

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

26 January 2016

Report of the Chief Executive

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet

1 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT – TONBRIDGE FORUM AND PARISH PARTNERSHIP PANEL

1.1 Background

1.1.1 It has been agreed that Overview and Scrutiny will evaluate the scope for change and potential savings via informal review groups drawn from the membership of Overview and Scrutiny. The Community Engagement review group looked at the mechanisms through which the Council engages with parish/town councils and community groups in Tonbridge, focussing on the roles of Tonbridge Forum and the Parish Partnership Panel (PPP).

1.1.2 The review group met initially on 21 July 2015 and is now able to present the findings for formal endorsement and recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

1.2 Meeting Attendance

1.2.1 At the initial meeting the review group focussed on attendance levels at previous meetings and found that over the last two years, for Tonbridge Forum (where membership currently stands at 41 members) attendance ranged from 18 groups represented at its highest, to just 7 groups attending on one occasion. On average, less than half of the membership attends any one meeting. For PPP meetings, attendance has ranged from 15 parishes represented at its highest, to just 9 at the least attended meeting. Again, attendance is less than half the membership for most meetings.

1.3 Options for Change

1.3.1 Whilst Tonbridge Forum and PPP are appreciated by some of the attendees, it is clear a review was necessary given the low levels of attendance. The Review Panel requested further consultation with Members of Tonbridge Forum and PPP to consider the following options:

- To discontinue Tonbridge Forum and PPP and replace these meetings with a joint Borough Council/KCC quarterly service update which is circulated to Parish Councils and Tonbridge Community Groups

- To reduce the frequency of Tonbridge Forum and PPP meetings to two main meetings each year and focus on more targeted topics that would hopefully be of greater interest to members
- To make no change to the current meeting arrangements but canvass the opinions of members of Tonbridge Forum and PPP to establish a preferred format for the meetings and any changes they would like to see implemented

1.3.2 All members of the Forum and PPP were sent a questionnaire inviting their views on the above. The Review Group then met again on 6 October 2015 to discuss the findings from the consultation. The papers from this meeting are attached as Appendix 1 of this report.

1.3.3 Responses from the questionnaires suggested that, for Tonbridge Forum, a more informal style of meeting be adopted and be held twice a year, with a review of the membership. Responses for PPP suggested that the current frequency should be retained, with the option to cancel meetings if insufficient items are brought forward. A longer lead in time was suggested to allow greater opportunity for parishes to suggest items. For both meetings there was some support for earlier meeting times.

1.4 Legal Implications

1.4.1 None

1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.5.1 Reducing the frequency of the meetings would see a reduction in staffing costs and room hire costs (Tonbridge Forum) and refreshment costs for both meetings.

1.6 Equality Impact Assessment

1.6.1 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

1.7 Recommendations

1.7.1 In light of the questionnaire responses from Tonbridge Forum members, as set out in the report to the Review Group meeting held on 6 October 2015, the Review Group recommends the following suggested changes to Tonbridge Forum:

- 1. That the Tonbridge Forum be retained but reduced to two meetings each year. Meetings to be held in the Castle Chamber at the earlier time of 6pm.**

2. **A review of the Tonbridge Forum Membership should be undertaken which will enable members to withdraw from the Forum if they wish to do so or confirm their continued membership.**
3. **Rather than a formal Council 'Panel' as at present, consideration should be given to a reduction of Council Members attending, allowing for a more informal community meeting.**
4. **The format of future meetings should be changed with a view to implementing a round table style of meeting with community members encouraged to raise items.**

1.7.2 Further to the questionnaire responses from Parish Councils as set out in the Review Group meeting held on 6 October 2015, the Review Group recommends the following suggested changes to Parish Partnership Panel meetings:

1. **To retain the PPP meetings at the current frequency (four per year) on the understanding that if insufficient items are put forward, the meeting will be cancelled.**
2. **Meetings will be chaired by the Leader or Cabinet Member and will be at the earlier time of 6pm.**
3. **To encourage greater participation, Parish Councils will be given a longer lead in time to suggest agenda items. It will also be recognised that some area specific issues will be relevant/ of interest to the wider area and should be included on the agenda.**
4. **Rather than providing presentations, KCC and Police representatives to submit brief reports highlighting any relevant updates, including contact details to allow Parish Councils to follow up on any issues if they wish.**

Background papers:

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Nil

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