

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

TONBRIDGE FORUM

Monday, 25th February, 2019

Present: Cllr N J Heslop (Chairman), Cllr Mrs J A Anderson, Cllr O C Baldock, Cllr V M C Branson, Cllr M R Rhodes, Cllr Miss G E Thomas and Cllr F G Tombolis.

Together with County Councillors Mr R Long and Mr M Payne and representatives from:

The Bridge Trust	Tonbridge Historical Society
Kent Police (Tonbridge)	Tonbridge Line Commuters
Society of Friends	Tonbridge Music Club
Tonbridge and Malling Seniors	Tonbridge Rotary Club
Tonbridge Art Group	Tonbridge Theatre and Arts Club
Tonbridge Civic Society	Tonbridge Town Team
Tonbridge District Scout Council	University of the Third Age
	Women's Institute

Councillor H S Rogers was also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

Apologies for absence were received from Borough Councillors C P Smith (Vice-Chairman), Mrs P A Bates, P F Bolt, Mrs M F Heslop, Tonbridge Area Churches Together and Tonbridge Sports Association.

TF 19/1 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 10 September 2019 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

TF 19/2 UPDATE ON ANY ACTION IDENTIFIED IN THE LAST MINUTES

There were no updates or actions identified that were not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

TF 19/3 SUPPORTING THE HOMELESS

For awareness the Chairman (Councillor Nicolas Heslop) advised that he was a Trustee of the Bridge Trust.

The Housing Options and Support Manager (Claire Keeling) and the Head of Housing and Health (Linda Hibbs) set out measures for supporting the homeless. The Borough Council's work on preventing homelessness in Tonbridge and Malling was also set out.

As a result of the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act in 2018, which transformed the way local authorities helped homeless households, the emphasis was now on prevention at an early stage. Local authorities were required to take reasonable steps to prevent eligible households threatened with homelessness becoming homeless (Prevention duty); to take reasonable steps to secure accommodation for them for six months (Relief duty) and had a duty to provide advisory services.

The numbers of rough sleepers had risen nationally and within Tonbridge and Malling this had risen from 8 individuals in 2017 to 12 in 2018. This represented a 50% increase. It was reported that most authorities in Kent had seen an increase in the numbers of rough sleepers.

Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council planned to introduce greater flexibility around the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEPE). When the 'feel like' temperature fell below 0 degrees for one night (not three nights as previously) the SWEPE would be implemented and would be for a longer period of accommodation. The role of SWEPE was emphasised and it was important for agencies and organisations within Tonbridge to be aware when the Protocol was activated. The Borough Council welcomed any opportunity to increase circulation and awareness if any of the Forum organisations were interested in being notified.

Other initiatives being considered were the establishment of a Rough Sleeper Protocol, which would set out how to report rough sleeping; an early intervention project focused on young men, improved communications and liaison with private landlords and 'Housing First' which was a project to secure 3 units of accommodation to move homeless individuals or households immediately from the streets or shelter into their own accommodation. The Borough Council would work with Porchlight, Look Ahead and Clarion Housing Group on delivering these initiatives and funding would be sought from MHCLG.

The Head of Housing and Health advised that the Borough Council were aware of 2 rough sleepers in Tonbridge currently. Members were assured that Housing Services were working hard to tackle issues although it was important to recognise that there were many complex reasons behind homelessness which were sometimes difficult to resolve.

The Chief Executive Officer of the Bridge Trust (John Handley) talked about homelessness from the perspective of the voluntary sector. Nationally there were 274,000 homelessness cases dealt with by local authorities. A major cause was being made homeless from the private rented sector. In addition, there was an estimated 3.38 million couples and single people 'hidden' in other households and over 12,800 rough sleepers in England.

Changes to the way Kent County Council commissioned homelessness services would come into effect from April 2019. The Bridge Trust expressed concern that the amount of support available in West Kent would be significantly reduced as a result of these changes.

In response to a question related to the provision of an emergency shelter, it was explained that the Borough Council would explore the feasibility of a shelter in Tonbridge and Malling as part of the bid for MHCLG funding.

Finally it was confirmed that a 'changing place' facility, including a shower, at Tonbridge Castle was available for use by a range of people including the homeless.

TF 19/4 TONBRIDGE STATION AND HIGH STREET IMPROVEMENTS

The report of the Kent County Council Principal Transport Planner provided an update on the progress being made on the Tonbridge Station improvements. Additional measures to improve the traffic system in the High Street were also outlined.

Particular reference was made to proposals to install yellow box markings in the junction to deter drivers from entering without a clear exit. It was hoped that this action would improve the traffic flow and address concerns raised by drivers and pedestrians.

Other measures proposed included the installation of additional pedestrian display heads higher up poles to improve visibility and the installation of a new pole on the corner of Waterloo Road. Installation dates for these improvements were yet to be finalised, although it was hoped this could be progressed within the next week.

To illustrate the concerns raised by residents and to provide context for the proposals outlined in the report, the Deputy Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport and Waste at Kent County Council (Michael Payne) presented a number of photographs showing the road layout and the new puffin crossing. Positive improvements welcomed by Members included the addition of a cycle path, taxi ranks, security bollards and a drop off point in front of the station.

There were also plans to improve the traffic flow past bus stop G by widening the carriageway and installing a bus layby to allow vehicles to pass stationary buses. It was anticipated that this work would be undertaken during the summer months.

Finally, County Councillor Payne was pleased to report that Southeastern had committed to providing a cycle hub in Barden Road. There had been reassurances that this project would be delivered irrespective of who held the railway franchise.

The following concerns, comments and points were raised, discussed and noted:

- Poor visibility of traffic lights for cyclists using the cycle lane near the station.
- The additional pedestrian display heads placed higher up poles to improve visibility would be facing pedestrians.
- Similar issues with pedestrian crossings at Bordyke.
- The sloped camber of the pavement along certain parts of the High Street made it difficult for those with mobility issues. However, it was reported that this configuration assisted with drainage of surface water.
- The possibility of adding audible signals to the puffin crossing would be pursued.
- The junction at Station Approach was recognised as difficult and measures would be considered as part of new cycle hub.
- The raised table area along the High Street provided an additional crossing area and another pedestrian crossing would have implications for traffic flow.
- Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council were actively pursuing the leaseholder (Network Rail) of the units in Station Approach in an effort to improve the appearance leading into the High Street.
- Since the installation of the new traffic lights there had been increased congestion along Vale Road.
- Improved signage and promotion of Tonbridge along the A21 to encourage visitors.

All of these points were noted by the County Councillors for Tonbridge (Richard Long and Michael Payne) and these would be raised with officers at Kent County Council.

TF 19/5 LOCAL ELECTIONS

The Head of Electoral Services (Daune Ashdown) advised that borough, town and parish council elections would be held on Thursday 2 May 2019.

Poll cards would start to be delivered to residents once the Notice of Election was published, which would be on Monday 18 March 2019. Candidate nominations would be accepted from Tuesday 19 March until 1600 hours on Wednesday 3 April.

The deadline to apply for postal votes was 1700 hours on Monday 15 April. Advice and assistance related to postal voting was available by contacting the Elections Team on voting@tmbc.gov.uk

All Forum Members were asked to promote the importance of voter registration and the last date to register was Friday 12 April 2019.

TF 19/6 KENT POLICE UPDATE

Inspector Rothwell provided a verbal update on the achievements made in performance and the neighbourhood policing agenda.

Recent operations and trends included:

- Efforts to tackle drug dealing operations in places outside a gang's usual area of activity (County Lines). This was a significant safeguarding concern due to the targeting of vulnerable children and Kent Police were working with British Transport Police in monitoring those travelling from London. Stop and search was being undertaken where it was appropriate to do so.
- An initiative related to brothels to protect and safeguard the vulnerable.
- The theft of push bikes, particularly in Tonbridge, was being actively pursued.
- Issues with large numbers of youths on cycles performing dangerous practices, such as wheelies, along the major road networks continued to be investigated. Youth Engagement Officers were engaging with local children.
- Proactive work included the use of number plate readers to monitor movements.

Initiatives for spring 2019 included:

- Anti-social behaviour hotspots to be targeted and dispersal orders used if necessary.
- Increased visibility for road and speed checks.
- Further work related to 'county lines'.
- Crime prevention.
- Unlawful encampments.

In response to a question from the floor regarding youths on cycles, Inspector Rothwell indicated that these large gatherings were organised via social media. There were concerns around safety and the potential to cause traffic accidents. The value of road safety education was noted.

Finally, all residents were encouraged to report suspicious behaviour or any incidents by calling 101.

TF 19/7 KENT COUNTY COUNCIL SERVICES UPDATE

The County Councillors for Tonbridge (Councillors Richard Long and Michael Payne) indicated that there was nothing further to raise as the Tonbridge Station and High Street improvements had been discussed in-depth earlier in the evening.

However in response to a question from the floor, it was indicated that the pedestrian crossing along Shipbourne Road was likely to be installed later this year.

TF 19/8 TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL SERVICES UPDATE

The Chairman (in his role as Leader of the Borough Council) provided context for the setting of council tax and his presentation illustrated the services in Tonbridge supported/funded by the special expenses element. These included responsibility for the closed churchyards at St Peter and St Paul and St Stephen; maintaining open spaces, parks and play areas; sports grounds and running and supporting local events.

Particular reference was made to the seven allotment sites in Tonbridge owned by the Borough Council, which were managed and maintained by the Tonbridge Allotments and Gardens Association. It was noted that the Association was a well organised, not for profit community group and had a very positive relationship with the Borough Council. The current arrangements were considered to be a very efficient and cost effective approach to the management of these Borough Council owned facilities.

The Borough Council were currently consulting residents on the Management Plan 2019-23 for Tonbridge Racecourse Sportsground. The deadline for responses was Friday 22 March 2019 and all were encouraged to submit [comments](#).

Members were advised that the Borough Council had made provision in its Capital Plan for the replacement of the Swimming Pool Bridge, funded in part by developer contributions. Liaison was currently being undertaken with the two utility companies whose pipes and cables were attached/adjacent to the bridge. Both companies had agreed to relocate their services by drilling under the river bed which would then enable the Borough Council to proceed with the installation of the new bridge. It was hoped that the utility companies would complete their works in late spring/early summer enabling the new bridge to be in place before the school summer holidays. The timing of the works was determined by the utility companies and every effort would be made to enable the timescale to be met.

In response to a question from the floor regarding financial support for local events and were costs allocated to specific events, the Chief

Executive indicated that the biggest cost related to administration and staff and these would be shared across all events. However, there could also be some event specific costs, subject to the type of event being organised.

The following updates were also provided:

Waste Services Contract:

A new contractor Urbaser had been appointed and an introductory leaflet would be sent to all residents in the next couple of weeks. The new contract would start on 1 March and up until the end of September would mirror the current service arrangements. The new service arrangements would be rolled out across the whole borough from 30 September.

Public Conveniences:

Following a review of the Borough Council's facilities by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee consideration was being given to a number of recommendations. The main focus would be on parished areas.

Local Plan:

This had been submitted to the Planning Inspectorate on 23 January 2019.

All representations received during the Regulation 19 Consultation in November 2018 would be published as soon as was practically possible on the Borough Council's website. It was noted that this would take time to complete as personal information would have to be removed in accordance with General Data Protection Regulations. However, it was estimated that this would not be complete before the end of March 2019.

Two Planning Inspectors had been appointed but no date for the Public Examination had been confirmed.

Further information regarding the next stages would be published on the website as soon as it was available.

The meeting ended at 9.35 pm