

## **TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **TONBRIDGE COMMUNITY FORUM**

#### **MINUTES**

**Monday, 27th February, 2023**

**Present:** Cllr J R S Lark (Chair), Cllr G C Bridge (Vice-Chair), Feast (Vice-Chair), Cllr Mrs P A Bates, Cllr M D Boughton, Cllr A E Clark, Cllr A Cope, Cllr F A Hoskins, Cllr D W King, Cllr F G Tombolis and County Cllr M Hood.

Together with representatives from:

- Angel Indoor Bowls Club
- Friends of Mill Stream
- Rotary Club of Tonbridge
- Tonbridge Bicycle Users Group
- Tonbridge Civic Society
- Tonbridge Dementia Friendly
- Tonbridge District Scout Council
- Tonbridge Historical Society
- Tonbridge Parish Church
- Tonbridge Sports Association
- Tonbridge Town Team

Councillors P J Montague and M R Rhodes were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J L Botten and M O Davis and Tonbridge and Malling Seniors.

#### **TCF 23/1 MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the meeting held on 28 November 2022 be approved as a correct record subject to the following:

- Minute TCF 22/28 to be amended to replace 'sponsored' with 'pre-payable'.
- Minute TCF 22/29 to be amended to reflect that the Nativity was held at St Peter and St Paul's Church, Tonbridge and not St Philips Church.

#### **TCF 23/2 UPDATE ON ANY ACTION IDENTIFIED IN THE LAST MINUTES**

The Leader provided an update on the provision of digital information boards, during which he advised that since the last meeting, the Council

had received an allocation of the UK Share Prosperity Fund which would fund the installation of digital information boards in Tonbridge.

### **MATTERS RAISED IN ADVANCE OF THE MEETING**

#### **TCF 23/3 TONBRIDGE POST OFFICE**

Members received a statement from Laura Tarling, Public Affairs Manager, Post Office as set out below:

‘Tonbridge Post Office previously operated as a franchise by WH Smith from the Tonbridge store. There were plans to redevelop the premises and WH Smith took the decision to close the store at the lease expiry on 30 July 2022. The Post Office began the search for a replacement branch after WH Smith submitted their resignation in January 2022. There was much interest from potential applicants who had registered on the Post Office website to operate Tonbridge Post Office, but finding suitable premises that were viable for a Post Office and retail business had been challenging. The Council had put forward Tonbridge Castle as a suitable location for a temporary branch whilst the search for a permanent Post Office continued and the temporary Post Office opened on 26 August 2022 and continued to operate from Tonbridge Castle.

There had been service issues at the temporary branch and the Post Office apologised to customers who may have had to travel further to access services when the service had been unavailable. Initially, there were some technical problems with wireless connectivity which resulted in the branch temporarily closing for a short period whilst a fixed line was installed. The temporary postmaster had also experienced staff and recruitment issues which meant that periodically service had been inconsistent. Post Office had been working closely with the temporary postmaster to minimise disruption to service and continued to monitor the situation.

The search for premises for the permanent Post Office had taken longer than anticipated due to the availability of suitable premises and the Post Office had continuously been working with local stakeholders and the applicants to find a suitable location in Tonbridge and premises at 64 High Street had been identified. Two applications were currently being assessed and once the application process has been successfully completed with the successful applicant identified and premises confirmed, Post Office would announce the details and opening date of the new permanent branch. Post Office expected to be able to share a further update by the end of March 2023.

Post Office took the opportunity to thank the Council and all stakeholders for their continued support over recent months to help find suitable premises, and for hosting the temporary Post Office at Tonbridge Castle.’

Members were asked to contact the Chairman if they wished to submit any questions to Laura Tarling following the meeting.

#### **TCF 23/4 KENT POLICE UPDATE**

Inspector Stubberfield was unable to attend the meeting, therefore an update from Kent Police was not received.

#### **TCF 23/5 LOCAL ELECTIONS 2023**

The Head of Electoral Services advised of the recent changes arising from the Election Bill and summarised the implications for the local elections in May 2023.

The three changes to be made in advance of the election related to mandatory voter identification, accessibility and the number of subscribers for candidates. There were no changes to postal votes and the verification process remained the same.

Electors would have to show an approved form of photo identification before voting. This could be either a driving licence, passport or immigration document. There were a number of documents that could be used as voter identification and more information was available from the Elections Office. If electors could not provide one of the required forms of identification as set out in legislation, they would be able to apply for a free Voter Authority Certificate from their Elections Returning Officer by 25 April 2023 for the elections in May 2023.

The process for managing voter identification at polling stations was summarised and it was noted that the final details were still to be refined. It was also explained that poll cards would now be in the form of a letter in a buff envelope due to the level of detail required.

There was a national campaign to publicise the introduction of voter identification together with information on the Borough Council website and social media channels.

Reference was also made to the legal obligation to take reasonable steps to support voters with disabilities and to facilitate access to polling stations for wheelchair users. A polling station review had been undertaken and the Returning Officers were confident that Tonbridge and Malling met this obligation.

There had also been a significant change in the number of subscribers required when seeking nomination for a parish council election and local elections. To encourage more people to stand individuals only required a proposer and a seconder.

Finally, Members were reminded that following the local election the Borough Council would have a reduced number of elected Members

(down to 44 from 54). The Notice of Election would be published on 13 March 2023 and the nominations period would run from 14 March to 4 April 2023. A briefing session for potential candidates and agents was arranged for 1 March 2023.

## **TCF 23/6 PROMOTION OF UPCOMING EVENTS**

Members noted the forthcoming events to be held in Tonbridge and the surrounding area:

### **(1) Tonbridge Calling**

Volunteer stewards were sought for the Tonbridge Calling music event in the park on 1 July 2023. Anyone interested in the role was asked to email [tonbridgecalling@gmail.com](mailto:tonbridgecalling@gmail.com).

### **(2) Zumba Session**

The representative from Tonbridge Dementia Friendly advised that the Mayor would be leading a fundraising Zumba session at Larkfield Leisure Centre on 26 March 2023.

### **(3) St George's Day Concert**

The representative from Tonbridge Dementia Friendly invited all to attend the St George's Day Concert on 22 April 2023 at Tonbridge Parish Church with Royal Tunbridge Wells Orpheus Male Voice Choir and Tonbridge Community Singers. The concert was a combined fundraising event between Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells Dementia Friendly organisations.

### **(4) Neuro Café**

Members were informed that a Neuro Café would be launched on 20 April 2023 at the Age UK centre in Tonbridge Town Lock in association with the MS Society, MND Association, Parkinsons and Brain Trust. The Café was set up to cater for those with neurological conditions other than dementia.

### **(5) St Georges Day Parade**

Members were advised that the Tonbridge District Scouts would be partaking in the St George's Day Parade through Tonbridge High Street on 23 April 2023.

### **(6) Design Awards**

Tonbridge Civic Society would be presenting Civic Design Awards this year and nominations were sought for the Design Award and new

Community Award. Further information could be sought by emailing [info@tonbridgecivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:info@tonbridgecivicsociety.org.uk).

(7) Tonbridge Triathlon

The Tonbridge Lions Club sought volunteers to assist with the Tonbridge Triathlon on 1 May 2023 and invited anyone interested in the role to email [tonbridgetriathlon@hotmail.com](mailto:tonbridgetriathlon@hotmail.com).

(8) Easter Egg Hunt

The representative of the Tonbridge Parish Church advised that there would be an open house Easter egg hunt on 1 April 2023 at St Philips Church.

**TCF 23/7 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Members were reminded that the terms of reference for the Tonbridge Community Forum were set out in the Council's Constitution at Part 3, Responsibility for Council Functions – Committees: Membership Terms Reference.

An update on the charges for use of public open spaces was sought and the Leader advised that a response would be provided to the representative of the Rotary Club following the meeting.

The meeting ended at 8.28 pm