

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

TONBRIDGE COMMUNITY FORUM

Monday, 27th November, 2023

Present: Cllr G B Hines (Chair), Cllr D W King (Vice-Chair), Friends of Mill Stream (Vice-Chair), Cllr K Barton, Cllr M D Boughton (substitute member), Cllr G C Bridge, Cllr J Clokey, Cllr A Cope, Cllr F A Hoskins, Cllr A Mehmet, Cllr B A Parry, Cllr K S Tunstall, County Cllr P Stepto and County Cllr M Hood

Together with representatives from:

- Tonbridge Bicycle Users Group
- Tonbridge Civic Society
- Tonbridge Historical Society
- Tonbridge Line Commuters
- Tonbridge Lions Club
- Tonbridge Sports Association
- Tonbridge U3A

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors L Athwal, R W G Oliver and Rotary Club of Tonbridge.

TCF 23/28 NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Notification of a substitute Member was recorded as set out below:

- Cllr Boughton substituting for Cllr Rhodes.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rules 17.5 to 17.9 this Councillor had the same rights as the ordinary member of the committee for whom they were substituting.

TCF 23/29 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 4 September 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

TCF 23/30 ELECTIONS - PARLIAMENTARY BOUNDARY CHANGES AND THE ELECTION BILL

The Head of Electoral Services provided an overview on the parliamentary boundary changes, the Tranche 2 changes arising from the Election Bill and summarised details in respect of new constituencies, polling district and polling station reviews and changes to postal and proxy votes.

There were no changes proposed to polling districts as the current configuration aligned with the new constituencies. However, a polling station review would be undertaken with consultation starting on 1 December 2023 for a four week period. Final proposals arising from this review/consultation would be considered by the General Purposes Committee on 24 January 2024.

Reference was made to new application forms for postal and proxy votes from 31 October 2023, which now included boxes for National Insurance number to enable verification checks on electors to be completed. Existing postal voters would change to the new system when renewing.

It was noted that the Parliamentary Election had to take place before 25 January 2025. However, the next election would be the Police and Crime Commissioner on Thursday 2 May 2024.

There was a request for anyone interested in working on elections to contact the Elections Team as there was an extreme shortage of election staff.

TCF 23/31 UPDATE ON ANY ACTION IDENTIFIED IN THE LAST MINUTES

Minute Number TCF 23/25 – Update on the bus stop outside Café Nero

Concern was expressed regarding the time it was taking to install a replacement bus shelter at the bus stop outside of Café Nero on Tonbridge High Street. The Leader of the Borough Council advised that when the contract was due for renewal, consideration would be given to the inclusion of a clause that stipulated that a replacement bus shelter would be installed within a reasonable period of time.

MATTERS RAISED IN ADVANCE OF THE MEETING

TCF 23/32 KENT POLICE UPDATE

Inspector Newman provided an update on the achievements made in performance and the neighbourhood policing agenda. Good progress was being made in recruitment with beat officer positions up by 57 and the plan was for the full quota to be reached by October 2024.

Reference was made to the low crime figures within Tonbridge and Malling, however over the past month there had been several burglaries in the Tonbridge area where burglars were seeking to steal expensive jewellery and gold, with many of the victims from Asian households. Kent Police were investigating at least 10 break-ins which may be linked. Families were reminded of the steps they could take to protect their homes from burglars.

There had been multiple arrests of individuals dealing low level drugs and noted that there was no organised crime or county lines activity in the area.

The discussion at the Borough Council's Communities and Environment Scrutiny Select Committee meeting on 6 November 2023 on proposals for tackling graffiti in the Borough was raised and in response to questioning, Inspector Newman explained that graffiti walls in some areas worked well and were generally used by street artists, however the walls would not deter vandals graffitiing in other areas of the town.

In terms of building relationships with local police officers, a list of contacts would be circulated to enable arrangements to be made for residents to meet with their ward officer.

TCF 23/33 TONBRIDGE 'NEEDS ACCESS TO CASH' CAMPAIGN

Sally Pearce presented a briefing paper on Tonbridge Needs Access to Cash. The campaign was for a Banking Hub in Tonbridge following the closure of several banks in the town. At present, Tonbridge did not qualify for a Banking Hub as there were still banks in the town that provided personal banking services. The campaign was to change the criteria so that the removal of business banking services was sufficient to qualify and an announcement confirming the new Banking Hub criteria was currently awaited.

TCF 23/34 REQUEST FOR DRINKING TAP AT TONBRIDGE RACECOURSE SPORTSGROUND

A request was made by Tonbridge Bicycle Users Group for a drinking tap at Tonbridge Racecourse Park.

The Leader of the Borough Council explained that officers were in the process of preparing a new Management Plan for the site that would cover the period 2024 – 2029 and that year 1 of the plan (2024) would include a project to carry out a detailed investigation to consider the installation of a bottle refill station. This would, however, need to consider the health and safety implications, purchase and installation costs, service and cleaning costs and water supply costs. Officers would investigate and take into account existing refill schemes, such as the Refill app which raised awareness of Tonbridge businesses which currently offered free refills, as well as a greater focus on promoting a reduction in the use of single use plastics.

TCF 23/35 PROMOTION OF UPCOMING EVENTSVisions of Tonbridge Town

The Tonbridge Civic Society had organised a Visions of Tonbridge Town event which would be held at The Old Fire Station on 3 December at 5.00pm.

Tonbridge Folk Club

Members were reminded that the Tonbridge Folk Club met every first and third Monday of each month at Ye Olde Chequers Inn, Tonbridge.

Children's Christmas Bicycle Ride

A children's bicycle ride organised by Tonbridge Bicycle Users Group would be held on 30 December 2023 at 11.00am, starting from the Christmas Tree in Tonbridge High Street.

Weald of Kent Christmas Fete

The Weald of Kent Christmas Fete would be held on 3 December 2023, 12pm to 3pm, at Weald of Kent Grammar School, Tonbridge.

Tonbridge Historical Society

A lecture by Michael Smith for the Tonbridge Historical Society on Tom Crean: The Unsung Hero of Polar Exploration would be held at the Angel Centre, Tonbridge on 14 December 2023 at 7.45pm.

TCF 23/36 ANY OTHER BUSINESS(1) Car parking fees and charges consultation

Concern was expressed in regard to the review of car parking fees and charges and the timing of the formal public consultation on the proposed changes to the on-street and off-street charges. The Leader of the Borough Council advised that the Local Authorities Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England & Wales) Regulations required a statutory consultation of at least 21 days for the invitation of objections, however the decision had been made to extend the period of consultation to the 7 January 2024 due to the Christmas period. Residents were encouraged to respond to the consultation and to provide any comments.

(2) Enforcement issues

In terms of enforcement, concern was raised regarding the retail units in the industrial estate. The Leader explained that the Borough Council was transferring a number of service-based

platforms to a new software provider called Agile. This was a significant change and the systems had 'gone live' in October. Unfortunately, services were experiencing technical difficulties due to the number of outstanding issues and the Borough Council were working closely with the software provider on resolving these issues.

The meeting ended at 9.18 pm