

Decisions effective from the 13th October 2021 unless they are called in or are recommended to the Council for approval

Cabinet

Minutes of a Meeting of the Cabinet held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **30th September 2021**.

Present:

Cllr. Clarkson (Chairman);
Cllr. Bartlett (Vice-Chairman);

Cllrs. Barrett, Bell, Buchanan, Feacey, Forest, Iliffe, Pickering, Shorter.

Apologies:

Cllr Clokie.

Also Present:

Cllrs. Harman, Sparks, Wedgbury, Wright.

In attendance:

Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive, Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer, Accountancy Manager, Economic Development Manager, Senior Economic Development Officer, Play and Open Spaces Project Officer, Member Services Manager.

117 Declarations of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Bartlett	Made a Voluntary Announcement as he had used some of his KCC Combined Members Grant to support the Rylands Road play area.	123
Wedgbury	Made a Voluntary Announcement as he had used some of his Member Grant for play equipment in Kingsnorth and he was a Member of Kingsnorth Parish Council.	123

118 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 29th July 2021 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

119 Leader's Announcements

The Leader said that he did want to provide some clarity to one issue. As colleagues would know the NCP car park in Ashford Town Centre had closed last week and it had been reported in the local media that this would be a permanent closure. The local newspaper had also reported this week that the Council had bought the car park over a year ago which was untrue. The reality was that the owners of the NCP car park had chosen to dispose of it, along with a number of its car parks, and once the Council had learned it was being disposed of they had entered negotiations and completed only that previous Friday (24th September).

The Council's intention was to ensure that the car park was fit for purpose. They were going to spend some money refurbishing it, including remedying the current leaks in to Park Mall and resurfacing it, and once those repairs were complete they would be re-opening the car park and reducing parking charges for the community in line with the Council's other car parks. It was hoped this would increase footfall for the premises in Park Mall.

120 Financial Monitoring Report – First Four Months to 31st July 2021

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which presented the first budget monitoring position for 2021/22, up to 31 July 2021. This first update reported the General Fund (GF) as having a small surplus of £42,000. However, this included a pressure of £954,000 in services which was supported by additional investment income of £515,000 and £481,000 being transferred from reserves. The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) was forecasting an underspend of £2.468m against budget, which was due to slippages in planned maintenance works as a result of supply chain issues and continued delays from the Covid-19 Pandemic. The first quarter report also provides an update on the Collection Fund, Capital expenditure, Treasury Management and Reserve movements. The Rough Sleepers Accommodation Programme (RSAP), Courtside and Pitchside fees and charges, and Council write offs were also included within the report.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Land Management said one point that concerned him was that the Housing Services (General Fund) budget was forecast at £914k and had gone up by another £90k. Although this was a modest amount, it did point to the fact that Temporary Accommodation costs for the homeless were still high. He asked if that were to be the end of year figure, would that be reduced down to around £500/£600k after Housing Benefit receipts had been taken into account, or was that roughly a net £1m on Temporary Accommodation? Secondly, with regard to

the Henwood Temporary Accommodation Scheme, he considered this was vitally important to this Council as an 'invest to save' project and thought that, looking at the figures, the Council may need to consider a second facility of this type as this was not something that could be allowed to continue indefinitely and did need to be addressed in the coming years. The Deputy Chief Executive said that whilst he would be happy to provide the Member with a more detailed answer outside of the meeting, it was important to note that the budget for Housing Services that had been highlighted was the budget for the entire budget for the General Fund element of the Service, not just Temporary Accommodation costs. The figure would also be net of Housing Benefit. It was true to say that the chief element of this was pressure from Temporary Accommodation costs and this was partly from delays to the Henwood scheme which had been factored in to the original budget. This was an pressure that was well known and understood and the Council were putting in place a number of measures to mitigate it. It was an important budgetary issue that would continue to be closely monitored. The Portfolio Holder said that the questions did stress the importance of regular Financial Monitoring reports being produced. These highlighted situations in almost real time and did not wait until the end of the year to identify issues and tweak delivery within the budget year if necessary.

Resolved:

- That**
- (i) the forecast outturn position for the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account be noted.**
 - (ii) the Collection Fund position be noted.**
 - (iii) the proposed contributions from reserves be approved and noted.**
 - (iv) the overspend on the capital programme for 'The Poplars' and how this can be funded from programme underspends (Paragraph 47 of the report refers) be noted.**
 - (v) the Treasury Management position be noted.**
 - (vi) a further application to the Rough Sleepers Accommodation Project be approved, which would lead to a request for Council approval for capital expenditure.**
 - (vii) the fees and charges for Courtside and Pitchside, as shown at Appendix C to the report, be noted.**
 - (viii) the HRA write offs totalling £239,583.22, which have been processed under delegated authority, be noted.**
 - (ix) the General Fund Housing write offs made under delegated authority be noted and the amounts over £1,000, as detailed in Exempt Appendix D to the report, be approved.**

Recommended:

That the receipt of £764,235 of grant monies from Round 1 funding be noted and Council approve capital spend of £1.7m for the purchase of 10 General Fund properties.

121 Corporate Performance Report – Quarter 1 2021/22

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which summarised performance against the performance indicators introduced in the Recovery Plan presented to the Cabinet in July 2020. He reinforced that the data within the report belonged to all Members and he encouraged all to interrogate the report where it applied to them.

The Deputy Leader referred to two areas – the proposed new car park in Adley's Yard which he hoped to see a delivery date for soon, and the potential closure of the Flour Mill car park, which he hoped would not again see Council staff parking displaced to the Mill Court residential area. The Leader said that the Adley's Yard Car Park had been approved and was progressing. He could not give an absolute date yet, but it would be delivered at pace. On Flour Mills, the Chief Executive advised that all staff now received free parking at the Civic Centre and the car parks there were big enough, so there would be no reason for displacement in to Mill Court.

Resolved:

That the performance data for Quarter 1 2021/21 be received and noted.

122 Boughton Aluph and Eastwell Parishes Neighbourhood Plan

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which advised that the amended and final version of the Neighbourhood Plan had been the subject of a local referendum in the Parish and 92.67% had voted in favour of the plan. Following the successful referendum it was now the Local Planning Authority's responsibility to formally 'make' (i.e. adopt) the Plan, which would confer full Development Plan status for decision making purposes. This must be agreed by Full Council. He said he wanted to express his thanks to those in the village who had put in the hard work to develop this plan and he was happy to endorse it.

Recommended:

That Full Council 'make' the Boughton Aluph and Eastwell Parishes Neighbourhood Plan 2013-2030 in accordance with Section 38A(4) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, to become part of the Development Plan.

123 Play Area Investment

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which proposed a Capital Play Regeneration Programme alongside a Repairs and Renewals Programme to safeguard appropriate play spaces and facilitate opportunities for ongoing improvement. The Programme included three key priority locations that required significant refurbishment and explained that £1.1m capital investment was required to make them fun, innovative and fully inclusive and accessible. To further safeguard play spaces owned by the Council, an enhanced Repairs and Renewals programme was proposed that included £200,000 in 2022/23 and £100,000 per annum thereafter, for refurbishment and maintenance of existing play, teen and outdoor gym facilities.

A Member said he taken a great interest in play areas over the years and was really pleased to see this report coming forward. He considered most Local Authorities would rely on Section 106 monies to provide play facilities and without proper maintenance these often failed and had to be removed, but Ashford's investment in to play areas was exciting. These were so important to communities and he was also pleased that local Members would be able to have a decent input in to conversations and he hoped that would be extended to Parish Councils as he knew Kingsnorth Parish Council, as one example, had a keen interest in this subject.

The Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Wellbeing said he fully supported this paper and stressed the importance of such facilities. He said he wanted to pay particular tribute to the residents of Rylands Road who he knew had been fundraising for their park and he considered that sort of investment from the local community would ensure a sustainable legacy for these facilities.

The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Property and Projects said he was too excited by the proposals. He had heard anecdotally about people from certain communities having to drive to get to a decent play area and this would ensure that many more people would have a decent play area within walking distance. The addition of cycle racks and Public Rights of Way would also help to enhance the Council's Cycling and Walking Strategy.

The Portfolio Holder thanked everyone for their comments. On engagement with Kingsnorth Parish Council, he knew this was already in hand along with the Park Farm Playground Group. He agreed that such engagement gave a sense of ownership to communities and the play areas were more likely to be respected and looked after.

Resolved:

- That**
- (i) £1.1m be invested for a Play Regeneration Programme from the Improvement and Corporate Projects Fund in three key priority play locations – Rylands Road, Bybrook; Central Park, Bluebell Road, Park Farm; and Spearpoint Recreation Ground, Kennington.**
 - (ii) the Head of Culture, Tourism and Leisure be delegated authority, in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder, to execute and**

complete all tasks and documentation necessary to deliver the Play Regeneration Programme.

- (iii) additional budget of £200,000 in 2022/23, and £100,000 each year thereafter, be allocated to the Repairs and Renewals budget, earmarked for maintenance, repair and replacement of individual play area assets as agreed by the Head of Environment and Land Management, in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder.**

124 Update on Broadband Improvements in the Ashford Borough

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which analysed the latest data on fixed and mobile telecommunications access in the Borough. It also updated Members on the activities undertaken to attract investment and improve infrastructure in the Borough by private sector operators, in particular the implementation of Policy EMP6 within the Ashford Local Plan. Finally, the report set out potential areas for Officers to investigate and work on moving forward given the importance of broadband and telecommunications infrastructure within the Council's Corporate Plan 2022 – 2024.

The Leader advised that following the recent Cabinet reshuffle, Councillor Neil Bell would continue to lead on broadband issues rather than Councillor Shorter.

Resolved:

- That**
- (i) the content of the report and the broadband work undertaken in the past year be noted.**
 - (ii) it be noted that the delivery of broadband is a key priority in the Council's draft Corporate Plan.**
 - (iii) the proposed actions for digital infrastructure (section 34 of the report refers) be incorporated into the final version of the Corporate Plan 2022 – 2024.**

125 Queen's Platinum Jubilee and Albacore Event Programme 2022

Report Withdrawn.

126 The Resettlement of Afghan Nationals Through the Government ARAP Scheme

The report gave an overview of Ashford Borough Council's response to the Government's appeal to Local Authorities to assist in the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP), and to the subsequent emergency evacuation of Afghan Locally Employed Staff (ALES) and their families and other qualifying Afghan

nationals. This showed how the Council continued to play its part in the national commitment to planned refugee resettlement under the UK Resettlement Scheme.

The Leader advised that further to this, a local hotel was being used as a 'bridging hotel' for some of the ALES and their families, before they were rehomed all over the country (not Ashford) - Ashford had made its own separate pledge to settle between five and ten families. The Portfolio Holder for Housing said it was important to acknowledge the amazing work going on at the bridging hotel and the donations and volunteers from businesses and the community and even the hotel staff themselves, that had all been forthcoming to help in all of that. It was really heart-warming to see what had gone on there. It was also important to note that the five to ten families would be provided with private rented accommodation, so there would be no impact on the Council's current housing waiting lists.

The Deputy Leader said that Ashford had really stood out for its speed and decisiveness in getting involved with this scheme and for its community response which had been astonishing. He asked about the size of the families, which were traditionally larger than UK families, and whether the Government were providing sufficient funding for them to be properly accommodated. The Chief Executive confirmed that the Government ARAP Scheme matched the previous Syrian Refugee Scheme in that the allocation of funding was per individual, so there was adequate funding. The intention was that the settlement of the Afghan nationals would be a lot quicker than the previous Syrian Refugees. Many already spoke English, had British passports and already had connections within the UK.

Resolved:

- That**
- (i) debt of gratitude owed by the UK to the Afghan Locally Employed Staff be acknowledged.**
 - (ii) the offer to settle between five and ten families in Ashford under the ARAP scheme be supported.**
 - (iii) the continuing development of projects and infrastructure to promote and enable successful integration and promote community cohesion to benefit the wider Ashford community be supported.**
 - (iv) a future report will come before Members in due course to approve funding for the programme.**

127 Joint Transportation Board – Minutes of 7th September 2021

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Joint Transportation Board held on the 7th September 2021 be received and noted.

128 Compliance and Enforcement Board – Notes of 27th July 2021

Resolved:

That the Notes of the Meeting of the Compliance and Enforcement Board held on the 27th July 2021 be received and noted.

129 Economic Regeneration and Investment Board – Notes of 25th August 2021

Resolved:

That the Notes of the Meeting of the Economic Regeneration and Investment Board held on the 25th August 2021 be received and noted.

130 Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group – Notes of 5th August 2021

Resolved:

That the Notes of the Meeting of the Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group held on the 5th August 2021 be received and noted.

131 Schedule of Key Decisions to be Taken

Resolved:

That the latest Schedule of Key Decisions as set out within the report be received and noted.

132 Exclusion of the Public

Resolved:

That pursuant to Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item, as it is likely in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings that if members of the public were present there would be disclosure of exempt information hereinafter specified by reference to Paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Act, where in the circumstances the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

133 Review of Housing Options Team

The Portfolio Holder introduced the exempt report which advised that as a result of a review of the Housing Options Service, a new structure had been identified. Cabinet was required to recommend to Council the early release of pension costs associated with the review.

Recommended:

That the early release of pension costs arising from the Housing Options restructure be approved.

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