

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

TONBRIDGE FORUM

Monday, 30th June, 2014

Present: Cllr O C Baldock (Chairman), Cllr N J Heslop (Vice-Chairman),
Cllr Mrs J A Anderson and Cllr Ms V M C Branson.

Councillors Rogers, Miss Sergison and Cure were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

Members of the Forum: Kent County Councillors Long and Smith, Kent Fire and Rescue Service, Kent Police (Tonbridge), Skinners Company, Tonbridge Allotments and Gardens, Tonbridge Area Churches Together, Tonbridge Citizens' Advice Bureau, Tonbridge Civic Society, Tonbridge District Scout Council, Tonbridge Historical Society, Tonbridge Line Commuters, Tonbridge Rotary Club, Tonbridge Round Table, Tonbridge Sports Association, Tonbridge Theatre and Arts Club, Tonbridge Town Team and Women's Institute

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ms J A Atkinson, P F Bolt, Mrs M F Heslop, Ms S V Spence and Tonbridge Music Club

TF 14/6 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 17 February 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

TF 14/7 UPDATE ON ANY ACTION IDENTIFIED IN THE LAST MINUTES

There were no actions identified.

TF 14/8 FLOODING PROGRESS REPORT

The Borough Council and the Environment Agency (EA) provided an update on the progress made towards addressing flooding matters since the last meeting of the Tonbridge Forum. Both organisations had worked closely with businesses and residents to support and assist communities with the recovery process and were participating in the county-wide Strategic and Tactical Recovery Coordinating Groups chaired by the County Council as part of the multi-agency recovery strategy.

A multi-agency Technical Working Group had also been established and included representatives from those organisations involved in flood risk

management as well as community representatives from Tonbridge, Hildenborough and East Peckham.

It was reported that the Borough Council and the EA had lobbied hard for capital funding to improve flood defence measures. Members were pleased to note the following funding allocations:

- Avebury Avenue: £80,000 for improvements to the flood defence wall
- Hildenborough: £200,000 for a flood defence scheme
- Leigh Flood Storage Area(LFSA): £100,000 for improvement feasibility

In addition, it was noted that the work on the LFSA was to be brought forward and anticipated to start in 2018. The EA advised that remodelling of the catchment had begun and would be delivered in November 2014 to assist in developing schemes for the LFSA and Hildenborough.

Members noted that there was no final design yet for the flood defences in Tonbridge and the remodelling should identify any potential areas at flood risk. With regard to the funding allocations the EA were committed to achieving best value and would look carefully at the final design. However, it was acknowledged that there might be a need to lobby for additional funding.

Work to rebuild/improve Buleys Weir was scheduled to start in July/August 2014; whilst repairs to the river walls near Churchill House were expected to be completed by October 2014. Consideration would also be given to contingency planning and temporary defences for this winter. The EA advised of the difficulties in providing temporary measures for some areas but it would try to deliver what it could. It was unlikely that work on any permanent flood defences would be completed until 2020.

Two flood fairs had been held in the Borough since the last meeting of the Forum. These had been well attended and provided a valuable and effective way of informing residents how to protect their homes. Funding was available to residents and businesses affected by flooding and so far 34 applications had been approved for the 'Repair and Renewal' grant. 100 properties remained uninhabited and the Borough Council remained in close contact with those homeowners and arrangements were in place to assist those residents.

The Right Honourable Greg Clark MP had visited local areas affected by flooding in his role as the Flood Envoy for Kent.

Members were advised that there were sufficient volunteers to establish Flood Warden Schemes in East Peckham and Hildenborough, although further volunteers were required for Tonbridge. Training would be provided by Kent County Council, the EA and Kent Fire and Rescue Services.

Finally, the EA reported that the flood warning area was to be expanded to include Hildenborough and be bespoke to Tonbridge. The Chairman referred to the difficulties experienced previously by local councillors in trying to find relevant information for neighbouring wards not in their post code area.

The Forum expressed concern regarding sewage and whether pumping station equipment required further improvements and whether ditches and drains alongside roads would be cleared before winter. In response, it was reported that the agencies responsible for both these concerns (Southern Water and Kent County Council Highways) were members of the Multi-agency Technical Group where these issues would be addressed.

Kent Police confirmed that there had been no further incidents of theft from affected properties and advised that the County Council had responded positively regarding reinstating night time street lighting during that period.

The Chief Executive assured Members that a huge amount of work was ongoing and whilst it was difficult to outline everything that was being done during this period of flood recovery it was a top priority for the Borough Council and partner agencies.

TF 14/9 COMMUNITY ENHANCEMENT FUND

The Borough Council was pleased to announce a further funding round for the Community Enhancement Fund, established to provide funding support for local community groups, voluntary sector bodies and charities and included the Borough's town and parish councils.

It was explained that the maximum grant available was normally £2,500 and would be used to support proposals for one-off purchases or expenditure only. The bid period would be from 7 July to 8 September. All bids submitted would be considered by the Communities and Health Advisory Board on 23 September 2014.

Full guidance and criteria for applicants would be available on the website in the near future.

TF 14/10 MIND PRESENTATION

This item was WITHDRAWN from the agenda

TF 14/11 SUMMER ACTIVITIES

The Leisure Services Manager (Development) advised Members of the leisure activities being provided by the Borough Council over the summer. These included:

- Summer Play Scheme: Covered 13 sites across Tonbridge and Malling and offered arts, crafts and sporting activities
- Summer Play Scheme Plus: Offered support for vulnerable and families with special requirements/needs
- Activate: For ages 8 – 16 and offered life skills and outdoor activities
- Y2Crew: In partnership with Kent County Council and for ages 11 – 18 and aimed to build confidence and better relationships by offering team building tasks and workshops
- Tonbridge and Malling Youth Forum for 11 – 18 and encouraged participation in debate and discussion

Members were also reminded that the Tonbridge Arts Festival would take place from 1 – 6 July. A variety of visual, literary and performing events would be held at different venues across the town and further information was available on www.tmbc.gov.uk and www.tonbridgeartsfestival.co.uk

Reference was made to the Tonbridge Festival Concert and whether there was an opportunity for better promotion of community events. It was noted that the Tonbridge Town Team had a Facebook page and organisations were welcome to post event information there.

Finally, Tonbridge Rotary Club took the opportunity to give advance warning of the Christmas Festival which was scheduled for 23 November 2014. It was hoped that this would be a bigger event than previous years and businesses and volunteers were encouraged to participate.

TF 14/12 KENT POLICE UPDATE

The Chairman welcomed the newly appointed District Commander for Tonbridge and Malling, Chief Inspector Gill Ellis, to the Forum who briefly outlined the recent changes in organisational structure and the implications for local policing. As part of the new police model District Commanders now had greater control of resources in their area to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour.

Local District Policing Teams dealt with emergency and non-emergency calls, investigated local crime such as assault, theft and provided greater visibility in the community. This change also provided greater flexibility in allocating officers where they were most needed.

Community Policing Teams had been established and worked with the existing Community Safety Units (CSU) to tackle anti-social behaviour and persistent local problems. Inspector Hutcheon advised that he was now based at the CSU in Kings Hill and that 3 new sergeants had been allocated to East Peckham and Hildenborough, the Mallings and rural wards.

Members were assured that residents should not see any difference or decline in service delivery as a result of the changes.

Inspector Hutcheon provided an overview of crime and disorder within Tonbridge and advised of a reduction in crime overall, despite a slight increase in violent crime. There was no obvious pattern although domestic abuse could be a contributing factor. This was a difficult area to address and Kent Police continued to work closely with domestic abuse agencies on many initiatives.

Police Contact Points (mobile police stations) had been used to provide crime prevention advice workshops and had offered bike marking, shed alarms and purse chains. This initiative had proved successful with an increased attendance at the Police Contact Points. The next event was arranged for 19 July 2014.

There had also been great success with enforcement and crime reduction on the rail network and further operations would be arranged. It was difficult to judge whether crime increased if the Tonbridge station gates were not closed, although general evidence suggested that crime reduction was likely when station gates were in operation.

Forum members were alerted to a spate of rogue traders operating in the Tonbridge area and everyone was asked to keep an eye on elderly relatives and neighbours.

In response to a question from the floor it was confirmed that there was no evidence to show that crime had increased since night time lighting had been switched off. However, it was noted that if Kent Police identified an issue in an area or community they could ask the County Council to reinstate the night time lighting.

Reference was made to police attendance at community events and it was confirmed that there was a charge for private events. This was partly due to insufficient resource available to attend community events and was a county-wide stance. However, Members were assured that Kent Police remained committed to assisting and supporting communities where possible.

TF 14/13 KENT COUNTY COUNCIL SERVICES UPDATE

The Kent County Council Community Engagement Manager reported that the three year transformation programme 'Facing the Challenge' continued and that £330m of savings were required.

The new Combined Member Grant fund which merged the previous funding streams, community, local schemes, small capital and highways, was now open. Last year over 60 organisations in the Borough benefitted from the Grant Fund. Interested applicants should contact the Community Engagement Manager or the County Member directly.

Reference was made to the County Council's successful 'Safer Kent's pothole' initiative which had been awarded £6.3 million from Government as a model authority. Members commented that a first class and efficient service was provided and everyone was encouraged to report potholes and other faults on line at www.kent.gov.uk/highways

Finally, reference was made to the 'Shared Lives' scheme which meant taking someone into your home who was unable to live independently and needed some practical and emotional support. Volunteers were needed who could share their home for short breaks, day support or long term care. Full training and a financial package were available for the challenging and rewarding role. Further information was available at www.kent.gov.uk/sharedlives

TF 14/14 TONBRIDGE AND MALLING SERVICES UPDATE

The Chief Executive of the Borough Council referred to the recent Commonwealth Baton activities held at Tonbridge Castle and thanked the community, local organisations and schools for their participation in a successful event.

Recent events and other key points relevant to Tonbridge and Malling were also provided by the Chief Executive. The headline messages included:

- Peer Challenge Review: A team organised by the Local Government Association had reviewed a number of issues related to the Borough Council's approach to economic regeneration, effective governance and decision making, financial planning and other organisational and strategic management. The report was an endorsement of the approach taken by the Borough Council, recognised its position in the current climate and set out the challenges being faced. It was noted that the business community had been involved in the process. The report was available to view on the website at www.tmbc.gov.uk

- Community Safety Unit remained active in addressing anti-social behaviour in the Borough, with a joined up approach between the CSU, Kent Police and Licensing Services.
- Welfare Reform was ongoing and represented a significant challenge for the Borough Council and residents. The Director of Finance and Transformation was actively engaging with key partners across a range of organisations including social housing providers, the County Council and Job Centre Plus to identify and address challenges.
- 'Love Kent Hate Litter' campaign: The Borough Council was active in this initiative working in cooperation with a range of local organisations, clubs and communities all committed to improve and tidy up the local area. It was noted that the Tonbridge Canoe Club had received a gold award for their clean-up of the River Medway; Tonbridge Beavers had participated in a 'Big Tidy Up'; Tonbridge Scouts had held a woodland walk and there had been a presentation of the Voluntary Litter Code.

The meeting ended at 9.05 pm