

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

14 November 2024

Part 1 - Public

Recommendation to Cabinet



Cabinet Member	Cllr Des Keers, Community Services
Responsible Officer	Damian Roberts, Chief Executive
Report Author	Gill Fox, Policy, Scrutiny and Communities Manager

Review of Tonbridge Community Forum and Parish Partnership Panel

1 Summary and Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To consider options for future meetings of Tonbridge Community Forum and Parish Partnership Panel.

2 Corporate Strategy Priority Area

- 2.1 Efficient services for all our residents, maintaining an effective council.
- 2.2 Ensuring we are meeting the needs of members of the Tonbridge Community Forum and Parish Partnership Panel in relation to engagement and information sharing.

3 Recommendations

That the following are recommended to Cabinet:

- 3.1 The venue for Tonbridge Community Forum is moved to Tonbridge Methodist Church on a trial basis, for all meetings taking place in 2025
- 3.2 Meetings of Tonbridge Community Forum are all held in person (rather than virtually via MS Teams) on a trial basis, for all meetings taking place in 2025
- 3.3 Following a topic or item raised at Tonbridge Community Forum, a section should be dedicated to open discussion to provide an opportunity for all members to discuss and respond to the item
- 3.4 That initial responses in relation to Parish Partnership Panel are shared at a future meeting of Parish Partnership Panel, to allow all members additional opportunity to discuss and consider options for this meeting.

4 Introduction and Background

- 4.1 The former Chair of Tonbridge Community Forum requested that a review be undertaken in relation to the venue and operation of Tonbridge Community Forum. A scoping report (Annex 1) was discussed at the meeting of Overview and Scrutiny in September 2024. At this meeting it was also agreed that a review of the operation of Parish Partnership Panel would also be helpful.
- 4.2 The current membership of Tonbridge Community Forum is as follows: Friends of Mill Stream, Angel Indoor Bowls Club, EMBER Community Interest Company, Feast, Rotary Club of Tonbridge, Tonbridge and Malling Seniors, Tonbridge Bicycle Users Group, Tonbridge Civic Society, Tonbridge Dementia Friendly Community, Tonbridge District Scout Council, Tonbridge Historical Society, Tonbridge Line Commuters, Tonbridge Lions Club, Tonbridge Parish Church, Tonbridge Sports Association, Tonbridge Town Team and Tonbridge U3A. In addition, there are 13 Tonbridge ward Members (not politically balanced) and two KCC Members.
- 4.3 The Terms of Reference for Tonbridge Community Forum state it is “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 wellbeing of the town through identification of problems and joint working towards solutions”.
- 4.4 At the last review of the Forum (in 2021), it was agreed that “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.”
- 4.5 Membership of Parish Partnership Panel is comprised of all Parish/Town Councils across the Borough.

5 Proposal

- 5.1 Views have been sought from existing Members of Tonbridge Community Forum and Parish Partnership Panel on the current venue, style and format of the meetings. All responses are provided in Annex 2.
- 5.2 Looking at Tonbridge Community Forum responses, it is evident that there is a preference for in-person meetings (with only one respondent expressing a preference for online meetings).
- 5.3 Views were expressed in relation to the way information is shared, with a request for a more collaborative approach with greater input from community groups. Meetings with more open discussion would be more meaningful for some members.

- 5.4 There was only one written comment received in relation to the venue for the meetings (expressing a preference to remain at the Angel Centre), however both the Chair and Vice Chair of Tonbridge Community Forum have expressed their views that the meeting should be moved to Tonbridge Methodist Church.
- 5.5 Promotion of Tonbridge Community Forum, including a request for new members has been distributed via the Council's Media Team. So far, two additional groups have come forward. It is suggested that the invitation to join the Forum be kept open and the Chair and Vice-Chairs will review expressions of interest and notify members of the Forum of the decisions as they are made.
- 5.6 There have been some initial responses in relation to Parish Partnership Panel, however, there have also been requests to allow from more time to consider options. It is therefore suggested that an item is added to a future agenda of Parish Partnership Panel, where a further discussion can take place, seeking views from all participants.

6 Other Options

- 6.1 Possible venues for meetings of Tonbridge Community Forum, including approximate costs for each option have been considered in other locations in the town. Tonbridge Baptist church was considered, but depending on the room used, there may be additional work to set up and mobile microphones may be required. Two school venues were considered, but they were unable to accommodate all the dates and were more expensive than the church options, so they have not been followed up.
- 6.2 Having considered costs and availability the preferred option to trial is Tonbridge Methodist Church. This will save money as room hire is reasonably priced and includes audio equipment, they have confirmed availability for all the dates and the room will be set up ready. Both the Chair and Vice Chair are key holders and are willing to operate the audio equipment at the meetings.

7 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 7.1 Current room hire costs (for Tonbridge Community Forum) at the Angel Centre and the cost of audio/visual equipment for the in-person meetings, total £763. In addition, there are costs incurred in relation to staff time (administration).

The proposed venue (Tonbridge Methodist Church) will cost £22.50 per hour, meetings are not expected to go beyond two hours. Audio facilities are available at the church and are included in the hire cost. In addition, there are costs incurred in relation to staff time (administration).

8 Risk Assessment

- 8.1 Any risk related to the use of venues and equipment will need to be managed as the proposed venue is not owned by the council. Appropriate health and safety checks will need to be completed.

9 Legal Implications

- 9.1 Tonbridge Community Forum and Parish Partnership Panel are not decision-making bodies.

10 Consultation and Communications

- 10.1 Initial consultation has taken place for both groups. Further views will be sought from members of Parish Partnership Panel at a future meeting. Proposed changes to Tonbridge Community Forum will be reviewed after a trial period of one year.

11 Implementation

- 11.1 Changes to the format of the meetings will take place from 2025 for a trial period of one year.

12 Cross Cutting Issues

- 12.1 Climate Change and Biodiversity

12.1.1 Limited or low impact on emissions and environment.

12.1.2 Climate change advice has not been sought in the preparation of the options and recommendations in this report.

12.2 A move to all in-person meetings is likely to increase car journeys. However, groups are all Tonbridge focussed and should therefore be locally based providing some attendees the opportunity to walk to the meetings, use public transport and/or car share, which should be encouraged and promoted.

- 12.3 Equalities and Diversity

12.3.1 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.

Background Papers	None
Annexes	Annex 1: Review of Tonbridge Community Forum (Scoping Report) Annex 2: Summary of Responses