

Ashford Borough Council

Minutes of a Meeting of the Ashford Borough Council held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **19th October 2017**.

Present:

His Worshipful the Mayor, Cllr. W R Michael (Chairman);

Cllrs. Bartlett, Mrs Bell, Bell, Bennett, Mrs Blanford, Bradford, Buchanan, Burgess, Chilton, Clarkson, Dehnel, Mrs Dyer, Farrell, Feacey, Galpin, Heyes, Mrs Heyes, Hicks, A Howard, W Howard, Howard-Smith, Koowaree, Krause, Link, Macpherson, Miss Martin, Mrs Martin, Pickering, Sims, Smith, Suddards, Waters, Mrs Webb, Wedgbury, White.

Also Present:

Director of Finance and Economy, Director of Law and Governance, Senior Member Services Officer.

Prior to the commencement of the meeting Members remained standing in respect for the late Charles George Findlay who was the Member for the Ashford Bybrook Ward between 1991 and 1995, and a Member of Kent County Council until 2009. The Reverend John Mackenzie then said prayers.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Aaby, Barrett, Clokie, Knowles, Murphy, Ovenden, Shorter.

193 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 Director of Law and Governance advised that there were none.

194 Minutes

Resolved:

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

195 Announcements

(a) The Mayor

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting. He said although it may now be long forgotten, he trusted Members and Officers had been able to relax over the summer and spend quality time with family and friends. He said it was essential to do this to stay sharp with Council matters and balancing yin and yang was important in this regard. Since the last Council meeting he and the Mayoress, together with the Deputy Mayor, had fulfilled many engagements and presented Ashford in the best

possible light. To date he had fulfilled about 80 engagements, meeting many wonderful people that made up the Ashford community. One thing that had struck him was how dependent many organisations were on volunteers. Indeed, without volunteers much good work in the community would come to a grinding halt. These people unselfishly gave hours of time for no reward and went about their work in a silent way. Ashford was enriched by having this large band of dedicated volunteers within its midst and he wished to publicly thank all volunteers for their devotion and to let them know that the value they delivered to Ashford had not gone unnoticed.

Ashford was twinned with the towns of Bad Münstereifel in Germany, Fougères in France and Hopewell in Virginia, USA. Every year the towns in Germany, France and England met as an act of commitment to friendship and understanding following the two World Wars. Each town took a turn to host the meeting and this year was in Fougères. The theme for this year was sport and the youth of each town presented what their town had to offer and the value of sport to the health and wellbeing of their communities and the town in general. Homewood School had put together an excellent presentation for Ashford and he thanked the students on behalf of Ashford for their hard work, which for them came at a time when they were also taking very important exams. Brexit had been on the mind of their Twinning friends so he had taken the opportunity to address this in his speech and off-line with those that had engaged him on the subject. He reassured them and said that what happened at a local level transcended what happened on a national level and Brexit would not affect the relationship they had enjoyed and fostered since the Second World War. 'Brexit' was an unfortunate term as it implied that the UK was 'pulling up the drawbridge' when he considered it was simply about sovereignty. If it was permissible he said he would share an analogy he had used which had been endorsed by Ashford's MP Damian Green – One day a friend may say to you "you and I are friends and we enjoy doing many things together, but that thing we do on a Friday, I do not want to do that anymore, would you be offended by this?" As a friend I say "of course not, but I hope we can continue with all of the other things which we do together". To which the reply would be "yes of course". He considered with Brexit it was the same and they still wished to continue doing many things together. In private he may wish to understand why his friend wished to stop doing some things, but never would he criticise his friend – true friends did not resort to this. Those who had spoken with him said they understood the British position more clearly and were pleased that we wished to remain friends and continue to do things together. He considered there was a lot of misunderstanding about Brexit.

As part of the relationship, a party of students from Fougères had recently visited Ashford and asked him many questions in an attempt to learn more about the differences between the two towns. Also, at the Twinning meeting, he had met a Politician charged with getting a grip on immigration in Germany. He informed that 50% were now refused entry to Germany and returned to their country of origin. He had stated that immigration had become a major problem and the infrastructure of the country had been so overwhelmed by an influx of nearly one million immigrants that it had led to resentment and anger from the population. For a number of years Ashford had stood still due to an absence of any real direction, but it was now going through an exciting era of renaissance and a new beginning. These were exciting times for everybody and as Council Members and Officers he considered they should all be proud to be part of it. As with the immigration issue in Germany, many residents that he had met had expressed worries over proposed development levels overwhelming their communities and local infrastructure and the impact on quality of life. He said that as a Council they were only too conscious of this and he had

reassured people that they were taking action to counter those fears. Residents had asked that the Council do not “take their eye off the ball” through complacency or assumption and they expected them to get a grip on matters and give reassurances to them.

The Mayor said that in meeting members of Ashford’s community he came across people doing remarkable, incredible and exceptional things for the betterment of their communities – he called these the ‘Silent Heroes’. This had led him to think that the Mayor’s Office should recognise these individuals in some way and he had introduced a new Mayor’s Award. These would not be “handed out like confetti”, but only given to those who did or achieved something truly exceptional and the first recipient had received their award this past Tuesday. Harrison Cummins, a nine year old boy who had lost his Mother to cancer in 2015, having seen the love and care given to his mother by the Hospice staff, decided to raise money for them so their excellent work could continue for both his Mother and others. Over the past two years he had raised £25,000 for the Pilgrims Hospice through cake sales and other charity events. He said it was wonderful that his Mother had lived to see him raise £13,000 in the first year. The Mayor said he would be attending his next fundraising event in December. Harrison was an inspiration to all because he proved that by drawing on true inner strengths you could make what appeared to be impossible, entirely possible, and he had been very honoured to meet him.

He said that he had others lined up to receive awards during his term of office, and he also hoped to introduce a Mayor’s Award for businesses and organisations who had achieved something truly exceptional. At engagements he had become conscious that the Mayoralty was revered by the general public and they did attach importance to meeting the Mayor. The Mayor’s Awards would bring tangibility to the general public to the Mayor’s Office and subsequently the Council. If Members or Officers knew of individuals or organisations doing exceptional things he said he would be pleased to hear from them.

The Mayor said it had given him great pleasure to host a tea in the Mayor’s Parlour for those who had sponsored the Create Festival. The festival had been an outstanding success again this year, improving with each passing year. Without sponsors though this would be impossible so he wanted to publically thank all sponsors and called for all businesses to lend their support to Create, which delivered immense value to thousands of people in Ashford. He had met many people at the Festival who had been coming for years, including a couple who had attended every one since the beginning. It seemed that Create’s reputation for fine acts and civilised atmosphere was far reaching. Chris Dixon was the person behind the festival and should probably go be the name of “Mr Create” given his hard work! He wanted to publicly congratulate Chris and let him know that his painstaking efforts had not gone unnoticed by both the Council and the people of Ashford.

In conclusion, the Mayor reiterated that he had two charities which he wished to support through his events and he hoped Councillors would support these events to enable his charities to deliver much needed equipment for use by those in the community who were disadvantaged through personal circumstances. The “Winter Warmer” evening at the popular Cinnamon Spice restaurant on the 7th November was almost a sell-out, but there may be one or two last tickets available at £15 for those who could get in quickly! Finally, on the 28th October he and Doreen would mark 50 years of marriage. He had been told that they were a dying breed and it was

therefore perhaps fitting that they were spending all day at a wildlife conservation centre and it had been said that he was wild life!

(b) Leader of the Council

The Leader said that he wanted to take the opportunity to highlight some of the positive developments that had taken place since the Council last met.

Over the last few months two of the Council's Big 8 projects had reached significant milestones. The new multi-million-pound state-of-the-art Ashford College had opened its doors to students in September and now stood proudly on the corner of Elwick Road. This first-rate facility would educate and equip students with the necessary knowledge to assist their employment skills for the future. Two weeks ago he had also been pleased to be invited by developers Quinn Estates and George Wilson Developments to take part in a special ceremony to mark the 'topping out' of the first office block in the new business hub opposite Ashford International Station. He had been told that it was on course for completion in January 2018 and with at least 75% of space already let, this was another of the Big 8 Projects.

These two projects were particularly pertinent when considering the results of a perception report produced by inward investment agency Locate in Kent which again identified Ashford as the most improved area in Kent for business growth. Excellent rail and road links in close proximity to London and Europe, available sites, quality of life and a supportive local Council were all listed as positives. The study showed that 62% indicated that Ashford had improved as a business location over the past five years. This was up from 57% in 2014 and made Ashford the most improved District in the county and the number one business location in Kent yet again.

The Leader reported that the previous week the Council had held an event at the German Museum next to St Pancras International Station and invited around 100 guests to hear from the Council and their key partners about the opportunities there were in Ashford. The event had been a great success and indeed the Housing and Finance Institute had circulated a three page paper the following day entitled "How to Run a Great Business Breakfast" and started by saying "Here we share our view of how to put on a good business breakfast, inspired by the Ashford Way".

It was also important to realise though that the Council's focus was not only about attracting inward investment and creating jobs – they were also working very hard to provide every day services for a growing population. Aspire, the in-house grounds maintenance service, was now one year old and was making the Borough a brighter, more colourful and tidy place. There was of course more to do and the team was receiving considerable training to improve their skill levels, which in turn would allow them to broaden their work.

On the 15th September 2007, the Stour Centre opened following a huge redevelopment. Ten years on the Centre had earned a reputation as a well-used and much enjoyed leisure facility for local residents and visitors alike and it was soon about to embark on a new chapter. The Council and the Ashford Leisure Trust had recently signed a new partnership agreement which would reinvigorate the way leisure was provided in the Borough in the future. This paved the way for them to work together to secure major investment into the facilities and to ensure that they could provide the best and widest possible range of leisure opportunities for Ashford's residents and visitors.

Finally, the Leader advised that earlier that evening he had attended the launch event for sponsorship opportunities for *Snowdogs Discover Ashford* – a significant cultural event coming next year. For ten weeks in Autumn 2018, leading up to Christmas, the streets and open spaces of Ashford would become a world class trail of individually designed and beautifully created giant Snowdog Sculptures. Businesses, groups, education establishments and individuals were invited to sponsor a Snowdog sculpture (themed on Raymond Briggs' classic *The Snowman and The Snowdog*). Local and national artists would design and decorate Ashford's Snowdogs and each dog would be unique, with its own design and personality. The finished sculptures would be displayed at key locations throughout the streets, roads, parks and public areas of the town and Borough. Each Snowdog would then be auctioned by Pilgrims Hospices and would raise significant funds to support specialist end of life care for local people.

196 Cabinet – 14th September and 12th October 2017

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

(a) Cabinet – 14th September 2017

Resolved:

- That (i) the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 14th September 2017 be received and noted with the exception of Minute Nos. 156 and 157.**
- (ii) Minute Nos. 156 and 157 be approved and adopted.**

In accordance with Procedure Rule 15.5 Councillor Miss Martin asked for it to be recorded that she had voted against the resolution in Minute No. 156 of the Cabinet of 14th September 2017.

(b) Cabinet – 12th October 2017

Resolved:

- That (i) the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 12th October 2017 be received and noted with the exception of Minute Nos. 184 and 187.**
- (ii) Minute Nos. 184 and 187 be approved and adopted.**

197 Appointments Committee – 20th, 21st, 24th and 25th July 2017

(a) Appointments Committee – 20th July 2017

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Appointments Committee held on the 20th July 2017 be received and noted.

(b) Appointments Committee – 21st July 2017

Resolved:

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

(c) Appointments Committee – 24th July 2017

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Appointments Committee held on the 24th July 2017 be received and noted.

(d) Appointments Committee – 25th July 2017

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Appointments Committee held on the 25th July 2017 be received and noted.

198 Audit Committee – 28th September 2017

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit Committee held on the 28th September 2017 be received and noted.

(DS)

MINS: