

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

TONBRIDGE FORUM

Monday, 1st June, 2009

Present: Cllr M S Worrall (Chairman), Cllr N J Heslop (Vice-Chairman), Cllr D J Aikman, Cllr A W Allison, Cllr Mrs J A Anderson, Cllr Ms J A Atkinson, Cllr O C Baldock, Cllr Ms V Branson and Cllr M J Dobson.

Councillors Coffin, Court, Luker and Mrs Murray were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

Members of the Forum:

Kent County Councillor Horne, Age Concern Tonbridge, St John Ambulance, Tonbridge Art Group, Tonbridge Christian Leaders, Tonbridge Citizens Advice Bureau, Tonbridge Civic Society, Tonbridge Debt Advice Centre, Tonbridge Historical Society, Tonbridge Music Club, Tonbridge Rotary Club, Tonbridge Sports Association, Tonbridge Townswomen's Guild, Tonbridge Volunteer Centre and Women's Institute.

Apologies for absence were received from Borough Councillors Bolt, Ms Spence and Thornewell, Kent County Councillor Mrs Dagger and Kent Fire and Rescue, Kent Police, Kent Scouts, Society of Friends, Skinners Company and Tonbridge Theatre and Arts Club.

ACTION
BY

PART 1 - PUBLIC

TF
09/008 **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on 9 February 2009 were received and agreed as a correct record of the proceedings.

TF
09/009 **UPDATE ON ANY ACTION IDENTIFIED IN THE LAST MINUTES**

No matters were identified.

TF
09/010 **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 within his report related to the Brook Street development; Cash for Roads; Education and Health issues and an update on the Icelandic banks situation. Mr Flory reported that Kent County Council was currently finalising its 2008/09 accounts which showed an underspend of approximately £6M. This underspend took account of the interest lost on the Icelandic bank deposits. In response to a question raised Mr Flory was unable to confirm whether any of the underspent monies would be used to fund infrastructure or projects within Tonbridge.

Borough Councillor Dobson thanked the engineers who had worked on cleaning the Hildenborough gully for their helpful attitude in resolving the problem.

Kent County Councillor Horne advised the Forum of a recent meeting between EDF and the County Council. This had resulted in EDF allowing County engineers access to street lights to install electrical equipment, which it was hoped would improve services and enable the lights to function properly. Councillor Horne was confident that this approach would be successful.

At the request of the Chairman the Services Update report would be circulated with the Minutes.

TF
09/011

OLDER PERSONS STRATEGY

Prior to the Older Persons Strategy item, the Chairman took the opportunity of introducing the new Mayor of Tonbridge and Malling, Councillor Mrs Murray, who would be focusing on older persons' interests during her year in office. The Mayor announced that the charities she would be supporting for the year were Age Concern Malling and Tonbridge and Carers First. The Forum was updated on the Mayor's recent Friendship Circle trip to Heusenstamm in Germany which was celebrating 50 years of township. The Tonbridge Philharmonic Society had attended and given a performance and the whole trip had been very successful.

Members received a presentation on Kent's Policy Framework for Later Life from Debra Exall, Head of Strategic Policy at Kent County Council, which outlined the key themes and strategic objectives to help older persons live later life to the full.

The main aim was to ensure the views and needs of older people were understood and taken into account.

Key themes which had emerged as part of the consultation and research process centred around valuing later life; planning for a secure old age including finance, health and social life; healthy communities particularly transport, housing, leisure and community safety; information, education and access to learning about new technology. The assumption that social care was the main driver appeared to be inaccurate as independent living had been identified as an important factor.

Ms Exall reported on better communication between agencies and improved links between the networks and Kent County Council on older people's concerns. The next step was to develop a multi-agency action plan building on existing work and initiatives already in place. Individual agencies would report back on how they met the objectives in the Policy Framework. Copies of the full Policy were available from Debra Exall on request or via Kent County Council's website:

<http://www.kent.gov.uk/publications/council-and-democracy/policy-framework-for-later-life.htm>

The Cabinet Member for Community Development reported that the Borough Council was committed to older persons' issues and had created a new Older Persons Issues Advisory Board to deal with initiatives and improve links with relevant organisations. It was anticipated that this new Advisory Board would feed into the Older Persons' Forum and be an important part of the Older Persons' Strategy.

The Women's Institute queried the loss of adult education funding for older people which had caused a potential loss of social networking opportunities, increasing the sense of isolation. Ms Exall and the Chairman agreed that the lack of learning and skills funding was unfortunate and the knock-on effects were acknowledged. However, the Forum was reminded that voluntary sector organisations offered good alternatives to gain experience especially in modern technology.

TF
09/012

TRANSFORMING SOCIAL CARE FOR OLDER PEOPLE

Margaret Howard, Director of Commissioning and Provision - West Kent, provided a presentation on Kent Adult Services and Achieving Objectives through Partnerships. This outlined the transformation of social care; the policy background for older people and partnership forums for older people. The main objective of the team was to help the people of Kent live independent and fulfilled lives safely

in their local communities.

The key components of the new services were explained including self directed support; unique personalised solutions, timely and responsive services and proportionate assessment. It was hoped to tailor services to individuals' needs.

The importance of working together with other local authorities and external agencies in providing joined up planning, services, shared consultation and engagement, information, advice and guidance was emphasised.

The early intervention of advice and signposting information and guidance to local communities was an important factor in preventing social isolation and creating stronger foundations for older people. Good information could be easily accessible by various means including mobile Gateways and technology.

In thanking Ms Howard for her contribution to the meeting the Chairman took the opportunity of introducing the second Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Innovation and Improvement, Councillor Baldock, who provided a brief update on the Tonbridge Gateway project. Many services would be available and easily accessible at Tonbridge Castle including advice on housing and benefits. The Borough Council intended to hold a Gateway presentation at the next meeting of the Customer Service Improvement Advisory Board on 1 July 2009, where more information would be available.

TF
09/013

TONBRIDGE DEBT ADVICE CENTRE

The presentation by Mr Graham Connell provided information on the services and help available from the Tonbridge Debt Advice Centre.

The Forum was advised that the Tonbridge Debt Advice Centre was an independent non-profit organisation providing advice and practical assistance to those in debt or financial difficulty. The service was completely free and impartial and the work was supported and funded by the churches of Tonbridge acting together for the benefit of all.

The Centre had over 50 volunteer advisors trained to help people through the process of sorting out their money issues. Due to the increase in workload additional volunteers were being trained to offer support and guidance. The main factors contributing to debt and

ACTION
BY

financial difficulty were overspending on credit cards, difficulties with benefits, loss of employment, mortgage arrears and negative equity.

The serious problems surrounding personal debt in the United Kingdom were explained and Members were advised that Tonbridge would not be immune.

The importance of seeking early advice was stressed as solutions could be available. More information could be found on www.tdac.org.uk

The Centre valued the support received from the Borough Council and Russet Homes but reminded the Forum that it required the goodwill, support and flexibility from local organisations.

The Chairman thanked Mr Connell for his informative and thought provoking presentation.

In closing the meeting the Chairman thanked Dr T Robinson for his contribution as a Kent County Councillor and his years working as a Member of the Forum and as a local GP in Tonbridge. The Forum acknowledged his contribution and invited the Chairman to write to Dr Robinson expressing their gratitude and wishing him a happy and long retirement.

Members were reminded that the next meeting of the Forum was Monday 14 September 2009.

The meeting ended at 2105 hours.