

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

PARISH PARTNERSHIP PANEL

MINUTES

Thursday, 28th August, 2025

Present: Cllr R W Dalton (Chair), Cllr Mrs M Tatton (Vice-Chair), Cllr Mrs S Bell, Cllr R P Betts, Cllr B Banks, Cllr M D Boughton, Cllr M Taylor and Cllr A G Bennison (substitute)

Together with representatives of Addington, Aylesford, Birling, Borough Green, Burham, East Malling and Larkfield, East Peckham, Hadlow*, Hildenborough, Ightham*, Kings Hill, Platt, Ryarsh (Vice-Chair), Snodland, Stansted, Trottiscliffe, West Malling, Wrotham Parish/Town Councils, County Cllr H Rayner and County Cllr D Sian and Chair of Kent Association of Local Councils (Tonbridge and Malling) (Parish Cllr S Barker)

(*participated via MS Teams)

In attendance: Councillors R I B Cannon*, D A S Davis* and M R Rhodes* were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

(*participated via MS Teams)

Apologies for absence were received from Borough Councillors P Boxall, L Chapman, M A Coffin*, S Crisp, S M Hammond, P M Hickmott, Ditton, Plaxtol, Watringbury Parish Councils and County Cllr S Hudson.

(*apologies submitted for in-person attendance and participated via MS Teams)

PART 1 - PUBLIC

PPP 25/19 NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Notification of substitute Members was recorded as set out below:

- Cllr A Bennison substituted for Cllr P Hickmott

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.

PPP 25/20 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 29 May 2025 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

PPP 25/21 UPDATE ON ACTION IDENTIFIED IN THE LAST MINUTES

There were no matters required to be updated.

PPP 25/22 UPDATE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION AND COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW INTO A TOWN COUNCIL FOR TONBRIDGE

In the first part of the presentation, the Chief Executive (Mr D Roberts) and the Council Leader (Cllr M Boughton) provided a comprehensive update to Borough, Town and Parish, and County Councillors on the ongoing Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution process, including the Government's legislative agenda, options for proposed models for new unitary authorities within Kent and Medway currently under consideration, and the implications for local councils and services.

Particular attention was drawn to the seven models under consideration for Kent and Medway, including three, four, and five unitary authority options, as well as the Kent County Council's proposal of a single unitary with three Area Assemblies. Population criteria and the distribution of services and assets were discussed, with maps showing proposed boundaries of new unitary councils and population figures to illustrate the various options. The increased complexities and risks associated with boundary changes under some unitary models were highlighted and acknowledged given the requirement for a full Boundary Commission review process. The three Unitary option, based on initial consultancy analysis, proved to be a more financially sustainable model compared to the four Unitary option, and was the preferred option by the Borough Council alongside another four Councils in Kent and Medway.

With regard to the Neighbourhood Area Committees as introduced in the latest feedback from the Government, it was understood that these committees were intended to address concerns about local democracy and responsiveness, but their exact powers and relationship with parish councils remained to be determined.

In terms of the next steps and milestones of the Local Government Reorganisation programme, the proposal submission deadline of 28 November 2025 for all Councils within Kent and Medway was reiterated, with Government feedback and possible public consultation to follow in early 2026, elections to the new Unitary Councils in May 2027, and full implementation in April 2028. During the transition year between May 2027 and April 2028, existing Borough Councillors would continue delivering services for the borough, while the newly elected Unitary

Councillors would prepare the new Unitary Council's structures and policies.

Concerns were raised by Members of the Panel about the distribution of existing debts, particularly the risk of West Kent authorities inheriting a disproportionate share. It was noted that discussions with the Government and MPs to advocate for fair allocation were ongoing, noting that the new Unitary Councils would inherit both assets and liabilities, and that financial sustainability would be a key criterion for the proposals.

In response to questions raised by parish representatives about the implications of the Local Government Reorganisation for Town and Parish Councils, including precepts, asset ownership, and the role of Neighbourhood Area Committees, it was advised that parish assets and precepts would remain unchanged and that, while the relationship between Neighbourhood Area Committees and parishes was yet to be fully defined, there was no expectation that parish councils would be replaced or subsumed.

Furthermore, there was concern raised over the impact of the Local Government Reorganisation on Council staff, particularly regarding job security, staff transfers and the risk of staff leaving for other authorities that were included in the Devolution Priority Programme. As explained by the Chief Executive and based on what happened elsewhere in the country where reorganisation had taken place, the vast majority of staff would transfer on existing terms and conditions to the new Unitary Council and continue to deliver the services that residents needed. However, the main risk identified was retaining and attracting sufficient staff to maintain service delivery, due to retirements as a result of an aging profile and existing difficulty across the sector in recruiting to specialist roles.

Finally, reference was made to a communications campaign being coordinated across all 14 Councils in Kent and Medway to raise awareness among residents about the forthcoming reorganisation. The Borough Council committed to ongoing communications with Town and Parish Councils throughout the process, including regular updates, presentations and meeting with representatives of the Kent Association of Local Councils, especially while approaching key milestones.

In the second part of the presentation, the Head of Electoral Services provided an update on the outcome of the consultation in respect of a Community Governance Review into a town council for Tonbridge, showing a strong support from 72% of the 3,257 respondents for establishing a Tonbridge Town Council, although a 12% response rate of the electorate was noted.

A full report on the results of the consultation and the recommended next steps as part of the Community Governance Review would be

presented to the next meeting of Council on 28 October 2025 for a final decision to be taken and, subject to approval by Members, legal orders would be prepared and elections for the new town council could take place in May 2027, aligning with the local election cycle.

PPP 25/23 PLANNING CONSULTATION - ROLE OF PARISH/TOWN COUNCIL

With regard to a query raised by parish representatives at a previous meeting around the '21-day rule' in respect of the legal consultation period that Town and Parish Councils as well as other statutory consultees were required to submit representations on planning applications, it was explained by the Cabinet Member for Planning (Cllr M Taylor) that, while town/parish councils were required to submit responses within the 21-day statutory consultation period as set out in Article 25 of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015, late submission of representations before an application was determined would still be accepted, although with less likelihood of it being fully considered and reflected in the case officer's report.

Town and Parish Councils were reminded of the merit of early submission and were also made aware of an early Member engagement plan in respect of major and strategic development proposals, subject to approval by Council, which was aimed to enhance engagement with Members at an early stage of a major application and create an opportunity for input from local Members around key planning issues or concerns.

PPP 25/24 LOCAL PLAN

During an update provided by the Cabinet Member for Planning (Cllr M Taylor), the importance of progressing the Local Plan and meeting the submission deadline set by the Government to avoid imposed plans was reinforced, with reference made to the uplifted housing need requirement from the Government placed on the Borough Council and the increased complexity created by the forthcoming Local Government Reorganisation.

Members noted that in accordance with the approved Local Development Scheme, the second stage of the Regulation 18 consultation was expected to be undertaken before Christmas this year, with Regulation 19 consultation and submission to the Planning Inspectorate by the December 2026 deadline. Depending on the capacity of the Inspectorate, the examination in public could potentially occur in late 2027 or early 2028.

Finally, in order to ensure Town and Parish Councils were kept up-to-date on the key dates and developments regarding the Borough Council's Local Plan process, it was agreed that the Cabinet Member for Planning would provide a concise written summary of key points to

parishes following the next meeting of the Housing and Planning Scrutiny Select Committee on 21 October 2025 and/or subsequent decision taken by Cabinet at its extraordinary meeting on 29 October 2025, both of which would focus on the second stage of the Regulation 18 Local Plan.

PPP 25/25 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(1) Questions from East Peckham Parish Council

The Chair of Kent Association of Local Councils (Tonbridge and Malling) (Parish Cllr S Barker) reminded that a letter had been sent by the East Peckham Parish Council raising a number of questions, to which the Leader (Cllr M Boughton) advised that subject to clarification a response would be provided as soon as possible and could be shared with other interested parishes for transparency.

(2) Informal Landfill Register

The Cabinet Member for Planning (Cllr M Taylor) was compiling an informal landfill register and encouraged parishes that had not responded to provide the relevant information.

The meeting ended at 9.27 pm