

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

PARISH PARTNERSHIP PANEL

Thursday, 3rd March, 2011

Present: Cllr M S Worrall (Chairman), Cllr N J Heslop (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Mrs J A Anderson, Cllr M A C Balfour, Cllr R W Dalton, Cllr D W P Evans, Cllr Mrs E M Holland, Cllr Mrs S L Luck, Cllr Miss A Moloney and Cllr Mrs C J Woodger.

Councillors Miss Sergison, Baldock and Coffin were also in attendance.

Together with Kent County Councillors Mrs Dagger and Mrs Dean and representatives from Addington, Aylesford, Borough Green, Ditton, East Peckham, Hildenborough, Leybourne, Mereworth, Offham, Platt, Wateringbury, West Malling and Wrotham Parish Councils; Snodland Town Council; a representative from the Kent Association of Local Councils (Tonbridge and Malling branch) and Kent Police.

Apologies for absence were received from Borough Councillor Stone, Kent County Councillor Mrs Hohler and East Malling and Larkfield, Ightham and Kings Hill parish councils.

PART 1 - PUBLIC

PPP 11/001 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2010 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

PPP 11/002 **UPDATE ON ANY ACTION IDENTIFIED IN THE LAST MINUTES**

No items were identified.

PPP 11/003 **STREET LIGHTING ISSUES**

At the request of Borough Green Parish Council the Street Lighting Manager at Kent Highway Services (KHS), Sue Kinsella, advised of a new process in place where the street lighting team arranged the installation of street lights in a co-ordinated way with EDF Energy. It was explained that KHS 'rented' jointers from EDF which enabled them to programme works and carry out a complete installation in one day. This service was available to parish councils and the rates were significantly lower than EDF standard rates. An estimate for the supply of materials, installation of column and connection could be provided to parish councils on request. On formal acceptance of the estimate KHS would arrange all the work on behalf of the parish council under their current contract and re-charge them once the work was completed.

Ms Kinsella was pleased to report that currently such work was being completed within 6 weeks of orders being raised. Additionally, she believed that, dependent upon the terms of individual contracts, parish councils should be able to approach any alternative provider.

West Malling Parish Council briefly outlined concerns regarding issues of safety and the inconvenience of having two lots of 're-instatements' to get street lights operating. In addition, they were not convinced that parishes could be helped by KHS due to having contract arrangements with other providers. Reference was made to the Government's 'Barrier Busting' website and other parish councils were strongly urged to report problems with street lighting contractors. Members agreed that this whole issue was a bureaucratic nightmare and providers needed to be pushed to take on responsibility, particularly when EDF appeared to have a monopoly which was a serious cause for concern. Ms Kinsella indicated that any problems reported to her regarding EDF would be addressed directly with the contractor.

A list of accredited and approved contractors would be shared with parish councils, along with website links to relevant information that could prove helpful.

Parishes were invited to contact Ms Kinsella direct if there were any further issues they wished to discuss.

**PPP
11/004**

SALT BIN ISSUES

Borough Green Parish Council referred to their enquiry about the siting of salt bins on the pavement or highway and outlined problems with the points system used by Kent Highway Services (KHS). It was explained that where a need had been identified the parish council had installed salt bins. In some cases this was on private land and the parish council had negotiated a deal with the relevant landowner. The parish council believed this important local need would not have been addressed if KHS point criteria had been used and there were calls for a much simpler process to be devised.

Ms Kinsella indicated that the comments raised would be passed to the manager with responsibility for salt bins, for a response which would be circulated in due course.

Members thanked Ms Kinsella for her help in addressing the street lighting item and expressed disappointment that KHS officers dealing with salt bins were not as willing to attend the meeting and enter into effective dialogue.

The Chairman thanked Ms Kinsella for attending the meeting at short notice and advised that her help in the past was greatly appreciated.

QUEEN ELIZABETH II FIELDS CHALLENGE

The Chairman invited Mr Terry Housden, Project Officer, from the Queen Elizabeth II Fields Challenge to give a presentation on the details of the project and respond to any questions. The presentation also included a video message from the Fields in Trust patron, Prince William.

It was explained that the Fields in Trust, formerly the National Playing Fields Association, had announced a national campaign to commemorate Her Majesty The Queen's Diamond Jubilee in 2012. The goal was to create a fitting and lasting grassroots legacy across the UK to mark the Diamond Jubilee and the London 2012 Olympics that was visible, permanent and cost effective; increased participation in sport and physical activity; created good quality, sustainable grassroots sports, play and recreation facilities and provided opportunities for community engagement and volunteering.

The Queen Elizabeth II Fields Challenge gave communities an opportunity to vote for an outdoor space in their area to become part of the scheme and be permanently protected as a tribute to the Diamond Jubilee. Sites eligible for the scheme included woodlands, children's play areas, bicycle trails, sports pitches, ornamental gardens and country parks.

Parish councils were invited to identify and nominate sites for inclusion in the scheme as it provided an excellent way to mark both the Diamond Jubilee and the London 2012 Olympics in communities all across the country; a relevant, permanent and credible legacy; an opportunity to increase participation in both physical activity and volunteering; a mechanism to improve community cohesion and engagement and a chance to be involved in a high profile campaign.

The Leisure Services Manager (Outdoor) reported that the Borough Council would be promoting and supporting the Fields Challenge and had nominated Priory Wood Public Open Space, Frogsbridge Sportsground, Woodland Walk and Scotchers Field for entry into the public vote. Other nominations were invited. The Cabinet Member for Leisure indicated that developers would be encouraged to participate and parish councils were urged to be involved.

In response to questions raised by the Panel, Mr Housden confirmed that there was no limit to the number of sites that could be nominated and that Fields in Trust were unable to accept sites that were already held in memorial.

West Malling Parish Council advised that the Woodland Trust were undertaking a similar project by creating a scheme of Jubilee Woods that might be worth the Borough Council's consideration.

The Chairman suggested that representatives from the Woodland Trust be invited to a future meeting of the Parish Partnership Panel to share

details of the scheme.

The Chairman thanked Mr Housden for his interesting presentation and encouraged parishes to get involved. He also reiterated the Borough Council's support of the campaign.

**PPP
11/006**

PRESENTATION BY ROYAL BRITISH LEGION INDUSTRIES

The Chairman introduced Mr Jonathan Shaw, Ms Erika Reynolds and Mr David Jessop from Royal British Legion Industries (RBLI) who provided the Panel with a presentation on the services offered to Service and ex-Service personnel. These included care, rehabilitation, employment and housing. Welfare services were offered to the ex-Service community and assessment and support to people with disabilities seeking to find and retain employment. The Employment Solutions Division was currently working to form partnerships to support delivery of the Government's new Work Programme, whilst the Manufacturing Division was looking to extend its customer base for pallets, road and rail signs, print and direct mail services. The RBLI were proud to be renowned for quality and reliability. The Welfare, Healthcare and Property Services Division offered advice and guidance on a range of issues, including accommodation, benefits, healthcare and finance to those leaving the Services.

Particular reference was made to the Army Recovery Capability initiative established to ensure that wounded, injured and sick soldiers received the care and support they deserved. RBLI was proud to have been chosen as a pilot site for this course in which students received assessment and training in a variety of employment skills, along with visits to local employers to familiarise themselves with the sort of opportunities available to them.

Mr Shaw explained that as a charity the aim of the RBLI was to extend the benefits of their service to the widest possible number of people, developing collaborative partnerships to improve opportunities for vulnerable and disadvantaged people.

Additionally, the RBLI were involved with Blue Sky, a specialist charity dealing with ex-offenders. It was an unfortunate statistic that many ex-Servicemen ended up in the criminal justice system due to a lack of support in adapting to civilian life. Mr Shaw indicated that this provided a good partnership opportunity and the RBLI were happy to discuss this further with parish councils.

In response to a question raised by County Councillor Mrs Dean, the Panel was advised that negotiations were taking place with Kent County Council regarding the supply of signs and good progress was being made with County contracts. Mr Shaw was hopeful of a satisfactory resolution as the RBLI were competitive in price and value for money.

Members sought clarity on the type of job training available and were advised that the RBLI recognised the importance of creating

opportunities for re-training, developing new skills and gaining apprenticeships. Mr Shaw believed that the strength of partnership working at a local level was an important part of the Work Programme strategy.

The Chairman thanked the representatives from Royal British Legion Industries for their contribution to the meeting and wished them continued success for the future.

**PPP
11/007**

POLICE LIAISON

Chief Inspector Kirby of Kent Police, Borough Commander for Tonbridge and Malling, provided an overview of the achievements made in performance and in the neighbourhood policing agenda. A slight increase of 3.5% in 'all crime' for Tonbridge and Malling in 2010/11 was noted. However, particular attention was drawn to the improving position regarding anti-social behaviour, which had seen a 10.35% reduction. Chief Inspector Kirby emphasised that, despite this slight increase, Tonbridge and Malling was a safe place to live and experienced relatively low levels of crime. He was pleased to report that night time economy violence had fallen in Tonbridge and Malling due to a focused approach and additional resource.

Additionally, Chief Inspector Kirby was pleased to report an excellent overall service for victim satisfaction with Tonbridge and Malling achieving 91.5% to the end of December 2010. This was the highest overall victim satisfaction level in the County.

Members were advised of proposals to reduce to three divisions, as part of the ongoing police re-structuring, and that West Kent would now include Maidstone. Chief Superintendent Matthew Nix had been appointed as the new Divisional Commander and would take over once the amalgamation had taken place. The Chief Constable remained committed to delivering community and neighbourhood policing and Chief Inspector Kirby was pleased to report an increase in police officers. There would also be a move to a centralisation of the emergency response and borderless policing. This meant that an emergency call would now always be attended by the closest police patrol, irrespective of where the 'local' police station to the incident was situated.

Details on how the new police structure would operate were still to be finalised but it was anticipated to be in place by the end of the year at the latest. Chief Inspector Kirby indicated that this provided a useful opportunity to programme in some local consultation to potentially influence the delivery of policing locally. It was suggested that operational details and contact names and numbers be shared and circulated when known.

The Chairman thanked Kent Police, and particularly local PCSOs in West Malling, for addressing specific low level crime and this was greatly appreciated by residents.

The Chairman thanked Chief Inspector Kirby for his contribution to the meeting and Kent Police for the excellent quality and high level of policing received throughout the Borough.

**PPP
11/008**

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL SERVICES UPDATE

Members noted the content of the written update on Kent County Council Services provided by the Kent County Council Community Engagement Manager for Tonbridge and Malling, Mr Charman, and circulated prior to the meeting.

**PPP
11/009**

LOCALISM BILL

The Chief Executive gave a brief overview of the content of the Localism Bill of relevance to parish councils. These included the abolition of the present Standards regime and the potential requirement for a local code of conduct; the introduction of a general power of competence for unitary and district councils; greater flexibility to determine governance arrangements; the introduction of various measures in connection with business rates and new provisions to grant discretionary relief; the abolition of regional spatial strategies and significant changes to housing and planning legislation.

Reference was made to the introduction of new requirements for authorities to hold referendums in response to petitions and if a council tax increase was above a rate set by the Secretary of State. The significant cost implications, of approximately £100,000, associated with holding a referendum were set out.

The Chief Executive indicated that further presentations on aspects of the Localism Bill, particularly changes in housing legislation, could be given at future meetings of the Parish Partnership Panel.

Members were warned that this was a wide ranging and significant Bill which would have profound implications for all local authorities and parish councils. It was also unlikely that the statutory and regulatory detail would remain the same as the Bill progressed through the committee stages in Parliament. The Chairman acknowledged that the Bill was subject to further amendments and a degree of speculation was likely during any ensuing discussion. He suggested that once clarity on the details of the Bill was known, and for the benefit of any new councillors elected in May, a single briefing evening be arranged to outline the significant points of interest. The Parish Partnership Panel approved this approach.

The Director of Planning, Transport and Leisure gave a presentation on the emerging legislation regarding planning. He advised that this was the most fundamental change in decades and sought to change the approach and culture of development and was linked closely to the strategy of fostering more local growth to meet housing needs.

Particular reference was made to planning at the neighbourhood level and included neighbourhood development plans and neighbourhood

development orders. Neighbourhood development plans could be prepared by town or parish councils for all or part of their areas, or by agreement for more than one parish. In non-parished areas a Neighbourhood Forum designated by the local authority, subject to prescribed criteria which was evolving as the Bill progressed, could prepare a development plan. It was noted that not all communities would wish to have one. The Director of Planning, Transport and Leisure warned of the significant cost implications, in the region of £50,000 - £200,000, in preparing development plans.

Members were advised that there were various procedures for testing involved in the preparation of neighbourhood development plans and neighbourhood development orders. It seemed that neighbourhood planning was about promoting more development and was not a process for opposing it. Parish and town councils needed to decide why they would follow this process as a planning application for appropriate development supported by local people might be the best and least expensive route, especially as neighbourhood development plans and orders could be very expensive to prepare.

Brief reference was made to planning enforcement changes and the Community Right to Buy - Assets of Community Value.

Copies of the presentation would be circulated with the Minutes.

**PPP
11/010**

NEW HOMES BONUS AND NON DOMESTIC REVENUE RATES

West Malling Parish Council asked if the Borough Council would support passing on part of any income received under the New Homes Bonus or non domestic revenue rates.

The Chairman conceded that a fair point had been raised but reminded Members that final details regarding the future of non domestic rates had not been agreed. It was suggested that a far more sensible approach would be to have further discussions once the proposals were known and understood.

With regard to the New Homes Bonus the Chairman accepted this provided an opportunity to ensure that the whole community benefited, rather than individual parishes where new housing had been built. It was indicated that the Borough Council wished to work with parish councils if sufficient funding was available. The Chairman was pleased to report the creation of a Community Enhancement Fund to support community projects. The £500,000 fund would be set up using money from the New Homes Bonus scheme.

West Malling Parish Council noted the point made that confining funding to places where development had proceeded could be divisive and accepted the invitation for further discussions once more detail was known.

THE BOROUGH COUNCIL'S FINANCIAL POSITION

The Director of Finance outlined the implications for the Borough Council's financial position following the announcement of the final settlement grant figure. She was pleased to report that council tax would be maintained at its current level for 2011/12; that services would be protected in 2011/12; that the resources needed to deliver those services were ensured, with no redundancies anticipated for 2011/12 and the Borough Council would still play a role in supporting worthwhile community projects.

It was explained that the longer term view to budget planning adopted by the Borough Council gave the organisation time to understand and address any future financial problems without taking a knee jerk reaction. It was noted that the Borough Council was a very lean and efficient organisation, operated a value for money philosophy and engaged in effective partnership working with neighbouring authorities to create both monetary and efficiency savings. A good example of this was the recent announcement of sharing a Chief Executive with Gravesham Borough Council. Reference was made to the nil percent pay rise for all staff for the second year and the fact that Members' allowances had been frozen. All of these actions meant that the Borough Council was better placed to tackle the recent cuts.

The Director of Finance highlighted the significant cut in government grant of 16.2% in 2011/12 and 13.6% in 2012/13. This gave a cumulative cut of 28% over the two year period with more cuts expected in the following two years. This meant that there was a gap of £2 million between income and expenditure which needed to be addressed. Therefore the Borough Council needed to find savings of £2 million. The reserves had enabled the authority to retain services for the next year but Members were warned that this deficit would need to be tackled and difficult decisions made.

Reference was made to the New Homes Bonus which would see the Borough Council receiving funding based on the number of dwellings built in the borough, based on 80% of the value of a Band D property, with the remaining 20% going to the county council. This equated to approximately £650,000 for the first year of the scheme. The Director of Finance reminded Members that the number of development schemes was finite and the Borough Council was taking a cautious and sensible approach to this income stream.

Additionally, the Director of Finance referred to the Community Enhancement Fund and reiterated the commitment to support community projects by setting aside £125,000 a year for the next four years, giving a total fund of £500,000.

It was noted by Members that in comparison to neighbouring authorities, Tonbridge and Malling employed fewer staff to undertake the same roles and functions.

The Chief Executive explained the position adopted by the Borough

Council of delaying cuts for the future rather than implementing them little and often in year one, to enable a better understanding of the full financial picture due to the variable factors regarding income, inflation, the speed of recovery and utility prices.

**PPP
11/012**

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING ELECTIONS MAY 2011 - GUIDANCE FOR PARISH CLERKS

The Elections and Special Projects Manager outlined the key information and guidance for the upcoming parish elections on Thursday 5 May 2011.

The role of the parish clerk was to explain to potential candidates what the parish council does, how it worked, information about roles, responsibilities and meetings; use parish newsletters, magazines and websites to encourage participation from potential candidates and to advertise the election to residents; refer potential candidates to the Elections Office immediately to receive papers and guidance and to publish election notices provided by the Borough Council. Parish clerks should continue with normal duties before and after the election. Acceptance of office documents from all councillors after the election, even if restanding, should be as normal. Further information about declaration of interest arrangements would be provided by Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council legal services in due course.

The Panel was advised that nominations would be accepted from 22 March until noon on 4 April. The deadline to apply for postal votes was 1700 hours on 14 April.

Parish councils were invited to contact Electoral Services if they required further advice and assistance.

In closing the meeting the Chairman made particular reference to ongoing reforms in public health and reported that discussions had started with GP commissioning consortia, the body taking over the responsibility of commissioning future health services. An invitation would be extended to representatives of the GP Commissioning Consortia to attend a future meeting of the Parish Partnership Panel.

The Chairman also thanked all Members of the Parish Partnership Panel for their commitment and contribution over the last four years and hoped it would continue after the election.

The meeting ended at 2230 hours