

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
ECONOMIC REGENERATION ADVISORY BOARD

02 November 2021

Report of the Chief Executive

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken by the Cabinet Member)

1 TONBRIDGE SAFER TOWNS PARTNERSHIP

This report sets out a proposed £8,000 contribution towards the purchase of much needed new equipment that will ensure that the partnership remains an effective mechanism through which crime against Tonbridge town centre businesses is prevented. This contribution would use up the remaining Business Rates Retention Pilot reserve funding that was earmarked for ‘Tonbridge Town Centre Initiatives’.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 The Tonbridge Safer Towns Partnership (also known as a Business Crime Reduction Partnership) is a constituted partnership made up from members of the local business community, working together to reduce and prevent crime in their premises and to protect staff from acts of physical violence and verbal abuse.

1.1.2 As part of the scheme, businesses can rent a radio which links them to the partnership co-ordinator, the CCTV control room, and the Police. This means that they can alert each other when there are problems or if they see/suspect a shoplifter. The scheme can also exclude those who have caused problems from businesses within the town and can help those involved in the scheme to feel confident in reporting issues. Whilst reported crime levels in Tonbridge are low, there are still incidents of shoplifting, purse thefts and anti-social behaviour and the Safer Towns Partnership can help to lower these types of crime and create a safe and welcoming environment for customers, staff, and the public. In doing so, it contributes towards making Tonbridge an attractive place to work, socialise and shop.

1.1.3 In August 2019, a new co-ordinator for the partnership was appointed. Before the pandemic hit, there were approximately 30 businesses signed up to the scheme, with the new co-ordinator tasked with increasing this number, and ensuring strong links with the Town Centre PCs and PCSOs. Unfortunately, with the restrictions associated with the pandemic, the work of the partnership has been severely

disrupted. However, with the town centre now opening up again, work is now being undertaken to proactively strengthen the partnership.

1.2 Proposed Support for the Tonbridge Safer Towns Partnership

- 1.2.1 One key area of focus for the partnership is ensuring that existing and new potential members have the equipment and systems they need in order to report instances in a timely and effective manner. With the partnership now having run for over 15 years, the existing analogue radio equipment is coming to the end of its shelf life. With the current level of membership, there is insufficient income being generated in order to purchase new equipment, but without the new equipment, there are limited opportunities to recruit new members and increase income.
- 1.2.2 If the funding is approved this would be used to upgrade to a digital radio network which would improve communication between current members and also ensure that the scheme can expand to the outlying business districts within Tonbridge (e.g., the Cannon Lane Retail Park, York Parade and other areas as required).
- 1.2.3 The equipment to be purchased will include a new digital base station, digital aerial, repeater units and replacement control equipment. It will also include ascertaining the most appropriate siting of aerials and installation costs. The initial outlay has already been significantly reduced by the compatibility of the majority of existing radio handsets, which will not require replacement, the existence of the current internet link with CCTV control and use of an existing (redundant) aerial situated on Tonbridge police station.
- 1.2.4 Future and ongoing costs of maintenance (radio handsets and aerials) and licensing will be borne by the Tonbridge Safer Towns Partnership. They will also continue to seek additional funding as appropriate.
- 1.2.5 The work of the Safer Towns Partnership links in well with the aims of the Borough Council to make Tonbridge a thriving and vibrant town centre, encouraging growth and inward investment. It also links in with the work of the Community Safety Partnership to ensure that Tonbridge is a safe place to live, work and visit.
- 1.2.6 The Safer Towns Partnership is overseen by a Board of Management who provide direction to the scheme. Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council is represented on the Board by Laura Mason, Gateway Manager (Tonbridge Castle also has access to a radio). Other Board members consist of representatives from some of the businesses within the scheme. The Safer Towns Co-ordinator is also a member of the Community Safety Unit and regularly meets with the Safer & Stronger Communities Manager to ensure good partnership links.
- 1.2.7 The Safer Towns Partnership is also proposing to establish a Strategic Advisory Group which would sit alongside the Board of Management. This Group would consist of representatives from the Police, Borough Council and other relevant organisations. If appropriate local Members could also be invited to sit on this

Group. This will ensure additional links and strategic direction could be provided to the Partnership on wider issues within the town centre.

1.3 Next steps

- 1.3.1 A site visit and feasibility study of the current aerial and proposed locations for repeater units has already taken place and a quotation is being prepared. Initial indications suggest that the works will fall within budget and will significantly improve the signal and range of the current system.
- 1.3.2 A Board of Management meeting has recently been held where the current situation was noted. The next phase will be to establish the Strategic Advisory Group with the aim that this will be set up within the next few months.
- 1.3.3 Once the digital system is in place the Safer Towns Co-ordinator will be looking to widen membership and promote the scheme across Tonbridge.
- 1.3.4 A report on the progress of the scheme will be brought back to a future meeting of this Board.

1.4 Legal Implications

- 1.4.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.5.1 £25,000 was set aside from the Business Rates Retention Pilot reserve to support 'Tonbridge Town Centre Initiatives'. To date, this funding has supported a pop-up shop (£2,000), Christmas lights (£2,000) and improvement works to units at Railway Approach (£13,000). There is therefore £8,000 remaining from this pot that could be used to support the Tonbridge Safer Town Partnership.

1.6 Risk Assessment

- 1.6.1 There is a negligible level of risk associated with this work.

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 Recommendations

- 1.8.1 That the report **BE NOTED**.
- 1.8.2 That the proposed £8,000 contribution towards new equipment for the Tonbridge Safer Towns Partnership, and the arrangements set out in 1.2 **BE AGREED**.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration and the Chief Executive confirm that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

Background papers:

Nil

contact: Jeremy Whittaker,
Strategic Economic
Regeneration Manager

Alison Finch, Safer & Stronger
Communities Manager

Julie Beilby
Chief Executive