

EXTRACTS FROM MINUTES**PARISH PARTNERSHIP PANEL -Thursday, 8th September, 2016
PPP 16/18 FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS WITH PARISH COUNCILS – UPDATE
FOLLOWING CONSULTATION**

The Director of Finance and Transformation referred to the two recent consultations on the potential withdrawal of Council Tax Reduction grants to parish councils and the potential introduction of a Special Expenses Scheme (Fairer Charging) in place of the s136 Financial Arrangements with Parish Councils Scheme. The latter was aimed at achieving savings where possible and to provide equity for residents throughout Tonbridge and Malling.

Both consultations had ended on 20 June 2016 and Parish Councils were thanked for their participation. The responses received had been considered by a Special Cabinet meeting held on 28 July and a preferred way forward formulated for recommendation to Council in November.

With regard to Council Tax Reduction grants it was proposed that these grants would be withdrawn with effect from April 2017, subject to Council approval. The Panel was reminded that the Borough Council had no statutory obligation to passport funding to parishes and, in fact, many local authorities had already withdrawn this financial support as a result of the reduction in local government funding from Central Government.

However, the impact on some Parish Councils was recognised and the Director of Finance and Transformation offered to discuss the implications to individual parishes out of meeting.

In respect of Fairer Charging it was proposed to introduce a Special Expenses Scheme from April 2017 and withdraw financial support (through s136 grants) to Parish Councils at the same time, subject to comment from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in September and final approval of Council in November 2016.

Following responses received from parish councils and residents a number of changes had been made to the initial proposals. The consultation had highlighted an issue regarding Tonbridge Cemetery and after further reflection the Borough Council felt that this should not be included in the Special Expenses Scheme on the grounds that it was a facility that was available equally to all residents in Tonbridge and Malling.

EXTRACTS FROM MINUTES

Reference was also made to open churchyards across the borough and, whilst there was no obligation on the Borough Council (or parish councils) to provide financial support, Members had requested that some further work be undertaken. Information was to be sought from the church authorities on the capacity status of open churchyards throughout the Borough to enable further consideration of whether some funding (under section 214 of the Local Government Act 1972) should be offered to Parochial Church Councils to support their maintenance in furtherance of the previous policy in this regard. The Director of Finance and Transformation stressed that this work had not been undertaken and therefore no decisions had yet been made.

At the current time, Christmas lighting was not included in the Special Expenses Scheme although the Borough Council recognised that there was an inequity between Tonbridge and the parished areas of the borough as there were differing funding arrangements in place. With this in mind, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would undertake a thorough review and explore alternative opportunities. It was hoped that a new system could be adopted for Christmas 2017.

The Director of Finance and Transformation recognised the concerns of Parish Councils regarding the introduction of 'capping' and indicated that the Borough Council continued to make informal enquiries with Government.

Details of the projected timetable for the proposals were available in full on the Borough Council website but summarised below:

- 13 September – Overview and Scrutiny Committee review proposals for Special Expenses and make recommendations to Cabinet
- 12 October – Cabinet considers proposals and any recommendations from Overview and Scrutiny and makes recommendations to Full Council
- 1 November – Full Council considers final proposals and approves/adopts Special Expenses Policy
- December – Parish Councils contacted with information for budget setting

EXTRACTS FROM MINUTES**TONBRIDGE FORUM – Monday, 12 September, 2016****TF 16/17 FAIRER CHARGING IN TONBRIDGE AND MALLING – UPDATE FOLLOWING PUBLIC CONSULTATION**

The Chief Executive referred to the recent public consultation on the proposals for fairer charging in Tonbridge and Malling by the introduction of a Special Expenses scheme. The proposal aimed to achieve savings where possible and to provide equity for residents throughout Tonbridge and Malling.

The consultation had ended on 20 June 2016 with a good response from residents. These responses had been carefully considered by a Special Cabinet meeting held on 28 July and a preferred way forward formulated for recommendation to Council in November. As a result of those considerations a number of changes had been suggested and it was now recommended that Tonbridge Cemetery be removed from any Special Expenses Scheme on the grounds that it was a facility that was available equally to all residents in Tonbridge and Malling.

At the current time, Christmas lighting was not included in the Special Expenses Scheme although the Borough Council recognised that there was an inequity between Tonbridge and the parished areas of the borough as there were differing funding arrangements in place. With this in mind, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would undertake a thorough review and explore alternative opportunities. It was hoped that a new system could be adopted for Christmas 2017.

As a consequence of the suggested changes to the Scheme indicative figures for Special Expenses would be lower than originally estimated but the final sums were still being calculated.

Details of the projected timetable for the proposals were available in full on the Borough Council website but summarised below:

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- 13 September – Overview and Scrutiny Committee review proposals for Special Expenses and make recommendations to Cabinet
- 12 October – Cabinet considers proposals and any recommendations from Overview and Scrutiny and makes recommendations to Full Council
- 1 November – Full Council considers final proposals and approves/adopts Special Expenses Policy

A question was asked about financial arrangements for Tonbridge and whether local councillors, or a local Member panel, would be granted delegated authority to make decisions regarding local precepts and funding opportunities. The Chief Executive responded that, under current Borough Council arrangements, those councillors elected to represent Tonbridge residents' interests had the opportunity to do so via the Advisory Board system and the standard budget setting process.

Members were encouraged to read the report on Special Expenses considered by Cabinet on 28 July 2016 via the following link:

<https://democracy.tmbc.gov.uk//ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=146&MIId=3006&Ver=4>