

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

07 October 2021

Report of the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet

1 REVIEW OF TONBRIDGE FORUM AND PARISH PARTNERSHIP PANEL

To review the format and engagement of Tonbridge Forum and Parish Partnership Panel, considering options for improvement.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Tonbridge Forum and Parish Partnership Panel (PPP) have been operating for several years, to enhance engagement between the Borough Council and Tonbridge based community representatives, and between the Borough Council and Parish Councils across Tonbridge and Malling.

1.1.2 The Terms of Reference for each group are defined in the Council's constitution, as follows:

Tonbridge Forum:

A vehicle for the exchange of information, consultation and a structured dialogue between the Borough Council and those Tonbridge-based organisations with a shared interest in enhancing the well-being of the town through the identification of problems and joint working towards solutions

Parish Partnership Panel:

A vehicle for the exchange of information, consultation and a structured dialogue between the Borough Council and the parish councils in the Borough

1.1.3 For both Tonbridge Forum and PPP, the Council has sought views from its members (including any potential new members, in respect of Tonbridge Forum), regarding how they would like to see the meetings operate in the future. It was apparent that a reform was required for both, with a desire for change and improvement to the existing operation provided by most of the respondents.

1.2 Tonbridge Forum

- 1.2.1 An email was sent out to all existing community representatives on Tonbridge Forum, inviting them to have their say and help shape the future operation of the Forum. In addition, the Council sent out social media posts asking any other Tonbridge based groups, to share their thoughts or suggestions relating to a reform of the Forum.
- 1.2.2 A number of responses were received, which have been very helpful and allowed us to shape and plan for a Forum that best facilitates a relationship between the Borough Council and community groups across the town.
- 1.2.3 From the comments received, it was apparent that;
- Standing item agendas with a one-way information update were not popular
 - A greater diversity of members, including faith, under-represented groups, youth, and school representatives would be beneficial
 - A greater opportunity to hear from community groups in the town, regarding key events or activities that are taking place, would help with partnership working between different community groups
- 1.2.4 Having considered all the suggestions, the following is being proposed:
- Operate a more community focused forum, renaming it Tonbridge Community Forum.
 - Meetings to operate as a two-way discussion, with no standing agenda items.
 - The informal question session at the start of the meeting to be cancelled, instead each member can put questions for the Community Forum in advance of the meeting. Notice of the question shall be given in writing or by email not less than 10 working days before the date of the meeting. Issues that need to be raised on the evening, can be covered during the AOB section.
 - Agree a forward plan or work programme at the start of the year, to ensure that agendas are much more focused on the needs of the community groups.
 - Increase the frequency of meetings from 2 per year, to 4 meetings per year. Meetings will alternate with 2 meetings per year held “in person” and 2 meetings to be held virtually. The “in person” meetings will be held at the

Angel Centre and will not be live streamed (the Angel Centre does not have live streaming facilities).

- The Chairmanship of the meeting to be changed to a chairman from the majority group of TMBC and two vice chairmen, one from an opposition party and one from community group membership. The Chairman should not be a member of the Executive/Cabinet. The two vice chairman to be selected by the relevant groups.
- Membership from TMBC to consist of all Borough Councillors representing wards in Tonbridge.
- Membership from the community to include recognised, constituted groups, not affiliated with a political party. All existing and new members to complete an application form to ensure a balance of organisations that are representative of the town and to avoid multiple representatives from the same/ similar institutions.
- An AOB item included at each meeting to provide an opportunity for members to share forthcoming key events for the town.

1.2.5 The above suggested proposals will ensure that the focus is to provide voluntary and community groups an opportunity to work collaboratively for the benefit of the town.

1.2.6 A 'call for members' will be issued if this composition is accepted for community groups to apply for membership of Tonbridge Forum.

1.3 Parish Partnership Panel

1.3.1 As with the Forum, PPP members were contacted to seek their views on the existing structure of the meetings, to enable a better working relationship. From the comments received, it was apparent that:

- Some members felt that the discussions at the meeting were dominated by a vocal minority, making it difficult to contribute
- It would be useful to request that Cabinet Members and Council officers be present to answer pre-sent questions on a particular topic
- It would be useful for parishes to be able to call outside officers (e.g. police, utility companies, and public service providers) to the meetings, to enable a joint parish-borough voice on certain issues
- The Panel should be more action focused, with actions reviewed at subsequent meetings
- There was a preference noted by some to retain online meetings

- There was a suggestion that the chair should rotate between a Borough Councillor and a Parish Councillor
- The venue could be changed to a parish hall or community centre
- There should be more input from parishes when setting the agenda

1.3.2 Having considered all the suggestions, the following is being proposed in relation to PPP:

- PPP will enable the Borough and Parish Councils to share information and communicate on enhancing the well-being of the community through the identification of problems (within the remit of the borough and parishes) and the joint working towards solutions
- The chair of PPP will be a Borough Councillor. There will be two vice chairs, one a Borough Councillor from a different political party and another a parish councillor, selected by KALC T&M Area Committee. Neither the chair nor vice chair should be a member of TMBC executive
- Increase the frequency of meetings from 3 per year, to 4 meetings per year. Meetings will alternate with 2 meetings per year held “in person” at the Borough Council Offices and 2 meetings to be held virtually.
- Each Parish Council to nominate a representative (total: 27 Parish representatives). The 5 County Councillors covering parished areas in Tonbridge and Malling will be members. There will also be 13 Borough Council representatives, to include cross party representation. These members must represent the parished areas of Tonbridge and Malling.
- If a nominated representative of a parish cannot attend, then they may send a nominated substitute.
- Members who are both Borough and Parish Councillors cannot be on PPP in both capacities. If they are representatives of a parish on PPP, then they cannot sit as a borough representative, and vice versa.
- There will be no standing items on agendas, however it is within the gift of the chair/vice Chairs to invite whoever they wish to the meeting (such as local businesses, utility providers, police etc). The question-and-answer session will be retained, providing questions are submitted in advance of the meeting. Issues that need to be raised on the evening, can be covered during the AOB section.
- A forward plan of agenda items will be agreed each year.

- 1.3.3 The above proposals will enable a reformed PPP that will improve and enhance the relationship between Parishes and the Council, helping to achieve solutions collaboratively for the benefit of residents.

1.4 Legal Implications

- 1.4.1 The Forum and PPP are not decision-making bodies.

1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.5.1 There is no set budget for PPP, although costs will be incurred in relation to staff time (administration, plus caretaking when meetings are held in the Council Chamber).
- 1.5.2 For the Forum, in addition to the cost of staff time, there is also room hire charges. During 2019/20 room hire was £128.25 per meeting, catering was £20.83 per meeting and audio services were £561.00 per meeting.

1.6 Risk Assessment

- 1.6.1 N/A

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 Policy Considerations

- 1.8.1 Communications
- 1.8.2 Community
- 1.8.3 Customer Contact

1.9 Recommendations

- 1.9.1 That Members **ENDORSE** the proposed changes to Tonbridge Forum as set out in section 1.2.4
- 1.9.2 That Members **ENDORSE** the proposed changes to Parish Partnership Panel as set out in section 1.3.2

Background papers:

contact: Gill Fox

Nil

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Leader of the Council

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