

Ashford Borough Council

Minutes of a Meeting of the Ashford Borough Council held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **18th May 2017**.

Present:

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

Cllrs. Barrett, Mrs Bell, Bell, Bennett, Mrs Blanford, Bradford, Buchanan, Burgess, Chilton, Clarkson, Clokie, Mrs Dyer, Farrell, Feacey, Galpin, Heyes, Hicks, W Howard, Knowles, Krause, Link, Macpherson, Miss Martin, Mrs Martin, Michael, Ovenden, Pickering, Shorter, Sims, Wedgbury, White.

Prior to the commencement of the meeting the Reverend Alan Dinnie said prayers.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Aaby, Bartlett, Dehnel, Mrs Heyes, Murphy, Smith, Waters, Mrs Webb.

Also Present:

Chief Executive, Director of Law & Governance, Strategic Officer Lead for the Chilmington Management Organisation, Head of Corporate Property and Projects, Head of Finance, Communications and Marketing Manager, Senior Member Services Officer.

1 Election of Mayor

Councillor Ovenden nominated Councillor Winston Michael for election as Mayor of Ashford Borough Council for the forthcoming municipal year.

This was seconded by Councillor Clarkson.

Councillor Ovenden said that it was a privilege to propose Councillor Winston Michael to be the next Mayor of Ashford.

He said that Winston had started off life in Welling, Kent where he gained his education and had been a keen sportsman representing his school and the District in several disciplines. His sporting prowess was to prove useful later in life whilst working at Lloyds of London when he was challenged to run from the top of the Lloyds building in Leadenhall Street, to the top of the Monument and back in less than ten minutes. Substantial betting took place, although he was sure no money changed hands, and the race was on and the whole of Lloyds took a deep breath. Winston completed the challenge well within the time, no doubt with a substantial reward from those who had backed his success! Throughout his working life his diligence and hard work led him to a number of notable achievements. Working in the finance department in Lloyds he was the youngest manager in their 200-year history. In 1963, a career change led him to NCR, at that time one of the top three computer manufacturers in the world. His new role involved development and installation of cutting edge business solutions to major banks and financial institutions. Whilst working in the City, every evening Winston took the 17.23 from Cannon Street to Dartford – he and his friends always travelling in the same

compartment, the one that stopped opposite the exit gate for the platform. Sharing their part of the carriage was a small group of young ladies and a conversation was struck up between the groups. One girl in particular had caught Winston's eye who he discovered was called Doreen and worked for the Anglo Portuguese Bank. Winston thought Doreen was gorgeous so eventually plucked up the courage to ask her for a date. Doreen was 17 then and after three years' engagement and saving the deposit for a house (having to sell his beloved Triumph in the process!) Winston and Doreen married in October 1967 and started life together in a new house at Barming near Maidstone. In 1972 Winston moved on to form an IT Consultancy with colleagues which over the next 25 years, with his strong leadership, became a major provider of finance, logistics and manufacturing solutions to companies across the globe. His work in the industry led him to becoming an acknowledged expert rubbing shoulders with the likes of Frankie Howerd, Richard Branson and Alan Bond. In 1976, now with four children, Winston and Doreen moved to a large house with grounds at Charing – Doreen running a playschool at Pluckley before taking a job at the William Harvey Hospital where she remained until retirement.

Councillor Ovenden said that during the Great Storm of 1987 Winston had arrived home during the early hours to find his house and garage obstructed by many fallen trees. Fearing that the remaining precarious tree would topple on his neighbour's house and with a tree surgeon unable to reach him, Winston sprung into action and saved the day by crawling in to his garage, retrieving a chainsaw and doing the job himself, becoming the hero of the hour. A few years later on their 25th wedding anniversary, after making the impulsive decision to check some masonry on the outside of the house before going out to celebrate, Winston was standing on a ladder outside the bedroom window and he still swears Doreen opened the window to push him off! Lying on the ground, broken and unable to move, his cries for help were answered by his youngest daughter. So where was Doreen? Looking for his life insurance no doubt!

He had asked Winston to tell him something about Doreen and he said "she has skills far beyond mine – useful ones! She is a good artist, poet, seamstress, an excellent cook and she has great patience". Councillor Ovenden thought that was a useful quality when you got to know Winston!

Councillor Ovenden said that having taken a keen interest in the local community, on retirement Winston's involvement increased, becoming Chairman of the Parish Council. As an active campaigner on local issues, in 2011 he was elected as a Borough Councillor and since then he had worked tirelessly to represent the residents of his Ward and the surrounding areas. His devotion and energy were something others could only aspire to. He was passionate about helping young people who may have struggled against misguided preconceptions, regardless of their background or abilities, feeling that their capabilities were often underestimated. He believed that our young people were exceptional and very much the future of Ashford. Winston and Doreen had recently thrown themselves into an event – The Kent Challenger Games - that would help young people find their inner strengths and encourage them to be the best that they can be.

Councillor Ovenden said that he was sure Winston would excel in this challenging new role and he hoped that he would have a thoroughly enjoyable year as Mayor.

Councillor Clarkson said he was pleased to second the nomination of Councillor Winston Michael.

He said he had known Winston for about 15 years or so when they had both lived in Charing and when Winston had joined the Council he realised that they were going to have someone who was astute, challenging and in the nicest possible way, a bit of a Rottweiler! That was Winston to a tee, but what everyone had to realise was that he was passionate about everything he embraced and entered into and he knew that he would enter his Mayoral year in the same spirit. Inside Winston was a heart of gold and he was devoting his Mayoral year to the children and young people of the Borough.

Councillor Clarkson said if Winston used his energies half as well as he had used them with the Council then everybody would be in for a great year. Winston was a character, and he was honoured, proud and pleased to be seconding the nomination.

There were no other nominations.

Resolved:

That Councillor Winston Michael be elected Mayor of the Borough of Ashford for the Municipal Year 2017/18.

2 Declaration of Acceptance of Office by the Mayor

Councillor Michael made his Declaration of Acceptance of Office. The retiring Mayor, the Chief Executive, the newly elected Mayor and his Chaplain then left the meeting. Upon their return, having been invested with his chains of office His Worshipful the Mayor, Councillor Winston Michael assumed the Chair.

3 Appointment of Mayor's Chaplain

His Worshipful the Mayor said that his Chaplain for the coming year would be the Reverend John Mackenzie. The Reverend Mackenzie then said prayers.

4 Vote of Thanks by the Mayor for His Election

His Worshipful the Mayor began by welcoming the High Sheriff of Kent George Jessel, the visiting Mayors and Mayoresses from other areas as well as invited guests, fellow Councillors, ABC Officers and all others present and thanking them for attending his inauguration. He advised that following the meeting all were invited to join him for refreshments in the reception area downstairs.

He said that on behalf of Doreen and himself, he thanked George and Gloria for sharing the last twelve months with them. It had been magical and they would treasure their friendship. He thanked them both on behalf of everyone for being such great ambassadors for Ashford.

He said he needed to savour this moment for a while as he had never in his wildest dreams expected this and he was not sure if Members fully appreciated what they had gifted him – an opportunity for him to always have the last word! He said he saw some worried faces around as to where this might lead but he wanted to reassure everyone that he would not have a 'Donald Trump moment'. Or would he?! But seriously, he thanked everyone for the gift of being the First Citizen of Ashford which he said was an honour and a privilege. He wanted to thank the residents of his Ward

for bringing this opportunity to him by electing him as their representative in 2011. He assured them that he would continue to act on their behalf and look after their interests regardless of his Mayoral duties and to keep them informed as he had always done in the past.

His Worshipful the Mayor said that there was one other person that he must thank and that was his wife Doreen. Since they married she had quietly accepted his involvement with the community which had at times seen him out every night fundraising or organising community activities. As all Councillors would know in work you experienced highs and lows and in his life, he was blessed with Doreen as she was the one who always pulled him through another day. In October, he and Doreen would celebrate 50 years of marriage and in accepting the Mayor's Office he could say thank you for 50 wonderful years and show the huge love he had for her. He would have a great Mayoress by his side. A truly remarkable wife, mother, grandmother and friend as all who knew her would testify.

He said his position as a Borough Councillor brought him in to contact with schools and a recent visit to Wyvern School had brought home to him the incredible work done by all of our teachers. Teaching was no longer solely about education but embraced every component of a young person's life – entering the realm of social welfare. When he saw the challenges that teachers faced each and every day, he realised that it took a very special person to be a teacher and he wanted to thank every teacher on behalf of our young people. The same thing could be said about another group of very special people that they should thank - our nurses and doctors and this had been brought home to him recently when he had opened the new Celia Blakey cancer unit at the William Harvey Hospital. He came across many other people in the community doing such great work to improve the lives of others in their own quiet way. Ashford should be proud that as a Borough it had such great people who were the unsung heroes and he thanked them. He said he wanted to know more about these people and see if, through his office, he could make a difference to what they delivered, so he invited anyone to come forward and tell him their story and he would try to help.

His Worshipful the Mayor said that his year would be both exciting and challenging. The Council had achieved much and the developments in Elwick Road, Victoria Way and the Commercial Quarter should do much to regenerate the town. He was proud to have been part of a Council that had been innovative in its approach to falling government subsidies and to not follow where the path may lead, but instead to go where there was no path and leave a much sought after trail. Yes, inevitably some things may fail, but anyone who said they had never made a mistake had never tried anything new. It took both sun and rain to make a rainbow and he was sure that if they all worked together in the best interests of their residents and the Borough, then there would be many more rainbows to come.

He said there were many young people in the community who were struggling in the face of misguided preconceptions about what they were capable of. Past focus had been geared towards academic prowess but this was changing with a cracking new College campus in Ashford offering a wide range of vocational training and life chances for many young people would be much improved. They should however not rest on their laurels because there were people who would still find it hard to obtain a 'piece of paper' and they must find a way to embrace their needs with on the job training alongside experienced workers, where skill at doing the actual job counted for more than that 'piece of paper', just as it had in bygone years. They needed to work with local businesses to realise this for the Borough's young people. Continuing

with the theme of young people, the purpose of the Kent Challenger Games on the 14th July 2017 was to show those who did not normally participate in sporting or physical activity due to disability, medical conditions or additional needs, their true inner strengths as well as giving them self-worth. They would experience something out of the ordinary, challenging, exciting and that would give them a sense of achievement. They would come to realise that what they thought was impossible was entirely possible – the impossible is impossible for them! Disabled military veterans would be at the Games to inspire the young and as part of the Games the Military Covenant would be affirmed. This was fitting as this year they would also remember the First World War and Paaschendaale. They all owed what they had today to the brave military personnel who put their lives on the line for all of us every day and whenever it came to a defining moment, without hesitation they were prepared to define that moment, often with their lives. So, everyone may have gathered that he was passionate about helping the Borough's young people - they were after all the future of Ashford, Kent and the country and it was theirs to shape.

As was customary, His Worshipful the Mayor said he had two nominated charities for the year which would both engage those young people who faced adversity to give them self-esteem and self-worth and to let them know that they were valued. His nominated charities were Wyvern School Foundation Trust and Uprising and he gave a warm welcome to their representatives who were present. Wyvern was a school for young people with special needs and their new addition of a large two storey building would allow them to deliver the incredibly good work they did to many more people. Uprising was another incredible organisation helping young people to achieve their true potential through projects such as Aspire, CATS, Hang 10, House, Purple and Stanhope Community Hub. This was the 'baby' of the late Tom Pelham and he was pleased to see his outstanding work continuing. He looked forward to working with his charities and helping them achieve much more which he knew was their passion. He thanked them on behalf of the Borough for the good work they did and said long may it continue.

He said that the forecast growth for Ashford would bring many employment opportunities and he said they must do all they could to give their young people a fair crack at filling those places. He therefore asked fellow Councillors and every Ashford business to support him by making this year a special one for all of the Borough's young people regardless of their personal circumstances. People would forget what you said and people would forget what you did, but people would never forget the way you made them feel and because of that they must all make young people feel good about themselves and wanted.

His Worshipful the Mayor concluded by saying that he had had a huge responsibility placed on his shoulders and been given everyone's trust and he said he would be the best he possibly could be on behalf of the Borough and all its residents. Yes, there would be challenges ahead, but let us all be optimistic about the future as the Council had an incredible team of Officers and Councillors. Thinking about where Ashford was now, and its future, he was reminded of the story of the Lion King and the magnificent production he had attended last year at Phoenix School. There was a phrase in that story that says you should have 'no worries' about your future, so he wanted to end by saying to all – "Ashford – *Hakuna Matata*".

His Worshipful the Mayor said he did also want to draw attention to the fact that this would be the last Council meeting attended to by Andrea Collard before her retirement. Andrea had been PA to Mayors for several years, providing great support and service. In the Mayoral fraternity, she was well respected and seen as an

efficient and effective PA, giving the Ashford Mayor's Office a very good name. On behalf of all Mayors he thanked Andrea and gave his sincere wishes for a retirement filled with enjoyment and many wondrous things.

5 Vote of Thanks to the Retiring Mayor and Mayoress

Councillor Galpin began his speech by congratulating Councillor Michael on his elevation to the Mayoralty. He looked forward to a year of excitement, but perhaps not too much as they were not all as fit as Winston!

Councillor Galpin said it was his pleasure to propose a vote of thanks to the retiring Mayor Councillor George Koowaree and his loyal and rather lovely Mayoress Gloria.

George had already served his apprenticeship as Mayor in 1996/97 so they expected great things and a polished performance and they had not been disappointed. He had been a great servant to the Ashford Borough throughout the 26 years he had served his Ward and it had been his pleasure to get to know him a bit better this year. As ever there had been a lot going on in Ashford town centre recently and they had met on a number of occasions. These included openings of shops where George had cut countless ribbons, the Create Festival and many other joyous occasions such as the recent 100th birthday of Mrs Dawes where George and Gloria had made her and other residents of Chamberlain Manor feel very welcome and it had been a lovely day.

He said that this was what marked George and Gloria out, they loved people and in return people loved them back. George had a popularity streak built in to his personality and people, both local residents and dignitaries from other Boroughs had been delighted to meet both he and Gloria. As a result of their approachable manner they had become the most excellent ambassadors for our wonderful Borough. They were always willing to sing the praises of Ashford's successes to Mayors in other Districts and they were still invited back! He felt that commerce lost a potentially great salesman to nursing and politics! Gloria herself had become a world class 'schmoozer' which was quite rare after initially being quite shy, and she had become a remarkable asset to George as Mayor and the Borough itself this past year. Ever present with a right word and a regal smile of encouragement, the vote of thanks went to her too, and not only because she was able to keep George under control, something very few people could actually manage. This appeared particularly true when music and dancing were involved as George was actually a demon on the dancefloor! Perhaps now he had a little more time he should sign up for Strictly Come Dancing!

Councillor Galpin said he wanted to add his own congratulations to all that had been said before because during the year George had also retained his seat on Kent County Council. This spoke volumes about him as a man because as Mayor he would have obviously been limited in the time available to him to campaign. In this case, it was not about what you said on the doorstep it was about how you had served your community and that was remembered. He had spoken earlier about joyous occasions but they had also needed the support of George and Gloria on some sad ones too. They had lost some remarkable people this past year, most recently Councillor Harold Apps and others including Tom Pelham and George had stood with them all shoulder to shoulder demonstrating the honour in which such remarkable people were held and his sober and thoughtful countenance had provided the necessary tenet to proceedings.

Councillor Galpin concluded by saying that George had been Ashford Borough Council's number one citizen twice, so how about a third time?! But seriously he wanted to thank George and Gloria for being two very special people.

Councillor Clokie said that he did not think that many of the Mayors they had had in the Borough would have made quite as big a mark as George, so it was with great pleasure that he seconded the motion of a vote of thanks to the retiring Mayor and Mayoress.

6 Response by the Retiring Mayor

Councillor Koowaree said he first wanted to congratulate the new Mayor on his appointment and he was sure he would enjoy his year. He also wanted to welcome the High Sherrif of Kent George Jessel, the Chairman of Kent County Council David Brazier, Mayors from other areas, fellow Councillors and everyone present this evening.

Councillor Koowaree said that all good things came to an end and there had been so many good things that he and Gloria had experienced over the last year. From meeting special individuals, school groups, being invited to other Mayor's functions, meeting Royalty, having access to the Houses of Parliament and even walking on the same ground that President Lincoln has walked on, these were just some of the highlights of the year. He said he would like to briefly run through his year, picking out key functions along the way.

Starting last May, one of the first events they had been invited to was the Royal Garden Party. They had left about 9.30am in order to arrive at Buckingham Palace in plenty of time, allowing for enough time to have a picnic in the park first. That particular morning though God was against him! Both the Blackwall Tunnel and the Dartford Tunnel were shut and there was so much traffic all trying to cross the river to get in to the city. Peter, the driver, knew London like the back of his hand, but every way he tried was blocked and they eventually parked and arrived at the Palace at 3.55pm, just in time to see the Queen and the rest of her entourage arrive and walk down the steps. They were obviously right at the back, about four rows deep, and just about saw her going past. However, there was always a silver lining and as they turned around at the back of the group they were the first people to come across Prince William and Kate walking the other way! William had suddenly turned to him, shook his hand and asked him where he was from. Councillor Koowaree said he was initially speechless but soon recovered and told him "I am the Mayor of Ashford". William then asked "How is Ashford?" and he told him "Ashford is great you should come and visit". The Garden Party was lovely but because of all the delays they had still not had anything to eat nor drink. Afterwards the traffic was just as bad so Peter had suggested they go to the park and have their picnic then. He had brought food, drink, tables and chairs and they had a lovely time and got home very late!

In June he had planted a tree in the Memorial Gardens to commemorate the Queen's 90th Birthday, funnily enough something he had also done 20 years before in his previous Mayoral year to commemorate an anniversary for the Women's Institute. July had brought another special function that the Leader would not soon forget – the fire walk to raise money for the Charing Sports Pavilion. He agreed to do it but only if he could keep his socks on! However, the Leader and others had been braver and done the walk and raised a lot of money and he was proud to come back later in the year and officially open the new Pavilion. August had been emotional

when they had been invited to the Civic Centre to meet the Syrian refugees who had been brought to Ashford to re-settle. Their stories were so emotional and the conditions they had left behind were horrific and they were so pleased to be here. Credit should go to the Leader and the whole Council for accepting a quota above and beyond most other areas. In September, he had attended the annual fun day for one of his charities – Riding for the Disabled. He had picked this charity because as Deputy Mayor he had witnessed the joy experienced by those who attended and how much they learned and that was again very moving this year. He also wanted to thank the representatives from Riding for the Disabled as they had attended and supported nearly all of his Mayoral functions this year as well. In October, he had attended a 'Taste of Africa' event which had been amazing and colourful with extremely good food and entertainment - rhythmic drum music, dancing and people attending from London and all over to promote BAME communities in Ashford. Of course, December brought Christmas and an unforgettable experience when he and Gloria had attended the Salvation Army Christmas morning service and then helped to serve the Christmas lunch to over a hundred homeless and lonely people. Talking to those people and realising the impact that event had on them was a credit to the Salvation Army.

He said that moving into the New Year, February had brought an invitation from the Mayor of Lewisham to spend the day at the House of Lords and the Houses of Parliament. An experience they would never have expected topped off with a cream tea on the famous terrace. The day then got even better when his driver Sandra had taken them to The Shard. The views were fantastic and entrance to the first 32 floors was free, but if you bought a drink – well that was a different matter! Just two weeks ago on the 8th May they had experienced the icing on top of the cake of their Mayoral Year. They had received an invitation from the Mayor of their twin town in Hopewell, Virginia, USA for a visit marking the 20-year anniversary of his previous visit which was a pre-cursor to the formal twinning arrangement of the two towns in 1999. It had been a great way to celebrate the friendship between the two towns and although Gloria had initially been reluctant to go because of the long flight, they had both had a fantastic time. Each day they had been given a unique experience by different people including visiting the sites of some of the key battles of the American Civil War, including City Point - the harbour that was key in changing the path of the War in favour of the Union, located in Hopewell. He had also attended a Council meeting where he had been presented with a proclamation and he had brought that to the Council Chamber that evening, along with a press cutting from the local newspaper in Hopewell about their visit for any colleagues who were interested in seeing them. He had been pleased to renew that link and he knew the Mayor of Hopewell was keen to visit Ashford so he hoped perhaps the Leader and the new Mayor could arrange something.

Councillor Koowaree said it was only right that he gave some thank yous. First of all, he wanted to thank Andrea Collard his PA for all her hard work, organising events, giving advice and being so fantastic in keeping him organised. He did have a tendency to lose his paperwork so she had done a great job! He also wanted to thank his Attendant Sandra and her other drivers. She was always on time, always there with advice and guidance, making sure he was properly dressed and presentable, accompanying him, bringing an umbrella if it was raining and looking after the things he had to carry - always supportive and she would be a great asset to the new Mayor and all after him. Perhaps his biggest thanks though should go to his Gloria – what would he have done without her?! She had always kept track of what they were doing each day when he had forgotten, she had been alongside him, supporting him, holding his hand and giving advice. He knew that when he first had

to tell her the news that he had accepted the nomination for them to become Deputy Mayor and Mayoress two years ago she had not reacted too well and she had been a little nervous, but after two years she had been amazing. She had also not initially wanted to fly to America but when they had landed at Heathrow she said “I did that for you, but don’t ever ask me to do it again!” However, any fear and anxiety she had initially had about the role had gone and she would now go and talk to anyone and she may even be willing to do it for another year!

Finally, Councillor Koowaree said he wanted to thank everyone involved in the past year very sincerely.

7 Election and Appointment of Deputy Mayor

Councillor Bell proposed that “Councillor Mrs Jessamy Blanford” be elected Deputy Mayor for the Borough of Ashford for the ensuing year”.

This was seconded by Councillor Shorter.

There were no other nominations.

Resolved:

That Councillor Mrs Jessamy Blanford be elected Deputy Mayor of the Borough of Ashford for the Municipal Year 2017/2018.

8 Declaration of Acceptance of Office by the Deputy Mayor

Councillor Mrs Blanford made her Declaration of Acceptance of Office. The Deputy Mayor was then invested with her chains of office.

9 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on the 20th April 2017 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

10 Confirmation of Cabinet Arrangements for 2017/18 by the Leader of the Council

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Clarkson, said that the new Cabinet had actually come in to effect on the 1st May 2017, as previously advised, but he was conscious of the two upcoming By-Elections and the new Members that would be coming in. He therefore advised that there may be changes to overall membership and the Committee structure to come forward in due course.

11 Selection and Constitutional Review Committee – 11th May 2017

His Worshipful the Mayor directed Members attention to the tabled papers which proposed an amendment to the membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Resolved:

That subject to the amendment in the tabled paper, the Minutes of the Meeting of the Selection and Constitutional Review Committee held on the 11th May 2017 be approved and adopted.

12 Cabinet – 11th May 2017

Resolved:

That subject to the expiry of the period by which decisions arising from the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 11th May 2017 may be called in, i.e. 24th May 2017: -

- (i) the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 11th May 2017 be received and noted with the exception of Minute Nos. 409 and 410.**
- (ii) Minute Nos. 409 and 410 be approved and adopted.**

(DS)
MINS: