

# Ashford Borough Council

Minutes of a Meeting of the Ashford Borough Council held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **28<sup>th</sup> May 2015**.

## Present:

His Worshipful the Mayor, Councillor J S Link (Chairman);

Cllrs. Aaby, Apps, Barrett, Mrs Bell, Bell, Bennett, Mrs Blanford, Bradford, Britcher, Buchanan, Burgess, Chilton, Clarkson, Clokie, Mrs Dyer, Farrell, Feacey, Galpin, Heyes, Mrs Heyes, Hicks, Hooker, Howard, Knowles, Koowaree, Krause, Miss Martin, Mrs Martin, Michael, Ovenden, Pickering, Shorter, Sims, Smith, Waters, Webb, White.

Prior to the commencement of the meeting: -

- (i) the Reverend Eileen Harrop said prayers.
- (ii) His Worshipful the Mayor advised that the meeting was being recorded by AHBS Community Radio 107.1FM for broadcast at the weekend.

## Apologies:

Cllrs. Bartlett, Powell, Wedgbury.

## Also Present:

Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive, Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Head of Culture and the Environment, Head of Finance, Head of Community and Housing, Head of Planning and Development, Head of Environmental and Customer Services, Member Services and Scrutiny Manager, Principal Solicitor for Property and Projects, Senior Member Services and Scrutiny Support Officer.

## 1 Election of Mayor

Councillor Mrs Blanford nominated Councillor Mrs Geraldine Dyer for election as Mayor of Ashford Borough Council for the forthcoming municipal year.

This was seconded by Councillor Clokie.

Councillor Mrs Blanford said that it was a privilege for her to be able to propose Councillor Mrs Geraldine Dyer to be the next Mayor of Ashford, the latest one in a long line since 1974. She said that Geraldine was a fairly quiet Member of the Council who did not go around telling everybody about herself, so she wanted to give a little bit of background information.

She said Geraldine was born in Redhill which made them both Surrey girls. She was brought up in Croydon and attended St Anne's School where she studied languages in the sixth form and went on to Exeter University to read German and Italian. On leaving University she decided to make a career in teaching and did a year's teacher training diploma at Goldsmith's College in London. Her first teaching post was at a school in Dagenham where she taught languages to 11-18 year olds for four years.

She certainly threw herself in at the deep end which showed real stamina and she would have learnt a few tricks that would help keep the Members in order at future Council meetings should they become unruly!

Councillor Mrs Blanford said that in 1973 Geraldine married Brian and they were still happily together after 42 years of marriage. They had met at University, with Brian reading languages, and although they were both from Croydon, strangely they had not known each other prior to that. From 1973 to 1978 Brian and Geraldine lived in Maidstone with Brian teaching PE in Chatham and also playing football in London and Dover, while Geraldine taught at the Towers School in Kennington where she was also connected with Ashford's Twinning arrangements. Later she taught for 15 years at Highworth Grammar School for Girls teaching French and Grammar. In 1978 they had the good sense to move from Maidstone to the Ashford Borough and the even better sense to move to Smarden – one of the prettiest, most filmed, photographed and friendliest villages in the Weald – and she should know as she lived there for 27 years! While in Smarden, Geraldine and Brian brought up their two children, Christopher who lived in Pluckley and ran his own water softening business, and Jennifer, who was a Lecturer at Leeds University.

When she retired from Highworth, Geraldine showed an exemplary community spirit volunteering for a while for the Samaritans and the Kent Mediation Service. She was still a volunteer for the Pilgrims Hospice. In Smarden she was involved in the community by being an Administrator for the Charter Hall (a rather grand Village Hall!), running the computer club, as a trustee for the very active local history society and as Smarden's correspondent for the Kentish Express. She was also a member of the WI, the short mat bowls club and played tennis. Councillor Mrs Blanford said that she was sure that this combination of academic and community skills would help Geraldine in her new role and she wished her a very enjoyable year.

Councillor Clokie said it was his great pleasure to second the nomination of Councillor Mrs Geraldine Dyer as Mayor of the Borough of Ashford for the forthcoming year.

He said he had been told that Geraldine had a very interesting sense of humour and he thought the Council would certainly look forward to seeing that in the coming year. He considered everyone would be in for a very enjoyable Mayoral year and he was happy to second the nomination.

There were no other nominations.

**Resolved:**

**That Councillor Mrs Geraldine Dyer be elected Mayor of the Borough of Ashford for the Municipal Year 2015/2016.**

## **2 Declaration of Acceptance of Office by the Mayor**

Councillor Mrs Dyer made her Declaration of Acceptance of Office. The retiring Mayor, the Chief Executive, the newly elected Mayor and her Chaplain then left the meeting. Upon their return, having been invested with her chains of office Her Worshipful the Mayor, Councillor Mrs Geraldine Dyer assumed the Chair.

### **3 Appointment of Mayor's Chaplain**

Her Worshipful the Mayor said that her Chaplain for the coming year would be the Reverend Catherine Wilson. The Reverend Wilson then said prayers.

### **4 Vote of Thanks by the Mayor for Her Election**

Her Worshipful the Mayor began by thanking Councillors and Officers for the support, help and advice they had given her over her last four years as a Councillor. They had been immensely supportive and she said she certainly could not have done the job without that. She also wanted to thank those people for the trust they had put in her in allowing her to represent the Borough and the Council as the Mayor and those people who had come along to support both her and the outgoing Mayor this evening. Finally she wanted to thank her husband who had been a fantastic help to her, particularly over the last four years. He had shown huge patience and they were hopeful that together they would be able to work to promote and support the wonderful Borough of Ashford. She intended to carry on the tradition of past Mayors in this regard.

She said it was an honour and a privilege to serve Ashford. It was a great place to live and work and recent residents' surveys had shown very high levels of satisfaction with both the Borough and the Council itself. They were therefore obviously doing something right at the moment. It was a very exciting place to be with some wonderful new things emerging such as Conningbrook Country Park, the extension to the Outlet Centre, amazing rail links to London and the rest of Europe and of course the new College in the town. This all made for a very exciting time and she was looking forward to supporting and being a part of that in the coming year as it happened.

Her Worshipful the Mayor said that as everybody knew each Mayor was able to support some charities during their year. She had chosen Find a Voice and the Pilgrims Hospice (Ashford). She had not heard of Find a Voice until recently but she had been so impressed with what they did. They provided life enhancing advice, equipment and training to people with communication difficulties. This could be for a variety of reasons such as autism, strokes, multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy etc. They had a resource centre in South Ashford which had the most amazing devices from the simplest of toys for children up to some very sophisticated communication equipment. It had been run by some very dedicated volunteers since 1996 and she was pleased to say that this was her first charity for the year. Secondly, it had been mentioned by Councillor Mrs Blanford that she was a volunteer at Pilgrims Hospice and they would be her second charity. She had been a volunteer at the Ashford Hospice since it opened in 2001 and as everybody knew they did amazing work which she had witnessed first-hand and they were totally reliant on donations. The volunteers worked very hard to fund raise and keep the Hospice as good as it was, which was the most amazing standard of care and support for those people who needed it.

She said she wanted to thank John and Jill Link for everything they had done during their Mayoral year. She said she used to look at their engagement sheet each week to see what they were doing and she thought the sheer number of events that they attended had been unbelievable and she wondered how she would ever be able to do as much as they did! The huge amount of engagements they had attended had all been pursued with smiling faces and kind words for everybody. They were

universally liked and respected and would be a hard act to follow. She also wanted to thank Catherine, her Chaplain, for taking on the role and the commitment involved.

Her Worshipful the Mayor concluded by once again thanking everybody for her election and for being such a nice bunch of people!

## **5 Vote of Thanks to the Retiring Mayor and Mayoress**

Councillor Galpin began his speech by congratulating Councillor Mrs Dyer on her appointment as Mayor of Ashford and offered his best wishes to her and her Consort for a successful Mayoral year.

Councillor Galpin said he would like to propose a vote of thanks to the retiring Mayor and Mayoress John Link and his wife Jill.

The year had been an interesting one. It had started with a bang, well at least a smoulder, when the High Sheriff's reception had been abandoned due to a fire in the marquee. If only there had been trained fire fighters in the Council who could have given them some advice! Over the last 12 months John and Jill had been very busy and had seen all human and animal life (well at least a statue of a tiger) across the Ashford Borough. It had been a year when they had remembered the beginning of World War I, a hundred years ago, as well as somewhat ironically the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Ashford's twinning with Bad Munstereifel in Germany and John had played a full and important part in both events. The year all but finished last weekend with his "soft opening" of the Conningbrook Lakes Country Park, which would be a vital leisure project for Ashford's residents.

He said this had been John's second time as Mayor of Ashford. He had also been Mayor of Tenterden four times which he thought meant he had won it outright and would get to keep the chains! He was personally glad to have this opportunity to recognise John's contribution. His previous period as Mayor had coincided with Councillor Galpin's term as Chairman of the Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce and they had attended many functions together, with John carrying the Mayoral chain with great honour. Their last joint function, with him as a Councillor this time had been only two weeks ago when John had kick started the "Heart of Ashford" – an animated sculpture in Park Mall.

Councillor Galpin said that John had had to park many of his own outside interests this year, however he had used his golfing connections at London Beach so that they were able to host events as fund raisers for his charities which he understood had been very successful. Perhaps he would now again have time to utilise those golf clubs in the garage rather than letting them gather dust and get his handicap back under control. He was told he also liked to bowl and with the weather looking good he hoped he could get that going again as well.

Councillor Galpin concluded by thanking John and Jill for their inestimable contribution to the life of the Borough. He looked forward to continuing to work with him for the next four years in whatever role he took on (or was thrust upon him!) In the meantime he advised him to sit back and have a bit of a rest – well until Monday anyway!

Councillor Clarkson said he would like to congratulate Councillor Mrs Dyer on her appointment as First Citizen of the Borough and he was sure her and her Consort would equip themselves well and represent the Borough in a dignified way this year.

He said he had witnessed a number of Mayors over the last decade and he had to say that John and Jill had been exemplary. He had attended quite a number of their many functions and they had been a great credit to the Borough. There was no doubt there was a large number of volunteer and other small groups, people both young and old and those with difficulties and not in the best of health, who had all benefitted from John's commitment to attend all those functions. He knew in his own Ward of Charing alone John had attended several times in the year and the Mayoralty being able to commit to all those groups was marvellous. He said he wasn't so sure about the golf as now that he was free from the Mayoral role, John had been put on quite a number of Committees and was chairing one or two! Councillor Clarkson concluded by congratulating John and Jill and thanking them for their year.

## **6 Response by the Retiring Mayor**

Councillor Link said in the first instance he wanted to congratulate Councillor Mrs Dyer on becoming Mayor of Ashford Borough and he hoped her and her husband would have a very successful year, although it would be hard work! He said he would also like to thank Members for allowing him to be the Mayor for a second time. Having done it before he thought it would be easy second time around, but this time had actually been a lot busier. They had been to fetes, dog shows, flower festivals, tug of war competitions, tea parties, a Christmas lunch with the homeless, AGMs, opened several shops and small businesses and been to several schools – opening a new library in one and a new music room in another. At the new Repton Park Infants School they had been there early in the morning to meet the children arriving at the gate and the Head Teacher had surprised them all by already knowing every child's Christian name as they came through the gate – which was well over 100. They had presented prizes at most of the schools in Ashford and he had cut ribbons at new housing developments for the elderly in Appledore, Charing Heath and the new extension at Luckley House in Wye. He said one piece of advice he would give to the new Mayor was to ask for real scissors this year rather than the silly imitation cardboard ones that he had been given!

Councillor Link said they had experienced great entertainment at the Gang Show by Ruckinge Scouts, but perhaps more entertainment at the High Sheriff's Garden Party when the Calor gas had caught fire and they had to abandon the marquee and evacuate to his garden and wait in the rain until allowed back in by the fire brigade! He had attended three services at Canterbury Cathedral, including a buffet lunch with the Archbishop of Canterbury at one of those. Along with ex-Councillor Hodgkinson and the Bishop of Dover he had also opened the extension to Singleton Village Hall. This only just scratched the surface on what they had done this year and he could have mentioned a lot more although he said he would stop there for fear of becoming a bore, like showing somebody their holiday snaps! However he wanted to say that you only had to look around Ashford at things such as the Panorama building which was nearing completion, the Conningbrook Country Park which had opened that past weekend and the Farmers Market in the High Street with a lot more to come, to see what was happening in Ashford. Ashford was changing for the better. They had been to Ellingham Industrial Estate and Victoria Way which were bursting with both large and small businesses and he would encourage everybody to go and have a look at them. He said there was a gentleman who wrote

a column in the Kentish Express nearly every week and he had nothing particularly good to say about Ashford. To him he would say go and have a look at Ellingham and Victoria and see what was going on down there Mr B!

He said as the Mayor you obviously had to do quite a bit of entertaining during the year and they had always received good feedback about Ashford and where they had taken people and what they had shown them. He quoted from a letter from the Chairman of Sevenoaks District Council who had said – “We started off with coffee, then a tour and tasting at Chapel Down Winery, then we had lunch at London Beach Golf Club, followed by a visit to the rocking horse makers at Bethersden. It was a lovely day out and you have introduced us to so many interesting aspects of the Ashford Borough during your year.” He was pleased to say that other Mayors had also paid those sorts of compliments about Ashford when they had been entertained, so they must be doing something right as a Borough and he knew they had surprised some people.

Finally, Councillor Link said he would like to say his thank yous. First and foremost he would like to thank his wife Jill. She had been beside him and for him the whole year and deserved his thanks. He wanted to thank his Chaplain, the Reverend Eileen Harrop, Andrea Collard, the Mayor’s PA for all the hard work she did and their driver Sandra Sutters for getting them to all of the events on time. Lastly he wanted to thank the people of Ashford all very much.

## **7 Election and Appointment of Deputy Mayor**

Councillor Clarkson proposed that “Councillor George Koowaree be elected Deputy Mayor for the Borough of Ashford for the ensuing year”.

This was seconded by Councillor Chilton.

There were no other nominations.

### **Resolved:**

**That Councillor George Koowaree be elected Deputy Mayor of the Borough of Ashford for the Municipal Year 2015/2016.**

## **8 Declaration of Acceptance of Office by the Deputy Mayor**

Councillor Koowaree made his Declaration of Acceptance of Office. The Deputy Mayor was then invested with his chains of office.

## **9 Minutes**

### **Resolved:**

**That subject to noting the apologies of Councillor Sims, the Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on the 16<sup>th</sup> April 2015 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.**

## **10 Announcements**

Her Worshipful the Mayor announced that her Civic Service would be held on the 12<sup>th</sup> July 2015 at 10.30am in Smarden Church. She said that as previously mentioned the village of Smarden was worth a visit and it would be wonderful if as many as possible would come along. There would be refreshments in the Charter Hall afterwards. Speaking of refreshments, there would be some served in the Committee Rooms downstairs after the meeting and all were welcome.

## **11 Election of the Leader of the Council for a Four Year Term**

Councillor Bell proposed that “Councillor Clarkson be elected as Leader of the Council”.

This was seconded by Councillor Galpin.

**Resolved:**

**That Councillor Clarkson be elected Leader of the Council for a four year term.**

## **12 To Note the Names and Number of Members to be Appointed by the Leader to the Cabinet**

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Clarkson, said he wished to thank colleagues for the vote of confidence in his continued leadership. He said the people of Ashford had once again put their faith in this Conservative Administration for the next four years and they would all work hard to deliver on that trust. Firstly he wanted to congratulate all Elected Members and indicate from the outset that they must all work together by being bold and innovative to grow and shape the changing economy in Ashford. He said they must all strive to attract new businesses and increase the skills level in support of the changing economy and they would insist on quality housing that was built to Ashford’s own space standards. In making his appointments to the Cabinet he was conscious that they had made promises to the people of Ashford in their election manifesto and they would honour those commitments.

They had said that Ashford would remain the lowest Council Tax in Kent and give full discretionary rate relief to all existing recipients for the full four years of this administration. Accordingly, he was appointing Councillor Neil Shorter to the Cabinet with direct Portfolio responsibilities for Finance, Budget and Resource Management to deliver on that promise.

They had said they would work to promote thriving business in their two towns of Ashford and Tenterden. They had already completed the purchase of Wilkinsons and were in an advanced stage of the purchase of Park Mall – indeed exchange of contracts was imminent. They were blessed with not only one but two towns and it was important to remember that whilst they had the urban town of Ashford at the heart of the Borough they also had the delightful rural town of Tenterden that was equally important. He had therefore appointed Councillor Graham Galpin to the Cabinet with direct Portfolio responsibility for Town Centres and Business Dynamics.

They had undertaken to continue with the improvements to recycling and in doing so to retain the weekly collections as an important part of the service. They also needed to ensure that the Borough was clean, tidy and well maintained and there would be a concerted and sustained drive to ensure that this happened. Customer services would be at the heart of the Council serving their community, there would be links to tourism at the point of delivery and they needed to build on their dialogue with the public at a local level. He had therefore appointed Councillor Clair Bell to the Cabinet with direct Portfolio responsibilities for Public Interaction and Borough Presentation. He said that Councillor Mrs Bell would deliver those promises and in doing so would also Chair the Parish & Urban Forum.

They had said that they would continue to deliver quality new homes and give planning permission, but only for quality development built to the Council's space and other standards. They would not allow inappropriate development, especially in the villages and countryside, so he had therefore appointed Councillor Mike Bennett to the Cabinet with direct Portfolio responsibility for Planning, Development and Enforcement. It was worth noting that enforcement had been brought to the fore and added to the Portfolio title. In his view there was no point having planning policies and adding planning conditions if they were not rigorously adhered to and indeed enforced.

The Leader said that the Council was not only committed to delivering its statutory duties for the homeless but also ensuring that there were affordable, local needs and extra care housing. In addition they intended to work to create more home ownership in the Borough and examine how they might help those at the lower end of the property market to own their own homes. They would also seek to encourage a number of high value homes in order to cater for the widest range of home ownership. He had therefore appointed Councillor Paul Clokie to the Cabinet with direct Portfolio responsibility for Housing and Home Ownership to ensure that they again delivered on that commitment.

He said that it was implicit in all that they did and continued to do that the correct infrastructure and services were required. This included traffic management, public safety matters and health and wellbeing. Healthcare was not only relevant within an aging population, but also in the largest land mass District in Kent with a population that was significantly growing. To be even considering any location out of Ashford for Accident and Emergency made no sense whatsoever – indeed this should be the very area where healthcare services were expanded. He was therefore appointing Councillor Bernard Heyes to the Cabinet with direct Portfolio responsibilities for Highways, Wellbeing and Safety. He would be charged with ensuring that this Borough and its inhabitants were served well in these important areas. The question of Accident and Emergency provision would now command the Council's careful attention at the highest level.

All societies needed more than just tangible goods and services. There was also a need for arts, culture and leisure. People needed to relax in today's busy world and accordingly the Council needed to look after its public parks and leisure facilities. They needed to be aware of their environment and enrich their lives with arts and culture. He had therefore accordingly appointed Councillor Jessamy Blanford to the Cabinet with direct Portfolio responsibilities for Culture, Leisure and Environment in order to develop this key area.

He said that one of the key elements of modern society was the physical development of new technology, especially in the communications sphere. He was



advised that Ashford had relatively good 4G capabilities, but there were still some rural areas with poor broadband facilities. The availability of public information was more vital than ever in the world of the internet and social media and the Council was becoming more connected with interactive websites and automatic sizing to whatever device was being used. The Council needed its Annual Report and other information to be delivered directly into homes or, at this stage, hard copy and this was a major responsibility for the Council. He therefore appointed Councillor Jane Martin to the Cabinet with direct Portfolio responsibilities for Information and Communications. In this important role liaison with Cabinet colleagues and Service Heads would be essential in delivering a greatly improved conduit of communication.

In conclusion the Leader said that his own responsibilities were largely prescribed but included economic development, strategic projects and corporate marketing, media and communications. As many would know, the public realm work in Dover Place was well underway and they were about to start creating the Commercial Quarter – or as he liked to call it “CQ38” (with the 38 minute connection to London). To support the development of the Commercial Quarter they would also soon be seeing the new College, set to give Ashford’s workforce a range of skills needed for the future. During the following week, all Members would be issued with full details of the roles and responsibilities of himself and the entire Cabinet and they would shortly be included within the Council’s Constitution.

### **13 Deputy Leader of the Council**

The Leader said that this Council, along with all levels of Local Government were directed by and had to respond to the Central Government of the day and it was important that they gave proper consideration to what was being proposed. There was of course a Community Governance Review in progress in this Borough at the present time and they already knew that the Boundary Commission was due to review the democratic governance in 2016. It was therefore important that there was a focus on these very crucial governance matters and he had therefore appointed Councillor Neil Bell as the Deputy Leader of the Council with direct Portfolio responsibilities for Government Policy Interface and Democracy.

### **14 Selection and Constitutional Review Committee – 21<sup>st</sup> May 2015**

Her Worshipful the Mayor directed Members attention to the addendum paper which had been tabled.

Councillor Clarkson proposed that “the Minutes of the Selection and Constitutional Review Committee meeting held on the 21<sup>st</sup> May 2015 be approved and adopted subject to noting the name of the remaining Member of the Licensing and Health & Safety Committee”.

This was seconded.

The Council was then asked to consider appointments to the Alzheimer’s Society – Ashford & Shepway Branch and the River Stour (Kent) Internal Drainage Board.

Councillor Clarkson proposed that Councillor Burgess be appointed to the River Stour (Kent) Internal Drainage Board.

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This was seconded by Councillor Bell

There were no other nominations.

There were no nominations for the appointment to the Alzheimer's Society – Ashford & Shepway Branch and it was advised that this appointment would stand referred to the next Selection & Constitutional Review Committee meeting.

**Resolved:**

**That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Selection and Constitutional Review Committee held on the 21<sup>st</sup> May 2015 be approved and adopted subject to the following:-**

- (i) Licensing and Health & Safety Committee – Councillor Apps taking the remaining seat.**
- (ii) Councillor Burgess being appointed to represent the Council on the River Stour (Kent) Internal Drainage Board.**

## **15 Presentation of Service Certificates by the Mayor to Former Members of the Council**

The following former Councillors attended the Meeting and were presented with framed certificates for their dedicated service to the Council: - Mr Michael Cloughton, Mr Bob Davidson, Mr Matthew French and Miss Amanda Hodgkinson. The Mayor explained that for those other former Members who wished to receive certificates and who were unable to attend this Meeting, separate arrangements would be made for them to receive them in due course.

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