

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

MANAGEMENT LIAISON PANEL

Tuesday, 1st December, 2009

Present: Cllr M S Worrall (Chairman), Cllr M J Dobson (Vice-Chairman), Cllr D J Aikman, Cllr C Brown, Cllr G Court, Cllr D W P Evans, Cllr Mrs F A Kemp, Cllr D Lettington, Cllr H S Rogers, Cllr A K Sullivan and Cllr D Thornewell.

Councillors Mrs Anderson, Bolt, Coffin, Cure, Heslop, Mrs Holland and Miss Sergison were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Baldock and Rhodes.

PART 2 - PRIVATE

ML 09/001 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

ML 09/002 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Management Liaison Panel held on 21 February 2008 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

MATTERS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE CABINET

ML 09/003 REGIONAL ARCHITECTURE

The joint report of the Leader and Chief Executive described the new structures of regional governance in the south east following the dissolution of the South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA) from 31 March 2009. In introducing the report the Leader referred to the extreme complexity of the new structure much of which had developed at a fast pace with decisions being made by bodies upon which the Council was not represented. Accordingly, it had been necessary to make some decisions on joining new structures at short notice to protect the Council's interests which were now recommended for endorsement by the Cabinet.

The Chief Executive made an illustrated presentation explaining the function and composition of the various elements of the new regional structure. It was noted that the most important regional policy making body, the South East England Partnership Board (SEEPB) had only

8 of the 74 Councils in the south east represented on it compared to the full representation that SEERA provided. It was for this reason that the Council had voted against the dissolution of the latter.

The Panel was advised of action taken to join a new body, South East England Councils (SEEC), which was intended to comprise all 74 Councils in the south east region (represented exclusively at Leader level). It was noted that this body determined representation on SEEPB and its sub-structures and itself operated through an executive entitled the South East England Leaders' Board upon which there were two representatives from Kent. The report also referred to arrangements for monies held by SEERA at its point of dissolution to be vested in a company known as SEERA Ltd to which all 74 Councils were invited to become shareholders for a nominal £1 cost. The Borough Council had become a shareholder in the company and would accordingly be able to influence the way in which the funds were used for the promotion of the economic, social and environmental well-being of the south east.

During discussion Members expressed concern about the complexity of the new arrangements, the concentration of power among a small group of people and the impression that district councils were considerably less influential than other types of authority under the new arrangements. It was noted that in an effort to counter the latter, South East District Council Leaders had been established to seek to exert more influence over SEEC.

Members raised a number of questions on the new structure, implications for funding of service delivery and the independence of the district tier of local government. It was agreed that a seminar be arranged for all Members of the Council to enable these issues to be explored further and debated.

RECOMMENDED: That

(1) the action taken in joining South East England Councils at an initial subscription of £1,016 be endorsed;

(2) the action taken in joining SEERA Ltd as a shareholder through the investment of a nominal £1 be endorsed; and

(3) a seminar open to all Members of the Council be arranged on the new structures of regional governance in the south east.

***Referred to Cabinet**

MATTERS SUBMITTED FOR INFORMATION

**ML
09/004**

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION - DISTRICT COUNCILS NETWORK

The joint report of the Leader and Chief Executive advised the Panel of a new grouping within the Local Government Association (LGA) to promote the interests of district councils. Reference was made to the

Council's long held view that the merger of the various bodies representing the differing types of local authorities into a single LGA had resulted in a marginalisation of the voice of district councils. Therefore, in accordance with a provision within the LGA's constitution for "Special Interest Groups", a District Councils' Network had been established, supported by a group of Chief Executives drawn from across the regions. The Panel was pleased to note that this Council's Chief Executive had been elected to one of the four south east positions of policy adviser.

ML
09/005

KENT PARTNERSHIP

The Chief Executive made a presentation explaining the structure, representation and key areas of business activity of the Kent Partnership, the Local Strategic Partnership for the administrative county of Kent. It was noted that the Partnership operated through a complex structure of Boards and a growing number of new policy documents were being developed with important implications for the Borough and its residents. Members expressed particular concern about the Kent and Medway Housing Strategy being superimposed on the Borough Council's own Housing Strategy and the potential diversion of funding to parts of East Kent at the expense of those residents of the Borough in need of affordable housing.

The Leader updated the Panel on the positive work of the Tonbridge and Malling Local Strategic Partnership and discussions held with the County Council as part of its localism agenda. Reference was made to the acceptance by KCC of an enhanced role on the Parish Partnership Panel and Tonbridge Forum. These bodies would therefore be used as the vehicles for local liaison rather than the previously mooted establishment of six separate County Member Boards in each division in Tonbridge and Malling. It was also noted that County Councillor Valerie Dagger had been designated as the lead County Member for the Borough. The Leader also referred to the more formalised involvement of Parish Councils on the Joint Transportation Board which was designed to improve liaison with both Borough and County Councils on highway matters. The improved liaison mechanisms were acknowledged by the Panel.

The meeting ended at 2122 hours