

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

PARISH PARTNERSHIP PANEL

Thursday, 25th February, 2010

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 D W P Evans, Cllr Mrs S L Luck, Cllr Miss A Moloney and Cllr B D Stone.

Councillors Aikman, Baldock, Court, Mrs Murray and Miss Sergison were also in attendance.

Together with Kent County Councillors Mrs Hohler, Homewood and Long; representatives from Addington, Aylesford, Ditton, East Malling and Larkfield, Hadlow, Hildenborough, Kings Hill, Leybourne, Mereworth, Trottscliffe, West Peckham and Wrotham Parish Councils; Snodland Town Council and the Kent Association of Local Councils.

Apologies for absence were received from Borough Councillor Mrs Woodger and County Councillor Mrs Dagger.

PART 1 - PUBLIC

**PPP
10/001**

MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 10 September 2009 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**PPP
10/002**

UPDATE ON ANY ACTION IDENTIFIED IN THE LAST MINUTES

No items were identified.

**PPP
10/003**

DEPUTY MAYOR ANNOUNCEMENT

Councillor Gordon Court, the Deputy Mayor of Tonbridge and Malling announced a Charity Golf Day to be held on Monday 14 June 2010 in aid of Kent Air Ambulance. Members were invited to join him at the prestigious London Golf Club, which last year had hosted the European Open Championship, to support a good cause. The cost for the day was £380 for a 4 ball team. Further information was available from the Mayor's Office at Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council on 01732 876 005 or email mayors.office@tmbs.gov.uk

**PPP
10/004**

THE BOROUGH COUNCIL'S FINANCIAL POSITION

The Cabinet Member for Finance outlined the financial pressures facing the Borough Council explaining how the economic downturn was having a significant impact on the Council's income and budget. It was explained that due to the state of public finances central Government grant was likely to be cut significantly after the next general election and subsequent spending review. The Panel was reminded that Tonbridge and Malling had seen grant increases over the past few years which had been substantially lower than other parts of the country. The settlement figure for the 2010/11 Comprehensive Spending Review had been an increase of 0.6%, with a further reduction in funding anticipated for next year. Borough and district councils were extremely reliant on the fees and charges collected for the services provided, such as income from planning, land charges and car parks, and these continued to decline.

The Cabinet Member for Finance assured the Panel of the Borough Council's continuing commitment to parish councils and that financial arrangements would be honoured with whatever grant received from Government being passed down. As a result of the financial pressures facing the Borough Council grants were no longer offered to parish councils for capital projects, although interest free loans would be offered as an alternative scheme for supporting these projects. Loans would only be made to help finance capital projects that merited special consideration and would be capped at £25,000 with repayment terms normally no longer than five years. Parishes were advised that Secretary of State consent was required before entering into a loan agreement. Full details and the criteria of the interest free loan scheme would be circulated to parish councils in due course.

**PPP
10/005**

PRESENTATION BY KM GROUP ON COMMUNITY INFORMATION: ~ ADVICE ON HOW PARISH COUNCILS CAN ACCESS COMMUNITY PAGES VIA THE WEBSITE

Mr G Boniface, KM Group Commercial Manager, and Mr J Rastelli, KM Group Head of Digital explained how parish councils could access community pages and information via Kent Online. A demonstration of the site was provided.

The main aim of the service was to offer local news, information and entertainment to the local community with residents being able to find information on their village by name or specific postcode. The site also offered Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council an opportunity to communicate and distribute information at a very local level, whilst encouraging feedback from residents.

Further information was available via the KM Group on www.kmgroup.co.uk

The Chairman withdrew from the meeting after this item to attend a prior engagement. The Vice-Chairman took the Chair for the remainder of the meeting.

PPP
10/006

POLICE LIAISON

Inspector Allen provided an update on recent changes in personnel in the Tonbridge and Malling policing area and an overview of the achievements made in performance and in the neighbourhood policing agenda. Particular reference was made to the overall crime reduction in the Borough and residents' perception that Tonbridge and Malling was a relatively safe place to live. A slight increase in domestic abuse was seen as an encouraging indication that more incidents were being reported.

The Vice-Chairman, supported by the Panel, expressed his gratitude and good wishes to the outgoing Borough Commander, Dave Pate, who had moved on within the police service for his hard work, commitment and contribution to tackling issues within Tonbridge and Malling.

The Panel supported and welcomed the role of Police Community Support Officers recognising the excellent job they achieved in bridging the gap between the local community and police. In response to a question raised by East Malling and Larkfield Parish Council Inspector Allen confirmed that members of the policing team would be in attendance at the neighbourhood shop in East Malling in the near future.

A brief discussion followed on speeding limits and parking enforcement measures in various villages throughout the Borough.

The Chief Executive advised that from April 2010 the Borough Council's Community Safety Team would be co-located with police officers as part of a new Community Safety Unit (CSU). This Unit would be based at the Borough Council offices at Kings Hill.

The purpose of the CSU was to improve communication and joint working arrangements between various external agencies involved in tackling crime, anti-social behaviour and community issues. Members welcomed and supported this joint venture as these type of units had been successful in targeting hotspots and reducing crime by taking immediate and effective action.

PPP
10/007

EXTREME WEATHER CONDITIONS: HOW TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILS CAN BETTER PREPARE AND WORK CLOSER WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS TO MAINTAIN AND PROVIDE EFFECTIVE SERVICE DELIVERY TO THE PUBLIC.

Further to requests from Snodland Town Council and East Malling and Larkfield Parish Councils, Members discussed improvements to maintaining and providing effective service delivery to residents in extreme weather conditions. It was believed that a co-ordinated approach dealing with localised solutions to problems was essential for communities as well as improved communication between agencies to prevent working in isolation.

The parish councils expressed their frustration and disappointment at the County Council's handling and management during the extreme weather conditions, particularly the lack of communication and leadership, supply of gritting materials and the response to local issues in terms of maintaining the road networks and ensuring residents' safety.

Kent County Councillor Mrs Hohler reported that County intended an initiative to promote parish and community level emergency planning. The primary purpose of this was to promote simple local level resilience planning, enabling a self help approach during major incidents such as flooding or severe snow. It was anticipated that the formal launch would be arranged in the next few months. Further information on this initiative was available from David Cloake, Head of Emergency Planning at Kent County Council.

Mr A Moreton of Kent Highway Services advised Members of a Tonbridge and Malling Local Winter Service Plan which set out operational details for dealing with a severe weather event. The Plan also identified salt bin locations and areas for hand salting. Copies of the Winter Plan would be circulated to parishes who were asked to identify local issues and level of need.

Kent County Council acknowledged that their level of performance was relatively poor during the first snow incident but that lessons had been learnt and acted upon for the later occurrence.

**PPP
10/008**

PROVISION OF GRIT BINS AND CLEARANCE OF PAVEMENTS OF SNOW AND ICE

East Malling and Larkfield Parish Council welcomed the opportunity to discuss the new arrangements in place for the provision of grit bins, as it was now understood that parish councils were no longer expected to fund them and that Kent Highway Services would provide them where necessary. It was noted that assessment criteria had been introduced to ensure salt bins were placed appropriately and safely on the highway network.

East Malling and Larkfield Parish Council expressed concern at the lack of consultation relating to the change of salt bin regime, especially as many Kent County Council staff seemed unaware that salt bins were their responsibility. The difficulties in obtaining salt bins from County were highlighted by Borough Green Parish Council which had raised funds to purchase its own bins. Parish councils were keen to offer assistance despite a perceived reluctance from Kent Highway Services in supplying materials at reasonable prices. Members queried the price of the salt bins from Kent County Council which were £595.33 each, including administration costs, compared to £280 each from Tonbridge and Malling. Kent Highway Services were unable to provide an answer and offered to seek clarification on the price difference outside the meeting.

East Malling and Larkfield Parish Council queried the point of having parish charters if parishes were not consulted on important issues and feared it was endemic of a culture within Kent County Council.

Further to a request from East Malling and Larkfield Parish Council, the responsibilities relating to clearance of pavements of snow and ice was discussed. Frustration was expressed at the lack of action taken in trying to clear pavements and bus routes leaving many residents isolated and vulnerable. Members were advised that Kent County Council was the responsible authority for ensuring that pedestrian areas and footpaths were cleared as these were classified as part of the highway network.

Mr A Moreton urged parishes to provide feedback on the Winter Plan and complete questionnaires when these were circulated between now and the Summer. The Vice-Chairman proposed that parishes look at the Winter Plan, which would be circulated electronically, and identify locations for salt bins and local gritting priorities. It was important to respond to the Winter Plan as it provided an opportunity to contribute.

The depth of feeling relating to Kent County Council's winter service was noted by County Councillors and Officers, who hoped that by gathering better intelligence via the Winter Plan the situation could be improved for the future.

**PPP
10/009**

THE KENT INTEGRATED TRANSPORT STRATEGY

The Director of Planning, Transport and Leisure reported that Kent County Council had recently undertaken a consultation exercise on its draft Integrated Transport Strategy. The document sought to provide a context for future local transport plans to inform the Local Development Framework process by providing a vision for an integrated transport network for Kent over the next twenty years. The Borough Council had offered some observations on the draft strategy which were summarised in the attached annex. It was acknowledged that an opportunity to air and advocate a range of transportation matters that were important to the residents and businesses in the Borough, both present and future, had been presented.

The Panel was advised that additional Member comments had been captured at the Planning and Transportation Advisory Board held on Tuesday 23 February 2010. The Panel raised concerns relating to the junction 5 slips along the London to Dover route and the possible Maidstone parkway station. These comments were noted and would be fed back to the relevant parties.

**PPP
10/010**

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL SERVICES UPDATE

The Kent County Council Liaison Manager, Loic Flory, provided an update on County services and invited questions from the Panel none of which were forthcoming. Parishes were invited to suggest issues for future meetings.

A copy of the KCC update would be circulated with the Minutes.

**PPP
10/011**

ADDRESS MATCHING REQUIREMENT - MINISTRY OF JUSTICE

The Chief Executive began by apologising for any upset and confusion caused by the recent errors and inaccuracies in name and address information arising from the recent changes.

The Information Technology Manager explained that the Ministry of Justice required the Borough Council to match addresses on the local gazetteer to the national gazetteer. In making this change it was discovered that the national system had many incorrect addresses. The complications in moving to a new database were outlined but Members were reassured that every effort was being made to correct the information. 500 queries were outstanding which staff were attempting to resolve and slow but steady progress was being made.

The Vice-Chairman reminded Members that the next meeting of the Parish Partnership Panel was scheduled for Thursday 20 May 2010.

The meeting ended at 2145 hours