



A G E N D A

ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

Thursday 25 July 2013 at 6.30 pm
Council Chamber, Royal Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN1 1RS

1 Apologies

2 Membership Changes

- a Membership applications (for decision)
- b Changes of representatives (for information)

3 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 23 May 2013 (Pages 1 - 10)

4 Actions from previous meetings (5 mins)

Minute 4 – evidence of formal appointments – all representatives

NB – To date, 12 out of 47 member organisations have submitted evidence. (33 of those organisations are regular attendees.)

This requirement is a governance matter, in order to comply with section 4 of the Town Forum Constitution, which states that Forum members shall: “submit to the Town Forum Secretary a copy of the Annual General Meeting minutes, or similar, at which the named representative(s) was/were authorised to attend the Forum on behalf of the membership organisation”.

5 Update report from Leader of the Council (10 mins)

6 Update report from Chief Executive - a corporate and financial overview of TWBC for 2013/14 (10 mins) (Pages 11 - 20)

7 Highways and transportation in Tunbridge Wells (60 mins) (Pages 21 - 22)

A report on the purpose and structure of this item is attached.

8 Update reports from the working groups (5-10 mins each) (Pages 23 - 24)

- (a) **Water in the Wells** – Michael Holman, chairman of the working group, has prepared the attached update report.
- (b) **Leisure, Culture and Tourism** – An update will be provided on TWBC’s draft Cultural Strategy.
- (c) **Traffic Strategy** – Jane Fenwick, acting chairman of this working group, will report verbally on any other issues (additional to item 7) verbally.
- (d) **Planning and Development Strategy** – Michael Doyle, chairman of the working group, will report verbally on the Site Allocation Development Plan Document timetable.
- (e) **Finance and Other Issues** – David Wakefield, chairman of the working group, will report verbally.

9 Future consultation issues (5 mins) (Pages 25 - 26)

Mike McGeary will summarise the attached paper, which sets out which issues of general interest to the Town Forum will be the subject of formal public consultation or on which a Cabinet decision will be taking place, over the next six months.

10 Any other business (5 mins)

Dates of remaining 2013 meetings

Thursday 26 September

Thursday 28 November (including the Annual General Meeting)

(Meetings start at 6.30pm)

Mike McGeary, Democratic Services Officer

**Town Hall
ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS
Kent TN1 1RS
Tel: 01892 554015**

ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

Thursday 23 May 2013

Attended: Cllr Bob Backhouse, Sally Balcon, David Barnett, Lorna Blackmore, Stephen Bowser, June Bridgeman, Cllr Ben Chapelard, John Cunningham, Michael Doyle, Jane Fenwick, John Forster, Maggie Fraser, Alex Green, Michaela van Halewyn, Dorothea Holman, Michael Holman, Glen Horn, Sue Kaner, Jim Kedge, Bill Kern, George Lawson, Katharina Mahler-Bech, John Mattei, Chris Morris, Marguerita Morton, Cllr David Neve, Altan Omer, Cllr James Scholes, Cllr David Scott, Alastair Tod, David Wakefield (Chairman), Mary Wardrop, Cllr Mrs Lynne Weatherly, Philip Whitbourn (sub) and Cllr Chris Woodward

TWBC officers present: Adam Chalmers (Democratic and Community Engagement Manager), Jo Wiltcher (Museum Manager) and Mike McGeary (Democratic Services Officer)

Also present: Cllr David Jukes, Cllr Jane March, and Anthony Fisser and Eddy Walsh (from KCC Youth Services)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were reported from: Tim Harper, Léonie Harrington, Angela Phillips, Kate Sergeant, Anne Stobo, Margaret Watts, Chris Wigley and Cllrs Peter Bulman, Mrs Catherine Mayhew and Frank Williams.

2. MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

The Democratic Services Officer advised on the following changes in representation: (a) Pantiles Traders' Association – where Glen Horn was no longer the appointed representative; (b) Friends of Grosvenor and Hilbert Park – where the Chairman, J Paul Lambert, had stood down from the committee; (c) Clarence Road Users' Association – where David Webster had stood down and his replacement, Bill Kern, was welcomed to his first meeting; and (b) Transition Tunbridge Wells – who were no longer active in Tunbridge Wells, meaning that their representative and substitute, Kate Sergeant and Carole Barnes, respectively, would no longer be members of the Town Forum.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED – That, with the addition of the name of Cllr David Scott to the list of those having given their apologies for absence, the minutes of the meeting held on 7 March 2013 be agreed.

4. ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

7 March 2013

4 Evidence of formal appointment to the Town Forum

MMcG Representatives to submit evidence of their formal appointment to the Town Forum.

The Democratic Services Officer advised that, even though there had been some progress, there were still 40 representative organisations who had not yet submitted evidence of their formal appointment to the Town Forum. The Chairman reiterated once more the importance of submitting this information, in the interests of good governance. He added that member representatives should ensure this evidence was submitted, to safeguard their voting rights at and beyond the next AGM, due in November.

12(c) Access to consultation documents in the Library

MMcG To take this matter up with the Library Manager and see what facility could be provided during the building works.

Following a site visit and discussions with the District Customer Services Officer, it was noted that adequate provision was in place during the current building works, with an additional space which could be provided, if needed.

5. UPDATE FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Cllr David Jukes was welcomed to the meeting, to provide an update report on a number of town centre initiatives which the Borough Council was leading on. He began by advising Forum members that a study had been commissioned to assess the feasibility of developing a **cultural hub** for the town. He added that the selected consultants would report their findings in the Autumn, at which point it would become clearer as to how best to take the proposal forward.

Cllr Jukes particularly welcomed the prospect of a cultural hub which was likely to be on the site of the **Museum, Library and Adult Education Centre**, as it would provide the top end of the town with an iconic building residents could be justifiably proud of.

The Leader also advised that, the previous week, all members of the Council had had the opportunity to be briefed on a **'conservation statement' for the civic centre site**, which the Town Forum Chairman had also attended. This had been commissioned jointly by TWBC and English Heritage; the purpose of the statement, the Town Forum was told, was to enable TWBC to assess and develop its understanding of the heritage significance of the buildings and to set out their potential for change and to be able to accommodate new uses, to enhance their contribution to the vibrancy of the town centre.

Cllr Jukes next advised on how TWBC would like to see the 'shared space' plans for Mount Pleasant develop, between Monson Road and Upper Grosvenor Road. He added that KCC were generally supportive of the proposal, so TWBC would be commissioning the same consultants that KCC favoured in examining the scheme in detail. To the great interest of Town Forum members, the Leader advised that it was the intention that a water feature would be included as part of this initiative.

The Chairman invited questions from Forum members, as follows:

- (i) Cllr Backhouse expressed the hope that, if the cultural hub were to be realised, it would act as a focus for the whole of West Kent. The Leader felt that its appeal and 'draw' would be even wider than that, encompassing East Sussex as well;
- (ii) Sally Balcon, although welcoming the proposals, felt that the cinema site required more urgent attention. Cllr Jukes reiterated how TWBC had pressed very hard to achieve the position it had currently, where the asbestos removal would be taking place and detailed drawings of redevelopment proposals would shortly be available. The Leader also pointed out that TWBC did not own the site;;
- (iii) Michaela van Halewyn enquired about the business rates position with the owner of the cinema site. Cllr Jukes advised that TWBC had initiated formal legal proceedings, adding that the hearing had been deferred, pending the submission of further information from the site owner. He added that he was in regular contact with the owner and constantly reminded him of the rising cost of the business rates liability;
- (iv) Jane Fenwick welcomed the Leader of the Council's statement, as it supported several of the ambitions of the Town Forum expressed over a number of years for the future of the Town Hall complex of buildings and for 'shared-space' schemes;
- (v) Dorothea Holman referred to the member briefing on the conservation statement and asked whether TWBC was working in similar harmony with English Heritage on traffic and transport issues in the town. The Leader advised that TWBC was keen to work with English Heritage on all relevant issues.

The Chairman expressed the Town Forum's thanks to the Leader of the Council for his update and for answering questions.

6. DRAFT CULTURAL STRATEGY

June Bridgeman, the Chairman of the Leisure, Culture and Tourism Working Group, had earlier circulated her group's proposed response to TWBC's draft Cultural Strategy. In her opening remarks, Mrs Bridgeman thanked the Leader of the Council for TWBC's proposals to enhance the Museum and Art Gallery to promote culture-led regeneration.

One of the recommendations set out in the proposed response to TWBC was that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee might usefully review what the working group had identified as 'planning deficit' in terms of a clear, coherent policy framework for the next five years.

Although Mrs Bridgeman had been unable to attend that morning's first of two public meetings, where interested parties had been invited to give their feedback on the draft strategy, the Chairman advised that it had been very informative and well organised, where a warm welcome had been given to the Council's broad plans. Mrs Bridgeman added that she had been told by others who had attended that the interactive session had been particularly welcome.

Michael Holman felt that the working group's recommended response should be endorsed, adding that the Town Forum should acknowledge that detailed proposals will emerge, once the consultation stage has ended. The Leader of the Council picked up on the 'five year' element referred to above. He advised that this was exactly the right sort of time frame in which to provide both a vision and a master plan for the town, adding that this would be one of his key actions over the coming months.

Cllr Jane March, the Cabinet portfolio-holder responsible for Tourism, Leisure and Economic Development, thanked those members of the Town Forum who had attended the morning's public meeting on the draft Cultural Strategy. She had been very pleased and encouraged by the response and the quality of the input.

The Chairman highlighted one particular aspect of the morning's session, namely where one should draw the geographical boundaries of the cultural 'offer' of Tunbridge Wells. He expressed the hope that this could be reflected in how the document was developed. Cllr Jane March acknowledged that point, adding that this formed another element of work which had been commissioned.

RESOLVED – That the proposed response to TWBC's draft Cultural Strategy, as prepared by the Leisure, Culture and Tourism Working Group, be endorsed and submitted and that thanks be conveyed to the members of that working group for their detailed work.

7. YOUTH SERVICES IN TUNBRIDGE WELLS

Eddy Walsh, KCC's Senior Youth Work Practitioner, provided Town Forum members with a presentation on the current level of youth support services within the town centre and wider area. He responded to member questions as follows:

- (i) Dorothea Holman enquired about the 'target' age group. Mr Walsh advised that this was, in the main, 13-19 year olds, although the Streetcruizer service covered a wider age range. He added that the afternoon provision (between 3 and 6pm) was aimed at supporting the younger age group;
- (ii) Dorothea Holman also asked how the various support services were publicised and therefore reached out to those most in need. Mr Walsh stressed the importance of publicising in a manner that young people felt happy to access, so social media was an important element, although 'word of mouth' was also effective. He also emphasised how talking to the rest of the community in which young people lived was an important and sometimes overlooked aspect;
- (iii) Dorothea Holman enquired if young people had identified any specific services or issues which they wanted in the town centre. Mr Walsh advised that having somewhere safe to go was a key need, adding that the facilities which KCC were able to provide were really only basic;
- (iv) John Forster enquired if there was any benefit in reintroducing a youth forum, which used to exist. Mr Walsh said that there were already plans to reinstate a youth forum, with a remit to respond to formal consultation processes and to raise issues of concern or interest amongst young people;

- (v) June Bridgeman invited Mr Walsh to say what youth issues her Leisure, Culture and Tourism Working Group might usefully discuss at their next meeting. Mr Walsh said that, in general terms, he would like to see greater support for the actions of young people being viewed in a more positive light;
- (vi) June Bridgeman also asked how the Camden Centre might be modernised, in order to improve its facilities for young people. Mr Walsh felt that the Camden Centre was seen positively among young people;
- (vii) Cllr Scott raised the issue of music and its importance to young people. He enquired how greater encouragement could be given to involve more youngsters in music in the town. Mr Walsh believed that more 'small scale' opportunities would assist, adding that The Forum on the Common was a good example of how this worked effectively. Cllr Scott asked whether KCC were already supporting this approach, to which Mr Walsh added that some specific music events were receiving some KCC direct funding;
- (viii) Cllr Scholes advised that, through his KCC member fund, he might be able to assist specific groups in their youth service work.

Cllr Woodward, who had been appointed as TWBC's 'Youth Champion', responded to some of the issues raised. He advised that he was keen to reinvigorate the youth forum, adding that in its previous guise, it had been drawn exclusively from school representatives, which maybe reflected too narrow an opinion of views.

Cllr Woodward also expressed his keenness to see KCC's plans for a permanent youth hub in the town centre come to fruition. He stressed that the provision of the afternoon support service for young people currently running in the Camden Centre was only temporary but he acknowledged that there were funding issues which needed to be overcome before a permanent facility could emerge.

Cllr Woodward's key message was that we should all find ways to communicate with young people, rather than to confront them. He also reminded Forum members that there were other strands to the provision of youth support services in the town, e.g. through churches, the YMCA, Voluntary Action in West Kent and CXK (delivering the Connexions service).

Adam Chalmers, TWBC's Democratic and Community Engagement Manager, added that TWBC had been working closely with Mr Walsh, who had made a recent presentation to the Borough Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Chairman of that Committee, Cllr Mrs Catherine Mayhew, had also written to the KCC Cabinet portfolio-holder responsible for youth service provision, seeking reassurance about the commitment to a permanent youth hub; she had also sought support for a relatively small increase in KCC funding, to be able to develop the current Camden Road service from two afternoons a week to three.

The Chairman thanked Mr Walsh for his presentation and responses to member questions, adding that the contribution which young people can make to the debate about the future of the town was often overlooked. He also enquired whether the Town Forum could assist in efforts to find volunteer drivers for the Steetcruizer bus. Mr Walsh advised that this facility had now been transferred by TWBC to the Weald Rural Activities Partnership. He advised that it would be very

helpful to have a few more volunteer drivers for the double-decker bus, adding that anyone interested must have obtained their driving licence before 1997.

There were no specific action points arising from this item.

8. SITE ALLOCATIONS DEVELOPMENT PLAN DOCUMENT

Philip Whitbourn, who had been appointed as the chairman of a working party, tasked with preparing a draft response to the above document, paid tribute to the hard work and effort of his group. He drew attention to page 12 of the agenda, in which he had prepared a summary of the key issues which he felt should form the basis of the Town Forum's formal response to TWBC's document. The full text of the working party's recommended response had been circulated to all Forum members ahead of the meeting.

The key issues were presented as follows:

- (a) Housing numbers – Dr Whitbourn explained how it had been agreed that there was nothing to be gained from challenging the housing figures contained in the Core Strategy. However, the working party believed that there was an over-provision set out in the Site Allocations document and that the allocation for Hawkenbury should be reduced, to accord more closely with the Core Strategy position. The consequence of that proposal, Dr Whitbourn added, would be the removal of the area to the north of Hawkenbury Road, which was within the Green Belt; in addition, it was noted, there was a recommendation that the 'area of search' for new housing at High Woods – again, within the Green Belt but also in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty – should be strongly opposed.
- (b) Retail floorspace provision – Dr Whitbourn's group felt that misgivings should be expressed about the quantity and the distribution of new shops contained in the document. Objections were also proposed for the extension of the 'primary shopping area', which covered the Assembly Hall and the Library. Dr Whitbourn went on to say that the recommended approach to the civic complex was to support the ideas envisaged in the document produced by the Leisure, Culture and Tourism Working Party ('A place of pleasure and resort'), as supported by the Town Forum. Finally on this element, Dr Whitbourn added that the working party believed that the report of the Town Plan Advisory Panel, as supported by the Town Forum at their July 2012 meeting, provided a good framework for the future of the Town Hall.
- (c) Transport – Dr Whitbourn and his working party favoured keeping options open for the possibility of connecting Tunbridge Wells to a second London to Brighton main line, based upon the former Tunbridge Wells West station. On traffic issues, attention was drawn to a response on the working party's proposed submission, from the acting chair of the Traffic Strategy Working Group, Jane Fenwick. Her working party had expressed great concern at the impact of new development on existing traffic levels, leading to further congestion; they had asked that 'traffic' and 'development' should be considered as one and not separately and asked that the Town Forum's response to the draft Transport Strategy 2012-26 (submitted to TWBC in April) should be taken into account by the Borough Council when considering responses to the Site Allocations document.

The Chairman enquired if individual resident associations and other interest groups had submitted their own responses to the Site Allocations document. Michael Holman felt that, because the topic had been so complex, inviting an e-mail response might not have been the right format. However, he added that he welcomed the proposed response of Dr Whitbourn's working party and commended the report for formal submission to TWBC.

The Chairman thanked Dr Whitbourn and all the members of his working party, for such a comprehensive outcome. Mary Wardrop added her own thanks to the working party, for their support they had shown for the community of Hawkenbury in this work.

RESOLVED – That the draft response to TWBC's Site Allocations DPD, as prepared by the working party established for this purpose, be fully endorsed and approved.

9. WORKING GROUPS

Update reports were made from the working groups as follows:

Water in the Wells Working Group – The Chairman, Michael Holman, started his update report by welcoming the announcement from the Leader of the Council regarding the shared space/Fiveways scheme water feature proposal.

He added that the working group's progress since the last meeting had been focused on the following: (i) ensuring that the vision of a spa town featured in key strategy documents wherever possible, to provide a policy 'hook' for implementing the vision of the Town Forum; (ii) engaging groups and individuals to support the spa town vision; (iii) initiating a small publicity campaign, which was featured in the Courier; and (iv) making an application to Companies House, to establish a community interest company, capable of raising and spending funds on creating water features.

On specific sites which had been identified as possible water feature locations, Prof Holman remained optimistic about: (i) the roundabout at Notcutts in Pembury; (ii) the development of Grosvenor and Hilbert Park; and (iii) the former Kent & Sussex hospital site. He was less so about Brighton Lake on the Eridge Road, where significant practical problems existed, concerning the electricity supply.

Finally, Prof Holman expressed how pleased he was with the improved appearance of the Chalybeate Spring on the Pantiles, which had been cleaned up in time for the start of the main tourist season.

Cllr Neve asked whether the Water in the Wells Working Group had access to the historical data held by the Friends of the Grosvenor and Hilbert Park, to help them in their work. Prof Holman confirmed that this was the case.

RESOLVED – That the progress report be accepted.

Leisure, Culture and Tourism Working Group – June Bridgeman, Chairman of this group, advised that the next meeting (18 June) would be focusing on issues for young people, adding that any other interested Town Forum member was welcome to attend.

Mrs Bridgeman added that her group was also looking at how to develop the souvenir offer for visitors to the town. Alex Green, from Trinity Theatre, was assisting the group in this work, by means of an on-line survey, details of which can be found from the following link:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1Dqdeoc79fMn8nUFIQpwNmvuwPfhmGzOQkHQQFN0X4vY/viewform>

RESOLVED – That the progress report be accepted.

Traffic Strategy Working Group – The acting Chairman, Jane Fenwick, reported that her group had been in discussion with the TWBC Cabinet Portfolio-holder for Planning and Transportation – Cllr Alan McDermott – and with TWBC's Head of Economic Development – David Candlin – on follow-up issues to the draft Transport Strategy 2012-26. Mrs Fenwick added that the working group was aiming to meet with Joint Transportation Board members, as well as KCC county councillors in the next few weeks, to share their continuing concerns with them. She proposed that the July meeting of the Town Forum have as its main focus a feature on transport matters.

Mrs Fenwick thanked the Borough Council for its easily-found 'Parking and travel' button on its refreshed website, (although she believed the 'pothole reporting' link required correcting). Cllr Scholes added that now was a good time to report a highway pothole, as new highway gangs had been employed. On this topic, Cllr Scott reminded Forum members of how effective the 'Looking local' mobile phone application was in reporting potholes.

RESOLVED – That the progress report be accepted.

Planning and Development Strategy – Michael Doyle, Chairman of this working group, advised that he had nothing additional to report beyond supporting Dr Whitbourn's earlier presentation.

Finance and Other Issues – David Wakefield, Chairman of this working group, advised that he had no issues to report to the wider membership.

There were no specific action points arising from the above reports.

10. TOWN FORUM REPRESENTATIVE AS OBSERVER AT MEETINGS OF THE JOINT TRANSPORTATION BOARD

Jane Fenwick proposed that the Town Forum members formally appointed to be observers at future meetings of the Joint Transportation Board (JTB) should be: Sally Balcon and herself. (Sue Kaner, it was noted, was happy to stand down from this position.)

Similarly, on the Borough Council's Public Transport Forum, Mrs Fenwick proposed that Peter Perry and Stephen Bowser become the formally-appointed observers.

Mrs Fenwick added that the next meeting of the JTB would include an item on the continuing issue of the Pembury Road/Cornford Lane traffic signals. She added that this issue highlighted her dissatisfaction with the structure of decision-making on transportation matters.

RESOLVED – That the above appointments be confirmed.

11. FUTURE CONSULTATION ISSUES

Mike McGeary had circulated a list of future consultation issues which the Borough Council would be leading on, drawn from TWBC's 'Notice of Intent to Make Key Decisions'.

Attention was drawn to the 'public realm improvements' item, which was due to be submitted to the 20 June Cabinet meeting, on which the Town Forum would be formally consulted. Michael Holman enquired about the extent of the area under consideration. Adam Chalmers advised that it would be the area around the Millennium Clock. Prof Holman asked whether this might act as a model scheme for other sites; Mr Chalmers confirmed that yes, this would provide an opportunity for the Borough Council to assess what works best and how this might be applied to other sites in the future.

There were no action points arising from this report.

12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Grosvenor and Hilbert Park – David Barnett advised that: (a) approximately 5,000 people had attended the family day held on 6 May; (b) there was just one week left before the public consultation stage on the improvement scheme ended; and (c) another event had been organised, on Sunday 9 June, entitled 'Music in the Park'.

13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Town Forum administrator advised that meetings for the remainder of the year had been arranged as follows:

Thursdays 25 July, 26 September and 28 November (to include the AGM), all starting at 6.30pm.

The meeting concluded at 8.10pm.

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Corporate and Financial Overview

To: Finance and Governance Cabinet Advisory Board

Date: 8 July 2013

Main Portfolio Area: Leader of the Council

Author of report: William Benson, Chief Executive

Classification: Non-Exempt

Ward: All Wards

SUMMARY

In June/July each year, Cabinet begins the process of formulating its key priorities and setting out its budget strategy for the following year. The Corporate and Financial Overview is intended to provide context to the accompanying paper on the Budget Strategy and to set out how the Council intends to start the process of consulting on its key priorities for the year ahead.

LINK TO STRATEGIC COMPASS

This paper both proposes some minor alterations to the existing Strategic Compass and sets out the proposed approach to developing the Council's priorities for 2013/14.

Report status

For decision

Route to Implementation/Timetable:

This report will be considered by the Cabinet on 1 August 2013.

BACKGROUND/INTRODUCTION

1. In July each year, Cabinet begins the process of formulating the Council's key priorities and budget strategy for the following year. The Chief Executive has historically produced a 'Corporate and Financial Overview' to set the backdrop against which decisions are being taken.
2. As with previous years, I have set my report out under three heading: national issues; regional and county-wide issues; and local issues.

State of the Borough

3. Before setting out details of the financial, structural and legislative challenges and opportunities facing the Council, I thought it might also be helpful to provide a brief overview of the state of the Borough and the Council based on statistics that have been released over the course of the past year and to set out progress on a number of major political priorities.
4. The Council receives a wide range of data emanating from the Census, Ward Walks, the most recent Borough-Wide Survey and other sources.
5. The data paints a remarkably positive story: Tunbridge Wells has the lowest level of crime across the whole county and the highest levels of community safety; the Census data also shows us that Tunbridge Wells has the highest proportion of residents who regard themselves as being in good health and the lowest levels of unemployment (and this is corroborated by information from JobCentre Plus). The Census also shows us that we have the best qualified/ highest skilled workforce within the county and that our population has both increased (by over 10 per cent) and that the size of households has increased. Our own data also shows us that levels of satisfaction have increased both of Tunbridge Wells as a place to live (91 per cent) and with the way in which the Council runs things. We have also improved the number of people who feel that the Council provides value for money and who are satisfied with the way in which we handle complaints.
6. We know from the Borough Survey that highways/congestion matters are issues of very high concern for residents and we have been successful in obtaining funding commitments both to dual the A21 and to implement improvements to North Farm – projects that will both ease congestion and promote economic growth. Our end of year outturn report also demonstrated that the Council had successfully delivered (or was on track to deliver) over 80 per cent of the political priority projects. Particular examples include the delivery of a 'big switch' campaign and the provision of Metro WiFi in the town centre (which will be rolled out later this year).
7. A number of other significant projects have also either commenced or been delivered since last year including TCHG undertaking a significant redevelopment of their housing stock in Sherwood, work to open up the lake and woods in Sherwood and the opening of the new Skinners' Kent Academy building. Work is underway to look at further projects including exploring whether the Library and Museum could be improved, a trial 'shared' space scheme at Fiveways and, outside the town centre, work continues to look at the provision of a community centre in Cranbrook and to improve rural broadband.

8. There are also signs that the economy is beginning to pick up in Tunbridge Wells. Whilst unemployment has remained low throughout the recession and post-recessionary period, planning applications began to rise fairly significantly during the first quarter of this calendar year. On the flip side, it is clear that times remain tough for a substantial number of residents and businesses and the impact of welfare reform is beginning to become apparent through increased arrears in council tax and increased numbers of enquiries to the Citizens' Advice Bureau.
9. We will look to produce a more comprehensive 'State of the Borough' report later in the year and Cabinet may wish to consider whether or not it could form the basis of a debate in Full Council.

National issues

10. Nationally, the Government has continued to press forward with its four key priorities of: growth, deficit reduction, public sector reform and rebalancing the economy.
11. Appendix B of the report of the Head of Finance and Governance, entitled 'Budget projection and strategy 2014/15' is attached, for the benefit of Town Forum members. It deals with the issues of growth and deficit reduction but, put simply, it is fair to say that growth has been much slower than predicted and that (partly as a result of this) the government is taking much longer than anticipated to eliminate the structural deficit. The Spending Round (which covers the period 2015-2016) has outlined a further round of reductions in departmental expenditure limits and further reductions have been forecast well into the next Parliament.
12. As Appendix B makes clear, local government has borne by far the highest proportion of cost reductions and it is probably fair to say that some government departments continue to struggle with the coalition government's commitment to devolve power and responsibility to a local level. For example, in the case of council tax benefit, government was happy to devolve responsibility for making a 10 per cent cut in council tax benefit budgets but nationally mandated a requirement to protect pensioners (which, in effect, took the reduction to the working age population to 20 per cent) and refused to allow local discretion for local schemes in other areas such as the single persons' discount scheme.
13. Similarly, in response to Lord Heseltine's recommendation that £49bn of central government expenditure should be ring-fenced to local initiatives to promote growth, the government identified just £2bn of which more than £300m was derived from New Homes Bonus which was already allocated locally. This means that the 'rules of the game' for incentivising house-building and rewarding communities that accept new houses have been changed within a space of just three years and with the money being ring-fenced to the whole of the South East LEP we could see money derived from new homes in Tunbridge Wells now being spent in Essex or East Sussex. It is very difficult to plan when the basis upon which government rewards growth and distributes finance changes so frequently.
14. The government's programme of public sector reform has also continued and a number of changes that I highlighted in last year's report have now been introduced including the election of a Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), the transfer of responsibility for public health to local authorities and various components of welfare reform all of which

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have a fundamental impact on the way we do business. Particular issues include the transfer of responsibility for Police assets to the PCC and the extent to which KCC will retain or devolve responsibility and funding for public health (and whether or not the Council has a view on this).

15. Welfare reform has had a particularly significant impact on the Council's budgets. The Council has adopted a county-wide scheme for council tax benefit that has eased the impact of the reduction in benefits for the non-protected caseload (largely the working age population) from 8.5 per cent in 2013/14 to 13.5 to 18.5 per cent over the subsequent two years. Whilst the Council has taken a number of steps to raise awareness about the changes a significant number of those paying council tax for the first time are in arrears and this will have a bearing both on the cost of collection and on the overall council tax collection rate. There are also likely to be additional costs associated with bed and breakfast accommodation as the number of homeless cases continues to rise (and this trend is likely to continue well into the future).
16. The Council continues to work with the Department of Work and Pensions to manage this and other changes (including, most significantly, the move to universal credits). It is also trying to help those affected by the changes adapt with, for example, a community switch campaign (which offers the potential for residents to save considerable sums on utility bills) and work through the 'neighbourhood community budget' to try to get families into work. Tunbridge Wells has the lowest levels of unemployment within the county but we must not be complacent.
17. Further public sector reforms have been announced, including far reaching changes to the Probation Service, which will have an impact on the Council's partnership working arrangements with regards to community safety.
18. The cuts to local authority spending are forcing many councils to consider new models of governance and there have been some radical decisions taken elsewhere to stop or massively reduce service levels or quality. Whilst there has been no formal stated objective to seek local government reorganisation, it is clear that government (or at least the Department for Communities and Local Government) is keen to promote joint working and is looking to incentivise new partnership working arrangements. Tunbridge Wells has been working in partnership for many years and, over the past five years, has focused its attention on the Mid-Kent Improvement Partnership (MKIP). Further details are provided below.

Issues for consideration

- The Council will need to consider its approach to public health. Whilst responsibility has transferred to KCC at a county level, the Primary Care Trust had historically engaged primarily at a district level and the Council has a strong track record of delivering and commissioning in this area. KCC's funding allocation took account of the fact that the west of the county had historically been underfunded.

Regional/County Issues

19. The Government continues to promote growth through Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and, in particular, through a series of 'City Deals'. Tunbridge Wells is currently part of the South East LEP that comprises Kent, Essex and East Sussex. Discussions are currently underway to determine whether or not the LEP should adopt a more federated approach and also as to whether or not Kent and Medway should seek a 'Growth Deal' for Kent. Tunbridge Wells BC is collaborating with a number of other councils to produce a paper on this for Kent Leaders to consider. I will provide further information on this as the direction of travel becomes clearer.
20. Last year, I provided details of KCC's proposals for district-based Locality Boards. Our Board has met on a regular basis and has been extremely useful in establishing and driving forward local priorities and this has led to action on North Farm and a commitment to explore the possibility of enhancing the Museum and Art Gallery. Following the election, KCC has changed its approach to Locality Boards but we have agreed that a very similar arrangement will continue locally in Tunbridge Wells.
21. In addition to local issues, TWBC continues to work with KCC and other districts on a variety of other issues including troubled families and the LEP (see above). Last year I reported that the Council had been selected as the only district-led 'Community Budget pilot' and we successfully delivered a set of proposals to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) earlier in the year and are now working with them to discuss how the proposals can be delivered on the ground.
22. Perhaps the most significant area of partnership working is with MKIP (the Mid-Kent Improvement Partnership) where, together with Maidstone and Swale borough councils, we continue to work together to improve the quality and resilience of services and to reduce their cost. As I explained last year, over 150 staff are now employed by MKIP services with savings of £5.5m projected to be delivered over a five-year period. Since last year's report, the joint ICT service has gone live and agreement has been reached to implement two new partnerships in Environmental Health and Planning Support.

Issues for consideration

- The Council should continue to maintain a watching brief on progress with the Local Enterprise Partnership and, in particular, whether or not we should seek to become part of a 'Growth Deal' with Government.
- Partnership working continues to offer significant opportunities for savings and, in particular resilience. Cabinet will need to maintain a watching brief on developments within the Mid-Kent Improvement Partnership and make a decision on which services it is willing/not willing to see delivered in partnership with other local authorities. More work is also needed to communicate next steps to staff and councillors.

Local issues

23. The Council last agreed a 'Vision' in 2008. It is fair to say that a great deal has changes since then (most notably the economic downturn) and it has been apparent for some time that we need to revisit the Council's Vision. The Council's Overview and Scrutiny

Committee has undertaken a review of the Vision and come up with a number of very sensible recommendations and the Leader has agreed to work up a five-year Vision for the Borough. This should be complete some time in the Autumn.

24. In the meantime, the Council has agreed a slimmed-down set of political priorities which are in the process of being delivered.

Issues for consideration

- Cabinet has agreed a slimmed down list of political priority projects and the Leader is in the process of producing a draft Vision for the Council.

WHAT IS THE ISSUE THAT REQUIRES A DECISION?

25. This report is largely for information but it does set out a number of issues for consideration alongside the report on the Budget Strategy.

WHO HAVE WE CONSULTED AND HOW? (OR WHO WILL WE CONSULT FOLLOWING THE DECISION?)

26. The budget will be subject to consultation in its own right and the Strategic Compass has already been subject to a major public consultation exercise.

HOW WILL THE DECISION BE COMMUNICATED?

27. Decisions on priorities and the budget will be communicated to staff on a regular basis through road shows and blogs and to members via the Member Bulletin. Externally, they will be communicated through a variety of means including newspaper articles, Local magazine and the Council's website as well as briefings to interest groups and the like.

CONCLUSIONS

28. The Council continues to operate within an extremely challenging environment with significant reductions to its grant and huge changes to the public sector landscape. Whilst there are signs that the economy is beginning to pick up locally this is not and will not be experienced universally and issues such as welfare reform will continue to pose significant challenges for many of our residents. The funding outlook for the Council remains bleak but strong relationships with partners (most notably KCC and MKIP) provide us with an opportunity both to reduce costs and improve resilience and to deliver on a number of vital political priorities.

RECOMMENDATION:

That Cabinet notes the backdrop against which the budget strategy will be developed and that further briefings be provided to members on a range of issues including the Mid-Kent Improvement Partnership.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION:

It is vital that the Council takes account of likely changes to the environment in which it will be operating and that decisions on the budget strategy are informed by priorities being set and pursued by the Council.

Contact Officer: William Benson, Chief Executive

William Benson, Chief Executive

Background Papers

Previous Corporate and Financial Overview papers

APPENDICES TO REPORT

Appendix B – 5 year budget projections

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Appendix A

5 YEAR BUDGET PROJECTIONS

APPENDIX B

Year	Annual (Surplus) / Deficit	Explanation
	£000s	
2013/14	0	Balanced without use of general reserves
1 2014/15	657	Year 4 of Spending Review Grant Cuts
2 2015/16	1,317	SR 2013 & End of 2011/12 Council Tax Freeze Grant
3 2016/17	2,316	Increase in National Insurance due to State Pension Reform
4 2017/18	2,704	Year on year cuts in Government Grant of 8.5 per cent
5 2018/19	3,326	Year on year cuts in Government Grant of 8.5 per cent
NET 5 YEAR (SURPLUS)/ DEFICIT	10,320	IMPACT ON THE GENERAL FUND

Changes to MTFS

- 1 These projections assume Council Tax is frozen each year
- 2 Fees and Charges income is forecast to increase by 2% each year.
- 3 Existing Car Park Income is frozen.
- 4 Savings from further partnership working have been included.
- 5 New Homes Bonus for years 1 to 3 are included in the base budget
- 6 The revenue costs of a new ICT Strategy are included up to 2016/17.
- 7 Assumes no reserve funding in base budget.
- 8 Business Rate growth of 1% has been assumed for each year from 2013/14
- 9 Government Grant will be cut by a further £657,000 in 2014/15 as per CSR10, then £350,000 as per SR 2013 then by 8.5 per annum.

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ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

Thursday 25 July 2013

HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORTION IN TUNBRIDGE WELLS

Introduction

- (1) In January this year, the Borough Council began a formal public consultation process into its draft Transport Strategy 2012-26; the consultation process is now complete. An interim report on the consultation feedback was made to the TWBC/KCC Joint Transportation Board on 15 July.

Town Forum's response

- (2) The Town Forum's Traffic Strategy Working Group made a presentation to the full Town Forum at the 9 January meeting, setting out their initial thoughts and views on the draft Strategy. Having noted the comments made by Town Forum members at that stage, the working group next prepared a proposed response to the draft Transport Strategy, which was circulated to all Town Forum members for final comment, before its submission to the Borough Council in March.
- (3) In order to further the dialogue between TWBC, KCC and the Town Forum, Jane Fenwick, Stephen Bowser and Peter Perry met on 1 July with the KCC Chairman of the Joint Transportation Board (JTB) (County Councillor Alex King), the JTB Vice-Chairman (Borough Councillor Nicholas Rogers), as well as Chad Nwanosike and Hilary Smith. The purpose of that meeting had been to explain in more detail where the Town Forum felt that the draft Strategy could be developed further.
- (4) In order to follow up on some of the key highways and transport issues identified by the Traffic Strategy Working Group and in order to explain how TWBC and KCC work together on highways and transportation, a number of leading KCC and TWBC elected members, supported by senior officers from both authorities, will be in attendance at the 25 July Town Forum meeting.
- (5) The following have confirmed their attendance:
 - County Councillor Matthew Balfour, Deputy to the Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment, Kent County Council
 - Chad Nwanosike, Senior Transport Planner, Kent County Council
 - Borough Councillor Alan McDermott, Cabinet Portfolio-holder for Planning and Transportation
 - Hilary Smith, TWBC's Economic Development Manager

Purpose of discussion at Town Forum meeting on 25 July

- (6) The purpose of the discussion on 25 July will be to hear how highways and transportation issues are jointly managed by KCC and TWBC. The discussion will therefore provide an explanation of the decision-making structure and how the Town Forum can participate through regular dialogue.

Agenda Item 7

Format of discussion

- (7) It is recommended that the following format be followed, with Jane Fenwick, Acting Chairman of the Traffic Strategy Working Group, assuming the chair for this item:

Topic	Led by	Time
(a) Introduction	Jane Fenwick	5 mins
(b) An overview from Kent County Council and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council on how highways and transportation issues are managed	Chad Nwanosike (KCC) and Hilary Smith (TWBC)	10 mins
(c) The political position – from KCC and TWBC	KCC Councillor Matthew Balfour and TWBC Councillor Alan McDermott	10 mins
(d) Open discussion by Town Forum members		20 mins
(e) Conclusion	Jane Fenwick	5 mins

ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

WATER IN THE WELLS WORKING GROUP

Progress report for Town Forum Meeting 25 July 2013

Since I last reported to the Town Forum (23 May 2013, item 9) the Working Group has held one meeting on 25 June. A further meeting is planned for 31 July.

I am pleased to report that:

1. A Community Interest Company (Water in the Wells CIC) has been incorporated. The CIC's stated activities include contributing to the design, construction, installation, maintenance and operation of water features in and around Royal Tunbridge Wells in order to promote the regeneration of the town's spa-town heritage. The CIC proposes to approach sponsors for money to support these activities. It is currently seeking pro bono assistance with publicity and fund-raising activities.
2. The Working Group awaits responses from TWBC to submissions made on a series of sites included in the Site Allocations Development Plan Document (SADP) and having potential for the incorporation of water features.
3. So as to make them aware of the benefit of including water features, the Working Group continues to engage with influential individuals and local firms that have development plans.
4. The Working Group welcomes the planned 'decluttering' of the Five Ways by TWBC in conjunction with KCC and wholeheartedly supports the declared intention of the Leader of the Council to incorporate a water feature in the eagerly awaited refurbishment of this central meeting point.
5. A 'Courier' 'Heart of the Community Award' of £1,000 has helped the St George's Community Project to install a fine, stainless steel spherical water feature in the children's playground. ('Courier' 12 July 2013, p. 22).
6. The Grosvenor and Hilbert Park Heritage Lottery Fund bid, soon to be submitted, includes three separate but related water features: regeneration of the Victorian 'Dripping Wells', dredging the lake and restoring its brick surrounds, and the creation of a major wetland feature.
7. The Working Group urgently needs help from individuals with publicity and fund-raising expertise.
8. Detailed proposals for the first water feature have been prepared by the Working Group. The costs for the installation have been established and the costs of maintenance of this project will be available shortly.

Michael Holman (Chairman, 16 July 2013)

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Extract from latest version of ‘Notice of Intent to Make Key Decisions’, summarising issues on which TWBC will be consulting in 2013 (including existing consultations*)

Cabinet:

Advisory Board:

Lead Officer:

(a) Leader of the Council: David Jukes

(Draft) Strategic Plan 2014/15 – start of consultation process

5 December

Finance & Governance
11 November

Holly Goring

(b) Finance and Governance Portfolio-holder: Councillor James Scholes

Setting of fees and charges 2014/15

21 November

Finance & Governance
11 November

Lee Colyer

(c) Tourism, Leisure and Economic Development Portfolio Holder: Councillor Jane March

Destination Management Plan

12 September

Communities, 21 Aug

David Candlin

(d) Planning & Transportation Portfolio Holder: Councillor Alan McDermott

Borough Transportation Strategy – to agree final document

24 October

Planning & Transportation, David Candlin
1 October

Tunbridge Wells Parking Strategy – start of consultation

5 December

Planning & Transportation, Kevin Hetherington
12 November

Parking fees and charges 2014/15 – start of consultation

24 October

Planning & Transportation Kevin Hetherington
1 October

(Draft) Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) – preliminary charging schedule 16 January 2014 Planning & Transportation James Freeman
17 December

(e) Health, Wellbeing & Rural Communities Portfolio Holder: Councillor John Cunningham

Housing Waiting List Management – consultation response 12 September Communities, 21 August Kevin Hetherington

(f) Joint Portfolio-holders: (i) Leader of the Council and (ii) Finance and Governance: David Jukes and James Scholes

Non-performing property and land assets – consideration of proposals from parish and town councils and/or ward members 18 October Finance & Governance David Candlin
30 October

Kevin Hetherington: Head of Communities and Wellbeing
James Freeman: Head of Planning
Lee Colyer: Head of Finance and Governance

David Candlin: Head of Economic Development
Holly Goring: Policy, Performance & Partnerships Manager