

Ashford Borough Council

Minutes of a Meeting of the Ashford Borough Council held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **20th April 2017**.

Present:

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

Cllrs. Aaby, Bartlett, Mrs Bell, Bell, Bennett, Bradford, Buchanan, Burgess, Chilton, Clarkson, Clokie, Mrs Dyer, Farrell, Feacey, Galpin, Heyes, Mrs Heyes, Hicks, W Howard, Krause, Link, Michael, Pickering, Smith, Waters, Mrs Webb, Wedgbury, White.

Also Present:

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

Prior to the commencement of the meeting: -

- (i) The Reverend Alan Dinnie said prayers.
- (ii) Councillor Smith gave a tribute to the late Councillor Harold Edwin Martin Apps.
- (iii) His Worshipful the Mayor asked Members to remain standing in silence in respect of Councillor Apps, who served as an Ashford Borough Councillor from 1973 to 2003 and again from 2011 to 2017 and was the Mayor of Ashford in 1979/80, as well as Mr Tom Pelham of Uprising and Mr Paul Hardisty, a Member of Chilham Parish Council and the Ashford Access Group, who had all passed away recently.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Barrett, Mrs Blanford, Knowles, Miss Martin, Mrs Martin, Ovenden, Shorter.

381 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.

382 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on the 16th February 2017 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

383 Announcements

(a) The Mayor

The Mayor said he firstly wanted to welcome visitors from Ashford's German twin town Bad Münstereifel who were present tonight. They had been in the country for a funeral and he said he wanted to take the opportunity to invite them to the meeting and to visit the Mayor's Parlour afterwards. He also advised that he was hosting his last charity event – A Rat Pack Evening - on Saturday 6th May at London Beach Golf Club, Tenterden and again all Members were welcome to attend and tickets were available from his PA Andrea Collard.

(b) Leader of the Council

The Leader said that he would like to take the opportunity to reflect with colleagues on the real progress being made by this Conservative Administration, which was wholly in line with its four key objectives as set out in the Corporate Plan two years ago. They were now at the mid-way point in the plan and they had reviewed progress against their desired objectives and were confident that they were doing rather well. The Council's Corporate Plan was adopted in October 2015 and set out the Authority's four key priorities for the next five years. These were underpinned by guiding principles that were set to ensure delivery and they were well on target with delivering what they had promised.

A week or so ago, he had been among a number of guests of the Hadlow Group, taken on a special tour of the new Ashford College which was going to be such an impressive teaching facility. Occupying a pivotal site opposite the International Station, they had been told that demand for places already far exceeded expectations and he was really looking forward to September when they would see close to 1500 students arrive for daytime and evening studies, changing the dynamics of the Town Centre which was to be welcomed.

All could now see the crane on site at the Commercial Quarter, where the first of a number of new office blocks would soon appear. Take up of that office space, even at this early stage, was more encouraging that they could have envisaged. Work was also due to start on site in the next few months at Elwick Place. Set in the new Town Centre, there would be a cinema, restaurants and a hotel built, all in such an important public realm setting close to Debenhams with a walk through directly into the old historic town with its cobbled high street and historic twelfth century Norman Church. In addition, work would soon start on the new Brewery and Visitor Centre again on the other side of the railway line, but just in the heart of the new larger Town Centre.

He advised that construction on the road accesses at Chilmington Green was now physically underway and it was important to ensure that this development actually justified the Council's claims that it would be an example to all. The quality of the build and the nature of the layout and setting were of such importance. Whilst they wished to assist the developers, they must also 'keep their eye on the ball' to deliver a truly delightful addition to the Borough of Ashford.

One of the largest expansion projects was the Designer Outlet, where construction work was due to start later that year. In addition, funding for Junction 10a and new signalling at Ashford International Station had been secured and the new signalling

was set to be installed and operating in early 2018. Last week a number of colleagues would have also seen the proposals for an iconic set of buildings right next to the International Station on the old B&Q site. This just demonstrated the appetite that existed for investment in Ashford.

As well as the 'Big 8', many other projects had been delivered that continued to contribute towards the Corporate Plan priorities. Highlights in terms of leisure included the opening of the Spearpoint Pavilion and the continued success of the Create Music Festival, whilst initiatives such as Farrow Court and Danemore would improve the housing provision for Ashford's elderly population.

The Leader advised that, as reported in last week's Kentish Express, the Council's very own in-house Aspire Landscape Management team had dramatically improved the Borough's open spaces. Over the past 18 months, the Council had enhanced the appearance of several of the Borough's roundabouts which created an attractive first impression of the town for visitors travelling to Ashford by car. Ashford's recycling service was also now one to be proud of. The service had not only seen the Borough quadruple its recycling performance, but also become the very best performing District in Kent and the Country's most improved recycling Authority as well. The Council's face to face customer services had also returned to Level One at the Civic Centre where all would be able to see what a remarkably good job they were doing in a busy environment. The new on-line IT reporting system had also proven to be very popular, making it easier to report issues such as fly-tipping to the Officers of the Council so remedial action could be taken much more swiftly. Multi-million pound investment, job creation and ground breaking service innovations were all the hallmarks of a thriving business like Council.

Ashford had been voted the best place in Kent to do business. Local firm, RIFT Group, had scooped the Excellence in Customer Service Award and Breakthrough Funding had won the Most Promising New Business at the Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce Annual Business Awards earlier that month. Katy Barker of Ashford's Directline Structures had been honoured as a finalist in the Young Person in Business award.

Finally, the Leader said that the range and scale of achievement of the 'Big 8' projects showed what a combination of strong political direction and Officers' endeavour could achieve. He believed that action spoke louder than words and as all could clearly see action and progress had been made over the last two years across every aspect of the Council's Corporate Plan. Yes, there was still more that could be done, but he hoped that residents, businesses and visitors could take great heart from the many projects and exciting developments coming forward that would all have a positive effect on the Borough's future economic prosperity. Looking ahead, an exciting number of projects had already been identified for the next two years – including further works around the Commercial Quarter, plans to rejuvenate Victoria Park, further commercial building acquisitions, the adoption of a new Local Plan, a response to homelessness and further investment at Conningbrook Lakes Country Park. Other projects were being advanced and were yet to pass the scrutiny of their suitability for Ashford and the planning processes that the Council had in place. He concluded by saying that in the last few weeks Ashford had sadly lost a few dear friends and colleagues who had served the people of the Borough well over many years. In remembering them they should continue to strive to create an Ashford that they too would have been very proud of.

384 Cabinet – 9th March and 6th April 2017

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

(a) Cabinet – 9th March 2017

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 9th March 2017 be received and noted.

(b) Cabinet – 6th April 2017

Resolved:

That subject to the expiry of the period by which decisions arising from the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 6th April 2017 may be called in, i.e. 21st April 2017: -

(i) the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 6th April 2017 be received and noted with the exception of Minute Nos. 371(b) and 372.

(ii) Minute Nos. 371(b) and 372 be approved and adopted.

385 Appointments Committee – 9th and 22nd February and 4th April 2017

(a) Appointments Committee – 9th February 2017

The Chief Executive left the Council Chamber at this point of the Meeting.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 9.3 Mr Relf, a local resident spoke on this item. He advised that an anonymous source had sent him some papers including Minutes of a meeting relating to the appointment of the Chief Executive so it was clear that somebody was unhappy with this. He said that referring to Agenda Item 8 of the Cabinet meeting of 9th March 2017 and to Agenda Item 4 of the Appointments Committee meeting of 9th February 2017, could somebody please clarify why the new Chief Executive/Head of Paid Service was not recruited by the same open recruitment process as was being used to appoint the new Head of Planning and Development and the new Head of Environmental Services? He considered that good recruitment was as vital for the Council as it was for any other organisation and without a recruitment process that was open to external as well as internal applicants, how could the residents of the Borough be confident that the Interim Chief Executive/Head of Paid Service was the best candidate for the post?

The Leader of the Council responded that he was always a little apprehensive when he saw people sending anonymous letters and he generally paid them little regard if people were not prepared to put their name to something. On this particular topic, Mr Relf was right to make the point that the Council should seek to appoint people from the widest possible pool, but sometimes there were exceptions and this was one

such case. There had been a sudden departure of the previous Chief Executive at a time of fairly high activity at the Council and it had been seen as the prudent thing to appoint someone swiftly to that post, but on an interim basis to give an opportunity to see how that person performed. They had chosen a Senior Officer who had been with the Council for 25 years – one that knew the Borough inside out and was highly recognised and respected throughout the nation (let alone the Borough) for delivering one of the finest Social Housing Departments in the UK. They had though still been cautious which is why they had not appointed immediately. The interim arrangements had been in place for over 12 months so they had not had to advertise externally and the interim post holder could be considered for a permanent post without the need to advertise. If there had been any doubt, the Council would have of course advertised, but this was considered an exceptional case. Ashford had already demonstrated that it was very committed to having the widest possible field of applicants during its recruitment of the Head of Environmental Services, with more than 30 applicants from all over the country. Only yesterday, the Council had invited consultants to help them with recruitment for a number of posts on a national scale. The Leader said that he agreed with Mr Relf inasmuch as the Council should look to recruit as widely as possible, but this had been considered an exceptional position and the Appointments Committee had been satisfied and content that on this occasion this was the right appointment. The Cabinet had concurred with that position as set out in Minute No. 330 of the 9th March 2017 meeting, and he was confident that the wider Council Members would also be supportive.

Resolved:

- That (i) the Minutes of the Meeting of the Appointments Committee held on the 9th February 2017 be received and noted with the exception of Minute No. 279**
- (ii) Minute No. 279 be approved and adopted.**

The Chief Executive then returned to the Council Chamber and the Mayor congratulated her on her permanent appointment.

(b) Appointments Committee – 22nd February 2017

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Appointments Committee held on the 22nd February 2017 be received and noted.

(c) Appointments Committee – 4th April 2017

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Appointments Committee held on the 4th April 2017 be received and noted.

386 Selection and Constitutional Review Committee – 9th March 2017

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Selection and Constitutional Review Committee held on the 9th March 2017 be approved and adopted.

387 Appeals Committee – 14th March 2017

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Appeals Committee held on the 14th March 2017 be received and noted.

388 Audit Committee – 21st March 2017

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit Committee held on the 21st March 2017 be received and noted.

(DS)

MINS: