and advice. Members were advised that the Bureau was an independent charity reliant on funds raised locally and the commitment of trained volunteers from the local community.

Services were provided at the Tonbridge Bureau, Russet Homes Debt Advice, Snodland Outreach and Finance Debt and Benefit Advice with Kent Probation. The main issues for which residents sought advice were on benefits, debt, employment, housing and relationship problems. The importance of dealing with debt problems sooner rather than later was emphasised.

Following a recent quality audit by the national Citizens Advice Bureau the Tonbridge service was in the top 10% in the country guaranteeing a high level of service.

The Forum was advised that future developments included providing a service in the north of the Borough with venues at East Malling, Snodland, Kings Hill and Larkfield being investigated. Consideration was also being given to developing a mobile advice service incorporating the use of laptops.

Members asked whether there were opportunities in which voluntary contributions from clients could be invited. Ms Newey replied that collection boxes were in place and small amounts were received. However, this was not a major source of income as people expected a free service. The Bureau's main funding was from the Borough Council but local charities were approached for contributions. Councillor Mrs Anderson reminded the Forum that Citizens Advice Bureaux were independent organisations who did not receive any government funding and that donations were welcomed.

The Chairman thanked Ms Newey for her presentation and contribution to the meeting.

A copy of the presentation would be circulated with the Minutes.

TF
08/029

TONBRIDGE SPORTS ASSOCIATION

Mr Alan Nicholl provided a presentation on the role of the Tonbridge Sports Association which supported the provision and development of organised sport in Tonbridge and the

surrounding area, including Hadlow, Hildenborough and Shipbourne.

The Association had been a member of the Forum since its creation and felt it important to attend regularly as they represented the community. Most of the sports facilities in the area were provided by Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council and the Association had close liaison with Leisure Services, as well as daily contact on issues that affected sports clubs and sport development in the Borough. The constant communication and engagement with the Borough Council ensured an effective and co-ordinated working relationship and it was hoped this would continue for the long term. The Association's main role was to advise and co-ordinate the activities of sports clubs as well as discuss and plan the provision and development of facilities.

The lack of all weather training facilities in the area was discussed. Members were advised that these type of venues required large capital outlay and it was not possible for a local authority or a voluntary sports organisation to fund such facilities. A policy of joint ventures with schools was being pursued but the problems associated with floodlights impacting on residential amenity made this difficult.

In response to a question asking whether an 'Olympic effect' had been witnessed Mr Nicholl hoped that the publicity of the Olympics would help promote sport and encourage young people to actively participate.

The Chairman thanked Mr Nicholl for an informative presentation and applauded the Association on the amount of activity being undertaken.

TF
08/030

BRIDGE TRUST

The Forum received a presentation from Mr John Handley, General Manager of the Bridge Trust, detailing the help offered to vulnerable persons in the area.

The Chairman reminded the Forum that he was a Board Member for the Bridge Trust.

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The Forum was shown a video of four volunteers undertaking a 'Homeless Challenge' in which they experienced the difficulties of sleeping rough for seven nights. The aim of the challenge was to raise awareness of the plight of homeless people, particularly the street homeless.

The work undertaken by the Bridge Trust included the provision of street teams who provided the homeless with warm food and drink; centres where advice on homelessness issues was provided; mediation to prevent homelessness occurring by trying to mend broken relationships, and supported accommodation. Members were advised that a dedicated support worker was on hand to deal with clients and other agencies to try and improve their situation.

The size of the homelessness problem was difficult to estimate although street teams regularly saw between 8-15 people per night, which represented 80% repeat business; whilst the advice centres would see approximately 350 homeless people this year.

The Forum noted the inadequate provision for those sleeping rough and the lack of spaces available in direct access hostels. The provision in the Borough could be increased but it was acknowledged that this would not just help West Kent residents as the homelessness problem was more widespread.

Funding had been provided to undertake a feasibility study on a 'Hosted Lodgings' initiative. However, problems associated with risk and risk assessment made this difficult to progress. Although this initiative was viable it could only provide a short term solution. The importance of adding to the supply of affordable housing in the borough, to provide a longer term solution, had been recognised by the Borough Council which had adopted this as a key priority.

Mr Handley acknowledged that Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council was very pro-active in dealing with homelessness issues. A mix of solutions were needed to improve the problem but lack of funding hindered any progress.

The Cabinet Member for Housing reminded Members that losing a home impacted on other areas of a person's life and mental health.

The Chairman thanked Mr Handley for an interesting and simulating presentation which had raised many searching questions with no immediate or obvious solution.

TF
08/031

NAMING THE BRIDGES - HAYSDEN COUNTRY PARK

Hazel Dawes, of the Haysden Country Park Users Group, explained that the residents of Tonbridge were proud of the park and as it was a well used recreational facility the Users Group had suggested naming bridges in the park to celebrate this fact.

The bridges would require name signs and a design had been suggested with prices of £218 per post identified. A total of £3k estimated costs would be required to name all 14 bridges and contributions were invited. Further information or donation pledges could be made via hazeldawe@bulldoghome.com

Members were assured that bridge names chosen would have local historic or geographical relevance.

Another project being organised was the River of Flowers which would connect the Country Park with the Old Orchard at Tonbridge School with a river of wild flowers.

Kent County Councillor Horne supported the Bridge Naming Project and offered to contribute £1,000 from his county budget to match fund any other contributions received and committed to the project before April 2009.

The Forum supported the idea of different organisations funding and sponsoring a bridge and asked whether the organisation's name could be featured on a plaque. Confusion existed as to whether the policy was acceptable to the Borough Council as it appeared that commercial sponsorship had been refused in the past. Officers would try and clarify the position and report back.

TF
08/032

TONBRIDGE GATEWAY UPDATE

The Cabinet Member for Innovation and Improvement updated the Forum on the Tonbridge Gateway Project.

Works would start in December to extend the ground floor offices at Tonbridge Castle and allow the expansion of services located there under the Gateway banner. The works had been the subject of discussions with customers

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and the Disability Working Party and would ensure for the first time that the offices were DDA compliant. A much better customer space with improved counter services for a wide range of interactions would be provided.

During the works all existing services would continue to operate from temporary accommodation on the Cannon Lawn seven days a week. The work was expected to be completed in June 2009 with the new Gateway opening in partnership with Kent County Council. All existing Borough Council services would continue to be provided from the new Gateway.

Further details of other services provided and joint working with other agencies would be provided at a future meeting of the Tonbridge Forum.

Members of the Forum were pleased to note that Kent County Council had agreed to 50/50 funding partnership.

The meeting ended at 2125 hours