

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

PARISH PARTNERSHIP PANEL

MINUTES

Thursday, 6th February, 2025

Present: Cllr R W Dalton (Chair), Cllr Mrs M Tatton (Vice-Chair), Cllr Mrs S Bell*, Cllr R P Betts, Cllr B Banks, Cllr M D Boughton, Cllr P Boxall*, Cllr M A Coffin, Cllr S Crisp*, Cllr P M Hickmott*, Cllr M Taylor

Together with representatives of Aylesford*, Birling, Borough Green (Vice-Chair), Ditton*, East Malling and Larkfield, East Peckham, Hadlow*, Hildenborough*, Ightham*, Kings Hill, Offham*, Platt*, Ryarsh*, Shipbourne*, Snodland*, Watlington*, West Malling, Wouldham*, Wrotham, County Cllr Mrs T Dean*, County Cllr Mrs S Hohler*, County Cllr S Hudson* and County Cllr H Rayner.

In attendance: Councillors R V Roud, A G Bennison* and D Keers* were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

(*participated via MS Teams)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor S M Hammond, Burham and Plaxtol Parish Councils.

PART 1 - PUBLIC

PPP 25/1 NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no substitute members.

PPP 25/2 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 21 November 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

PPP 25/3 UPDATE ON ACTION IDENTIFIED IN THE LAST MINUTES

There were no matters required to be updated.

PPP 25/4 UPDATE FROM KENT POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER

The Police and Crime Commissioner for Kent, Mr Matthew Scott, was invited to provide the Panel with an update on Kent Police initiatives with implications for the borough, including Parish and Town Councils.

First of all, as the Police and Crime Commissioner, Mr Scott explained that his key responsibilities included setting the priorities for the Police force, setting the budget for Kent Police, supporting victims and securing productive partnerships.

In order to deliver the key priorities set for the Police, a draft Kent Police and Crime Plan for 2025 – 2029 was introduced, focusing on ‘Cut Crime, Support Victims and Build Trust’ and covering four strategic areas – ‘Protecting People, Protecting Places, Protecting Property and Productive Partnerships’. It was explained that key mechanisms to ensure delivery of the Plan consisted of effective monitoring and accountability, sustainable budget and effective national and regional working.

Particular reference was made to the positive working relationship between Kent Police and the Borough Council, County Councillors and Parish Councils within Tonbridge and Malling borough, which was believed to have contributed to the low local crime and Anti-Social Behaviour rates and made the borough one of the safest areas in the county.

Furthermore, Mr Scott introduced the local Chief Inspector and the local Community Safety Unit Inspector for the borough, who were making visits and maintaining contacts with local communities to provide support on local safety issues. The Neighbourhood Policing Model was being rolled out and Neighbourhood Task Force and Rural Task Force were in place as well, with Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) focusing on crime prevention and supporting neighbourhood and rural community policing.

Finally, Mr Scott invited Panel Members to get in touch should assistance be required in receiving quarterly visits from local beat officers and written updates in between and contacts with him could be made via email to contactyourpcc@kent.police.uk.

In addition, the Cabinet Member for Community Services (Cllr D Keers) took the opportunity to provide an update on the engagement that had been undertaken with Parish and Town Councils in seeking funding support for the provision of the Anti-Social Behaviour Community Enforcement Team (the ‘ASB Team’) service for 2025, since a review of the trial of the ASB Team in 2024 was provided to and well received by the Panel at the last meeting in November 2024. It was understood that the Parish and Town Councils that had agreed to make a financial contribution towards the ASB Team service to be provided by the Borough Council would benefit from a bespoke Service Delivery Plan to help tackle local Anti-Social Behaviour issues and that those Parish and Town Councils that had not decided to support the scheme were encouraged to take advantage of the offer with a view to enhancing local safety measures and improving public confidence.

PPP 25/5 UPDATE ON 'ENGLISH DEVOLUTION WHITE PAPER'

The English Devolution White Paper, published by Government on 16 December 2024, set out plans to widen devolution across England, reform local government and introduce elected Mayors and Strategic Combined Authorities and Unitary Councils for all parts of the country.

As explained by the Chief Executive of the Borough Council, Mr D Roberts, it was understood that Mayoral Strategic Combined Authorities would be established as a new layer of local government sitting above the existing two-tiered local authorities and be offered new additional powers and influence in respect of skills and employment support, transport and local infrastructure, housing and strategic planning, economic development and regeneration, environment and climate change, health, wellbeing and public service reform and public safety.

As part of the Government's proposals for local government reorganisation, District and Borough Councils, County Councils and small Unitary Councils would be replaced by Unitary Councils covering a population of at least 500,000 and based on an approximate population of 1.9 million in Kent and Medway, this was likely to result in 3 or 4 Unitary Councils across the county.

Furthermore, the Leader (Cllr M Boughton) provided an update in respect of an indicative timetable for the devolution and local government reorganisation programme that was only received the day before the Panel meeting after it was confirmed that Kent and Medway had not been selected to be included in the Devolution Priority Programme. This would therefore mean that the Kent County Council Elections would proceed on 1 May 2025 and interim proposals for new Unitary Councils across Kent and Medway would need to be submitted by 21 March 2025 with full proposals to follow by 28 November 2025. While uncertainties and outstanding questions remained, known criteria for setting up Unitary Councils and contents expected to be included within the interim proposals were noted.

With regard to the impact of Devolution on Parish Councils, although it was unclear how this would apply to Parishes, it was assumed that existing Towns and Parishes would continue and potentially provide an even more important local presence with the move to much larger Unitary Councils.

In conclusion, the Government's intent in respect of implementing local government reorganisation across the country was clear, things were moving quickly and Government deadlines were fast approaching, however, it was emphasised that before any change was confirmed, Council business would continue as usual and efforts would be focused on achieving the best outcome for residents and staff.

PPP 25/6 UPDATE ON CLIMATE CHANGE INITIATIVES

The Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Regeneration and Property (Cllr R Betts) provided an update on climate change actions and initiatives that had been undertaken by the Borough Council since an update was provided at the last Panel meeting held in November 2024. Key points were highlighted and summarised as follows:

- Visit to the Leybourne Lakes Country Park new eco Café to learn about the latest low carbon technology used there to be arranged in April 2025;
- Free carbon literacy training provided for parish and town councils concluded, to be followed by free training for schools in the borough in February, to be funded by the same Borough Council's UK Shared Prosperity Funding grant;
- Tree planting target of 1,000 trees accomplished for this year;
- Installation of additional solar panels to continue at Larkfield Leisure Centre following upgrading of roof insulation, anticipated to be completed by March 2025; preparatory ground work to start next week for the air source heat pump, anticipated to be completed by November 2025;
- 50th Anniversary Community Grant Scheme open for parish and town councils to encourage local community groups to apply for, details available at [50th Anniversary Community Grant Scheme – Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council](#); and
- Gibson building refurbishment works underway to improve energy efficiency of the Borough Council's office buildings in King Hill.

In response to queries raised by Panel Members, the Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Regeneration and Property advised that negotiations would need to be held with TM Active about providing complimentary parking for café customers at Leybourne Lakes Country Park with them being the operator of the new café and that there was currently no plan to install floating solar panels above the lake before other more accessible Council owned premises were considered.

A copy of the Climate Change Quarterly Bulletin for Parish and Town Councils for February 2025 was attached to the Minutes at Annex 1.

PPP 25/7 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**(1) Planning Consultation – Role of Parish/Town Councils**

The Cabinet Member for Planning (Cllr M Taylor) brought to the Panel Members' attention a programme of meetings that were arranged for the Borough Councillors via a Local Plan Members Advisory Group in accordance with the Borough Council's Local Plan Engagement Strategy and advised that engagement with Parish and Town Councils would also be undertaken in the consultation process as part of the Engagement Strategy. Meanwhile, Parish and Town Councillors were encouraged to

keep in touch with their Ward Members for updates on development of the Local Plan.

In addition, the Cabinet Member for Planning reflected upon the limited timeframe available for local ward members and parish and town councils to engage in a large planning application process and taking into account the significant impact those major schemes would have on the local area and residents, he proposed to undertake an investigation into the application process and hoped to be able to develop a scheme that would facilitate, whenever possible, early engagement with local Members and Parish/Town Councils prior to the submission and validation of a major application, which was welcomed and supported by the Panel. Further details were expected to be provided at a future meeting of the Panel.

Finally, in response to a question raised by West Malling Parish Council regarding the Planning online portal and difficulty being experienced with regard to its search function, both the Cabinet Member for Planning and the Leader acknowledged awareness of the functionality issue linked to the current operating system used in Planning and a number of other Council services and advised that due consideration was being given to identifying a solution to resolve the issue in a timely manner.

(2) Work Programme 2025

The Work Programme setting out matters to be considered during 2025 was attached for information. Parish and Town Councils were reminded to suggest future items by liaising with the Chair of the Panel.

As suggested by the Chair, update on 'Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation' had been raised to be added as a standing item on the agenda and this was supported by the Panel.

(3) Review of Parish Partnership Panel

Further comments from Parish and Town Councils on a review underway of the operation of the Parish Partnership Panel were invited to be sent to the Policy, Scrutiny and Communities Manager (Ms G Fox), to enable the outcome of the review to be reported to the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 3 April 2025.

The meeting ended at 9.25 pm