

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

PARISH PARTNERSHIP PANEL

MINUTES

Thursday, 9th November, 2023

Present: Cllr R W Dalton (Chair), Cllr Mrs M Tatton (Vice-Chair), Cllr R P Betts, Cllr B Banks, Cllr M D Boughton, Cllr P Boxall, Cllr D Harman, Cllr P M Hickmott, and Cllr M Taylor.

Together with representatives of Birling, Borough Green (Vice-Chair), Burham, Ditton, East Malling and Larkfield, Hadlow, Ightham, Offham, Platt, Plaxtol, Shipbourne, Snodland, West Malling, Wrotham Parish/Town Councils and County Cllrs Mrs T Dean and County Cllr H Rayner.

Virtual attendance: Councillor D Keers* were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs S Bell*, M A Coffin; Kings Hill, Ryarsh and Wateringbury Parish Councils; and County Cllrs Mrs S Hohler and S Hudson* and the Kent Association of Local Councils (Tonbridge and Malling).

*attended via MS Teams.

(Note: Apologies had been received from Cllr Bell for in-person attendance.)

PART 1 - PUBLIC

PPP 23/24 NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no substitute members.

PPP 23/25 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 31 August 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

PPP 23/26 UPDATE ON ACTION IDENTIFIED IN THE LAST MINUTES

There were no actions identified that didn't appear elsewhere on the agenda.

PPP 23/27 TONBRIDGE AND MALLING SENIORS

Apologies had been received from the Chair of the Tonbridge and Malling Seniors (TAMs) Forum. In their absence, the Principle Democratic Services Officer read out a prepared statement which outlined the role of the organisation in informing and representing the views of senior people in the Borough.

The TAMs Forum was an independent group run by local older people for local older people and communicated with the County and Borough Councils; other local service providers and local agencies. A Management Committee met regularly to organise meetings, events and promote the needs of older residents.

Meetings of the Forum were free, open to all and were held every two months at the Angel Centre, Tonbridge. These meetings were generally planned around a specific theme such as health and other support services for older residents. The next meeting would be held at 1200 on Friday 24 November where Robin Betts (TMBC environmental spokesperson) and Steve Harman (Head Gardner at Tonbridge School) were guest speakers.

The Forum was keen to engage with the wider Tonbridge and Malling areas and had provided promotional leaflets advising of upcoming activities in the Borough and these were shared with parish/town council representatives. Anyone requiring further information were asked to contact tams.forum@gmail.com

An invitation would be extended to the organisation to provide a presentation in Spring of 2024, subject to the views of Members.

PPP 23/28 JOINT STANDARDS COMMITTEE - PARISH/TOWN REPRESENTATIVES AND VOTING ALLOCATIONS

The report of the Principal Democratic Services Officer confirmed parish/town council representatives for the Joint Standards Committee and allocated voting rights for the period 2024-2025, as set out in Annex 1.

In response to a question regarding substitutes for parish/town council voting members, the Panel was advised that whilst this was supported in principle the use of substitute members would need to be agreed by the Joint Standards Committee, by the Borough Council's Full Council and at each Parish Council.

RECOMMENDED*: That

- (1) The revised 'pool' of parish and town council representatives and the voting allocations for 2024 – 2025 (as set out at Annex 1) be

endorsed by the Joint Standards Committee at its first meeting in 2024; and

- (2) Options for the use of substitute parish/town council voting representatives be investigated and presented to the Joint Standards Committee for consideration in due course.

***Recommended to Joint Standards Committee**

MATTERS RAISED IN ADVANCE OF THE MEETING

PPP 23/29 KENT POLICE UPDATE

Inspector Newman provided a verbal update on the achievements made in performance and the neighbourhood policing agenda. The Panel was advised that the ongoing restructure of Kent Police was due to be completed by September 2024. Good progress was being made in recruitment with beat officer positions up by 57% and it was hoped to increase this further.

Details of recent initiatives and operations in the Borough were also outlined. It was indicated that the Neighbour Taskforce had doubled in size and was working to address issues in Snodland and Holborough Lakes where there had been a spate of anti-social behaviour and thefts of motor vehicles. Kent Police continued to work with key stakeholders on a variety of issues and had a good working relationship with the Borough Council via the Community Safety Unit. It was noted that the co-location at the Borough Council offices was valuable and effective for both parties.

Reference was made to the low crime figures within Tonbridge and Malling and it was reported that although there had been a marginal increase of 0.1% for all crime the Borough continued to be a safe place to live. There had been a 0.1% reduction in ASB in Tonbridge and Malling despite an overall increase in Kent. This demonstrated that the targeted approach adopted by the Neighbour Taskforce was achieving results. Violent crime, domestic abuse and stalking/harassment had also seen improving results.

In response to a question raised by Wouldham Parish Council regarding the use of CCTV evidence if provided by a parish council, Inspector Newman indicated this would be dependent upon the integrity of the evidence and quality of film provided. The best solution in respect of road traffic management continued to be 'designing out' of issues. However, Inspector Newman offered to discuss this further out of meeting.

There was a question regarding the support provided to shopkeepers when reporting instances of shoplifting. The Panel was advised that each time a crime was reported it was recorded and assessed. If

individuals felt they were not getting adequate support from Kent Police they were encouraged to contact Inspector Newman to raise their concerns.

PPP 23/30 UPDATE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AGILE PROJECT

The Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health explained that the Borough Council was transferring a number of service-based platforms to a new software provider called Agile. The Services affected included planning, building control and land charges. This was a significant change and the systems had 'gone live' in October.

Unfortunately, services were experiencing technical difficulties due to a number of outstanding issues which were creating backlogs in planning cases. The Borough Council was working closely with the software provider on resolving data and transfer issues.

Members were advised that the weekly list was now available as a basic function. The enhanced 'click link' directing to the case files on the planning portal was being worked on. Consultation comments could also now be submitted via the portal. The issues around the 21-day notice period for call-in and the new system were noted. To ensure that parish/town councils did not miss the opportunity to comment, consultation emails were also being sent out in tandem with the weekly list. It was also clarified that the 21-day notice period for parish/town councils to call-in an application was not a new process. If parish/town councils had concerns about an application they were encouraged to discuss a potential call-in with their local ward members, even if the ultimate decision was that the call-in didn't need to proceed following consultation with residents. Parish/town councils were encouraged to raise concerns with Planning Services if they felt there were discrepancies between the weekly list and the consultation emails.

It was also confirmed that it was now possible to see other comments on the planning portal. If this was not the case, Members were asked to report this to the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health for investigation.

Concern was expressed that parish/town councils had not been notified of the changes to systems and it was difficult to get information. The Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health indicated that it had been expected that the implementation of the new system would be quicker and with minimal downtime/change apparent to external users.

In response to a question regarding why parish/town councils were no longer consulted on trees, it was confirmed that this was not as a result of the new Agile system and the position on when the Council can consult had been confirmed to all Parishes in January 2022. Details of the new process had been circulated, via the weekly list, upon its introduction. The Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental

Health offered to include a reminder in respect of trees on the next weekly list. It was also clarified that Tree Protection Orders (TPOs) were assessed on risk and if there was an immediate issue it would be taken as a matter of urgency.

There was detailed discussion regarding potential implications for new and/or major applications and the risk of non-determination of applications. Regarding the latter, the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health would hope to engage with the developer to avoid the application proceeding direct to appeal.

The Cabinet Member for Planning (Cllr Taylor) and the Leader (Cllr Boughton) recognised the challenging position faced by Officers in identifying and resolving the technical issues, dealing with the software provider and addressing the increasing backlog of cases. It was also confirmed that the Borough Council were actively monitoring progress and would only be paying for services once they had been introduced appropriately.

Finally, the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health indicated that the main priority continued to be resolving 'bugs'; identifying 'fixes' and getting back to business as usual as soon as possible.

PPP 23/31 ELECTIONS - PARLIAMENTARY BOUNDARY CHANGES, REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND STATIONS AND PCC ELECTIONS

The Head of Electoral Services provided an overview on the parliamentary boundary changes, the Tranche 2 changes arising from the Election Bill and summarised details in respect of new constituencies, polling district and polling station reviews and changes to postal and proxy votes.

There were no changes proposed to polling districts as the current configuration aligned with the new constituencies. However, a polling station review would be undertaken with consultation starting on 1 December for a four week period. Final proposals arising from this review/consultation would be considered by the General Purposes Committee on 24 January 2024.

Reference was made to new application forms for postal and proxy votes from 31st October 2023, which now included boxes for National Insurance number to enable verification checks on electors to be completed. Existing postal voters would change to new system when renewing.

It was noted that the Parliamentary Election had to take place before 25 January 2025. However, the next election would be the Police and Crime Commissioner on Thursday 2 May 2024. Booking forms for

community/village halls to host polling stations would be sent to parish/town councils early in 2024.

There was also a request for anyone interested in working on elections to contact the Elections Team as there was an extreme shortage of election staff.

The presentation would be shared with parish/town councils after the meeting for information.

PPP 23/32 LOCAL PLAN

The Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health provided an update on the progress of the Local Plan. The Local Development Scheme, setting out the timetable for the preparation of the Local Plan, had been approved by [Cabinet](#) in July 2023 and good progress continued to be made towards a Regulation 18b consultation in Spring 2024.

There had been a number of briefings with Borough Councillors on key issues and sites, Officers were liaising with developers/agents on deliverability as part of the overall assessment of sites and collection of evidence. Engagement was also taking place with infrastructure providers.

Reference was made to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill which had recently been enacted. There remained uncertainty around housing targets and the green belt and it was anticipated that this detail would be included in the technical guidance to the Bill.

Future reports to the Housing and Planning Scrutiny Select would provide more information in relation to evidence base and the progress of the Local Plan.

The Cabinet Member for Planning (Cllr Taylor) indicated the importance of sharing the burden across the borough as a whole to avoid uncontrolled development as a result of not having a Local Plan in place. The Leader (Cllr M Boughton) encouraged all communities to work together to achieve the best outcome for the borough.

Members referred to the additional sites identified following further consultation and it was indicated that information relating to these would be published as part of the Regulation 18b Consultation to remain consistent with the approach adopted for the Regulation 18 Consultation.

In response to a question, it was confirmed that development in the Green Belt or in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty would be carefully assessed and special circumstances would need to be evidenced to enable development to take place.

PPP 23/33 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**(1) Terms of Reference**

It was confirmed that Terms of Reference for the Parish Partnership Panel were set out in Part 3 (Responsibilities) of the Borough Council's Constitution which was available on the [website](#). However, the Panel was intended as 'A vehicle for the exchange of information, consultation and a structured dialogue between the Borough Council and the parish councils in the Borough.'

The Leader advised that there had been a review of the Parish Partnership Panel in 2021 and the outcomes of this review had been reported to the Panel on 4 November 2021. [Minute Number PPP 21/16 refers](#). To reflect the responses provided, the role of second Vice-Chair, to be a parish/town councillor, had been introduced.

If there were any suggestions for improving the format of the Parish Partnership Panel, Members were invited to share these with the Chair, Vice-Chairs and Kent Association of Local Councils in the first instance.

(2) Tackling Graffiti

The Chair referred to discussions at the [Communities and Environment Scrutiny Select](#) Committee on 6 November 2023 on proposals for tackling graffiti in the Borough. The Committee had recommended that parish/town councils be included in the public consultation into the introduction of graffiti walls.

The meeting ended at 9.20 pm