

Website information

Fairer charging for public toilets in Tonbridge and Christmas lights

Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council is consulting everyone in the borough on how we pay for the cost of two particular services:

- Public toilets in Tonbridge
- Christmas lighting across the borough

We want to hear your views on whether these local services should be paid for by the residents of the areas where they are provided, rather than the costs being shared across the whole borough as is the case currently. The council's overall income would not change as a result of these proposals.

This consultation closed at 5pm on 20 July 2021.

Background

Most services provided by the council are funded on a borough-wide basis through the council tax paid by residents. Since 2017, in some parts of the borough an additional sum has been added to council tax rates to pay for particular services which largely benefit those areas. These adjustments are called special expenses. They are currently used to fund things like local parks, playgrounds and allotments.

This approach is seen as fairer as residents are not asked to pay for facilities outside the areas where they live and from which they are unlikely to derive significant benefit.

The council now proposes to add public toilets in Tonbridge and Christmas lights to the list of services which are funded locally via special expenses.

The provisions relating to special expenses are contained in the Local Government Finance Act 1992 at sections 34 and 35. Our policy is reviewed annually as part of the budget setting process.

Proposals for public toilets

In 2021, the operation of public toilets in Tonbridge and Malling transferred to parish and town councils.

In future years, the parishes which have taken on this responsibility will raise funds to manage the toilets through their own part of the annual council tax bill received by

residents. In those areas where the parish or town council have chosen not to take on running the local toilets, regrettably these facilities have closed.

Tonbridge is an exception as it has no parish or town council so the borough council will continue to pay for the provision of public toilets. Under current funding arrangements, this would mean that toilets in Tonbridge are paid for by all borough council tax payers.

To achieve consistency with new arrangements under which parishes meet the cost of their local public toilets, we are seeking your views as to whether the running costs of the three local public toilets in Tonbridge should be met by the council taxpayers in Tonbridge, rather than the whole borough. Toilets in our country parks and Tonbridge Cemetery would continue to be treated as a general expense paid for by all residents as these toilets are linked to more strategic land or buildings.

The running cost of the three public toilets in Tonbridge is approximately £75,300 a year. We estimate the additional cost for a band D home in Tonbridge would be approximately £4.02 per year. We estimate elsewhere, residents would see a reduction of approximately £1.47 a year as they would no longer be contributing to the cost.

Proposals for Christmas lights

Christmas lights in high streets and village centres across the borough are currently funded in a variety of ways. In Tonbridge they are paid for from the council's general budget, so everyone across the borough who pays council tax contributes to the cost.

Elsewhere, Christmas lights are paid for by a combination of retailers, local groups or charities, parish councils. The borough council provides small grants from our general budget to top up the funding. Parishes which currently receive these payments are:

- Aylesford
- Borough Green
- East Malling and Larkfield
- East Peckham
- Hadlow
- Snodland
- West Malling
- Wrotham

We currently operationally manage and pay for all the Christmas lighting costs in Tonbridge. For Christmas 2021 the overall budget is approximately £33,000. In

other areas of the borough, we administer a small grants scheme instead for which the overall budget is £13,750 for Christmas 2021.

This funding arrangement is inconsistent because Tonbridge has lights paid for by all council tax payers while in other parts of the borough it is paid for via a mix of local groups and the council.

The proposal to include the costs of Christmas lights in special expenses would mean that residents meet the cost in places where the council contributes towards Christmas lighting. Residents elsewhere in the borough would no longer be asked to pay.

The cost to individual households would vary, depending on population size and the cost of the lights in that area.

In the areas where Christmas lights receive council funding, between approximately £2.40 and £4.58 could be added to the special expenses element of band D bills. Across the borough, this change would also see the main element of council tax bills reduce by approximately 91 pence.

The impact on council tax bills

The combined estimated impact on council tax bills of these increases and reductions is shown below. With the exception of Tonbridge and West Malling, the proposals would result in a slight reduction in council tax bills.

Net change in band D council tax (£)

Addington	-2.38
Aylesford	-2.18
Birling	-2.38
Borough Green	-1.29
Burham	-2.38
Ditton	-2.38
East Malling and Larkfield	-2.12
East Peckham	-2.00
Hadlow	-1.75
Hildenborough	-2.38
Ightham	-2.38
Kings Hill	-2.38
Leybourne	-2.38
Mereworth	-2.38

Offham	-2.38
Platt	-2.38
Plaxtol	-2.38
Ryarsh	-2.38
Shipbourne	-2.38
Snodland	-1.74
Stansted	-2.38
Tonbridge	+5.51
Trottiscliffe	-2.38
Wateringbury	-2.38
West Malling	+2.20
West Peckham	-2.38
Wouldham	-2.38
Wrotham	-1.73

[View detailed breakdown](#) (see below)

Respond to the consultation

We want to hear what you have to say about this proposal. In particular, we want to know whether you agree or disagree that the cost of public toilets in Tonbridge and Christmas lights where they are provided should be met by residents in those areas, rather than by all council tax payers.

The deadline for responses is 5pm on Tuesday 20 July 2021.

[Respond to this consultation](#)

To request a paper copy and response form, please call our customer services team on 01732 844522.

Data protection statement:

Your personal information will be held and used in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018. A summary of your response to this questionnaire may be published as part of the feedback document regarding the consultation but your name will not be published. The information you provide will only be used should we need to contact you about your response and will be permanently deleted three months after the end of the consultation.

Detailed breakdown :

This table shows the estimated impact on council tax bills of including public toilets and Christmas lighting in special expenses separately and also the combined effect if both were to be included

Area of Borough	Public Conveniences			Christmas Lighting			Overall Change
	Special Expense	General Expense	Net Change	Special Expense	General Expense	Net Change	
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Tonbridge	5.49	-1.47	4.02	2.40	-0.91	1.49	5.51
Addington		-1.47	-1.47		-0.91	-0.91	-2.38
Aylesford		-1.47	-1.47	0.20	-0.91	-0.71	-2.18
Birling		-1.47	-1.47		-0.91	-0.91	-2.38
Borough Green		-1.47	-1.47	1.09	-0.91	0.18	-1.29
Burham		-1.47	-1.47		-0.91	-0.91	-2.38
Ditton		-1.47	-1.47		-0.91	-0.91	-2.38
E. Malling & Larkfield		-1.47	-1.47	0.26	-0.91	-0.65	-2.12

East Peckham		-1.47	-1.47	0.38	-0.91	-0.53	-2.00
Hadlow		-1.47	-1.47	0.63	-0.91	-0.28	-1.75
Hildenborough		-1.47	-1.47		-0.91	-0.91	-2.38
Ightham		-1.47	-1.47		-0.91	-0.91	-2.38
Kings Hill		-1.47	-1.47		-0.91	-0.91	-2.38
Leybourne		-1.47	-1.47		-0.91	-0.91	-2.38
Mereworth		-1.47	-1.47		-0.91	-0.91	-2.38
Offham		-1.47	-1.47		-0.91	-0.91	-2.38
Platt		-1.47	-1.47		-0.91	-0.91	-2.38
Plaxtol		-1.47	-1.47		-0.91	-0.91	-2.38
Ryarsh		-1.47	-1.47		-0.91	-0.91	-2.38
Shipbourne		-1.47	-1.47		-0.91	-0.91	-2.38
Snodland		-1.47	-1.47	0.64	-0.91	-0.27	-1.74
Stansted		-1.47	-1.47		-0.91	-0.91	-2.38
Trottiscliffe		-1.47	-1.47		-0.91	-0.91	-2.38
Wateringbury		-1.47	-1.47		-0.91	-0.91	-2.38
West Malling		-1.47	-1.47	4.58	-0.91	3.67	2.20
West Peckham		-1.47	-1.47		-0.91	-0.91	-2.38
Wouldham		-1.47	-1.47		-0.91	-0.91	-2.38
Wrotham		-1.47	-1.47	0.65	-0.91	-0.26	-1.73