

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

TONBRIDGE COMMUNITY FORUM

MINUTES

Monday, 12th June, 2023

Present: Cllr G B Hines (Chair), Cllr D W King (Vice-Chair), Cllr L Athwal, Cllr K Barton, Cllr G C Bridge, Cllr J Clokey, Cllr A Cope, Cllr F A Hoskins, Cllr A Mehmet, Cllr R W G Oliver, Cllr B A Parry, Cllr M R Rhodes, Cllr K S Tunstall, County Cllr P Stepto and County Cllr M Hood.

Together with representatives from:

- Angel Indoor Bowls Club
- EMBER Community Interest Company
- Feast
- Friends of Mill Stream
- Rotary Club of Tonbridge
- TBUG
- Tonbridge Civic Society
- Tonbridge Historical Society
- Tonbridge Line Commuters
- Tonbridge Parish Church
- Tonbridge Sports Association
- Tonbridge Town Team

Apologies for absence were received from Tonbridge and Malling Seniors, Tonbridge Dementia Friendly Community and Tonbridge Lions Club.

TCF 23/8 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR AND VICE CHAIRS

The appointments of Borough Councillors were confirmed. The Chair advised that nominations for a vice-chairman from the community groups would be sought prior to the next meeting.

TCF 23/9 NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no substitute Members nominated for this meeting.

TCF 23/10 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 27 February 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

TCF 23/11 UPDATE ON ANY ACTION IDENTIFIED IN THE LAST MINUTES

The Leader provided an update on charging for Borough Council open spaces during which he advised that the Communities and Environment Scrutiny Select Committee would consider a report on Events on Public Open Spaces on 14 June 2023 and make recommendations to Cabinet on 4 July 2023.

Furthermore, the Leader reported that since the last meeting, following a successful UK Shared Prosperity Fund bid, the digital information boards would be rolled out.

With regards to the recent Borough elections, details were sought on the number of voters who were denied a ballot paper due to not having valid identification. The Leader explained that the figures had been reported to the Electoral Commission.

MATTERS RAISED IN ADVANCE OF THE MEETING

Details of the matter to be raised should be provided in writing or by email to committee.services@tmhc.gov.uk at least 10 working days before the meeting. This is so that a response can be provided on the evening of the meeting. Only one question may be submitted by an organisation due to the time limitations.

TCF 23/12 LOCAL ELECTION RESULTS

Members received the Returning Officers certificate which certified those persons who were duly elected as councillors at the ordinary election of borough councillors held on 4 May 2023, for information.

TCF 23/13 KENT POLICE UPDATE

Members received a verbal update from Inspector Newman on recent initiatives and an explanation of the role of the Community Safety Unit.

Inspector Newman reported that each ward in Tonbridge would have a named Officer and that following a recruitment drive, there would be a full complement of staff by October 2024.

It was explained that the Community Safety Unit worked with partners to provide prevention advice to residents in areas where crimes were particularly prevalent and co-ordinated action plans to prevent further crimes in these areas.

Members were informed that the Borough Council had been successful in receiving funding to purchase four mobile CCTV cameras for use in tackling anti-social behaviour and were asked to contact the Borough Council if it was felt that any specific area should be targeted.

During discussion, Members were advised that a number of schools' officers had moved to the control centre to deal with 101 call demand and consideration needed to be given to how feedback could be provided; and that there was a task force in Kent specifically focused on county lines.

The key priorities for the summer months were policing parks and community areas and targeting main offenders. Inspector Newman took the opportunity to promote Named Intensification Week (week commencing 19 June 2023) and Anti-Social Behaviour Week (week commencing 3 July 2023). Members were encouraged to register with My Community Voice and report any incidences immediately.

TCF 23/14 TONBRIDGE POST OFFICE

Members received a statement from Laura Tarling, Public Affairs Manager, Post Office as set out below:

'Tonbridge Post Office was previously operated as a Franchise by WH Smith from their Tonbridge store. There were plans to redevelop the premises and WH Smith took the decision close their store at the lease expiry on 30th July 2022.

With thanks to Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council, Tonbridge Castle was put forward as a suitable location for a temporary Post Office. The branch opened on 26 August and continues to operate from Tonbridge Castle.

Post Office began the search for a new postmaster with premises for a replacement permanent branch in January 2022. There was a lot of interest from potential applicants but finding suitable premises that were viable for a Post Office and retail business has been challenging.

Premises at 64 High Street were eventually identified, with Heads of Terms agreed between the applicant and landlord. It was known that significant refurbishment works were needed to transform the premises to a retail business and Post Office. The successful applicant was appointed at the end of March, subject to signing the Post Office contract and lease on the premises. Plans to finalise the lease and contract were planned for early in May, due to the applicant being abroad in April.

Unfortunately, following further discussion with the landlord in May, the applicant was not able to agree the lease terms set by the landlord, and decided to withdraw from the premises. The applicant is aware of the urgency to open a permanent Post Office in Tonbridge and there were several factors involved in making this difficult decision. However, the final lease agreement was no longer viable for the applicant.

The applicant is now reviewing alternative premises – there was a site visit on 6 June at a proposed location. The design and location of the Post Office counter at these premises requires further work to make it fit, and discussions regarding the lease are taking place.

Following the temporary branch opening in August, there were customer service issues relating to IT connectivity, and difficulties with staff recruitment resulting in the branch closing for short periods. The applicant for the permanent Post Office is now operating the temporary branch to provide a more consistent service, supported by the Post Office Area Manager.

Post Office apologises to customers who have been affected by the disruption to services in Tonbridge over the past year. Post Office are working closely with the applicant to confirm permanent premises as soon as possible. We will share a further update when new premises are confirmed.

Post Office thank Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council and all stakeholders for their continued support over recent months to help find suitable premises, and for hosting the temporary Post Office at Tonbridge Castle.'

A number of members expressed disappointment that a representative from the Post Office was unable to attend the meeting and noted that the Post Office had indicated that a representative would be in attendance at the next meeting.

The Leader gave his assurance that the provision of a temporary Post Office at the Castle would continue until a permanent location had been identified.

TCF 23/15 PROMOTION OF UPCOMING EVENTS

Members noted the forthcoming events to be held in Tonbridge and the surrounding area:

(1) Tonbridge Calling

Volunteer stewards were sought for the Tonbridge Calling music event in the park on 1 July 2023. Anyone interested in the role was asked to email tonbridgecalling@gmail.com.

(2) Tonbridge Pride

Members were informed that Tonbridge Pride would be held on 5 August 2023 and were invited to join the town's vibrant LGBTQ+ community for a fun filled day of celebration and acceptance.

In addition to forthcoming events, Members were informed that over 200 cyclists took part in the mass ride for cycleways event held on the 9 June 2023. The event promoted the future of safer, healthier, cheaper and more planet-friendlier travel in Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge.

TCF 23/16 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Leader provided an update on the future of Beales and advised that no detailed plans had been submitted. Members raised concern that the premises was vacant and suggested that a presentation be received at the next meeting.

The meeting ended at 8.19 pm