

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

22 January 2019

Report of the Management Team

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet – Council Decision

1 BREXIT PREPAREDNESS

To set out a range of initiatives to ensure the Borough Council is prepared to maintain business continuity in the light of possible disruption related to Brexit issues.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 This report focuses on the need for the Council to be prepared for any disruption to our services related to Brexit and sets out a number of proposed actions to deal with such issues. Government has indicated that six months of disruption might occur following Brexit and that all relevant agencies should be planning for that eventuality.

1.1.2 The key concern for Tonbridge and Malling will be the likely major traffic congestion affecting the M20/A20/M26 corridor and surrounding roads should there be severe delays at Kent ports. Plans are in place (Operation Fennel) to deal with this scenario but the success of such plans have yet to be fully tested. We therefore need to plan for such problems which could have a major impact on staff travel to and from work and other key road-related Council services such as waste collection.

1.2 The Kent Resilience Forum

1.2.1 The Kent Resilience Forum (KRF) is made up of representatives from the 'blue light services' and other agencies including Local Authorities, the NHS, KCC and the EA are all defined as category 1 responders in the Civil Contingencies Act.

1.2.2 The KRF has been responsible for the management and production of all current draft Brexit related plans (Operation Fennel). As a Borough we have been engaged in the shaping of these plans through Kent wide strategic and tactical meetings that have been held on a monthly basis.

- 1.2.3 The KRF have established a number of Brexit focused co-ordination groups and sub groups. These groups are focussed on work streams on; traffic management, community resilience, environment and waste, health and social care, business continuity, business resilience, command and control, media and communication and finance and data.
- 1.2.4 The KRF has recently produced a 'Partner Pack' relating to a no-deal scenario and which includes a detailed checklist to help agencies prepare for potential adverse impacts and risks to business continuity. We will be using this checklist to ensure that all possible adverse issues which might arise are addressed.

1.3 Proposed Actions

- 1.3.1 We believe the following matters will need to be addressed:

(a) The need for remote working for staff

We are planning for prospect of most staff to be given full remote access to relevant Council IT systems to enable them to work from home when needed. We have made a bid to the Brexit Contingency Fund (managed by Kent County Council) for funding to purchase a further 100 laptops for officer use along with appropriate licences and funding to assist with the resourcing of this hardware.

(b) Waste Collection Services

Due to likely traffic congestion to the north of the Borough, waste collection services might be disrupted with an impact on service delivery. It is also foreseeable that there may also be difficulties with access to KCC waste transfer stations which could further exacerbate the disposal of household waste. Discussions with the Council's new contractor are being progressed with a view to mitigating any major disruption to the service.

(c) Leisure Facilities

The Council has a management agreement with the Leisure Trust to manage the main leisure facilities. Significant disruption to the road network particularly in the north of the Borough could impact on usage of Larkfield Leisure Centre. Income generation could therefore be affected and could impact the ability of the Trust to meet their financial targets.

(d) Other Council Key Services

Grounds Maintenance – possible delays to some cutting services but not considered critical.

Street Cleansing – given the potential traffic congestion, street cleansing may well be interrupted or deferred to tackle 'hot spot locations'

Tonbridge Cemetery – low number of burials, not considered critical.

Environmental Health - Food officers may need to be involved with imported food issues if a trade deal is not secured. There has been some speculation that officers may be needed at Dover Port to assist, although this is just speculation at this stage. The Food Standards Agency are launching more imported food training for officers early this year so depending on what's agreed we could, as an inland authority be asked to take on more duties. Borough wise, officers could be asked to condemn consignments of food that need to be destroyed, if goods have been held up and are out of temperature control when they arrive in the borough.

(e) Council Meetings

There may be difficulties for Members and key staff to attend council meetings due to congestion. There are a range of possible options:

- Cancel meetings at short notice: need to ensure alerts are provided
- Absence of Quorum on the night of the meeting – adjourn meeting or use emergency arrangements (see below)
- Relocate meetings to other, more accessible premises or having daytime meetings at times of least traffic congestion
- Invoke urgency provisions to allow decisions to be taken and reported subsequently. It is suggested as a contingency that the Council amends the Constitution as soon as possible to deal with decision making 'during a period of serious and/or unexpected disruption'
- Reduce the number of meetings to the minimum required for the exercise of Council business.

(f) Elections

It is possible that there could be disruption to the Local Government elections scheduled for the 2nd May. If the UK voted to stay within the EU, further elections would also take place on 23 May 2019. To counter any disruption, we will be preparing election paperwork in house rather than externally, and we will be assessing where polling station staff and others supporting the elections reside to seek to ensure they attend polling stations near to where they live. We will also consult with neighbouring districts to share staff on a mutual basis where, for example, staff living in the Borough but working at other districts could undertake roles for TMBC and vice-versa. We will also seek to further promote the take up of postal voting to seek to reduce the numbers of voters attending stations.

(g) Communications and Call Handling

Our Media Team are already attending OP Fennel meetings linked to the Kent Resilience Forum. Following the Brexit decision, we anticipate a significant increase in calls/enquiries from residents and local businesses on a wide range of issues particularly if high levels of traffic congestion arise locally. We will seek

to ensure that resources from each of the Council's service teams are in place to deal with this increase, working remotely as and when required. We will monitor the level of calls to our switchboard and visits to our offices at Kings Hill and Tonbridge and will seek to ensure sufficient staff resources are available to deal with those needing help and support. We will also issue regular updates to all Members regarding any issues that arise over the next 6 months period.

(h) Key Additional Resources

In addition to the funding bid relating to the purchase of additional laptops, we believe it to be prudent to seek additional support funding from the Brexit Contingency Programme Fund to help strengthen our staff resources in three areas:

- extra staff time to ensure we are able provide mutual support to key agencies as and when requested;
- additional out of hours resources to help deal with any incidents that arise outside of normal working hours; and,
- a temporary extension of hours worked by the Council's Emergency Planning Officer to ensure he will be available to assist with any Brexit issues arising.

1.4 Legal Implications

- 1.4.1 Any legal matters related to the Council's role in providing mutual assistance and support will be dealt with as such issues arise.

1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.5.1 As set out above, an initial bid to the Brexit Contingency Programme Fund has been made seeking funding of c £105K to provide for additional remote access facilities for staff and to strengthen key staff resources.

1.6 Risk Assessment

- 1.6.1 We will be utilising the Kent Resilience Forum's Partners Pack to assess possible risks via the checklist which they have provided.

1.7 Equality Impact Assessment

- 1.7.1 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.

1.8 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.8.1 That the above issues be noted and that further updates are provided as more information becomes available;

1.8.2 That the Cabinet **be recommended** to extend the current urgency provisions in the Council's Constitution and Policy Framework to include 'arrangements for decision making during a period of serious and/or unexpected disruption'.

Background papers:

Nil

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