

Ashford Borough Council

Minutes of a Meeting of the Ashford Borough Council held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **15th December 2016**.

Present:

His Worshipful the Mayor, Cllr. S J G Koowaree (Chairman);

Cllrs. Apps, Bartlett, Bennett, Mrs Blanford, Bradford, Burgess, Chilton, Clarkson, Clokie, Dehnel, Farrell, Feacey, Heyes, Hicks, A Howard, W Howard, Knowles, Link, Miss Martin, Mrs Martin, Michael, Shorter, Waters, Wedgbury, White.

Also Present:

Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive, Corporate Director (Law and Governance), Head of Finance, Senior Member Services Officer.

Prior to the commencement of the meeting: -

- (i) The Reverend Alan Dinnie said prayers.
- (ii) His Worshipful the Mayor asked Members to remain standing in silence in respect of Mr David Sharp, who served as the Council's Borough Recreation Officer from the late 1970s to 1989, who had passed away recently.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Adby, Barrett, Bell, Mrs Bell, Buchanan, Mrs Dyer, Galpin, Mrs Heyes, Krause, Macpherson, Murphy, Ovenden, Pickering, Powell, Sims. Smith, Mrs Webb.

244 Exempt or Confidential Information

The Mayor asked whether any items should be dealt with in private because of the likely disclosure of exempt or confidential information. The Corporate Director (Law and Governance) advised that there were none.

245 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on the 20th October 2016 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

246 Announcements

(a) The Mayor's Charity

The Mayor said he firstly wanted to thank all those Members who had attended his recent charity curry night. It had been a fantastic night and he had been really pleased and grateful to see so many Members there. He advised that he was hosting

a Shirley Bassey Tribute evening for his charities on Friday the 27th January at London Beach Golf Club, Tenterden and again all Members were welcome to attend.

(b) Leader of the Council

The Leader said that as 2016 drew to a close he thought he would take the opportunity to reflect with colleagues on the progress they had seen across the Borough in the last twelve months.

When they took office in May 2015, he said that this administration had made a number of promises. One of those was to take a firm stance against the minority who flouted the rules and behaved in a manner that caused distress to the vast majority of law abiding citizens. Another promise they had made was to make sure that Ashford remained the lowest Council taxing Local Authority in Kent. This meant that the Council would have to be more business-like and generate revenues, as encouraged by Central Government. In October 2015 the Council had adopted its new Corporate Plan - setting out a clear direction and priorities for the next five years. There were just four clear priority areas: -

- Enterprising Ashford - Economic investment and growth;
- Living Ashford - Quality housing and homes for all;
- Active and Creative Ashford - Healthy choices through physical, cultural and leisure engagement;
- Attractive Ashford - Countryside and townscape, heritage and conservation.

These priorities had been set to underpin and strengthen the Council's aspiration to remain a well-resourced Council, with effective governance, that provided high quality services, good communications, safe surroundings and demonstrated good compliance and high standards. The last twelve months had seen significant progress made in delivering on each of the priority areas.

In terms of Enterprising Ashford there had been a flurry of planning approvals given this year, including Elwick Place (the cinema, hotel and eateries), the Cineworld IMAX extension, town centre apartments and the Chapel Down Brewery, Aldi superstore and hotel all along Victoria Way. The town centre was bucking the national trend as footfall rose and shop vacancy rates fell to an historic low of 8.9%, compared to 19% in 2013 and for the first time below the national average of 10.2%. Additionally, Ashford's visitor economy continued to thrive with a 6% increase in attraction spend. Visits to the district rose to 4.3 million trips and the total number of jobs supported by tourism rose by 3.54% to 5,482 - this equated to approximately 1 in 10 of all jobs in Ashford. The total value of tourism across the Borough, including all visitor spend, as well as associated and indirect spending was £278 million. Ashford's thriving visitor economy and the value of tourism in the Borough could not be underestimated. Ashford accounted for thousands of jobs and contributed significantly to Kent's economy.

With regard to the second priority, Living Ashford, this year had seen phase one of the exemplar sheltered housing scheme at Farrow Court completed with phase two under construction. Just last night the Chief Executive had accepted an award at the Kent County Council Architectural Awards for the best quality design of residential accommodation for Farrow Court. Planning permission had now been agreed for the Danemore scheme and they continued to work with Housing Associations who were also delivering housing care for the elderly like Quarry House in Aldington. The year

had also seen many affordable homes built, providing new homes for local families. Chilmington Green should soon be under construction and the Council was working hard to review its Local Plan which would be considered during the coming year. They had also set out the Council's tougher line on compliance across the board including new enforcement policies and an online reporting system. In addition the Leader advised that he would soon be signing the document to agree the 300 homes at Conningbrook which would release money for Conningbrook Country Park and other contributions.

Turning to the third priority of Active and Creative Ashford, the Leader advised that the Ashford International Model Railway Education Centre had received planning approval this year, the new Spearpoint Pavilion now provided excellent facilities for sports clubs and the local community, the new cricket pavilion at Charing had been officially opened by England Cricket Coach Paul Farbrace and the Mayor and work had now started on another community facility at Repton Park. Revelation St Mary's continued to provide a platform for music both at the Church and the new town centre bandstand. The Jasmin Vardimon Company, in conjunction with KCC, seemed set to secure a new Dance Academy Studio to be built in Ashford. The Council had launched an activity programme aimed at the over 60s and the Create Festival once again entertained the crowds at Victoria Park. This was one of the largest free music festivals in the South East. With the new Ashford College preparing to accept nearly 1000 students from September 2017 there would be a growing interest in creative activities.

In terms of the final priority, Attractive Ashford, this had been addressed by the Council in October, bringing the responsibility for grounds maintenance across the Borough back in-house, under the name Aspire Landscape Management. 20 KCC staff had been transferred in and put on the payroll. This initiative was a key part of delivering the adopted Land Management Improvement Plan, which aimed to make the Borough a pleasant and enjoyable place to live, work, visit and enjoy. By enhancing Ashford's overall appearance and attractiveness this would raise civic pride and make the Borough more attractive for residents, visitors and businesses. The Leader said he was sure that colleagues would agree that Aspire had already made a marked improvement to the appearance of the Borough as a whole. In addition, new signage had been introduced in Ashford town centre and a Heritage Trail launched, while the Tenterden Tourist Information Centre had relocated to the Town Hall. They had also brought in the litter enforcement scheme, which had seen over 900 Fixed Penalty Notices issued by Kingdom wardens between 7th September and 30th November. That did show the scale of the litter dropping problem that was occurring in Ashford.

The Leader advised that the Corporate Plan set out the positive direction this Council was taking to help the Borough to grow, thrive and prosper in the coming years. It was pleasing to see such progress being made against the strategic priorities. Whilst core plans had to be implemented, there was much more going on both in service delivery and support for the community – and that meant people. This included Officers and Elected Members but also many others, including volunteers, who all had a positive part to play. He was sure that everyone involved had the best interest of the Borough at heart. Of course there was a great deal more to be done but he thought all could take a degree of comfort from the significant amount of improvements the Council had made thus far and they would continue to focus on exciting opportunities for economic growth, providing business and leisure facilities,

building quality homes and press on promoting Ashford as a clean and pleasant place to live, work and visit.

Finally, the Leader said he would like to thank colleagues and Officers for their efforts this year, and on behalf of the Council, to wish them all, and indeed the Borough's residents and businesses, a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

The Mayor said it was pleasing to note how well the Borough was progressing generally and he also wanted to add his congratulations to those responsible for winning the award for Farrow Court.

247 Cabinet – 10th November and 8th December 2016

The report of the Corporate Director (Law and Governance), which had been tabled, clarified the procedure for consideration of the Cabinet Minutes.

(a) Cabinet – 10th November 2016

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 10th November 2016 be received and noted.

(b) Cabinet – 8th December 2016

Resolved:

That subject to the expiry of the period by which decisions arising from the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 8th December 2016 may be called in, i.e. 21st December 2016:-

- (i) the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 8th December 2016 be received and noted with the exception of Minute Nos. 222, 224, 225, 226 and 227.**
- (ii) Minute Nos. 222, 224, 225, 226 and 227 be approved and adopted.**

248 Audit Committee – 6th December 2016

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit Committee held on the 6th December 2016 be approved and adopted.

249 Selection and Constitutional Review Committee – 8th December 2016

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Selection and Constitutional Review Committee held on the 8th December 2016 be approved and adopted.

250 Seasons Greetings

Councillor Mrs Martin said she wanted to take the opportunity to thank all of those who had helped her with the problems she had experienced this year. She wanted to thank the Mayor, Members and Officers in every department but in particular wanted to mention Councillors Chilton, Smith, Michael, Bartlett, Mrs Webb and of course her own daughter Councillor Jane Martin. The kindness and consideration shown really did go a long way and she wanted to reflect on that, especially at this time of year and wish everybody a Happy Christmas.

The Mayor said he also wanted to wish everybody a good Christmas with their families, a Happy New Year and invite everybody present to join him in the Committee Rooms after the meeting for some Christmas refreshments.

(DS)

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