

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

TONBRIDGE FORUM

Monday, 26th November, 2012

Present: Cllr O C Baldock (Chairman), Cllr N J Heslop (Vice-Chairman), Cllr P F Bolt, Cllr Ms V M C Branson, Cllr T Edmondston-Low and Cllr Miss J R L Elks.

Councillor Mrs Murray was also in attendance pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

Members of the Forum: Kent County Councillor Smith, Kent Police, Rotary Club of Tonbridge, The Skinners Company, Society of Friends, Tonbridge Art Group, Tonbridge Civic Society, Tonbridge District Scout Council, Tonbridge Historical Society, Tonbridge Lions Club, Tonbridge Sports Association, Tonbridge Theatre and Arts Club, University of the Third Age and the Women's Institute.

Other organisations present: PATHS and Tonbridge Shaw Trust.

Apologies for absence were received from Borough Councillors Allison, Mrs Anderson, Ms Atkinson, Mrs M Heslop, Lancaster, Ms Spence and Trice and from County Councillor Miss Hohler, Tonbridge Allotments and Gardens Association, Tonbridge Citizens Advice Bureau, Tonbridge Line Commuters and Tonbridge Music Club.

ACTION
BY

PART 1 - PUBLIC

TF
12/018

MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Forum held on 10 September 2012 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

TF
12/019

UPDATE ON ANY ACTION IDENTIFIED IN THE LAST MINUTES

No actions were identified.

TF
12/020

POLICE LIAISON

Inspector John Phillips presented an overview of crime and

disorder within Tonbridge and advised that, following proactive policing, violent crime, theft and shoplifting appeared to be decreasing although an increase in shoplifting was anticipated during the Christmas period. He confirmed that the Police would be working closely with ShopSafe on this matter. He advised that household burglaries had increased, as had activity by criminal gangs originating from eastern Europe who targeted vulnerable people.

Inspector Phillips responded to concerns raised by Tonbridge Lions Club regarding the lack of clarity on Police support available for Remembrance Day parades, and advised that, ultimately, any decision lay at Chief Constable level. He reminded the Forum of the need for careful budgeting, particularly in matters which were not a fundamental police function.

In response to a comment from the Tonbridge Historical Society, Inspector Phillips provided details of the new non-emergency telephone number (101) which had been introduced for callers not requiring emergency assistance. He asked that those organisations present 'cascade' the information available about the single non-emergency number and asked that they contact the force media officer for details.

The Chairman thanked Inspector Phillips for his contribution to the meeting.

TF
12/021

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL SERVICES UPDATE

The Kent County Council Community Engagement Manager advised that the County Council had received a very large number of applications for grant assistance and he circulated details of the successful organisations. He advised that the number of bids had greatly exceeded the amount of grants available and he encouraged organisations to provide as much information as possible in support of future applications as this would allow a better informed approach to the grant allocation process.

Mr Harman advised that the new youth service arrangements, which included greater involvement between community organisations and the voluntary sector and the County Council, were due to 'go live' in January 2013 and he reminded the Forum of the provision of the new youth centre in Tonbridge.

Mr C Smith, County Councillor for Tonbridge, drew the Forum's attention to the County Council's Fostering and Adoption Campaign and the desperate need for foster and adoptive parents. He indicated that the high number of placements within Kent by London Boroughs limited the availability of foster and adoptive parents for children originating from Kent. He encouraged people to consider becoming foster and adoptive parents to meet the needs of the local community.

The Chairman thanked the Members and officers of the County Council for their contribution to the meeting.

TF
12/022

WELFARE REFORM

The Revenue and Benefits Manager gave a presentation on the Council Tax Reduction Scheme due to commence next April and he outlined the outcome of the Council's recent consultation which had supported a reduction in overall entitlement rather than an increase in Council Tax or the use of reserves. The Forum noted that the reduction would only apply to claimants of working age and not to pensioners.

The Principal Welfare Officer provided a comprehensive update on the introduction of Universal Credit following the Government's recent welfare reform with particular reference to proposed changes to the housing benefit regime and the measures being taken by the Borough Council to inform and support residents who would experience the greatest changes in their financial circumstances.

TF
12/023

ASSETS OF COMMUNITY VALUE

The report of the Chief Executive set out the details of the Government's recently introduced Community Right to Bid which gave parish/town councils and local community groups the opportunity to nominate a local site or building to be included on a register of 'assets of community value'. The process for nominating an asset to the register was set out in the report which had been circulated in advance of the meeting. The Corporate Services Manager explained that the inclusion of any asset on the register did not provide a right for a town/parish council or community group to acquire the property and he advised that the Government guidance required careful consideration. This was available from the following link:

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<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/2229703.pdf>

The Forum noted that the Borough Council's online nomination form and further guidance were available on:

<http://www.tmbc.gov.uk/services/community-and-living/community-advice/community-engagement>

In addition, it was noted that any challenges to decisions should be directed towards officers as they had responsibility for what was listed on the register.

TF
12/024

STRATEGY ON STREETLIGHT TURN OFF/PART NIGHT LIGHTING

No update was provided on this issue.

TF
12/025

WINTER MAINTENANCE AND PLANNING

Reference was made to a written report, tabled at the meeting, which outlined the arrangements made between Kent County Council and Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council to provide a local winter service in the event of severe weather.

Information on how residents could help themselves was available on

www.kent.gov.uk/roads_and_transport/highway_maintenance/winter_maintenance_and_repairs/tonbridge_and_malling_winter_s.aspx

Details of salting routes and other information on Winter Service for Tonbridge and Malling were also available and members were encouraged to look at the website. The Forum noted that a full report on winter maintenance would be considered by the Joint Transportation Board on 3 December 2012.

TF
12/026

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING SERVICES UPDATE

The Chairman thanked all the organisations which had been involved in switching on the 'Christmas Lights' in Tonbridge over the previous weekend.

The Central Services Director advised that the Chief Executive, Mr David Hughes, would be leaving Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council for a new position at

ACTION
BY

Gravesham Borough Council. From February 2013 the new Chief Executive would be Julie Beilby. Information on the proposed management structure and lead responsibilities from 1 February 2013 was tabled and would be circulated with the Minutes. In addition, it was noted that there would be a further reshuffle following the retirement of the Director of Health and Housing in May 2013, with the Director of Planning, Transport and Leisure assuming responsibility for housing and some environmental health services. The Chief Leisure Officer would become the Director of Street Scene from this date.

The Forum was advised that the Housing Allocations Scheme was in the process of being drafted and consultation would be undertaken in the New Year. Details of this would be available on the Council's website.

The meeting ended at 2117 hours