

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

TONBRIDGE FORUM

Monday, 23rd November, 2009

Present: Cllr M S Worrall (Chairman), Cllr N J Heslop (Vice-Chairman), Cllr D J Aikman, Cllr A W Allison, Cllr Ms J A Atkinson, Cllr P F Bolt and Cllr M J Dobson.

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

Members of the Forum:

Kent County Councillors Mrs Dagger and Smith, Kent Police, St John Ambulance, Tonbridge Art Group, Tonbridge Civic Society, Tonbridge Historical Society, Tonbridge Lions Club and Tonbridge Sports Association.

Apologies for absence were received from Borough Councillors Mrs Anderson, Baldock, Ms Branson, Ms Spence and Thornewell and from the Society of Friends and Tonbridge Music Club.

ACTION
BY

PART 1 - PUBLIC

TF
09/021

MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on 14 September 2009 were received and agreed as a correct record of the proceedings.

TF
09/022

UPDATE ON ANY ACTION IDENTIFIED IN THE LAST MINUTES.

No matters were identified.

TF
09/023

CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed to the Forum Kent Police's new inspector for the Tonbridge and Malling area, Inspector Adrian Allen, who would be responsible for neighbourhood policing.

TF
09/024

TONBRIDGE ARTS FESTIVAL

Mr A Brett provided information on the Tonbridge Arts Festival, a new event planned for October 2010 aiming to establish a town-wide arts festival. The event was being organised by West Kent College and Tonbridge School and supported by Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council and Kent County Council. To move this project forward Tonbridge Arts Festival Committee had been established. Members of the Forum were invited to a public meeting of the Committee to be held on Monday 30 November at 1730 hours in the Angel Centre, Tonbridge. Further information was available from Leisure Services at Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council.

The Chairman thanked Mr Brett for his announcement and wished the Committee success in organising the Arts Festival, assuring him of the Borough Council's support and assistance.

TF
09/025

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL SERVICES UPDATE

The Kent County Council Liaison Manager, Loic Flory, circulated an update on County Council Services. Particular attention was drawn to the HOUSE project, organised by Kent County Council Youth Service, which provided temporary accommodation where youth workers and other professionals were available to give advice and assistance to young people who called in. The official opening was scheduled for Saturday 5 December 2009.

The Forum was reminded that any local community organisations could apply to their County Councillors for devolved budget grants, subject to funds being available. County Councillor C Smith explained that these grants were only eligible for new projects and initiatives and not those currently in operation.

Members of the Forum were invited to suggest items for future County Council Services Updates.

The Chairman thanked Mr Flory for his contribution and suggested that presentations on the Kent Environmental Strategy Consultation and Local Strategic Partnerships could be added to the next Forum meeting agenda.

TF
09/026

THE INTERNATIONAL MEETING PLACE: A PROJECT TO ASSIST INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS WITH THEIR ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS.

The Forum received a presentation from Alex Bonarius of Tonbridge Churches which provided information on the International Meeting Place. This was a project aimed at assisting international students with their English language skills and run by volunteers. The group met regularly on Friday evenings in a local coffee bar where foreign students were engaged in English conversation to improve their language skills. The project had now extended to offering weekend activities using local facilities.

The International Meeting Place was a successful initiative, well attended by enthusiastic individuals keen to meet people and make friends. The project was about more than the numbers attending but about forming relationships, being of practical help and assistance and welcoming to international students.

The Chairman thanked Mr Bonarius for his contribution and reminded Members of the Borough Council's successful twinning relationships.

TF
09/027

YOUTH CAFE FACILITY AND THE PROPOSED STREET PASTOR SCHEME

This item was **WITHDRAWN** from the agenda.

TF
09/028

ST JOHN AMBULANCE – RECENT CHANGES TO THE SERVICE

The Chairman introduced Mr John Hougham CBE who provided background to the St John Ambulance service and their operation, recruitment and training, reminding Members of the important contribution made by the volunteers. One of the major changes would be that a green operational uniform would now be visible at events rather than the traditional black and white.

Mr Hougham outlined the increasing pressures being faced in the current economic climate, explaining that the Service was reliant on charitable donations and income raised by charging for first aid training and other commercial activities. Ways of generating new income streams were being explored with charging for specialised passenger transport being considered. The Service was also looking at rationalising their property portfolio due to increasing

financial pressures and new and changing health and safety legislation. Consideration would be given to whether individual Divisions should be co-located or merged, taking into account the number of attendees, costs, property upkeep and leadership responsibilities.

Members were assured that any changes made would not diminish the quality of service but were intended to maintain or improve them.

St John Ambulance recognised the need to ensure adequate recruitment and maintain attendance levels. They were hoping to attract younger people into the Service by working closely with schools and various youth organisations.

The Chairman thanked Mr Hougham for his contribution to the meeting and offered to circulate any information provided to Youth Groups associated with the Borough Council and at the next meeting of the Parish Partnership Panel in February 2010.

TF
09/029

THE BOROUGH COUNCIL'S FINANCIAL POSITION

The Chairman outlined the Borough Council's current financial position and how the economic downturn was having a significant impact on the Council's income and budget. He explained that borough and district councils were more vulnerable than other public sector organisations due to their funding sources being reliant on income generated and Government grant. The situation was not anticipated to improve in the short term with reductions in planning, land charges search fees and other income streams likely to continue, along with rising energy prices. Low interest rates were impacting on investment income whilst potential Council Tax capping also had implications for the budget position. The Borough Council had undertaken a major savings exercise and a combination of various measures had been taken including the opportunity of changing working practices, holding positions vacant, a recruitment freeze and a number of compulsory redundancies. A similar exercise would be repeated in the future in an effort to find further options.

The Chairman reminded Members that public finances were at their weakest ever, and whichever Party formed the next Government, severe cuts in expenditure would be needed. It was likely that district and borough councils would have to take an even higher proportion of the burden in relative terms. The Borough Council anticipated a reduction in

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Government Grant from 2010/11 which would impact on services and staffing resources. However, any reduction in services needed to be balanced against public expectations, which appeared to be rising despite the financial pressures being faced and were coming at a time of falling resource and reducing capacity.

Members were assured that efficiency measures would continue to be rigorously pursued but the funding gap meant that difficult choices lay ahead about how to allocate resources. The Chairman advised the Forum that there was no provision for a pay award to council staff in 2010 although he was pleased to report that staff were supportive and understanding of the measures being undertaken to address the budget deficit.

The meeting ended at 2055 hours