

COUNCIL

21 APRIL 2016

REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE ELECTORAL REVIEW TASK GROUP

The Task Group met on Monday 11 April 2016 to consider the attached draft submission on Council size. The submission document was prepared by a small team of Officers led by the Director of Law & Governance & Monitoring Officer. The Task Group approved the draft submission and recommend the Council approves it for submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE).

The submission document itself explains the statutory background to the electoral review and the next steps in the process.

The Electoral Review Task Group Recommends the attached submission be approved and sent to the LGBCE.

ELECTORAL REVIEW

ASHFORD BOROUGH

Ashford Borough Council Submission on Council Size

April 2016

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Executive Summary

At present, 43 councillors representing 35 Wards serve on Ashford Borough Council. 27 Wards are single member wards; 8 are double member wards.

All councillors are elected every four years and serve a four year term of office. The most recent elections were held in May 2015.

The next scheduled Borough Council elections are due to take place in May 2019.

Based on the evidence set out in this submission, Ashford Borough Council propose that the number of elected councillors for the Borough will be 47.

Introduction

1. This document is submitted as evidence from Ashford Borough Council (ABC) to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) in relation to the size of the Council.
2. This submission has been prepared and collated by Officers using a range of data available, as outlined in the document, and in full consultation with elected members of the Borough Council through the Electoral Review Task Group. This final submission has been endorsed by full Council, and so reflects the views of the Borough Council, and the political parties represented on it.
3. The Electoral Review of Ashford commenced in January 2016 with the aim of reviewing electoral arrangements for the whole Borough. The review includes looking at the total number of members to be elected to the Council (Council size), the number and boundaries of electoral wards, the number of councillors for each ward, and the names of each ward.
4. The initial stage of an Electoral Review is to identify and confirm the preferred Council size. This is the number of elected councillors who will serve on the Borough Council. This should be the number required to deliver effective and convenient local government (ie: the number which allows the council and individual councillors to perform most effectively).
5. The final size of the Council will determine the average number of electors per councillor, and this is then used to determine warding patterns. It is therefore important that the figure agreed accurately reflects the needs of the authority and of the community. The LGBCE may amend the agreed figure if necessary to allow for a better representation of electors or as a result of consultation.

6. Within the review process, the LGBCE have no initial view on whether there should be an increase, decrease or no change in the size of Council. However, all submissions must be justified by evidence.
7. The last review of electoral arrangements in Ashford took place in 2000/2001 just as the Borough Council was preparing to move in 2001 from the "Committee System" of governance to the Leader and Cabinet model in accordance with the Local Government Act 2000. The outcomes of that review took effect from the local elections in May 2003. A report to the Council's Policy and Resources Committee in July 2000 outlined some key points in the Council's then proposed scheme:-
 - *It will involve a Council size of 43 members (compared with 49 at present). The reasons for this size are:-*
 - (i) *The Council is required by Central Government to modernise the democratic process by splitting the executive function from the 'back bench' role. Legislation provides that the executive unit should comprise no fewer than 3 members and no more than 10. This Council considers that on the projected electorate, the 'back bench' contingent will not need to be as large as it would be with the current number of councillors.*
 - (ii) *Regional Planning Guidance has identified Ashford as one of three future growth areas in the south east. A smaller Council size will make possible future expansion in line with the electorate more feasible.*
 - *It involves 33 wards. 23 with one member and 10 with two. The Review of Ward Membership Working Group favoured single member wards where possible as, in its view, they enhance councillors' links with the public they represent.*
 - *There will be approximately 2009 electors to each councillor in the year 2005. This is the year the LGC required us to plan around. The projected electoral figures were calculated and have been justified in liaison with the Council's Planning Policy section'.*
8. Thus it was clear that the predicted likely impact of cabinet style arrangements was taken into account when the current Council size was determined; and that future growth in size in line with electorate might need to follow in any later electoral review.
9. It is worth noting that in the financial year 2015/16, the total sum of allowances paid to Borough councillors was in the region of £340 K (including travel and subsistence). The sum paid to each councillor varies depending on responsibilities but the average is c. £7,885. Whilst the cost of allowances is not a matter taken into account in determining size, it is right to be aware of the likely cost implications of any increase in the number of councillors.

Guidance on Council Size

10. The LGBCE Guidance on Council Size submissions recommends the following issues should be considered:
- (A) Governance and Decision-Making – how decisions are taken across the Authority and the volume and distribution of responsibility amongst elected members and staff.
 - (B) Scrutiny Functions – must be capable of being administered in a convenient and effective way.
 - (C) Representational Role of Councillors – workloads and responsibilities.
 - (D) The Future – known future trends and developments may affect the issue of size.

Each of these is now considered in turn.

PART ONE - GOVERNANCE AND DECISION-MAKING

11. Ashford Borough Council has had a Conservative administration since the local elections in 1999. The current composition of the 43 councillors is:

Conservative	35
Labour	3
Ashford Independent	3
Liberal Democrats	1
UK Independence Party	1

12. Whilst there is no formal role description for councillors at Ashford, the Constitution contains a brief explanation of expectations and responsibilities (see Article 2.03 (a)). A more detailed statement was produced by the Council for all councillors elected in May 2015. "What To Expect as an Ashford Borough councillor" (part of a suite of documents for new councillors called "A Framework") is attached as Appendix 1. This deals with attendance levels, training and development, community roles and standards of conduct.
13. The Council moved to the Leader and Cabinet model of governance in 2001. In 2010 the Council adopted the "new style" Leader and Cabinet model which took effect following the elections in May 2011. This provides for the Leader to be elected by Council for a 4 year term and the Leader is responsible for appointing a Deputy Leader and Cabinet.

Full Council

14. All councillors are members of Full Council which is responsible for approving the rate, the budget and adopting key policies within which Cabinet decisions are taken. The Council has six scheduled meetings a year. Additional special meetings are held as and when necessary. Meetings of Full Council are chaired by the Mayor (a civic mayor, not an executive mayor).

Composition and Work of Cabinet

15. The Cabinet currently consists of a Leader and nine Portfolio Holders. There is no individual Cabinet member decision-making. All Cabinet decisions are taken collectively at Cabinet meetings held monthly on a programmed basis.

Full details of the individual Portfolio titles and responsibilities are set out in Part 3, Appendix 2 of the Council's Constitution.

<http://www.ashford.gov.uk/part-3---responsibility-for-functions>

16. The Leader and Cabinet portfolio roles are not full time roles. However, in a recent email survey (February 2016), the Leader indicated he spent 40 + hours per week fulfilling his role as Leader of the Council (and Chairman of Cabinet). From the five other Cabinet members who responded the average hours on portfolio roles was 20 hours per week. Under recent Leaderships, the role of Portfolio Holders has been broadened to include the taking of the

lead role in presenting reports at Cabinet meetings and this has inevitably increased the workload and required expertise of each Portfolio Holder.

17. The Cabinet (formerly called Executive) was established in July 2001 with a Leader and five Portfolio Holders (PH). They met on a three weekly cycle until June 2006 when it changed to a four-weekly cycle.¹ Examples of numbers of meetings per year and numbers of decision items considered are as follows:-

Year	Meetings	Items	Average Items per Agenda
2003/4	15	163	10.85
2005/6	13	162	12.46
2010/11	11	118	10.72
2013/14	10	91	9.1
2015/16 ²	9	61	6.77

18. The Council has considerable experience of running Cabinets with different sizes and meeting schedules. It considers the current division of responsibilities facilitates effective leadership, although the precise nature and content of portfolios is kept under review by the Leader of the Council and invariably some changes are made at each electoral cycle.

Cabinet Approved Boards, Steering Groups and Task Groups

19. The following Cabinet Boards, Steering Groups and Task Groups were constituted by the Cabinet in June 2015 and revised Terms of Reference were agreed at the Cabinet meeting in September 2015:-

Trading and Enterprise Board
 Joint Transportation Board
 Ashford Strategic Delivery Board
 Town Centre Regeneration Board
 Conningbrook Lakes Country Park Steering Group
 Stour Centre Regeneration Steering Group
 Park Mall – Dynamics and Occupancy Steering Group
 Policy and Compliance Task Group
 Public Transport Liaison Task Group
 Council Tax and Welfare Reform Task Group
 Environment and Conservation Task Group
 Hothfield Regeneration Task Group

¹ The size of Cabinet has changed over the years.
 May 2008 – one additional Portfolio Holder making total membership 7.
 June 2010 – one additional Portfolio Holder making total membership 8
 April 2013 – two additional Portfolio Holders making total membership 10

² This was an election year so no meetings were held in April and May (or August)

20. The Cabinet Task Groups are chaired by the relevant Portfolio Holder and have a membership of four Councillors, including one Opposition Member. The Minutes of the meetings of the Trading and Enterprise Board, Joint Transportation Board, Ashford Strategic Delivery Board and Town Centre Regeneration Board are submitted to Cabinet meetings for information. If decisions are required arising from any of the discussions at the various Boards and Task Groups, these are subject to an Officer report to a Cabinet meeting for formal consideration and decision. The table below provides further details on these groups.

Meeting	Frequency/Actual Number of Meetings in 2015/16
Trading & Enterprise Board	2
Joint Transportation Board	Quarterly (4)
Ashford Strategic Delivery Board	Quarterly (4)
Town Centre Regeneration Board	Monthly (9)
Conningbrook Lakes Country Park Steering Group	Ad Hoc (3)
Stour Centre Regeneration Steering Group	Ad Hoc (3)
Park Mall Dynamics & Occupancy Steering Group	Monthly (9)
Policy & Compliance Task Group	Ad Hoc (2)
Public Transport Liaison Task Group	Biannual (2)
Council Tax & Welfare Reform Task Group	Bi-Monthly (5)
Environment & Conservation Task Group	Biannual (2)
Hothfield Regeneration Task Group	Ad Hoc (2)

Further details of the Terms of Reference of each of these groups can be found here -

<https://secure.ashford.gov.uk/committeesystem/ViewDocument.aspx?DocumentType=AgendaItem&AgendaId=19109&MeetingId=1887>

Delegations to Officers

21. The Council has a well-developed and comprehensive Scheme of Delegation to Officers (contained in Part 3 Appendix 5 of the Constitution) which sets out clearly where the responsibility and extent of delegation lies.
22. In line with Government requirements the majority of all planning applications are delegated. However, if an elected Member (alone or with the relevant Parish Council) feels that there are grounds for a particular application to be

determined by Committee, they can request this. Further details on Planning Committee business are given later (see paras. 25 et seq).

Regulatory and Other Committees - General

23. The Committees/Meetings shown in the Table below were constituted for the 2015/16 municipal year. The number of meetings during 2015 and attendance records for each are also included. All seats are allocated in accordance with Group strengths on the Council, save where Council has agreed to certain ex officio memberships eg Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny on Standards.

It is worth emphasising that since the last electoral review in Ashford, major licensing powers have been transferred from magistrates to local authorities. This includes the licensing of premises for the sale of alcohol which has brought significant additional work for officers and councillors in this important, high-profile regulatory function.

2015

Meeting	Number of ABC Members	Number of Meetings	Total Projected Attendance	Percentage of Actual Attendance
Council	43	6	258	86%
Cabinet	10	9	90	92%
Appeals Committee ^{1, 2}	15 (but 3 drawn per meeting)	2	6	100%
Appointments Committee	5	0		
Audit Committee	8	4	32	78%
Joint Transportation Board	7	4	28	89%
Licensing and Health & Safety Committee	13	1	13	69%
Licensing Sub-Committee ^{2, 3}	13 (but 3 drawn per meeting)	3	9	100%
Overview & Scrutiny Committee ¹	16 (2014/15) 12 (2015/16)	8	108	79%

Meeting	Number of ABC Members	Number of Meetings	Total Projected Attendance	Percentage of Actual Attendance
Planning Committee ³	17*	12	204	97%
Selection & Constitutional Review Committee	12	5	60	87%
Standards Committee	8	1	8	87.5%
Community Grants Panel	7	4	28	75%
Joint Consultative Committee	6	6	36	92%
Local Government & Polling Districts Task Group	10	5	50	76%
Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group	10	9	90	88%
Member Training Panel	8	2	16	81%
Parish & Urban Forum	7	3	21	62%
Total	198	84	1057	86.75%

*In December 2015, the voting membership increased to 18. In addition the Leader of the Council is an ex officio member of the Planning Committee.

¹ These committees cannot include Cabinet members.

² These meet during the day which limits the availability of some councillors to sit.

³ Councillors cannot sit on these committees unless they have undergone specialist training.

24. Detailed Terms of Reference for the Council Committees is set out within Part 3 Appendix 4 of the Council's Constitution.

<http://www.ashford.gov.uk/part-3---responsibility-for-functions>

The membership of Committees etc is usually agreed at the Selection and Constitutional Review Committee meeting held annually in May. However, Group Leaders are free to change their representatives in accordance with their entitlement to seats on each respective Committee. Meetings of the Cabinet, Planning, Overview and Scrutiny, Joint Transportation Board, Audit, Parish and Urban Forum and Standards Committee are programmed and agreed as part of the meetings programme for the Municipal Year. There is one scheduled meeting of the Licensing, Health and Safety Committee held in January each year. Other meetings are held on an ad hoc basis dependent upon level of business. All meetings have been quorate and a breakdown of attendance per meeting is set out in the table above.

Planning Committee

25. Planning Committee meets on a four weekly cycle. Most planning decisions are delegated to officers. Committee deals with the most major, complex and controversial applications. The level of complexity involved in determining planning applications has increased significantly in recent years as a result of national and European guidance and regulation.
26. During the calendar year 2015, a total of 1282 planning decisions were made by the Council. Of these 1207 (94.15%) were dealt with by officers under delegated powers. The seventy-five most major, complex and sensitive were determined at meetings of the Planning Committee.
27. Planning Committee has a history of meetings occasionally extending very late into the evening. Accordingly a "guillotine" was introduced during the last administration which allowed meetings to be adjourned to another day at 10.30 pm in certain circumstances.¹

The average duration of Planning Committee meetings has remained reasonably constant as shown in the Table below.

Year	Average Duration	Numbers of Decisions Taken	% Delegated Approx.
2015	2 hrs 2 mins	75 out of 1282	94%
2013	2 hrs 19 mins	49 out of 1193	96%
2011	2 hrs 37 mins	88 out of 1191	93%
2009	1 hr 31 mins	102 out of 1262	92%
2007	2 hrs 10 mins	122 out of 1412	91%

¹ Since the introduction of this rule, no meeting has had to be "guillotined".

28. These figures demonstrate the depth of debate required to reach determinations. They also reflect a very keen level of public and parish council participation in Planning Committee meetings. For many residents planning decision-making is the most tangible and important role of a local councillor. Non Planning Committee councillors routinely attend meetings to speak on applications in their own wards and to represent the views of constituents.
29. Recent examples of major/complex planning decisions taken by Planning Committee are set out in the Table below.

Date	Application	Brief Description
October 2014	Chilmington Green	Mixed use development including 5,750 homes (the largest single planning application ever determined by ABC)
January 2014	Conningbrook	Creation of country park for recreational and water-sports purposes, an activity centre, a public house/restaurant, offices, car parks, including construction of 300 dwelling residential development and provision of an aggregates storage and distribution facility
September 2015	Ashford Designer Outlet	Extension of existing outlet to a site area of 18.1 ha.
December 2015	Elwick Place	Mixed use development including restaurants and cafes, a hotel, a cinema and car parking.
April 2015	Ashford College	Demolition of existing and construction of new College buildings
August 2013 - January 2016	Cheesemans Green	Various applications totalling approx. 1200 dwellings and associated facilities and works.
December 2010 – August 2014	Bridgefield (Park Farm)	Various applications totalling 454 dwellings and associated works

30. Planning Committee has more voting members (18 + 1 ex officio) than any other. This reflects its importance to local communities and the Council's wish to ensure as broad a representation as possible. The Council considers its approach to planning decision-making works well and is effective, transparent and democratic.

Conclusions on Council Committee Memberships

31. Taking into account the number of places on Committees, Task Groups, Boards, Panels etc. the number of possible attendances each year is well in excess of 1,100. The addition of the busy Overview and Scrutiny meetings schedule further increases the number of attendances.
32. Although not all councillors are eligible to sit on all Committees or Panels, an approximate rounded average number of meetings per councillor per year is in the region of 26 (leading to a total of 1118 attendances). This does not include additional ad hoc meetings of Committees, boards etc nor attendances required at partnership meetings or the considerable number of external bodies to which the Borough Council appoints representatives (as to which see paras 34 – 36 below). Nor does it include the significant number of attendances at meetings by non-committee members. This applies particularly at meetings of Cabinet and Planning Committee. Thus a considerable councillor resource is required simply to service the democratic decision-making mechanisms in place. Any material reduction of that resource would be likely to require change in the existing democratic structure. On the other hand, a modest increase in the councillor resource would assist in spreading this element of the member workload and facilitating more effective decision-making.
33. In terms of the “spread” of Committee membership (including Groups, Forums and Cabinet Task Groups) the position is as set out in the table below. The average number is 4.90 per councillor. According to the LGA “Census of Local Authority Councillors” (2013) the average is 3.3, although this may not be an exact comparison. However, the Committee workload per councillor at Ashford does appear to be higher than the national average.

Number of Committee Memberships¹	How Many Councillors
0	1
1	3
2	3
3	4
4	9
5	6
6	8
7	2
8	2
9	4
10	1
Total	43 councillors
Average	4.90 memberships

Outside Bodies

34. Ashford Borough Council appoints a councillor or councillors to a wide range of outside bodies and organisations. Such appointments may be annual or for a term of office. These are set out in the table below. In total there are 46 such bodies. Councillors are expected to attend meetings of the outside body and provide an annual report on activity of the body to the Selection and Constitutional Review Committee. The frequency with which these bodies meet and the time commitment required varies.

The link below provides further details on the bodies to which the Council appoints councillors.

<http://www.ashford.gov.uk/part-6---members-allowances-scheme>

35. Over recent years, the number of bodies to which appointments have been made has been rationalised and a further review is to be undertaken to ensure all appointments remain worthwhile and relevant. However, it is considered that the number of appointments will continue to make a significant call on member time.

Partnerships

¹ This includes Groups, Forums & Cabinet Task Groups but excludes Full Council.

36. Councillors also act on various strategic decision-making partnership bodies as set out in the table below.

Partnership	What it Deals With	Councillor and Frequency of Meetings
Ashford Health and Wellbeing Board	Looks at improving the health and wellbeing of the people living in Ashford through joined up commissioning across the National Health Service, social care, borough council, public health and other services that are directly related to health and wellbeing.	1 Member – Quarterly Meetings
Ashford Community Safety Partnership	Working with representatives from the police, the local council, the fire, health and probation services amongst many others to develop and implement strategies to protect local communities from crime and to help people feel safe. They work out local approaches to deal with issues including antisocial behaviour, drug or alcohol misuse and re-offending.	1 Member – Quarterly Meetings
Ashford Leisure Trust	To ensure the smooth operation of Ashford's principal leisure asset(s).	1 Member – Varies but have been meeting monthly
East Kent Hospitals University NHS Foundation Trust	The Council of Governors for the Hospitals Trust incorporating East Kent's five hospitals. (rep on behalf of the 6 EK Local Authorities)	1 Member – Quarterly Meetings

PART TWO - SCRUTINY FUNCTIONS

37. Ashford Borough Council currently has one Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) comprised of 12 members¹. Seats are allocated in accordance with political balance rules. This results in 10 Conservative and 2 opposition members. Historically at Ashford, Chairmanship and Vice Chairmanship have been taken by members of opposition groups.
38. OSC meets monthly and has its regular work programme which it determines itself. A “tracker” is maintained of matters which OSC has expressed a wish to review as time permits. OSC has the ability to “call in” Cabinet decisions, although at Ashford this is rarely exercised. One reason for this is that the Leader of the Council chairs Cabinet in a way which encourages involvement by non-Cabinet councillors in decision-making at Cabinet. Chairmen of Cabinet Task Groups do likewise.
39. At their meeting on 20 October 2015, the Chief Executive recommended the Committee consider adopting a more strategic approach to scrutiny. He indicated that there was an opportunity for the Committee to become involved in a more strategic, constructive and a more interesting programme of work which could add considerable value to the Authority. The Committee were supportive of adopting a more strategic approach and at its November meeting a dedicated session was held to devise a new forward work programme based on some of the principles outlined at the October meeting. Over time, it is certainly possible that development of a more strategic role for OSC will lead to pressures on the work programme and the need to consider increasing the membership of OSC.
40. In terms of overall workload, the work programme of the Committee has proved manageable although there is a particularly heavy period between December and January when the dedicated Budget Scrutiny Task Group has a series of meetings to scrutinise the draft Budget produced by the Cabinet. The Scrutiny Committee is supported by an Officer (currently within Member Services) who provides assistance to the Chairman and Vice-Chairman and who also undertakes research and drafting of reports and information for presentation to the Committee. Other Officers within the Council also regularly produce reports for consideration at the Committee. Whilst there is no routine requirement for members of the Committee to undertake work in between meetings, on occasions this does occur. For example, recently the Chairman and Vice-Chairman attended two separate briefing meetings with representatives of Southern Water and South East Water in terms of a fact finding mission based on the full Committee’s wish that issues associated with the work of those companies be examined.
41. It is fair to say that generally the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has been valued by the Cabinet and indeed the vast majority of recommendations made to the Cabinet have been accepted. Cabinet

¹ Since 2001, the number of members involved directly in OSC has varied. Between 2001 and 2004 there were three OSCs (aligned to three Cabinet Policy Advisory Groups) with 15 members each. This reduced to two Committees in 2004 and then one in 2003, originally with 19 members.

Portfolio Holders are also invited to meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee when matters within their Portfolio are on the agenda.

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PART THREE - REPRESENTATIONAL ROLE OF COUNCILLORS

42. The extent to which councillors routinely engage with and represent the views of local communities has a fundamental impact on their workloads and responsibilities.
43. During February 2016 a survey of all councillors was undertaken to help gauge workloads and range of community activity. A total of 31 of 43 members responded to the survey (72%). In early March this was followed up with a further single question survey seeking an overall figure from each councillor for the total hours spent on Council business on average each week¹. Twenty councillors responded to this (c.47%), including two of the ten Cabinet members. The March survey revealed a total of 474 hours, with an average of 23.7 hours per councillor.

However, six Cabinet councillors had already responded to a separate email survey (also in February, see para. 16 above) regarding hours spent each week fulfilling Cabinet responsibilities only. The average number of hours was 20. If one assumes either a 50% uplift or 100% uplift to allow for non-Cabinet work (eg on other committees, casework, community engagement, group work) then the average for Cabinet members rises to either 30 hours per week or 40 hours per week. Adding these to the March survey data (for the eight Cabinet members who did not respond to the March survey) provides a total of 714 hours or 794 hours amongst 28 councillors, an average of 25.5 hours per week per councillor or 28.35 hours per week per councillor.

44. Thus the estimated average number of hours spent by councillors on Council business each week is likely to be between 25.5 and 28.35 hours. In the LGA Census (2013), councillors reported spending an average of 25.1 hours per week on Council and group/party business with the majority being spent on Council business (20.8 hours). Current information therefore indicates that the Ashford average number of hours per week exceeds the national average.
45. Some key data from the detailed February 2016 survey is set out in the Table below.

¹ Councillors were asked to include time spent on:

- Attending meetings at Civic Centre (member or officer)
- Reading and preparing for these meetings
- Constituency casework
- Group or party work
- Work with external bodies
- Other community work including surgeries, newsletters, social media, working with parish councils etc

Representational Topic	Survey Statistic
Sitting on Committees	35% spend 1 – 2 hours a week 26% spend 3 – 5 hours a week 23% spend 5 – 10 hours a week
Reading/Preparing for Committees	35% spend 2 – 5 hours 29% spend 5 – 10 hours 19% spend 1 – 2 hours
Casework Subject	Most common topics planning and housing
Casework Volumes	37% 2 – 5 hours 27% 5 – 10 hours 13% 1 – 2 hours 20% 10 – 20 hours
Parish Council or Urban Forum Liaison	67% regular attendance 27% occasional attendance
Methods of Engagement with Constituents and Committees (other than email and telephone)	73% Newsletter 20% Surgery 10% Blog 50% Social media 30% Public meetings

46. It is clear that in addition to their Committee-based work, councillors spend a significant number of hours each week engaging with communities through casework and liaison with other tiers of local government. This work contributes significantly to the smooth running and effective governance of the Council.

In response to a specific survey question a clear majority of councillors (between 67% and 83%) considered the time they spent on attending meetings, working with constituents and working with community organisations was “about right”.¹

47. Councillors were asked an “open” question as to how they considered the representative role of the ward councillor has changed over the last 10 years. Themes emerging included raised expectations of full accessibility, especially by electronic means², community leadership roles and a general raised

¹ But few councillors would be likely to state that they thought they spent too much time engaging with their communities! Empirical data is a more reliable barometer perhaps. An important aspect of community engagement for councillors is the Ward Member Grant Scheme. Each councillor has a budget of £3,000 each year to support community activities and initiatives in their wards. This enhances the councillor’s role as a community representative and leader.

² 41 of the current 43 borough councillors have email addresses and are able to access corporate systems remotely.

expectation of councillors being able to engage themselves (and not simply through officers) with professional and technical issues.

48. Without question, expectations in these areas will continue to rise and the workloads and pressures on individual councillors will, as a result, continue to rise. In this context it is worth noting that a significant percentage of Ashford's councillors (21 of 43) are in employment or full-time education. This affects the time they realistically have available for dealing with casework and other Council business. Both these factors tend to point in the direction of more, rather than less, councillors for the future. Too small a council size could well deter people of working age from becoming councillors due to time commitments, especially at key Cabinet or other 'special responsibility' levels.

PART FOUR - THE FUTURE

New Corporate Plan

49. In December 2015 the council agreed a new Corporate Plan - "*The Five Year Corporate Plan – for Aspiration, Action and Achievement*", setting out what the council aims to achieve over the next five years.

<http://www.ashford.gov.uk/the-five-year-corporate-plan-for-aspiration-action-and-achievement-2015-2020>

50. Work has begun to produce comprehensive 'Delivery Planning' to translate the corporate plan into action. Whilst this is in the early stages the role of local members to shape, challenge and provide responsibility for these ambitions remains central to the longer-term success of the council's ambitions. The new corporate plan is also underpinned by a set of principles that strive for the council to be well resourced, with effective governance, delivering high quality services with good communication in a safe environment – all of which should demonstrate good compliance and standards.

Devolution and the changing policy landscape

51. Following the General Election of May 2015, it has become clear that devolution forms a key pillar of the new government's legislative and policy agenda. Devolution will exert a significant impact on the scope, complexity and diversity of the council's business – with likely implications for the workload and responsibility of councillors.
52. Early discussions have already begun between the council, its district neighbours and the County Council to discuss how authorities can most effectively respond to the challenges and opportunities presented by the devolution agenda. Whilst the full range of governance options is still to be explored, it is clear that any successful devolution will be based upon core principles of transforming local services, delivering increased efficiency and offering further value for money. As such, relevant and reflective governance arrangements, of which Members are a key component, will form a key element of any devolved structures.
53. The council has already developed strong relationships with many community-based organisations to take on local assets, provide services on the council's behalf or run services which benefit the communities they serve. This ethos will continue with large-scale initiatives such as a new Community Management Organisation at the major new settlement at Chilmington Green which further shifts the emphasis down to local communities.

Service Delivery

54. Over the last few years, the council has successfully adopted a more entrepreneurial approach to service delivery. This approach has been underpinned by a commitment to actively engage with partners across sectors

and interests, and conscious investment in key infrastructure and land in order to unlock those initiatives which are crucial to the borough's long-term growth and prosperity.

55. Councillors form a key pillar of this approach, with active member involvement in the council's new governance arrangements for a Trading Company, Strategic Delivery Board, Town Centre Regeneration Board and others. Ashford Borough Council is a solution-based organisation, an ethos which demands responsive and reflective governance, risk-management and accountability. It is important that these governance arrangements (and the capacity and skills of members to fulfil their role within them) are robust, efficient and meet the needs of the council and the community. Effective scrutiny of these evolving delivery models may also necessitate additional skills and capacity within the current committee structure.
56. Hybrid service delivery methods and the opportunities presented by in-house service provision are currently being explored and implemented in areas such as grounds maintenance. This acknowledgement of the need for a multi-faceted approach to achieving financial self-sufficiency, income generation and service improvements began in 2014 when the Cabinet approved the "Informing the Next Five Years" report.¹
57. This report stressed the need to look beyond service reduction, and included a new *Counter-Inflation Strategy*, and a *Borrowing and Investment Strategy* intended to develop and maintain a set of prudent and sensible principles to enable the council to take advantage of financial and other external markets for the benefit of the borough of Ashford. A continuous drive to explore further innovative and effective services – in concert with the wider devolution agenda noted above – is likely to require very different ways of working.
58. The diversity, dynamism and entrepreneurship of this future service delivery will need to be complemented by an engaged, active and knowledgeable group of councillors, able to pivot between a wide variety of issues which may include engaging with new partnerships or different governance models.
59. As such, over and above the workload generated by the traditional ward responsibilities noted in the Section above, future service delivery which embraces hybrid, partnership and in-house provision will require further development in the skills and roles of councillors.

Finance

60. Ashford Borough Council's service and financial planning process is underpinned by a robust evidence base that is used to inform decision making. The recent past has seen a growing emphasis on prioritisation, efficiency, collaboration and most especially innovation, income generation and self-sufficiency.

¹ Cabinet, 10th July 2014, Agenda Item Number 6

61. As part of the development of the council's Medium Term Financial Plan and Annual Budget, analysis is undertaken of the key financial assumptions on which the budget will be based. The key areas covered include:
- Economic factors, such as inflation
 - Treasury Management, including interest rates
 - Demographic pressures on spending
 - Asset Management, including a review of the Council's portfolio
 - Other spending pressures opportunities (revenue and capital).
62. The council's financial forecasting process is dynamic and reflects changing/emerging priorities, demand for services and changes in external factors. As noted above, the council has embraced entrepreneurship, strategic investment and an overarching ambition to be 'Grant Free' by 2018-19 as mechanisms to achieve greater self-sufficiency for the council and the borough in future years. This has and will continue to have an inevitable impact on service delivery, response times and councillors' own constituency work – and the need for councillors to be effective community leaders and advocates for the council has, as a consequence, increased.

The Electorate

63. The current electorate in Ashford Borough (2016) is 89,862. The estimated total population is 125,000 (ONS Mid-Year Projections). The electorate is the key number for the purposes of this review.

The electorate figure for 2016 is lower than the figures for 2012 and 2013 (90,919 and 91,565 respectively), all as taken from the relevant published electoral registers. This anomaly arises due to the effect of the transition to the new Individual Electoral Registration (IER) system which began in 2014. As a result of new IER procedures, the pace of removals from the register has outstripped the pace of additions but this is not expected to be a long-term trend. Accordingly the figure for 2016 (and those for 2014 and 2015) is artificially low at a time of continuing population growth and the strong expectation is that the register will return to normal levels and trends well before the projection date of 2022.

64. Consistent with Ashford's past growth and status for many years, its population has grown steadily.

Year	Population	Electorate
2016	125,000	89,862
2011	117,956	89,313
2001	102,661	76,994

65. Electoral forecast data for Ashford shows that further significant population and electorate growth to 2022 is inevitable.

Year	Population	Electorate
2022	133,000	99,868

This represents an increase of approximately 6.5% on the current population. When the last electoral review was undertaken in Ashford, the point was made by the Council at that time that there would be scope for increasing Council size at the next review should population and electorate continue to grow (see paragraph 7).

66. Comparison with Ashford's "family group" of similar authorities reveals the following¹

Council	Review Electorate		Current Electorate	Councillors	Electors per Councillor Approx.
	Year	Forecast			
Maidstone			112,112	55	2,036
Tonbridge & Malling	2018	97,539		54	1,806
Stroud	2020	97,781		51	1,917
W. Oxfordshire		80,000		49	1,632
Braintree	2019	116,844		49	2,384
Tunbridge Wells			78,595	48	1,635
Test Valley			93,571	48	1,950
Mendip			81,745	47	1,739
Lichfield	2019	88,783		47	1,889

¹ This is the so-called "Nearest Neighbours" model prepared and published by CIPFA. The comparison is based in some cases on forecasted electorates and in some cases on current electorates, depending on whether electoral reviews have recently been undertaken.

Council	Review Electorate		Current Electorate	Councillors	Electors per Councillor Approx.
	Year	Forecast			
Wychavon			95,169	45	2,115
East Hants			88,294	37	2,386
Rugby	2016	80,026		42	1,904
Vale of White Horse	2018	98,802		38	2,600
Daventry	2016	65,380		36	1,816
ASHFORD			89,862¹	43	2,090
ASHFORD	2022	99,868		43	2,323
ASHFORD	2022	99,868		47	2,125

Notes

- Approximate average electorate (excluding Ashford) - 91,070
- Average number of councillors (excluding Ashford) - 46
- Approximate average number of electors per councillor (excluding Ashford) - 1,987

67. From this it can be seen that even Ashford's current artificially low electorate is only just below the average. Its forecast electorate at 2022 places it at 3rd highest in the "family group"

At the same time its number of councillors is currently below the average and its number of electors per councillor (2090) is above the average even using the artificially low current electorate figures. Using forecast electorate figures of 99,868 Ashford's number of electors per councillor rises to c.2323, making it fourth highest in the group.

68. "Family group" comparisons indicate that any reduction in the number of councillors would move it further away from the relevant averages referred to in the Table in para. 66 above, whilst a modest increase in the number of councillors would move it closer to the average. For example an increase in the number of councillors by 4 to, say, 47 would bring Ashford up to the

¹ See paragraph 63 for an explanation as to why this electorate figure is artificially low.

average number of councillors with the number of electors per councillor in the region of 2125, maintaining it close to its current ratio.

Conclusions on Part Four – The Future

69. The council will continue to be a partner and stakeholder with a number of organisations from both the public and private sectors, which will require officer and elected member representation. Councillors will be required to represent the council and have greater knowledge in a number of areas to negotiate and ensure the interests of the council and the community are met. The devolution agenda will only sharpen the need to explore the full spectrum of possibilities under collaborative management and governance arrangements.
70. Ashford Borough Council is very active already in including councillors in its extended management arrangements that have become a necessary constituent part of modern management. More complex (and more demanding) management will become necessary with increasing numbers of councillors involved, especially those with significant committee or executive responsibility.
71. Ashford Borough Council remains a hugely ambitious council in a time of reducing resources. In recent years the council has found alternative means of funding and delivering not only its services but also an impressive number of high-impact strategic initiatives. While the council will continue to aim for focussed, efficient and value for money services, this is matched by an ever-greater role for elected members across the Council in ensuring that the authority's emphasis on dynamic delivery is matched by an effective decision making and scrutiny process.
72. Whilst it is too early in the life of the devolution agenda to reach firm conclusions on the impact on council size, the council foresees that the roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of all of its councillors will evolve to become more intense and complex over the coming years. With a continuing emphasis on efficient services - delivered through a full mix of hybrid, contracted or in-house provision, alongside devolution, collaboration and new ways of working, the council considers that any reduction in the number of councillors would lead to capacity and governance risks; whilst a modest increase could be seen as a prudent response to the future challenges described in this section.
73. A modest increase in the number of councillors would also address the risk of Ashford drifting further from the important "Family Group" averages referred to in the Table at paragraph 66.

OVERALL CONCLUSIONS ON COUNCIL SIZE

- A. Given that the current structure of the Council, including the range of task groups, panels and Boards and the current framework of regulatory Committees (including Planning) works well, it is undesirable and unnecessary to make structural changes simply in order to accommodate a reduction in the number of councillors. The current structure has evolved over many years and where change has been required, change has been embraced and this would continue to be the Council's approach to good governance and effective decision-making.
- B. Any reduction in Council size would be likely to increase the direct workload of councillors in terms of numbers of meetings. This would limit time available for the increasingly important and demanding role of engaging with constituents and other local community organisations. The impact of this would be accentuated by the fact that about half of councillors are likely to be in employment or education and that the Council's electorate continues to increase significantly. Indeed the effect of this on workloads could discourage people in full-time employment from considering a role as an elected councillor, reducing the diversity of representation and limiting the skills and experience of members.
- C. A number of factors indicate that a small increase in the number of councillors would be consistent with effective decision-making and effective government. These include:-
- (i) As is clear from Section Four of this submission, Ashford's corporate strategy embraces an entrepreneurial approach untypical of shire districts and an emphasis on efficient services delivered through various types of provider. Furthermore, recent and proposed developments are creating large new communities on a scale of regional importance. Such strategies bring vital pressures and increasing complexity to the role of the councillor.
- The "Framework" document produced by the Council for new members in 2015 (see Part One of this submission and Appendix 1) clarifies and raises considerably the general level of expectation and standards for Ashford councillors.
- Recognising the need to ensure a diversity of representation amongst councillors, workloads must be reasonable and not discourage those in employment, education or those already active in the community.¹
- (ii) Comparisons with Ashford's "family group" of authorities show that Ashford already has a higher than average elector-councillor ratio and

¹ Currently in Ashford, 7 councillors are "dual hatted" (6 as parish councillors and one as a county councillor) whilst one councillor is triple hatted. In addition a number of councillors have other roles in the community independently of their council membership eg school governors, charity trustees etc.

a lower than average number of councillors. This situation worsens markedly using electoral forecast data to 2022. An increase from 43 to 47 councillors would offset the impact of the growing electorate and provide necessary additional resilience and capacity to ensure decision-making remains effective and community leadership and representation remain strong.

- (iii) At the time of the last electoral review in Ashford (2000/2001 effective from 2003 elections) councillor numbers reduced from 49 to 43, in part to reflect a perceived but un-evidenced need for less “back bench” councillors with the new executive government model. At the same time the Council recognised that future increase in council size to reflect electorate growth would be rendered “more feasible”.
- (iv) The number of committee memberships per councillor at Ashford is higher than the national average.
- (v) The average hours per week spent on council business by Ashford councillors is higher than the national average of 25.1 hours.
- (vi) Growing expectations of accessibility, community leadership roles and technical competence will make the representative role of councillors more challenging.

Ashford Borough Council therefore recommends that the number of borough councillors increases to 47 with effect from the local elections in May 2019.

AFRAMEWORK

Document for elected members



people
serving
people

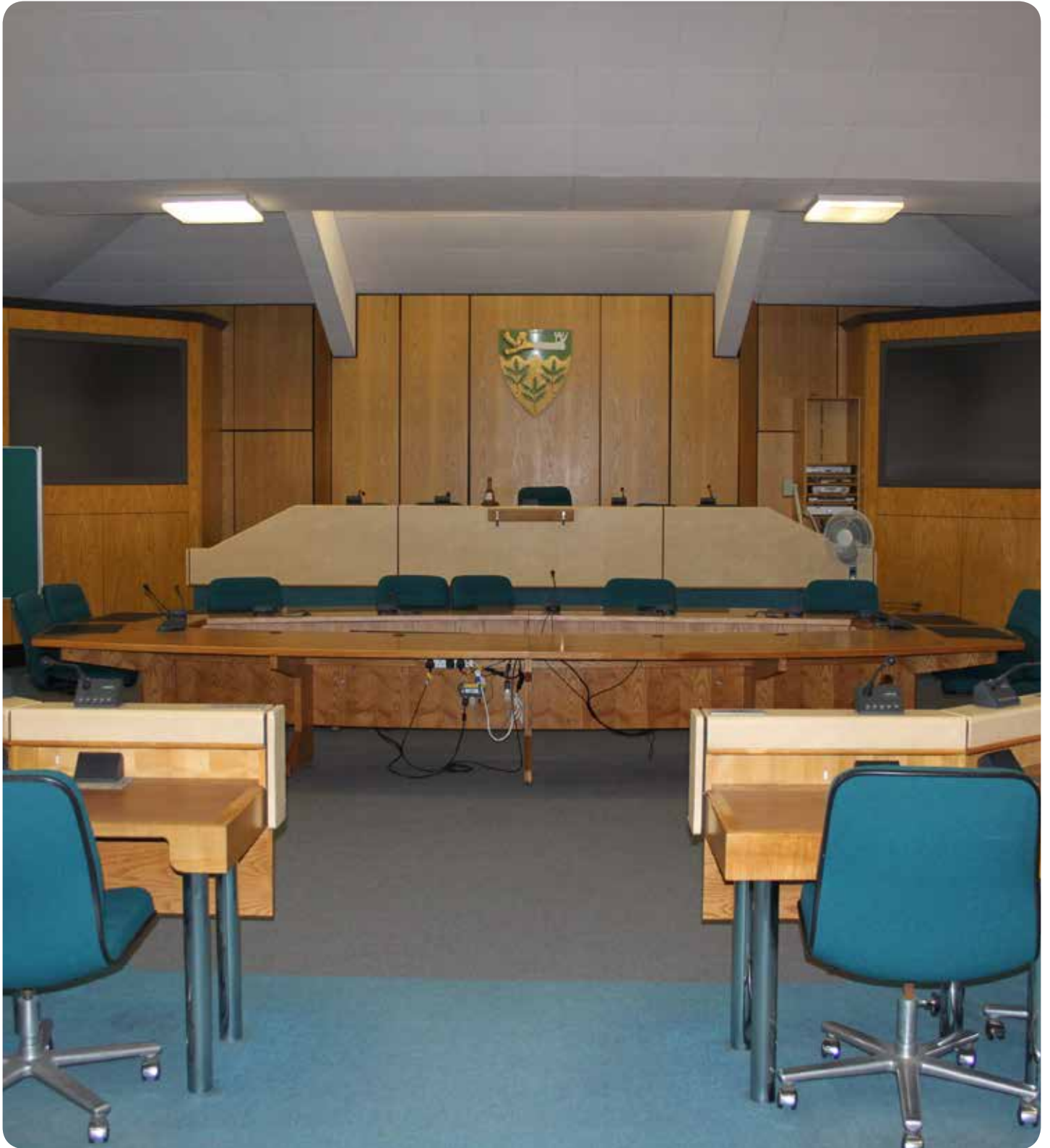
**WHAT TO EXPECT AS AN
ASHFORD BOROUGH COUNCILLOR**



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ASHFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL



What to expect as an Ashford Borough Councillor

This guide has been produced by the Member Training Panel with input from existing Councillors (of all political groups) and officers. There is no wrong or right way to be a Councillor but we hope that these tips and guidance will help to give you a better understanding of the role and what is expected at Ashford Borough Council. You will also inevitably learn through your own experiences and with guidance and assistance from your Political Groups and colleagues.

Now you are a councillor

As an elected local representative you have a unique and privileged position and the potential to make a real difference to people's lives.

However, being a good Councillor can mean hard work - as well as being rewarding in itself. You will often be expected to balance the needs and interests of your local area, your residents and voters, community groups, local businesses, Parish Councils, your Political Group (if you belong to one) and the Council. All will make legitimate demands on your time, on top of your personal commitments to family, friends and workplace. As a Councillor you will have many different roles. As the local elected representative you will engage with residents and groups on a wide range of different issues and take on an important community leadership role. You will contribute to the development of policies and strategies, including

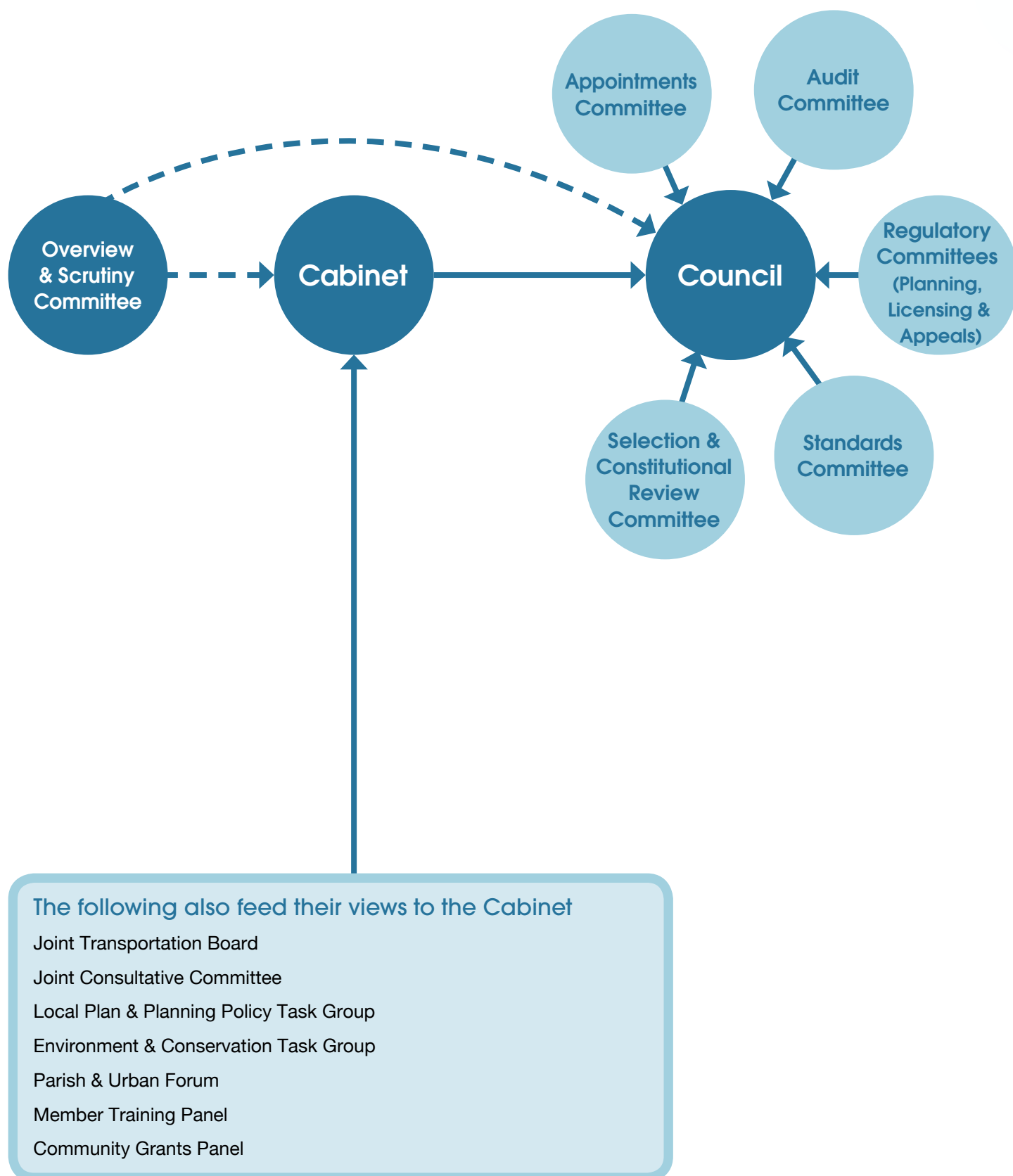
budget-setting, and you may be involved in scrutinising Council decisions or taking decisions on planning or licensing applications. Time commitments will vary from Councillor to Councillor and depend in part on what roles/Committees you may be appointed to, but it is estimated by the Local Government Association that a newly elected backbench Councillor would need to devote at least 10 hours per week to Council and Ward work. Members elected at normal elections serve a term of office of four years.

Committee Meetings

Councillors are expected to attend all the meetings of Committees and Groups to which they have been appointed, as well as all Full Council meetings. The amount of time dedicated to Council work, and attendance at meetings will obviously vary from Member to Member depending on what roles/meetings you are appointed to, but many take a wider interest and attending meetings such as Cabinet will give you a better understanding of the workings of the Council. From May 2015 attendance data for Full Council meetings will be recorded and published on the Council's website. The main Committees generally meet in the evening, but some meetings do take place during the day as well. There will clearly be occasions when you are unable to attend particular meetings and it is considered good etiquette in those circumstances to give your apologies and arrange for a substitute if possible.



ABC's Current Committee Structure



What to expect as an Ashford Borough Councillor

Training and development

There is a lot to learn in the early days of being a Councillor, so training and development opportunities are provided to assist in the learning process. Elected Members are expected to attend relevant training sessions and there is a Member training budget in place for attending external courses. An induction process will commence shortly after the May Elections and training for Members appointed to certain Committees (e.g. Planning and Licensing) will be compulsory before you can sit on those Committees.

Officers generally have a role, especially at senior level, to assist, support and guide Councillors to be effective.

Making yourself available

One of a Councillor's most important roles is to represent their Ward and the people who live in it. Councillors provide a bridge between the community and the Council. When residents contact you, you will be expected to respond in a timely fashion. As well as being an advocate for your local residents and signposting them to the right people at the Council, you will need to keep them informed about the issues that affect them.

Building strong relationships with local people and encouraging them to make their views known and engage with you will greatly assist you in understanding and representing local views. Your residents will expect you to respond to their queries and investigate their concerns in a timely fashion. Making

a telephone number and e-mail address available is important. You may wish to set up your own web page. If you have Parish Councils, active local community groups and businesses in your Ward you may wish to make early contact and forge links and relationships with those. Also with your local KCC Councillor and co-Ward Member if you are in a two Member ward. It will be important to communicate Council decisions that affect your residents and to know your patch and be aware of any problems. You may also be asked to represent residents' views at council meetings. In the early days you will not always be sure who the best contact on a particular issue is but Council officers will be able to help you with this. The Member Services team will always be available to assist you as a first point of contact. It is important not to 'promise the earth'. As an Ashford Borough Councillor you may not be able to achieve everything that residents ask of you. Being honest and realistic will help manage expectations and avoid placing you under unnecessary pressure from residents.

Local Government

Local government touches the lives of everybody, every day. Councils deal with everything from schools to care of older people, from roads to rubbish, libraries and local planning. As a Councillor, understanding how Local Government works will help you to represent your local community.

What do Councils do?

Councils work with local people

and partners to agree and deliver on local priorities. They provide a wide range of services either directly, in partnership with others or by commissioning them from a third party. Councils are responsible for the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of their areas. The Localism Act 2011 has given Councils and communities more influence over the way their local area is managed. Councils provide more than 800 services to local communities. Most are mandatory, which means that by law the Council must do them. Some mandatory functions are tightly controlled by central government, resulting in a similar level of service across the country. Other services are discretionary, which means the Council has discretion over the type and level of service it provides. They range from large economic regeneration projects right down to the removal of wasp nests.

How is Local Government organised?

Successive reorganisations of Local Government have created a complex and often baffling array of arrangements which vary from area to area. Much of England (including Ashford) has two tiers of local government – County Councils and District (or Borough) councils – with responsibility for services split between the two. Other areas have a single unitary authority responsible for all local services (e.g. Medway).

Two-tier areas:

County Councils provide services that cover the whole county, such

as education, waste disposal and adult social care.

District Councils (some are also known as Borough or City councils) are smaller and provide local services such as refuse collection, environmental health, leisure facilities, housing and planning.

Town and Parish Councils

In most areas, including Ashford, the most local tier of Local Government is a Parish or Town Council. They maintain some local amenities such as recreational areas, footpaths and cemeteries. The Parish Council is also consulted on highway and planning applications. A Councillor

may serve on one or more tiers of local government – so a County Councillor may also be a District Councillor and a Parish Councillor. Each Parish Council can be very

different and individual Parishes and their Parish Council create individual community spirit.



Who does what?

	County (KCC)	District/ Borough (ABC)
Education	✓	
Highways & Transport planning	✓	
Passenger transport	✓	
Social care	✓	
Housing		✓
Libraries	✓	
Leisure		✓
Environmental health		✓
Trading Standards	✓	
Waste collection		✓
Waste disposal	✓	
Planning applications	✓	✓
Local Strategic planning		✓
Local tax collection		✓

ABC does have an input on county functions such as education, highways and transportation, and therefore has set up its own Working Groups on those issues as well as the Joint Transportation Board (a joint Committee of KCC and ABC Councillors). As an ABC Councillor you may have an opportunity to be a member of those Groups. There is also a 'Faults Portal' on the KCC website for members to report highway faults.

Most day to day planning applications are dealt with by ABC. KCC also deal with some planning applications such as waste management and minerals development.

How are decisions made?



Ashford, as with most Councils, operates a Leader and Cabinet model of decision making. The full Council elects a Leader who in turn appoints and chairs the Cabinet. Each Cabinet Member has a specific area of responsibility. The Cabinet makes most day to day decisions within a policy and budget framework set by the Administration and approved by Full Council. The Cabinet meets regularly (monthly) so decisions are made quickly.

All Councillors sit on Full Council. This is responsible for setting the policy framework, agreeing the budget and spending plans, electing the Leader of the Council and making constitutional decisions. It is also a forum for debate on major issues affecting the Authority and its local area. Councils with a Leader and Cabinet system must establish Overview and Scrutiny arrangements, through which Non-Cabinet Councillors can scrutinise decisions.

Finally there are some regulatory functions over which the Cabinet does not have responsibility – for example determining planning applications and making decisions on licensing. These are delegated to separate Committees.

Key Positions at Ashford Borough Council

Mayor – The Mayor of Ashford is the Borough's first citizen. He/she is a Councillor who is elected by their peers for a year's term of office at the Annual Meeting of the Council in May. Responsibilities of the Mayor include: Chairing Meetings of the

Full Council; hosting a number of civic events; representing the Borough at ceremonial occasions; attending a wide range of events and presentations to which he/she is invited.

Leader of the Council – A Councillor elected by peers - normally for the four year Council term. The Leader provides overall political leadership and direction and overall co-ordination of Council policies, strategies and service delivery. The Leader chairs the Cabinet and appoints colleague Members as their Deputy Leader and to the Cabinet. The Leader of the Council is therefore normally the Leader of the Council's majority Group.

Cabinet Member – (also known as a Portfolio Holder) - a Councillor appointed by the Leader to serve on the Cabinet and given a particular area of responsibility (i.e. a Portfolio). A Cabinet can be made up of between three and ten Councillors. Ashford's Cabinet is currently made up of the Leader, a Deputy Leader and eight other Portfolio Holders, each having a Lead Member to assist them in their area of responsibility.

Chief Executive – A paid officer who is responsible for: the Council's business planning; overall management of the Council and ensuring that service delivery to the people of the Borough is of as high a quality as possible and that all the resources of the Council are used in the most effective way; leading and directing the Council's Management Team, ensuring a corporate



ABC Chief Executive John Bunnett



approach to management of the Council; ensuring Council policies are put into action, performance is evaluated and the operations of the Council are kept under review. The Chief Executive is the statutory Head of Paid Service. He is also appointed as the Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer for Ashford.

Section 151 Officer - (also known as Chief Finance Officer) - A statutory position to which the council must appoint which; ensures lawfulness and financial prudence of decision making; has responsibility for the administration of the financial affairs of the council; contributes to the Corporate Management of the council by way of professional financial advice; and provides advice to Councillors and Officers.

Monitoring Officer - a statutory position to which the council must appoint which; maintains the council's constitution; ensures lawfulness and fairness of decision making; supports the Standards Committee, and manages the Code of Conduct complaints system; is the proper officer for access to information arrangements; ensures Cabinet decisions are within the budget and policy framework; and provides advice on probity and policy framework issues to the Council. The council's current Monitoring Officer is the Head of Legal and Democratic Services Terry Mortimer.

The Constitution

As a new Councillor you will need to be aware of the Council's Constitution, which sets out how the Council conducts its business, including:

- Who is responsible for making decisions and how decisions are made
- Procedural matters (set out in the Responsibilities and Functions section)
- Role of officers
- Codes and protocols.

It is important to familiarise yourself with these parts of the Constitution, in particular the Responsibilities and Functions section. These specify the terms of reference of the Council's various committees etc, the rules on declarations of interest, the timings and order of business at Council meetings and the rules of debate.

Agendas and minutes

By law, the Council's formal meetings must be held in public, although the public and press can be excluded for discussions on some confidential/exempt items. Councils must give at least five days' notice of a meeting. The agenda must be made available at least five days before the meeting. The minutes should be available on the Council's website and available on request. The Cabinet must also publish its forward plan showing the key decisions to be made in at least the next four months (Ashford has a twelve month rolling schedule of Cabinet Key Decisions).

Code of Conduct and Standards



As a Councillor you will be expected to comply with the council's Code of Conduct for elected members. The code is the same as that adopted by most councils in Kent.

The Code of Conduct is based on seven principles of public life set out opposite. The code also reflects the national rules in the Localism Act 2011 regarding registration and declaration at meetings of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPIs). Within 28 days of election all councillors must register their DPIs (including those of their spouse or partner) with the council's Monitoring Officer. These registrations must then be updated promptly if they change. Failure to do this can be a criminal offence, as can taking part in meetings and voting when you have a DPI in a matter under consideration.

The Borough Council's Code of Conduct also requires declaration at meetings of certain other types of interest (Other Significant Interests or OSIs). All these rules will be explained to councillors soon after the election. In addition, the code imposes other general conduct obligations on councillors when acting as such, including not bringing your office or the council into disrepute and not using your position as a councillor improperly to confer an advantage or disadvantage on any person.

Complaints that councillors have breached the Code of Conduct are dealt with by the council's Monitoring Officer and can be considered by the Council's Standards Committee.



Seven principles of public life

Selflessness

Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.

Integrity

Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.

Objectivity

Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

Accountability

Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

Openness

Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for doing so.

Honesty

Holders of public office should be truthful.

Leadership

Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to change poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

Allowances and IT

Allowances are paid to Elected Councillors. A taxable basic allowance is paid to all Councillors (currently £4,466 per year - from 1st April 2015 - at Ashford) and it is intended to cover the costs associated with being a Councillor including disbursements such as telephone calls, stationery and IT peripherals. It is not intended to be remuneration for time spent in undertaking the role of a Councillor. Workloads and geographical areas covered vary between Councillors but all receive the same basic allowance.

Members who are appointed to certain roles (e.g. Leader, Cabinet Member, Committee Chairs/Vice-Chairs/Group Leaders) are also entitled to claim a special responsibility allowance (also taxable). The rates vary depending on the particular position appointed to. All Elected Members are also entitled to claim travel and subsistence and dependent and child care allowances in respect of their travel to and from, and attendance at, approved meetings. More details on this are contained within the Council's Constitution and will be made available to Members following their election.

IT equipment and support will also be made available to Elected Members.



Member Services

Ashford Borough Council has a Member Services Section which will be your first port of call at the council on many issues throughout your term as an Elected Councillor. Please ask any questions if something isn't obvious and if they can't answer themselves, they will certainly know where to direct you for an answer.

The Member Services team is part of Legal and Democratic Services and undertakes the following work:

- Administering all of the work associated with the council's decision making and scrutiny functions, i.e. producing agendas, attending meetings and producing minutes of all meetings of the council, cabinet and other committees and many other member meetings
- Management of the Members' Allowances Scheme
- Management of Members' Training and Induction
- Management of the Mayoral and Civic Ceremonial functions of the council
- Management of the Overview and Scrutiny Process
- Providing administrative support to all Members of the council
- Management of the booking/hiring of the Council Chamber and Committee Rooms
- Handling Ombudsman complaints
- Holding statutory registers (for example Members interests)
- Generally assisting Members by undertaking research or offering guidance as to whom members should approach for assistance within the authority
- Information or correspondence (from Members or Officers), which is intended for All Councillors must be sent to Member Services for distribution
- Supporting the Monitoring Officer in constitutional and interest matters

Keith Fearon is the Member Services and Scrutiny Manager and leads the team. Keith can be contacted on

01233 330564 or

keith.fearon@ashford.gov.uk

Terry Mortimer is the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer. Terry can be contacted on

01233 330210 or

terry.mortimer@ashford.gov.uk

We hope you have found this document useful and it has given you a better understanding of the role of an Ashford Borough Councillor. We look forward to working with you in the future.

