

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

PARISH PARTNERSHIP PANEL

Thursday, 8th September, 2016

Present: Cllr N J Heslop (Chairman), Cllr Mrs J A Anderson,
Cllr Mrs S M Barker, Cllr R P Betts, Cllr R W Dalton,
Cllr S M Hammond, Cllr D Lettington, Cllr B J Luker, Cllr R V Roud,
and Cllr T B Shaw.

Together with Addington, Birling, Borough Green, Burham, East Malling and Larkfield, East Peckham, Hadlow, Kings Hill, Leybourne, Platt, Plaxtol, Shipbourne, Trottiscliffe, Wateringbury, West Peckham, Wouldham Parish Councils and County Councillor M Balfour

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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M A Coffin (Vice-Chairman), Cannon, Snodland Town Council (Miss A Moloney), Wrotham Parish Council (Mr H Rayner), County Councillor Mrs S Hohler and Chief Inspector Pate (Kent Police)

PART 1 - PUBLIC

PPP 16/16 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 18 May 2016 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

PPP 16/17 UPDATE ON ACTION IDENTIFIED IN THE LAST MINUTES

There were no actions identified requiring an update that did not appear later on the agenda.

PPP 16/18 FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS WITH PARISH COUNCILS - UPDATE FOLLOWING CONSULTATION

The Director of Finance and Transformation referred to the two recent consultations on the potential withdrawal of Council Tax Reduction grants to parish councils and the potential introduction of a Special Expenses Scheme (Fairer Charging) in place of the s136 Financial Arrangements with Parish Councils Scheme. The latter was aimed at achieving savings where possible and to provide equity for residents throughout Tonbridge and Malling.

Both consultations had ended on 20 June 2016 and Parish Councils were thanked for their participation. The responses received had been

considered by a Special Cabinet meeting held on 28 July and a preferred way forward formulated for recommendation to Council in November.

With regard to Council Tax Reduction grants it was proposed that these grants would be withdrawn with effect from April 2017, subject to Council approval. The Panel was reminded that the Borough Council had no statutory obligation to passport funding to parishes and, in fact, many local authorities had already withdrawn this financial support as a result of the reduction in local government funding from Central Government.

However, the impact on some Parish Councils was recognised and the Director of Finance and Transformation offered to discuss the implications to individual parishes out of meeting.

In respect of Fairer Charging it was proposed to introduce a Special Expenses Scheme from April 2017 and withdraw financial support (through s136 grants) to Parish Councils at the same time, subject to comment from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in September and final approval of Council in November 2016.

Following responses received from parish councils and residents a number of changes had been made to the initial proposals. The consultation had highlighted an issue regarding Tonbridge Cemetery and after further reflection the Borough Council felt that this should not be included in the Special Expenses Scheme on the grounds that it was a facility that was available equally to all residents in Tonbridge and Malling.

Reference was also made to open churchyards across the borough and, whilst there was no obligation on the Borough Council (or parish councils) to provide financial support, Members had requested that some further work be undertaken. Information was to be sought from the church authorities on the capacity status of open churchyards throughout the Borough to enable further consideration of whether some funding (under section 214 of the Local Government Act 1972) should be offered to Parochial Church Councils to support their maintenance in furtherance of the previous policy in this regard. The Director of Finance and Transformation stressed that this work had not been undertaken and therefore no decisions had yet been made.

At the current time, Christmas lighting was not included in the Special Expenses Scheme although the Borough Council recognised that there was an inequity between Tonbridge and the parished areas of the borough as there were differing funding arrangements in place. With this in mind, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would undertake a thorough review and explore alternative opportunities. It was hoped that a new system could be adopted for Christmas 2017.

The Director of Finance and Transformation recognised the concerns of Parish Councils regarding the introduction of ‘capping’ and indicated that the Borough Council continued to make informal enquiries with Government.

Details of the projected timetable for the proposals were available in full on the Borough Council website but summarised below:

13 September – Overview and Scrutiny Committee review proposals for Special Expenses and make recommendations to Cabinet

12 October – Cabinet considers proposals and any recommendations from Overview and Scrutiny and makes recommendations to Full Council

1 November – Full Council considers final proposals and approves/adopts Special Expenses Policy

December – Parish Councils contacted with information for budget setting

PPP 16/19 LOCAL PLAN - UPDATE AND CONSULTATION

Members were advised that a period of public consultation on the Local Plan was expected to start on Friday 30 September 2016 for an eight week period. The closing date was 25 November and this was longer than the minimum statutory consultation period of six weeks.

The main focus of the consultation would be a revised Way Forward document, including an executive summary and map of the potential development strategy; the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping and the Habitat Regulations Assessment reports and an electronic survey setting out 15 set questions to provide consultees with a structure for responding. All of this material could be viewed on the website once the consultation opened and hard copies would be available at the two main Council offices and libraries. In addition, further copies would be shared with all the Parish and Town Councils.

All Parish and Town Councils were encouraged to work with their local communities to raise awareness of the Local Plan consultation period and to respond by the November deadline.

There would also be a small number of manned exhibitions around the Borough during the consultation period although the number and duration would have to reflect the limited resources available to the Local Plan team during this busy stage of plan making.

It was noted that requests for meetings would have to be managed proportionately to the resources available. In order to plan for this eventuality it was suggested that there would be a small number of Local

Plan events for Parish and Town Councils and other local amenity and community groups to attend.

In response to a question from Members, it was confirmed that traditional methods of promotion and communication would be used in conjunction with the use of social media and the internet.

With regard to the 15 set questions in the electronic survey, the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health confirmed that honest comment and opinion was welcomed. It was important to know what residents thought of the process and it was recognised that alternative viewpoints and/or proposals might come forward as a result.

Finally, Borough Green Parish Council referred to recent discussions regarding contaminated land at the last meeting of the Planning and Transportation Advisory Board. Members had asked for a report setting out the Borough Council's position in relation to contaminated land and it was suggested that this be shared with parish councils once finalised.

PPP 16/20 PLANNING ENFORCEMENT PLAN UPDATE

The Development Control Manager reported that since the last meeting of the Parish Partnership Panel a local Planning Enforcement Plan had been drafted and approved by the Borough Council. It set out how the planning enforcement service would seek to address breaches of planning control and prioritise its work.

In addition, the range of powers available to the Borough Council, how it was decided whether or not to pursue enforcement action, timetables for action and the process of enforcement were described. In doing this, the Plan complied with the contents of the Borough Council's wider enforcement policy, together with national legislation and Government guidance.

Particular reference was made to the commitment where Planning Services, via the Development Control Manager, would manage an update system for individual Parish Councils on a regular basis on enforcement cases where the parish was the 'complainant'. These updates were intended to provide some reassurance that investigations were progressing. It was reported that this process would continue as the enforcement plan began to be implemented and its effectiveness monitored. It was also hoped that the Plan would assist Parish Councils in dealing with residents' concerns and complaints and demonstrated the Borough Council's commitment to addressing those concerns.

However, as live enforcement investigations were confidential, because of the possibility of future legal action, the amount of information that could be shared was limited. All Parish Councils were asked that any updates provided were not discussed at public meetings or recorded in any public minutes.

The Parish Councils thanked the Borough Council for the improved communication on enforcement matters which was greatly appreciated. However, concern was expressed that the Plan focused on providing feedback to the original complainant and not to all parish councils that had a relevant interest. The Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health indicated that this aspect could be reviewed but advised of significant staffing and works pressures within Planning Services that potentially challenged undertaking more than was currently suggested.

The Development Control Manager advised that regular case reviews with Enforcement Officers were planned and it was hoped these would flag up potential problems to which parishes could be alerted.

The Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health and the Development Control Manager volunteered to explore what type of simple reporting and tracking system could be developed in house.

PPP 16/21 LOCAL SEWER SYSTEM

Borough Green Parish Council, supported by the Kent Association of Local Councils (Tonbridge and Malling), asked the Borough Council to contact Southern Water regarding issues arising from the failure to address problems associated with the ageing sewer system.

Reference was made to the regular incidents of localised flooding due to the Victorian sewer along the A25, the inadequate pumping station(s) and the lack of maintenance over many years. It was reported that any new building developments in the area exacerbated the problems.

It was noted that Snodland Town Council had similar experiences.

In response, the Chairman (and Leader of the Borough Council) would invite Southern Water to attend the next meeting of the Parish Partnership Panel to address concerns raised by Parish Councils.

PPP 16/22 COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP UPDATE

The report of the Director of Central Services provided an update on the work of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP), which was reviewed and noted by the Panel.

The CSP had a website: www.tmcommunitysafety.org.uk twitter account (@TM_CSP) and a Facebook page.

Crime statistics were available to download from the Kent Police website via www.kent.police.uk Unfortunately these could no longer be provided for parish council meetings due to increasing pressures on a police resource.

PPP 16/23 KENT POLICE SERVICES UPDATE

Inspector Rachel McNeil, attending on behalf of Chief Inspector Pate, provided a verbal update on the achievements made in performance and the neighbourhood policing agenda.

It was reported that the position in the Borough remained good despite a 7.7% increase in crime. Tonbridge and Malling had the 3rd lowest crime levels in Kent and remained one of the safest places in the County. Increased reporting of incidents, more accurate recording of crime and fewer resources were believed to have contributed to the percentage increase over the year.

Particular reference was made to resourcing levels and police numbers remained stable despite the reduction in Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) due to them becoming regular police officers. However, Kent Police were currently pursuing a recruitment campaign and this was actively supported by the new Police and Crime Commissioner to increase police visibility.

The Panel was advised that Chief Inspector Pate was now the Borough Commander for Tonbridge and Malling and Tunbridge Wells and this enabled an improved and co-ordinated approach between the two areas.

Recent police initiatives included a road safety campaign in partnership with Kent Fire and Rescue Services; the implementation of dispersal orders for youths and speed checks focusing on problem areas, road traffic accident hot spots and new building developments. A new road development experience had been built in Rochester for 14 – 18 year olds to educate on road safety. Details of this were available from the Kent Fire and Rescue Services website.

With regard to Speed Watch initiatives, Inspector McNeil was pleased to advise that Alan Watson was the new police co-ordinator and was eager to work with parish councils to develop opportunities.

The Chairman asked that an invitation be extended to Mr Watson to attend the next meeting of the Parish Partnership Panel in November to talk about Speed Watch initiatives and to listen to concerns raised by Parish Councils.

Waterbury Parish Council referred to the lack of support from Kent Police on Speed Watch initiatives which was leading to their decline as volunteers no longer felt it was worthwhile without effective enforcement. It was felt that points on licences and on the spot fines were more effective deterrents than warning letters from local Speed Watch co-ordinators.

Inspector McNeil responded that Kent Police took speeding seriously and arrangements were in place for speed checks over the coming

months. Locations that presented the highest risk were treated as a priority due to police resources. The lack of communication around Speed Watch was recognised and it was anticipated that the position would be improved with a co-ordinator in place.

In response to a question, Inspector McNeil assured the Panel that Kent Police took drug issues seriously and dealt with this appropriately. There was work undertaken with local schools and youth teams on education around drug use. However, it was important to report incidents as they occurred as it was difficult to deal with issues retrospectively. Dispersal orders were also an effective tool in preventing youths loitering and taking drugs but represented a challenging situation with reducing resources.

Kings Hill Parish Council asked about the level of community police liaison with parishes and the loss of the monthly reporting statistics. Inspector McNeil advised that PCSOs now had increased areas to patrol which had impacted upon the level of community engagement undertaken. The resourcing levels of PCSOs were under constant review. With regard to the crime statistics the information was available on the Kent Police website and verbal updates could be provided if requested. However, the more detailed statistics took time to prepare and the preference was for PCSOs to be visible in the community rather than behind a desk.

All parishes were encouraged to report any concerns or raise any issues with the Community Safety Unit.

PPP 16/24 KENT COUNTY COUNCIL SERVICES UPDATE

The Kent County Council Community Liaison Officer (Anne Charman) reported on a number of County initiatives and consultations. Further detail was set out in the Kent County Council Services update report attached to the agenda.

Particular reference was made to the recent incident where the M20 footbridge had collapsed onto the motorway after having been hit by a lorry. The footpaths leading to the bridge were now officially closed. The initial notice obtained from the County Council's Public Right of Ways team would be in force for three weeks, followed by a six month closure.

A pilot programme for Volunteer Community Wardens was being run by Kent County Council and parishes were asked to promote this new initiative. Full details were not yet available but information would be placed on the website in due course. Any information forthcoming in the near future would be circulated with the Minutes.

The Combined Member Grant Scheme had opened on 1 April 2016 with £20,000 available to every County Councillor to fund both community

and highway projects their electoral division. It was reported Speed Watch initiatives had been supported in the past and it was possible that if the Community Safety Partnership came up with an innovative approach or project that assistance might be available.

Finally, any ideas to improve the format of the Kent County Council Services update were welcomed.

Burham Parish Council thanked the County Council for its help and support in saving the 151 Arriva bus services which had been threatened with withdrawal with no public consultation. Kent County Council would cover the losses of this service until February 2017.

In response to a query related to the Young Persons Travel Pass it was indicated that this was subsidised heavily by the County Council but it was hoped that this could be maintained at an affordable cost to parents. Currently, the discounted rate was approximately £270.

PPP 16/25 TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL SERVICES UPDATE

The Director of Finance and Transformation provided an update on key points relevant to Tonbridge and Malling. The headline messages included:

- Hive Lotto

The Community Lottery had been launched on Friday 2 September and was a fundraising scheme to help good causes. It was reported that seven partners were on board and more were welcomed to be involved.

Details were available on: www.hivelotto.co.uk

- Heritage Open Days

Free entry to 25 historical properties was available from Thursday 8 – Sunday 11 September 2016.

Details were available on: www.tmbc.gov.uk

- Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme

This consultation, regarding potential changes to the local scheme for claimants had closed in August. Cabinet would review and assess proposals in due course. Due to the way council tax reduction was now operated, it was noted that the council tax base might change as a result which would have implications for parish councils.

PPP 16/26 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENT

The Chairman was pleased to announce that East Peckham Parish Council had successfully made it through to the long list of nominations for the National Association of Local Councils Star Council Awards. In addition, parish councillors Stephanie Watson (Chairman) and Penny Graham had been nominated for Councillor of the Year and Karen Bell nominated for Clerk of the Year.

Shortlisting was to take place later in September with the winners announced in October and the Chairman wished everyone involved good luck.

The meeting ended at 9.15 pm