



To the Members of the Borough Council

Dear Sir/Madam

You are hereby summoned to attend a Meeting of the Ashford Borough Council, to be held in the Council Chamber - Ashford Borough Council on Thursday, 14th December, 2023 at 7.00 pm.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T W Mortimer'.

T W Mortimer
Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer

Agenda

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13. **Tabled Paper - Previous Minutes**

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Council – 14th December 2023 Addendum Papers

Agenda Item 4 – Minutes of the Council Meeting – 19th October 2023

Following review, please see proposed amendments to Minute No. 180/10/23. The Minutes should be approved and adopted subject to agreeing the amendments below: -

180 Cabinet – 27th July and 28th September 2023

(b) Cabinet – 28th September 2023

The Leader of the Council proposed that these Minutes be approved and adopted or noted as appropriate.

This was seconded by Councillor Campkin.

Members requested that Minute Nos. 145 and 146 be considered separately.

With reference to Minute No. 145(b) (Updated Senior Structure), Councillor Bell said that whilst there was appreciation of the work undertaken by the Chief Executive to review her Senior Management Structure, there had been a number of concerns raised. Chiefly that the proposals had been presented as a *fait accompli* with limited opportunities to consider the wider objectives of any new structure. Additionally, that the structure appeared to be the result of purely internal review, with no external independent input and he thought this aspect was vitally important. He also thought the structure felt quite old fashioned and top heavy with too many layers and narrow spans of control. To address those concerns he suggested they delay any immediate implantation plans and take a short period of time to undertake a more comprehensive and independent review of the organisational structure and this should include the commissioning of expert external advice which reflected modern thinking on organisational design. It was accepted that any delay would impact on the need to make savings, but he considered a short pause to consider wider issues would ultimately give a better result, with potentially even more savings, but more importantly a resulting structure that would be more effective in delivering what residents needed. He assured that Members were committed to helping achieve a successful outcome to this project and would willingly participate and provide support where requested. He wished to propose a Motion accordingly.

Other Members supported this view and the use of external consultants and independent advice.

Councillor Harman said she was shocked by colleagues' suggestion the Council revert to a practice of appointing external consultants, at great expense, to put forward proposals which may or may not be accepted by their excellent Management Team or this Council. The Chief Executive had given considerable thought to this subject and approached it with great sensitivity. She believed appointing consultants

would be a step backwards and a way of pushing the blame elsewhere and that this Council should not be wasting tax payers money on employing consultants.

Councillor Nilsson said that the overall structure had been agreed during the previous Administration and indeed agreed by the Full Council in 2022. This report only proposed a minor change so she was a little confused at references to 'top heaviness'. No issues had been raised at the Joint Consultative Committee, where there had been a full and frank discussion and she considered there was a need to resolve this and take the uncertainty away from staff.

The Leader said that what they were looking at was a proposal from their appointed Chief Executive who had looked at her staff structure and made decisions with a knowledge of her staff that as Councillors they did not have. She had found a way that both made sense of the structure at the present time and made savings. These recommendations did not preclude a further review of the senior staffing structure going forward. The Administration had changed less than five months ago and he thought it would have been very heavy handed for them to come in and undertake a major review of the senior staffing structure whilst they were in a time of change and uncertainty. He asked Members to think carefully and seriously consider accepting the recommendations at this time, because this genuinely affected individuals' jobs and lives - individuals who had been through a consultation process and he did not want to interfere with that. He would be open to any suggestions going forward on the staff structure. Personally he would like to limit the use of external consultants and focus finances on delivering services for their residents, but if that was seen as preferable he would not rule it out. This Administration had already shown that they were willing to work in a cross-party fashion and he was happy for the group who had been working with the HR Portfolio Holder to continue to review the structure, perhaps with an external peer group. They employed staff to deliver services and with his involvement with the Senior Leadership Team on a day to day basis, he had seen no evidence of a deficiency within that team.

After further advice from the Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer, Councillor Bell then proposed an amendment to add to the Motion *that the Chief Executive undertake a further review of the structure more widely, taking into account independent external advice when making further recommendations.*"

This was seconded by Councillor Heyes.

Following debate, a vote was taken on the proposal put forward by Councillor Bell. This was lost.

The Council then voted on the original Cabinet recommendations in Minute No. 145 (b). These were approved.