

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

PARISH PARTNERSHIP PANEL

Thursday, 20th February, 2014

Present: Cllr N J Heslop (Chairman), Cllr B J Luker (Vice-Chairman), Cllr J Atkins, Cllr J A L Balcombe, Cllr M A C Balfour, Cllr Mrs J M Bellamy, Cllr Miss A Moloney, Cllr M Parry-Waller, Cllr A G Sayer and Cllr Mrs C J Woodger

Councillors O C Baldock, R W Dalton, D A S Davis, Mrs S Murray, Miss J L Sergison, Mrs E A Simpson and A K Sullivan were also in attendance.

Together with Kent County Councillor Homewood (Malling Rural North East) and representatives from Kent Police, Addington, Borough Green, Burham, East Malling and Larkfield, Hadlow, Hildenborough, Kings Hill, Platt, Plaxtol, Stansted, Trottiscliffe and Wrotham Parish Councils; Snodland Town Council and the Kent Association of Local Councils.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs J A Anderson and H S Rogers

PART 1 - PUBLIC

PPP 14/1 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

PPP 14/2 UPDATE ON ANY ACTION IDENTIFIED IN THE LAST MINUTES

There were no actions identified.

PPP 14/3 KENT POLICE SERVICES UPDATE

Chief Inspector Kirby, Borough Commander for Tonbridge and Malling, provided an overview of the achievements made in performance and the neighbourhood policing agenda. Members were advised of a current reduction in all victim based crime for the period April 2013 – February 2014. It was reported that Tonbridge and Malling was the only location in West Kent that was demonstrating a reduction.

Currently, the trend for burglary from a dwelling was upward although an improving figure was anticipated by the end of the year.

In addition, it was noted that the figures represented 'live data' and should be treated as provisional.

Reference was made to the reorganisation within the police force and the continuing need to make savings. To achieve these savings Kent Police hoped to reduce demand by using technology, better partnership integration and crime attendance. For example, a pilot scheme was currently operating with mental health professionals providing support to police officers in assessing and assisting individuals with suspected mental health issues. Police attendance at crime scenes had been reviewed and it was proposed that for non-serious incidents and where no further investigation was possible or necessary officers would no longer attend. This created a potential saving of 25-40% of resource time, which could be used to solve more serious crime. However, it was emphasised that for serious crime police officers would continue to attend.

Chief Inspector Kirby also reported on changes to police contact points as from 22 April 2014 and advised that 5 police community support officers had been employed specifically to staff them. These would operate Monday to Friday during the hours 1200-1300, 1345-1445 and 1630-1730. If any parish councils were unhappy with the time slots allocated they were invited to contact Kent Police to discuss alternative arrangements. The use of police contact points continued to be kept under review and further details would be circulated with the Minutes.

Snodland Town Council welcomed the return to community activity by Kent Police and the better usage of mobile police stations (police contact points).

In response to a query regarding the reduction in anti-social behaviour, Chief Inspector Kirby commented that joint working with Community Safety Partnerships, registered providers of social housing and communities themselves had proved beneficial in identifying 'hotspots' and tackling repeat offenders.

Finally, Chief Inspector Kirby noted the request for appropriate traffic management planning, and attendance if possible, on the commencement of road works along the A20 Seven Mile Lane junction.

PPP 14/4 RECENT FLOODING EMERGENCY

The Chief Executive referred to the recent flooding emergency that had affected many communities within Tonbridge and Malling, particularly Aylesford, Hildenborough, East Peckham and Tonbridge and outlined the actions taken by the Borough Council. A formal emergency response structure remained in place although this was now moving into a recovery phase.

Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council had been actively involved in a multi-agency approach and was responsible for opening and staffing rest

centres, securing emergency accommodation and providing Incident Liaison Officers to inspect and report back from flooded areas.

Event review was always important and lessons had been learnt from the experience and areas identified where all agencies could make further improvements to emergency plans and support to residents and businesses. The Borough Council would continue to work with communities and partner agencies to deliver a responsive approach in such circumstances.

A mapping exercise was being undertaken to identify all premises flooded and to attempt to identify the source of flooding involved, as there were many contributing factors in the borough such as coastal, river, surface water and fluvial flooding.

In addition, the Borough Council was committed to establishing Flood Warden Schemes and the Chief Executive referred to the East Peckham model as an example of good practice.

Parish councils and Local Community Forums were encouraged to work with the Borough Council and other agencies to develop and review local flood plans and identify local Flood Wardens. On behalf of the Borough Council, the Chief Executive thanked parish councils for supporting their communities during this difficult time.

The Chairman (and Leader of the Borough Council) acknowledged the significant emotional impact for all those affected and reiterated Tonbridge and Malling's commitment to reviewing the emergency response and identifying, with other agencies, where improvements to resilience against future flooding could be made. Multi-agency public meetings had been held recently with residents of Hildenborough and Tonbridge affected by flooding to enable concerns to be voiced and improvement actions to be identified and noted. The meeting of the Tonbridge Forum on Monday 17 February had also focused on flooding issues.

In addition, the Borough Council would strongly lobby Government and the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership for improvements to flood prevention measures.

Hildenborough Parish Council shared their experience and commented that the level of flooding and the number of agencies involved in co-ordinating a response highlighted the insufficient funding available to secure flooding prevention measures. The support of the Borough Council during the response was greatly appreciated.

Wrotham Parish Council and the Kent Association of Local Councils (Tonbridge and Malling branch) welcomed the willingness of the Borough Council to work with parish councils in identifying improvements and local problems.

Members also expressed concern and disappointment at the level of response provided by Southern Water Services and referred to problems with generators at the pumping stations.

PPP 14/5 SAFETY ADVISORY GROUP

The presentation of the Licensing and Community Safety Manager outlined the role and responsibilities of a Safety Advisory Group (SAG). It was reported that the main purpose was to offer guidance and independent advice to organisers of public events to promote, and ensure, the health and safety and welfare of all those involved. Particular reference was made to the role of the local authority in event management and the significant number of other organisations that also offered advice. This approach meant that the necessary expertise was always available via SAG to provide appropriate guidance.

Members were advised that the Hop Farm Music Festival and the Tonbridge Passion Plays were two upcoming significant events where the SAG would offer guidance and assistance to organisers.

In response to queries regarding road closures, it was confirmed that SAG did not have authority to issue road closures signs and legally could only advise and consult. Detailed information on the process surrounding road closures could be provided on request. However, the Licensing and Community Safety Manager was happy to discuss specific issues surrounding events in detail with organisers as long as sufficient time was allowed in advance.

Generally larger events had a well-developed and successful SAG operating in a collaborative partnership with a number of other responsible bodies and agencies. It was hoped that this multi-agency approach would reduce bureaucracy.

In summary, the role of a Safety Advisory Group was to scrutinize, review and advise to ensure compliance with safety requirements of the event and to share best practice. An ineffective SAG could create potential difficulties and financial risks together with negative publicity.

The Chairman asked that the contact details for SAG be circulated with the Minutes.

[Subsequent to the meeting the following was provided:

Contact: Licensing and Community Safety Manager

Telephone: 01732 876 151

Email: sag@tmbc.gov.uk

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PPP 14/6 PARISH COUNCILS ROLE AND CONTRIBUTION TO PLANNING APPLICATIONS AND PLANNING COMMITTEES

Borough Green Parish Council referred to the briefing paper circulated on behalf of the Kent Association of Local Councils (Tonbridge and Malling) prior to the meeting and urged that measures be considered to enable parishes greater involvement in planning decisions that affected their communities.

The Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health reminded Members how planning applications were determined by the Borough Council and advised of local authorities' statutory duty under the Town and Country Planning Act. It was reported that the Borough Council needed to be very cautious in enabling other parties to exercise or influence that responsibility. It was noted that different practices might exist elsewhere.

Any planning applications of an unusually complex or controversial nature were dealt with by the Area Planning Committees rather than under the Director's delegated powers. Local ward members were also able to ask for applications to be considered by the committee. Often the views of parish councils reflected those of local councillors and in these circumstances local members could be asked to call the application to committee if there were strong objections.

Public speaking was available at planning committees and parish councils had the same rights as other organisations, consultees and members of the public. No speaker could participate in the Committee debate which could give rise to issues of unfairness and ultimately legal challenge of decisions made. In addition, it was pointed out that planning decisions needed to be based on an assessment against the National Planning Policy Frameworks, current Development Plans and other material planning matters.

The Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health commented on the good relationship between the Borough and parish councils and it was important to ensure this continued.

Many of the parish representatives present felt that any objections they had on applications and requests for referring to committee were taken seriously.

Whilst the Chairman welcomed the in-depth and serious nature of the discussion, the Parish Partnership Panel was not the right place to take any decisions. Further investigation and consultation seemed a suitable way forward in the first instance.

Borough Green Parish Council thanked all Members for the full and frank discussion and welcomed any further consideration for a way

forward and suggested that advice also be sought from other local authorities on their processes.

Finally, the Chairman was pleased to report that all parish councils had now committed to meeting with Borough Council planners to discuss the local plan.

PPP 14/7 BOTTLE BANKS

The Chairman of the Kent Association of Local Councils (Tonbridge and Malling) commented that during the Christmas period many locations experienced overflowing bottle banks and asked if the Borough Council would appreciate assistance from parish councils on monitoring issues and if so, what services should be covered and by what method or to whom should the problem be reported. It was possible that smarter ways of working could be identified, together with value for money opportunities.

The Borough Council recognised that parish councils were a key partner and there were many advantages to closer working relationships. The Chief Executive thanked KALC for the offer of assistance and suggested that the current Street Monitors Scheme, which worked closely with communities to ensure that local street scene problems were identified and corrected as soon as possible, could be adapted for parish council monitoring. In light of recent events this initiative could also be extended to monitoring flooding issues.

The current street monitoring web forms were being reviewed and this gave an opportunity to look at and develop further participation of parishes. The forms would be shared with parish councils and their comments invited.

In addition, the 'my account' section of the Borough Council's website could be adapted for parish council monitoring and reporting.

PPP 14/8 KENT COUNTY COUNCIL SERVICES UPDATE

The Kent County Council Community Engagement Manager reported on the key points regarding the Transformation programme and budget. It was noted that County would move to a new organisational structure on 1 April 2014 and that a 1.99% increase in council tax had been agreed. This equated to an average of £18.56 for a Band D house.

Particular reference was made to the roll out of the part night lighting scheme which was nearly complete in Tonbridge and Malling. There were also new proposals for the Freedom Pass and these were currently out for consultation. It was proposed to increase the cost of the Pass to £200 and journeys would be limited between 6am to 7pm from Monday to Friday.

[Subsequent, to the meeting details of the consultation, which had started on 24 February 2014, had been circulated to all Members of the Parish Partnership Panel].

In response to a question raised by East Malling and Larkfield Parish Council it was confirmed that there were no further developments on the library service review other than market testing was on going.

Finally, new Member Grant funding for 2014/15 had been agreed with each Member allocated £25k per year.

PPP 14/9 TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL SERVICES UPDATE

The Chief Executive and the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health provided an update on key points relevant to Tonbridge and Malling. The headline messages included:

- Budget:

The Chief Executive was pleased to announce that parish funding streams had been protected and that the Borough Council had achieved £1.2M worth of savings. This meant that front line services continued to be protected.

In addition, a council tax increase of 7p for Band D properties had been agreed.

- Local Plan:

The Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health thanked all parish councils for their involvement and/or commitment to meetings regarding the local plan. Arrangements were now in place to have discussions with all twenty seven parishes. All meetings held to date had been constructive and worthwhile. A report would be presented to the Planning and Transportation Advisory Board in March setting out further details on the process.

The meeting ended at 9.39 pm