

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL



EXECUTIVE SERVICES

Chief Executive

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NB - This agenda contains proposals, recommendations and options. These do not represent Council policy or decisions until they have received proper consideration through the full decision making process.

Contact: Democratic Services
committee.services@tmbc.gov.uk

17 November 2023

To: MEMBERS OF THE TONBRIDGE COMMUNITY FORUM
(Copies to all Members of the Council)

Dear Sir/Madam

Your attendance is requested at a meeting of the Tonbridge Community Forum to be held in the Riverside Lounge, Angel Centre, Tonbridge on Monday, 27th November, 2023 commencing at 7.30 pm

Yours faithfully

JULIE BEILBY

Chief Executive

A G E N D A

1. Guidance on the Conduct of Meetings 5 - 6
2. Apologies for absence
3. Notification of Substitute Members 7 - 8

4. Minutes 9 - 12

To confirm as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting of Tonbridge Community Forum held on 4 September 2023

5. Update on any action identified in the last Minutes

6. Elections - Parliamentary Boundary Changes and the Election Verbal
Bill

To receive a presentation on the parliamentary boundary changes, the review of polling stations and the Police and Crime Commissioner elections.

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@tmbc.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.

7. Kent Police Update Verbal

Kent Police are invited to provide an update on neighbour policing and recent initiatives and operations.

Please note that attendance is subject to operational pressures.

8. Tonbridge 'Needs Access to Cash' Campaign 13 - 14

Details of the campaign to be provided by the organiser (Sally Pearce)

9. Request for drinking tap at Tonbridge Racecourse Sportsground Verbal

Requested by Tonbridge Bicycle Users Group

10. Promotion of Upcoming Events Verbal

Opportunity for organisations to promote upcoming events

11. Any Other Business

To consider any other issues raised at the meeting. Any answers, actions and/or outcomes may be provided at the next meeting of the Tonbridge Community Forum.

DISTRIBUTION

Borough Council Representatives:

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

Members of the Forum:

Mr M Hood (County Councillor)
Mr P Stepto (County Councillor)

Friends of Mill Stream (Vice-Chair)
Angel Indoor Bowls Club
EMBER Community Interest Group
Feast
Rotary Club of Tonbridge
Tonbridge and Malling Seniors
Tonbridge Bicycle Users Group
Tonbridge Civic Society
Tonbridge Dementia Friendly Community
Tonbridge District Scout Council
Tonbridge Historical Society
Tonbridge Line Commuters
Tonbridge Lions Club
Tonbridge Sports Association
Tonbridge Town Team
Tonbridge U3A

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GUIDANCE ON HOW MEETINGS WILL BE CONDUCTED

- (1) The majority of meetings of the Borough Council will be livestreamed to YouTube here, unless there is exempt or confidential business be discussed:
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCPp-IJISNgoF-ugSzxjAPfw/featured>
- (2) There are no fire drills planned during the time a meeting is being held. For the benefit of those in the meeting room, the fire alarm is a long continuous bell and the exits are via the doors used to enter the room. An officer on site will lead any evacuation.
- (3) Should you need this agenda or any of the reports in a different format, or have any other queries concerning the meeting, please contact Democratic Services on committee.services@tmbc.gov.uk in the first instance.

Attendance:

- Meetings of the Forum will alternate between 'in person' or online meetings. Please check the agenda as this will set out the meeting venue.
- Members of the Forum should attend in person wherever possible those meetings that are to be held in person.
- Members of the Forum should participate via MS Teams for those meetings that are to be held online. Appointments and joining instructions will be circulated on the day of the meeting.

For meetings held online, before formal proceedings start there will be a sound check of Members/Officers. This is to ensure that those participating can see and hear everyone and confirms attendance.

Ground Rules:

The meeting will operate under the following ground rules:

- Members in the room should indicate to speak in the usual way and use the microphone passed to them.

- If there any technical issues the meeting will be adjourned to try and rectify them. If this is not possible there are a number of options that can be taken to enable the meeting to continue. These will be explained if it becomes necessary.

For those Members participating online:

- please request to speak using the 'chat or hand raised function';
- please turn off cameras and microphones when not speaking;
- please do not use the 'chat function' for other matters as comments can be seen by all;
- Members may wish to blur the background on their camera using the facility on Microsoft teams.
- Please avoid distractions and general chat if not addressing the meeting
- Please remember to turn off or silence mobile phones

Tonbridge Community Forum

	Conservative	Liberal Democratic	Green	Ind. Kent Alliance	Labour
1	Matt Boughton				
2	Martin Coffin				
3	Robin Betts				
4	Des Keers				
5	Kim Tanner				

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TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

TONBRIDGE COMMUNITY FORUM

MINUTES

Monday, 4th September, 2023

Present: Cllr G B Hines (Chair), Cllr D W King (Vice-Chair), 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:

- Friends of Mill Stream
- Rotary Club
- Tonbridge Bicycle Users Group
- Tonbridge Civic Society
- Tonbridge District Scouts
- Tonbridge Line Commuters
- Tonbridge Lions Club
- Tonbridge Sports Association
- Tonbridge Town Team

Councillors K Barton, M D Boughton and S Crisp were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor L Athwal, Tonbridge Dementia Friendly and Tonbridge Parish Church

TCF 23/17 APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIR (COMMUNITY GROUPS)

A nomination for the appointment of Vice Chair from community representatives had been received for Mark Ansell. As there were no further nominations received by the deadline, the community representatives agreed that Mark Ansell be duly appointed as the second Vice Chair of the Tonbridge Community Forum.

TCF 23/18 NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no substitute Members nominated for this meeting.

TCF 23/19 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 12 June 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

TCF 23/20 UPDATE ON ANY ACTION IDENTIFIED IN THE LAST MINUTES

There was no update on any actions identified in the minutes of the previous meeting.

MATTERS RAISED IN ADVANCE OF THE MEETING**TCF 23/21 KENT POLICE UPDATE**

Members received a verbal update from Inspector Newman on recent initiatives.

Inspector Newman reported that staffing was currently at 50% and that following a recruitment drive, there would be a full complement of staff by October 2024.

There had been issues with e-bikes in the locality and the approach taken was to deal with these in a positive way. There had been a number of arrests in the town parks following drug related incidences and anti social behaviour.

An overview of crime in the area was provided and noted that there had been an increase in reported crime over the rolling year, partly due to the proactiveness of the neighbourhood team. It was highlighted that there had been a reduction in robbery and violence against the person and an increase in shoplifting and calls related to antisocial behaviour.

TCF 23/22 TONBRIDGE POST OFFICE

Members received an update on service provision from the Post Office during which they were advised that applications had been sought for a post office in Tonbridge since January 2022 and a number of locations in the town had been considered and although there had been interest, the challenge was finding the right premises. In Spring 2023, a successful applicant had identified a premise on the High Street, however it had been decided not to proceed with the premises. The Post Office were working with the applicant to identify alternative premises and negotiations were ongoing in regard to a lease agreement on a premise which had been assessed to be accessible and in a viable central location.

Members expressed concern if the current identified premise was not be financially viable and were advised that the business plan had been assessed and scrutinised. If determined not to be viable, discussions would be held with the applicant.

TCF 23/23 RAILWAY TICKET OFFICES AND THEIR POTENTIAL CLOSURE

Mr Robert Mansfield, representative of Tonbridge Line Commuters, brought members attention to the public consultation on Southeastern

and Southern Rail's ticket office closure. The proposals were to move staff out of ticket offices and onto station platforms and concourses to support better, face-to-face interactions, with the potential to close ticket offices in a number of locations, including Tonbridge. Members were invited to respond to stage 2 of the consultation when the consultation became live.

TCF 23/24 UPDATE REGARDING THE ROSE AND CROWN HOTEL

The Leader of the Borough Council provided an update on the Rose and Crown Hotel during which he reported that he had met with the new owners of the premises in July 2023 at which point their plans were in the early stages of development. Two phases of work were envisaged, firstly to the rear, followed by work to the front of the building. The expectation was for a planning application to be submitted detailing the intended changes and the applicant had been encouraged to seek pre-application advice from the Borough Council.

TCF 23/25 UPDATE ON THE BUS STOP OUTSIDE CAFE NERO

County Councillor Mark Hood explained that the Borough Council had a contract with an external provider for the bus stop outside Café Nero and the income from advertising space went towards the cost of infrastructure and maintenance. A bench had been installed in the interim to address concerns raised by the Community Safety Partnership and there were ongoing discussions with the Borough Council to resolve the issue.

TCF 23/26 PROMOTION OF UPCOMING EVENTS

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

(1) Angel Indoor Bowls Club Open Weekend

Angel Indoor Bowls would be holding an open weekend on 16 and 17 September 2023.

(2) Armed Forces Day Concert

Plans were underway for an Armed Forces Day concert in Tonbridge in 2024. Businesses were invited to sponsor the event or to place an advertisement in the programme.

(3) Tonbridge Half Marathon

The annual Tonbridge Half Marathon event, run by Tonbridge Lions and the Tonbridge Rotary Club, would be held on 1 October 2023, commencing at 9.00am, and there would also be an opportunity to enter a 5km and 10km run.

(4) Mass Bicycle Ride

The next mass bicycle ride organised by the Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells Bicycle Users Groups in support of the A26 Tonbridge to Tunbridge Wells cycle route would be held on 8 September at 6.30pm, starting from Quarry Hill Road.

TCF 23/27 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Councillor Dennis King raised concerns regarding graffiti in Tonbridge Town Centre and the surrounding area and reported that his concerns had been raised with the Borough Council who would be approaching landowners to offer assistance in removing graffiti and the Communities and Environment Scrutiny Select Committee would be asked to consider a report detailing the different approaches the Council took to remove graffiti in the town.

The opinion of Members on advertisement banners was sought. During discussion, it was recognised that local events were good for the economy, however some banners remained for a significant period of time following the event or were for an event outside of the area.

The meeting ended at 8.38 pm

Tonbridge Community Forum briefing paper

Background

In recent years we have seen the closure of all the business banks on Tonbridge high street. We still have Nationwide, Santander and Halifax, but these only provide cash counter services to personal customers.

In January 2024 we will have a permanent (close to the) high street post office in Quarry Hill Road which will provide limited cash counter services for personal and business bank customers.

It is our small independent businesses that struggle without full local banking services. The bigger businesses can afford cash collection and delivery services, plus have the security to store takes and plenty of change. So limited high street banking is unlikely to affect chain businesses like Poundland or B&M or Wetherspoons but will affect the small independent businesses that form the character of our high street. This will have a knock effect on footfall and thus our local economy.

Why being able to spend cash matters

While use of cash is reducing, there are some people who are not comfortable using cards and contactless. 2022 research by the Financial Conduct Authority shows that some 6% of us rely almost entirely on cash and a further 20% use cash and other payment types equally. 74% of us rarely or never use cash. In the context of Tonbridge with a population of 40,000 that's over 10,000 who will at least be inconvenienced including 2,400 people significantly affected.

Those 2,400 are likely to be the most vulnerable and losing the ability to spend cash locally means they are at risk of losing their financial independence. But the rest of us will also be affected.

Logistically we are not ready for an entirely cashless society, from kids spending pocket money to buying from the farmers' market when the wifi signal drops or using a pound coin to get a trolley at B&M. Going entirely cashless would affect our community and this affect all of us, including those who are happy to be cashless.

Banking hub

Without business banks providing cash banking services on Tonbridge high street our business will struggle to bank cash takings or get change for their tills, they have no choice but to go cashless. This means many of our vulnerable who prefer, or rely on, cash will suffer. Many of our small local businesses could be forced to close.

The new post office will provide limited services which will help but a town our size with the number of high street retail and hospitality businesses needs a business bank presence.

Our best option is to get a Banking Hub which will be funded by the banking industry and will have the added bonus of providing both business and personal banking services. A Banking Hub will lead to an organic increase in businesses accepting cash - some of those businesses happy to be cashless will be more inclined to accept cash if they have easy access to cash counter services as provided by banks.

There are three organisations involved in the Banking Hub process:

- Link - responsible for assessing whether a town gets a hub.

- Cash Access Group - responsible for setting up the hub once approved by Link.
- The Post Office - which would run the hub in partnership with the banks. (To be clear it does not provide post office services and would not affect the post office being set up at Quarry Hill Road in January).

Link has already considered and rejected Tonbridge having a hub. I submitted a further formal request which has been rejected. The rejection is because the criteria currently only allows a town to have a hub if it has no banks at all. We still have Nationwide, Halifax and Santander branches - but none of them provide business counter services.

Financial Services & Markets Act 2023

Under this act the criteria for assessing whether a town gets a banking hub is being reviewed by the Treasury in partnership with the Financial Conduct Authority. An announcement is expected towards the end of the year with formal update of the rules by Summer 2024.

So we have an opportunity to get the criteria changed and get a Banking Hub in Tonbridge.

To this end, I have written to the following, explaining the Tonbridge situation and asking for their support to make sure the criteria is changed so that a town without a bank branch providing business banking services, gets a Banking Hub.

1. John Howells, Link CEO.
2. Joanna Wallace, Chair of Community Cash Advisory Panel.
3. Sheldon Mills, Financial Conduct Authority director.
4. Andrew Griffith, Economic Minister at the Treasury (now replaced by Abimbola Afolami)

In addition I have also contacted and met with Tom Tugendhat who has confirmed his support and that he will lobby for the criteria change. He has asked for those who are affected and want a Banking Hub to email him - he needs real-life stories from constituents and high street businesses.

What's needed?

Sharing and communicating the need to email Tom Tugendhat tom.tugendhat.mp@parliament.uk sharing individual and business stories. He needs ammunition to lobby.

Anyone wanting more information can go to the Facebook group <https://www.facebook.com/groups/tonbridgeneeds>

Sally Pearce | Tonbridge needs access to cash | 15 Nov 2023