

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

PARISH PARTNERSHIP PANEL

Thursday, 18th February, 2016

Present: Cllr N J Heslop (Chairman), Cllr M A Coffin (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Mrs S M Barker, Cllr T I B Cannon, Cllr R W Dalton, Cllr Mrs S M Hall, Cllr S M Hammond, Cllr D Markham and Cllr R V Roud.

Together with Addington, Aylesford, Birling, Borough Green, Burham, Ditton, Hadlow, Hildenborough, Kings Hill, Leybourne, Mereworth, Offham, Plaxtol, Shipbourne, Snodland, Stansted, Watringbury, West Malling, West Peckham, Wouldham and Wrotham Parish and Town Councils.

Councillors B J Luker, S C Perry and A K Sullivann were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs J A Anderson and Mrs S Hohler and Parish Councillor H Bott (Stansted Parish Council)

PART 1 - PUBLIC

PPP 16/1 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 19 November 2015 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

PPP 16/2 UPDATE ON ACTION IDENTIFIED IN THE LAST MINUTES

There were no actions identified

PPP 16/3 COMMUNITY SAFETY AND CRIME PREVENTION:

Crime Prevention Panel:

The Crime Prevention Panel was established in order to reduce crime and the fear of crime in the community through working together and was made up of residents and local organisations. It also had its own funds.

A copy of the Terms of Reference (**Annex 1**) and Constitution (**Annex 2**) would be circulated with the Minutes.

Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2014:

The Act had received Royal Assent in October 2014 and various activities had been undertaken in accordance with the new legislation. Particular reference was made to Public Space Protection Orders and consideration was being given to proposals for implementation borough wide and specific to council owned land. Consultation on these proposals would be released shortly and all parish councils would be contacted for a response.

Tonbridge and Malling Community Safety Unit/Community Safety Partnership:

The Licensing and Community Safety Manager advised that the Community Safety Unit (CSU) would identify final priorities for the upcoming year in the near future. Current thinking was focused around three main themes of 'safeguarding', 'health and wellbeing' and 'safer communities'. The draft Kent Control Strategy, (**Annex 3**) which set out the priorities, would be circulated with the Minutes for information.

Members were reminded that the CSU was partnership working between the Borough Council and Kent Police.

Kent Police Services Update:

Chief Inspector M Hutcheon, acting District Commander for Tonbridge and Malling, provided a verbal update on the achievements made in performance and the neighbourhood policing agenda.

It was reported that the position in the Borough remained good despite a 12% increase in crime. Tonbridge and Malling had the 3rd lowest crime levels in Kent and remained one of the safest places in the County. Increased reporting of incidents, more accurate recording of crime and fewer resources were believed to have contributed to the percentage increase over the year.

Particular reference was made to the Police Spending Review announcement in November 2015 which had seen police budgets protected, although it remained difficult to predict the financial implications for the longer term. However, significant savings still had to be achieved due to the increased pressures in dealing with threats from extremists and child exploitation.

The draft Kent Control Strategy, which set the priorities for the year, had identified the 6 key elements of child abuse and exploitation; human trafficking/modern slavery; domestic abuse, serious violence and sexual offences; organised acquisitive crime; gangs and counter terrorism and domestic extremism.

Recent police initiatives included:

- Op Gallant: focused on theft from dwellings, particularly sheds
- Op Volume: a road safety initiative with Borough Green Parish Council had taken place on 6 January 2016
- Op Cactus: Promotion of road safety around schools and educating parents about parking responsibly
- Op Milan: An initiative in East Malling to tackle un-roadworthy and untaxed vehicles

In addition, seven civil injunctions for anti-social behaviour and low level crime had been served in East Malling; whilst extra officers were in place to address anti-social behaviour in West Malling.

PPP 16/4 SOLAR FEED-IN TARIFF

Borough Green Parish Council referred to the Feed-In Tariff (FIT) scheme, designed by Government to encourage the uptake of small scale renewable and low carbon electricity generation technologies, and advised that the arrangements for solar power excluded parish councils from those eligible to receive payment.

To enable parish councils to take advantage of this scheme and benefit from FIT when using new technologies, the Borough and County Councils were asked to lobby the Local Government Association for support in asking Government to change the criteria.

The Chairman asked that this request be put in writing to him, in his position as Leader of the Council, and he would contact the LGA to see if other authorities had similar experiences. The Kent Association of Local Councils also agreed to capture as many examples as possible and advise the Leader accordingly.

PPP 16/5 KENT COUNTY COUNCIL SOFT LANDSCAPING PROPOSAL

The Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) (Tonbridge and Malling) advised of informal discussions with Kent County Council on improved collaborative working with parishes and providing services in a different way. The Village Caretaker scheme and soft landscaping were examples of where parishes could potentially assist the County Council in delivering services.

The Chairman indicated that the Borough Council were also in discussions with Sevenoaks District and Tunbridge Wells Borough Councils regarding joint working on areas of common interest. There might be opportunities for parish councils to develop and once further details were known these would be reported back for discussion.

In addition, the Borough Council were talking to Kent County Council regarding a 'district deal' and looking at opportunities for more local service delivery.

Finally, KALC asked that parish councils were kept fully informed and consulted at an early stage, especially if contracts and/or specifications were going to change as they could contribute important detail.

PPP 16/6 LOCAL PLAN AND PLANNING REFORMS UPDATE

The Planning Policy Manager provided an update on the progress of the Local Plan and the programme for its preparation.

Good progress was being made on the assessments of the sites submitted as part of the Call for Sites exercise, although it was noted that there remained a number of factors beyond the Borough Council's control that might have an impact on the timetable. These included the contribution of key infrastructure providers and statutory consultees to the assessment process and the ongoing Government planning reforms.

As a result, the Local Plan programme had been revised and the Issues and Options element would be out for consultation in September 2016 rather than spring as originally planned. The new timetable also allowed for a second round of consultations on a preferred development strategy option before the Plan was submitted to the Secretary of State in November 2017 and adopted in mind-2019, subject to any further delays.

The new timetable would be available on the website for information.

Borough Green Parish Council thanked the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health for the time taken to respond to concerns raised around the Call for Sites.

Planning Reforms Update:

The Head of Planning advised that the Housing and Planning Bill was currently in the Committee stages in the House of Lords and was anticipated to receive Royal Assent in April/May of this year.

Particular reference was made to the proposals to outsource planning applications to third parties (a designated provider). This meant that applicants could choose an alternative provider to process their planning application. However, planning decisions remained with the Local Planning Authority.

This potentially represented significant change in how parish councils participated in the application process. Full details were not yet available, although the proposals were part of a consultation document released today (Thursday 18 February 2016).

Members expressed concerns about the potential quality of the service provided by third party organisations and the risk associated with the Local Planning Authority taking planning decisions if relevant information was not shared or provided.

In response to a question raised regarding the parish councils position as statutory consultees, it was indicated that this should remain unchanged. However, the Borough Council were concerned about the quality of wider consultation with interested parties.

The deadline for commenting on these proposals was 15 April 2016 and all parishes were encouraged to respond.

Finally, it was noted that the Secretary of State for the Department for Communities and Local Government was meeting the Kent Association of Local Councils shortly if anyone wanted the opportunity to raise their concerns directly.

PPP 16/7 WRAP PLASTIC RECYCLING LEAFLET - THE BOROUGH COUNCILS POSITION

Reference was made to the recycling leaflet produced by the Kent Resource Partnership (KRP) which implied that kerbside plastic recycling was available throughout the county. This had created confusion for local residents as this service was not provided by Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council.

The Street Scene Manager advised that the KRP had received a grant award from WRAP to publicise recycling. Unfortunately, the funding was insufficient to provide individual leaflets containing bespoke information for each local authority participating so a generic leaflet was created instead.

KALC indicated that the information was misleading from a Tonbridge and Malling perspective and better value for money for the KRP would have been achieved by leaving the Borough Council out of the leaflet. In response, the Borough Council advised that this opinion had been suggested but it was apparently cheaper to deliver 50,000 leaflets across Tonbridge and Malling rather than tailoring the leaflet.

Options for recycling would be revisited when the current contract with Veolia ended in 2019 and the potential for kerbside plastic collection would be revisited. The Borough Council would continue to work with neighbouring authorities to provide value for money and improved services.

Information on recycling was available on the website – www.tmbc.gov.uk to educate on what type of materials could be taken to 'bring sites'.

PPP 16/8 FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS WITH PARISH COUNCILS

The Director of Finance and Transformation reported that the final Local Government Finance Settlement received by the Borough Council meant a funding reduction in respect of the Settlement Funding Assessment of 65.1% over a four year period. This equated to a loss of funding of £2.4M and the impact needed to be addressed urgently.

2016/17 was the last year that Tonbridge and Malling would receive Revenue Support Grant (RSG) and in 2019/20 would have to give Government £1M as a 'tariff adjustment' out of the Borough Council's local share of business rates income.

Following a decision by the Secretary of State, which allowed local authorities to raise Council Tax by £5 or 2.6%, whichever was the higher, without triggering a referendum, the Borough Council had resolved to raise Council Tax by £5.

The Borough Council faced a significantly difficult and challenging financial position and needed to achieve savings of circa £1.9M over the next 3-4 years. It was indicated that efficiency savings alone were no longer sufficient to address the budget position and all other measures would be explored, including a review of the provision of services.

Reference was made to a draft timetable, presented to Cabinet on 11 February, for commencing a review of partnership funding with parish councils including the Scheme of Financial Arrangements and the issue of funding passed to parish councils in respect of the council tax reduction scheme (CTRS). It was clarified that parish councils had already been advised of their allocations for 2016/17 so any new arrangement would impact in 2017/18 or later.

The Director of Finance and Transformation advised that it was the intention that a more detailed 'options' report be presented to Cabinet on 22 March, and it was anticipated that the consultation process regarding financial arrangements and the CTRS grant would be finalised and approved at that meeting. She commented that whilst it was very important to receive views from parish councils, she hoped that parish councils would recognise that the Borough Council had an objective to alleviate significant financial pressure.

The Director of Finance and Transformation added that New Homes Bonus remained an area of significant risk. It could not be assumed that the funding would continue in its current form as this was currently out for consultation with the prospects of significant reductions in funding being made available.

KALC and the Parish Councils present thanked the Borough Council for the financial support offered to them in the past and understood the challenging circumstances being faced.

In response to a concern raised around the need to hold a referendum if parish precepts were raised, it was confirmed that, currently, the trigger did not affect parish councils.

A member of the Panel commented that it should not be forgotten that the reason the Borough Council awarded grants to parish councils was because there was no town council in Tonbridge. Therefore, the Borough Council had to pay directly for those 'local' services. Tonbridge residents did not have to pay a local 'precept' and perhaps this should be considered if grants were to be reduced or withdrawn. The Chairman advised that all options were open and this would be explored in the context of this review.

All present recognised the difficult financial position faced by both borough and parish councils, especially in the light of reduced incomes and funding streams. The Vice-Chairman encouraged parishes to put forward any suggestions they had for improved efficiencies, savings and better ways of working.

PPP 16/9 UPDATES ON RECENT SCRUTINY REVIEWS:

Holiday Activity Programme:

The recommendations arising from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's review into the Borough Council's three holiday activity programmes for young people were outlined.

In summary, the Committee supported the opinion that the Borough Council should withdraw from direct provision of the Activate Programme and the Summer Playscheme and the retention of support for the Y2Crew programme. Ongoing support for families on low incomes via the Leisure Pass scheme would continue subject to other partners providing continued financial support.

It was also suggested that, if required, administrative support by the Borough Council's officers be offered to the private providers during the transitional period in 2016 to preserve and improve the service provided.

The Easter Activate would be the last one offered by the Borough Council. If no external provider could offer a Summer Playscheme programme for East Malling, Snodland or Trench an alternative would be offered by Tonbridge and Malling for a further year. However, negotiations with private providers were progressing well and were currently being evaluated.

KALC requested that if a Holiday Activity Programme was not going ahead in a parish the parish council be offered the opportunity to fund one.

Community Engagement:

The Chief Corporate Policy Officer advised of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's recommendations following the review into how the Borough Council engaged with local community groups and parish councils. Those of relevance to the Parish Partnership Panel included:

- The meetings be retained at the current frequency (four per year) on the understanding that, if insufficient items were put forward, the meeting would be cancelled
- The meetings to be chaired by the Leader or Cabinet Member
- To encourage greater participation the parish/town councils to be given a longer 'lead in' time to suggest agenda items. It was recognised that some area specific issues would be relevant/of interest to a wider area and should be included on the agenda
- Rather than providing presentations the Kent County Council and Kent Police representatives be invited to submit brief reports, highlighting relevant updates and contact details, to allow parish and town councils to follow up on any issues should they wish to do so

Particular reference was made to the proposal for a revised start time of 1800 hours. However, the Parish Partnership Panel expressed a preference for retaining the 1930 start as it gave opportunity for those working to attend meetings.

PPP 16/10 LOWER THAMES CROSSING - UPDATE

The Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health updated the Panel on the latest round of public consultation for the Lower Thames Crossing.

It was reported that the current consultation was for a single option, namely a road tunnel crossing east of Gravesend (in Kent) and Tilbury (in Essex). Deadline for responses was 24 March 2016.

Further detail on the proposals and how to comment was available on the Highways England website: <http://www.lower-thames-crossing.co.uk/>

The Borough Council was considering the consultation documentation and formulating a response. However, it was critical that there was a thorough evaluation of the impacts on the local highway network and road infrastructure. It was noted that the primary advantage to Tonbridge and Malling was that it relieved pressure on the M20.

Parish councils were encouraged to comment on the proposal via the Highways England website and Borough Council officers.

Concern was expressed around the ability of the A229, A228 and A227 to cope with increased traffic movement.

PPP 16/11 KENT COUNTY COUNCIL SERVICES UPDATE

The Kent County Council Community Liaison Officer (Anne Charman) reported on a number of County initiatives and consultations. Further detail was set out in the Kent County Council Services update report attached to the agenda.

It was reported that the Combined Member Grant Scheme would continue next year and provided a small source of income for projects, which parish councils were encouraged to consider. Further information on this was available by contacting local County Councillors or the Community Liaison Officer.

A number of public consultations were ongoing and everyone was encouraged to participate. All Kent County Council consultations could be viewed online at:

<http://consultations.kent.gov.uk/consult.ti>

Particular reference was made to the consultation on the Mobile Library Service which sought views on the proposals to change routes and stops. The deadline for responses was 4 March 2016.

Kent County Council had recently agreed to an optimised all night street lighting policy. This would be aligned with the introduction of new LED lights. The programme of scheduled works was available on the County Council website. It was noted that conversion to LED within Tonbridge and Malling was scheduled for September – November 2016.

In addition, the County Council had approved its budget and increased Council Tax by 1.99%.

Members welcomed the suspension of the consultation on disposal of land and expressed disappointment that local parishes had not been consulted during the initial process and only became aware of proposals when notices were published.

Wrotham Parish Council referred to an 'open space' car park and the offer to buy this from KCC which had not received a response despite numerous requests. The Community Liaison Officer offered to pursue this further.

PPP 16/12 TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL SERVICES UPDATE

The Street Scene Manager provided an update on key points relevant to Tonbridge and Malling. The headline messages included:

- Queens 90th Birthday:

As part of the Queen's birthday celebrations beacons were being lit around the country on 21 April 2016. Details of how to be involved had been sent to all parish councils. Further information was available from Leisure.Services@tmbc.gov.uk

Tonbridge and Malling would be holding a beacon lighting event at Tonbridge Castle following consultation with the office of the Deputy Lord Lieutenant.

- Official Birthday Celebrations – 11 and 12 June

Kent County Council had streamlined the process for applying to hold a street party on quiet residential streets over the weekend of 11 and 12 June. Anyone wishing to make an application must do so by 23 May at the latest:

<http://www.kent.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/highway-permits-and-licences/apply-to-close-a-road/planning-a-street-party>

Any approved parties would be circulated on a regular basis to the districts' Safety Advisory Groups. Information regarding road closures was available by contacting Licensing Services.

- Clean for the Queen

This was a campaign launched to clear up Britain in time for the Queen's 90th birthday. Volunteers across the country were encouraged to clean up their local areas and included a special clean up weekend on 4-6 March. The Borough Council were encouraging community groups to hold events throughout March and April and would support these by assisting with publicity, providing equipment and arranging rubbish collection.

New roadside signs would be erected at key points around the borough over the next week and these would be rotated around littering hot spots over the coming months. Further details were available from waste.services@tmbc.gov.uk

- Publicity initiatives

Leaflets aimed at improving the amount of metals collected in Kent and highlighting what happened to metal collected from the Borough Council's green box service were delivered during the weeks commencing 1 and 29 February 2016.

- Easter refuse and recycling collection arrangements

Details of Easter collection arrangements were sent to households in October and were available on the website: www.tmbc.gov.uk/waste

There would be no collections on Good Friday or Easter Monday. Collections due on Friday would now take place on Saturday whilst those on Monday would be a week later.

- Littergram App

This was a free app solution for mobile phones or tablets which allowed users to take a picture of litter, fly tipping or other street scene issues. These were sent automatically to the relevant local authority for action. The app was available for both Android and Apple devices and more information could be found at: www.littergram.co.uk

Further details and contact information regarding all these events would be circulated with the Minutes (Annex 4).

The meeting ended at 9.30 pm