

Ashford Borough Council

Minutes of a Meeting of the Ashford Borough Council held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **18th April 2013**

Present:

His Worshipful the Mayor, Councillor R K Davidson (Chairman);

Cllrs. Adby, Adley, Apps, Bartlett, Mrs Bell, Bell, Bennett, Mrs Blanford, Britcher, Buchanan, Burgess, Chilton, Clark, Clarkson, Claughton, Clokie, Davey, Davison, Mrs Dyer, Feacey, Galpin, Heyes, Hicks, Hodgkinson, Link, Mrs Martin, Michael, Mortimer, Robey, Shorter, Sims, Smith, Taylor, Wedgbury, Yeo.

Prior to the commencement of the meeting:-

1. His Worshipful the Mayor asked Members to remain standing in silence for the late Peter John Friederich Wood who was the Member of the Borough Council for the Saxon Shore Ward from 2003 and the Leader of the Council since November 2010 and who had recently passed away.
2. The Reverend Alan Dinnie said prayers.

Apologies:

Cllrs. French, Mrs Heyes, Howard, Mrs Hutchinson, Marriott.

Also Present:

Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive, Head of Legal & Democratic Services, Member Services and Scrutiny Manager, Senior Communications Officer.

403 Exempt or Confidential Information

The Mayor asked whether any items should be dealt with in private because of the likely disclosure of exempt or confidential information. There were none.

404 Declarations of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Hicks	Announced an "Other Interest" as she had been appointed the Council's representative on the Ashford Leisure Trust.	410

405 Minutes

In accordance with Procedure Rule 9.3 Mr Relf, a local resident, spoke on the Minutes of the Council Meeting held on the 21st February 2013. He referred to Minute No. 335 – Minutes and asked how many licenses had been issued for HMO's at Kings Prospect, Willesborough, off Fairview Drive, near the Ashford Market. He explained that at the last meeting he had submitted the incorrect postcode.

Councillor Hicks, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Customer Services said there were eight licensed HMO's at Kings Prospect, Willesborough.

Mr Relf then referred to Minute No. 337(a) – Cabinet 10th January 2013 and said that in the year ending 30th September 2012 the crime rate in Ashford was higher than the average crime rate across similar areas such as Maidstone and Canterbury. This was based on crimes per 1,000 residents. Mr Relf said that now it had been established that all crime in certain areas, including Chilmington Caravan Site, were not being recorded correctly and he said this included fly-tipping, which was a crime despite what the Police had informed him. He questioned whether this was failings on the Environmental Department for not providing relevant data to the Home Office to be noted and recorded properly. He therefore asked whether he was right to assume if the correct data was recorded, Ashford could have the worst crime rate in Kent. He also asked how many convictions had Ashford Borough Council fully fulfilled concerning fly-tipping in the last three years.

The Portfolio Holder for the Environment said that she would like to advise Mr Relf that whilst fly-tipping was included within the general definition of anti-social behaviour, the statistics for fly-tipping were not included within the Police crime statistics. The method of classification used for Ashford was no different to that of other districts. Were they to include fly-tipping then their figures would also correspondingly increase. She said that so no Ashford did not have the worst, or anything like it in terms of crime statistics. Ashford's statistics for fly-tipping actually showed a decrease over the last two years and she said that she had no doubt that the correct data was supplied and could advise that no prosecutions had been taken by the Borough Council in the last three years. As far as the Kent Crime statistics were concerned the Portfolio Holder said that the current Police data pack showed Ashford as having stable performance and was ranked sixth highest out of twelve areas, not including Medway. Irrespective of how fly-tipping incidents were recorded, Councillor Mrs Blanford stressed that anti-social behaviour and environmental crime was a priority for the Borough Council, and also for its key safety partners, including the Police, Fire and Rescue and Kent County Council. She advised that an activity that one would soon hear about was a new mobile App called "Report It" that the Council was developing whereby the public would be able to instantly report anti-social behaviour. This would help identify problems quickly and conveniently for all the Borough's residents.

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on the 21st February 2013 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

406 Election of the Leader of the Council until the Annual General Meeting in 2015

Councillor Galpin proposed that “Councillor Clarkson be elected Leader of the Council until the Annual General Meeting in 2015”.

This was seconded by Councillor Robey.

Resolved:

That Councillor Clarkson be elected Leader of the Council until the Annual General Meeting in 2015.

The Leader of the Council said he wished to thank everyone for the responsibility and trust they had placed in him on being appointed to the position of Leader of the Council. He said that for his part he would endeavour to discharge those duties in a professional and meaningful way. He explained that he intended to operate in an inclusive and focused way. He said that Ashford had to continue to deliver quality services and be ready to understand the difficulties being faced by the Borough's residents and businesses in the uncertain economic climate. Whilst he readily accepted that Ashford was a growth area, and that the Council had a Core Strategy and a Development Plan, he firmly believed that it was very important that every planning application for any specific type of development was examined closely to ensure that the Council was doing their very best for the Borough of Ashford and for those who worked or lived in the Borough. The Leader said that in addition there were a number of things which needed attention, and indeed the Council's own intervention, if economic activity was to be stimulated and the Borough improved.

Councillor Davison said he wished to congratulate the Leader of the Council on his election, and explained he was pleased to hear that it would be an inclusive Council and that there would be cross party working with new Committees, a Councillor lead Council and unique opportunities like Conningbrook taken up and skills based initiatives developed through education which he believed all could support.

407 To Note the Names and Number of Members to be Appointed by the Leader to the Cabinet

Councillor Clarkson advised that the Cabinet would be comprised of the Leader, Deputy Leader and eight other Portfolio Holders and he had appointed the following Members to the Portfolio positions indicated:-

Deputy Leader Community and Wellbeing	Councillor Claughton
Tourism and the Rural Economy	Councillor Mrs Bell
Culture and the Environment	Councillor Mrs Blanford
Town Centre and Urban Economy	Councillor Galpin
Transportation, Highways and	Councillor Heyes

Engineering

Housing and Customer Services	Councillor Hicks
Young and the Elderly	Councillor Howard
Planning and Development	Councillor Robey
Resource Management and Control	Councillor Shorter

408 Deputy Leader of the Council

Councillor Clarkson advised that he had appointed Councillor Claughton as Deputy Leader of the Council.

409 Announcements

(a) The Mayor's Raffle

The Mayor explained that at the rear of the Council Chamber was a little box of raffle tickets which had been distributed to all Members. He said that for each Member who contributed to the raffle Barclays Bank had said that they would double the overall amount raised by Members. He therefore asked Members to be generous as it would all help towards the overall amount available for distribution to Charities at the end of his Mayoral Year.

(b) Leader of the Council

The Leader of the Council said that most Councillors, if not all, would be aware that there was an unfortunate disclosure by email of certain confidential information to third parties by a colleague in the aftermath of the Waste/Recycling Contract decision in October. Formal Code of Conduct complaints were lodged with the Council's Monitoring Officer and an investigation was commenced. He said that during the course of this the colleague Councillor put forward an unreserved apology which was regarded as acceptable and the Leader said he was pleased to say that a line could now be drawn under the matter. The matter, with the apology, would be reported through the Council's Standards Committee in accordance with the adopted procedures.

On more general issues the Leader said there had been a number of exciting developments recently and that he would like to take the opportunity to update Members upon them. He said that colleagues would have noted that John Lewis had announced that they would be starting work on a new At Home store next week. John Lewis was a household name with a strong reputation for quality and the Leader considered it would be a real feather in the cap for Ashford. They were exactly the type of Company the Council wished to attract and he believed that this was another sign of growing confidence in the town as a place to invest. Another important development was the renovation of Charter House. When Ashford Borough Council had granted planning permission in the autumn of 2012 they had wanted to breathe new life into the unoccupied building, creating new employment opportunities and giving added life and vitality to that part of the town centre.

The Leader advised that in the previous week Ashford had appointed a Town Team Manager to help revitalise the town centre into a prosperous and appealing place. The Town Team's aim was to establish a new focus for Ashford town centre and this role would help to support them and the local business community to achieve this. At the end of March a new section of exhibits displaying Ashford's proud railway history had opened. The Leader explained that in the previous year the Council had agreed to lease the former Tourist Information Centre in the Churchyard to the Ashford Borough Museum Society and now visitors to the attraction were greeted by a replica ticket and booking office, incorporating a working model railway donated by Hornby, plus interactive displays about the town's railway history and information about modern services, including high speed trains and Eurostar.

Finally, on Tuesday of the week, the Borough had welcomed Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal to the Borough. The Leader said he was pleased that the Princess Royal had taken time from her busy schedule to come and see the product of the excellent joint working relationship between the Council and the English Rural Housing Association. The Royal visit helped to raise the profile of this vital aspect of the Council's housing work in rural communities.

The Mayor also said that he would like it to be recorded that he would formally like to welcome the return of Peacocks to the town centre.

(c) Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Community and Wellbeing

The Deputy Leader said that Members would be only too well aware that the 2012 Welfare Reform Act represented the biggest change to social welfare in the last 60 years, and he said that it was the Council's job to do its very best to carry out these Governmental changes in a responsible and understanding way. He explained that since last summer the Council had been preparing for these changes which had been officially introduced on the 1st April this year, making people fully aware of what was being proposed. Working hard to ensure that the Council were well ahead of the game by communicating the details of these changes to residents and stakeholders. In addition the Council had been very proactive on the issue of under occupation in social housing in both verbal and written form with residents, with more work to come on universal credit and proposals under consideration to increase further the avenues of communication which was essential. A team of officers from departments across the Council met regularly, with input from a representative from the Department of Work and Pensions to discuss operational challenges to ensure that the right message were being communicated and that the Council was cognisant of the changes, so those members of the community who were required support the most, i.e. the vulnerable and disabled got precisely that support. Meetings continued to be held with colleagues from Parish Councils and the Council had teamed up with the voluntary sector at discussion groups and press briefings. Indeed he said only that day he had met with the Deputy Chief Executive and the Chief Executive and Chairman of Trustees of the Citizens' Advice Bureau.

He explained that there was no endless pot of gold but the Council was doing everything within its resources to assist the residents. The message was simple that the Council were here to help to advise and to support and he said that he was

determined that this would continue to be the case as more of the changes to welfare took effect. He said there was nothing compassionate about leaving a generation to stagnate on welfare or to be solely reliant on the dependency culture.

The Deputy Leader then said on welfare of a slightly different form, and again from the beginning of April 2013 GP's had become responsible for planning combined services for patients when they had taken control of £130m annual medical budget for the 121,000 people living in Ashford. Thus the Primary Care Trust had been replaced by the Ashford Clinical Commissioning Group as part of a national reorganisation of the NHS. The group was made up of all the areas' 16 GP practices and were represented by a sixteen strong governing body of six elected GP's, a nurse and two lay members, supported by a small team of experienced Health Managers. The Ashford Clinical Commissioning Group was one of eight in Kent and Medway and was chaired by Dr. Navin Kumta, who was a GP at the Willesborough Health Centre, whose aim was to ensure that everyone got fast, responsive, high quality integrated health care, especially in the current economic climate. The Deputy Leader said that GP's clearly understood what services were like for their patients and they recognised that listening to and acting on what mattered to local people was the key. Over the past year or so the Commissioning Group had been working hard behind the scenes preparing for the NHS changes and in matters relating to amongst others, eye care, gynaecology, emergency care and ever increasing threat posed by diabetes. With GP's now very much in the driving seat and with patients being involved every step of the way, and by those meetings being held in public, the Deputy Leader said that by working together there was every reason to believe that better health provision could be created for everyone.

The Deputy Leader then said that the Council's own Health and Wellbeing Board, (HWB) was now established and which he chaired, and that final membership was in the process of being sorted out. He explained that key members were Ashford Borough Council, Kent County Council Social Services and Public Health CCG, Health Watch and a Patient Participation Representative. The terms of reference were being developed in accordance with a template for Health and Wellbeing across Kent. Whereas before Local Authorities had been very much in the back seat, as far as communication and provision of health care was concerned they were now, through the HWB taking a far more proactive role and along with the Integrated Commissioning Group which had been established to undertake the drawing together of what were the common health and wellbeing priorities, with a strong focus on Ashford, he believed that the Council were very much on the right track in terms of local future health provision.

In conclusion, the Deputy Leader said that the Designated Public Places Order had come into effect on 31st March and covered the whole town centre and Victoria Park areas. About 60 signs had been placed in locations agreed with the Police, Kent Highways and Planning Officers. Press releases had been issued and the Police had agreed to ensure that it was one of their actions on the Tactical Delivery Plan. This would be reviewed periodically by the Community Safety Partnership as part of the Tactical Delivery Plan and a report would be going to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee shortly. So whilst the consumption of alcohol in the designated area was still permitted, the message could not be clearer, drink in moderation and drink responsibly.

410 Cabinet – 14th March 2013

Resolved:

- That (i) the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 14th March 2013 be received and noted with the exception of Minute Nos. 387 and 388.
- (ii) Minutes Nos. 387 and 388 be approved and adopted.

411 Audit Committee – 5th March 2013

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit Committee held on the 5th March 2013 be received and noted.

412 Changes to Committee Membership – Labour Group

The meeting considered the report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services which advised of changes in the Committee Membership of the Labour Group following the By-Election for the Beaver Ward on the 28th February 2013 and the subsequent election of Councillor Britcher to the vacant seat.

Resolved:

That the changes to the membership of the various Committees, Groups and Task Groups as set out in the report and as advised by the Leader of the Labour Group be approved.

413 Questions by Members of which Notice has been given

- (a) Question from Councillor Sims to Councillor Clarkson, Leader of the Council.

“My question is based on the fact that the National Planning Policy Framework at paragraph 53 advises Local Authorities to consider setting out specific policies to resist inappropriate residential garden development. Ashford has been prone to this type of development, not only in the north of the Borough as my question says, I have learnt since throughout the Borough. Does not the Portfolio Holder for Planning agree that Ashford should indeed have such a policy in order to prevent further harm to the local area, and especially harm to the environment that larger gardens provide for wildlife and also to lay down a marker for the developers not to waste their time and our time in putting proposals forward?”

Reply by Councillor Clarkson

“Mr Mayor I thank Councillor Sims for his question. It is very pertinent. The problem of inappropriate development being proposed in back garden areas is a common one around the country. National policy is clear there is no presumption either in favour or against such proposals. Inevitably each case will raise different site specific issues. Sometimes sensible design can make back garden development acceptable. Often the impact of the development is simply unacceptable. In line with the National Guidance the Planning Task Group will be considering a potential policy response during the process of reviewing the Core Strategy to make sure that unacceptable back garden development is resisted, so really in answer to Councillor Sims, yes a very good point, and that policy will be drafted to ensure we do not have that sort of development.”

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