

Decisions effective from the 31st December 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 **16th December 2021**.

Present:

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

Cllrs. Bell, Buchanan, Clokie, Feacey, Iliffe, Pickering.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Forest, Shorter, Chilton.

Also Present:

Cllrs. Brooks, Spain, Sparks, Wright.

In attendance:

Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive, Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer, Head of Housing, Economic Development Manager, Member Services Manager.

216 Declarations of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Bartlett	Made a Voluntary Announcement as a Member of Kingsnorth Community Council	220
Iliffe	Made a Voluntary Announcement as a Member of Kingsnorth Community Council	220

217 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 25th November 2021 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

218 Leader's Announcements

The Leader said that he had no particular announcements this evening other than to advise that the Council were adopting the Government's new rules for Covid at the Civic Centre. Officers had acted very swiftly in the last week or so apply them and he wanted to thank them for their efforts.

219 Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan 2021 – 2051 (including Financing and Affordable Homes Programme)

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which explained that each year Members were asked to agree the priorities within the HRA and note a 30 year Business Plan. This set the parameters of the work and spend that were undertaken by the Council's housing teams and underpinned every decision taken in the HRA.

Resolved:

- That
- (i) the HRA Business Plan financial projections be referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Budget Task Group to support the Draft HRA Budget reported to Cabinet in November.**
 - (ii) the updated HRA Business Plan and financial projections be agreed.**
 - (iii) delegated authority be given to the Head of Housing, in consultation with the Head of Finance and IT and the Portfolio Holders for Housing and Finance and IT, to acquire land up to the value of £5m and this be extended to include s106 acquisitions up to the value of £5m.**
 - (iv) the streamlined process for commencing the preparatory work on acquired sites as outlined in paragraphs 37 and 38 of the report be agreed, and it be noted that, where time permits, Members' approval for acquisitions will be sought and reported through to Cabinet, otherwise the existing delegated authority will be utilised.**
 - (v) the HRA priorities set out in the report from paragraphs 7-53, which mirror those agreed by Cabinet Members in the equivalent report last year, be noted.**
 - (vi) the Council will continue with the on-street purchase programme, recognising that some units per annum will be cross-subsidised in later financial years, and set affordable rents.**
 - (vii) the progress in delivering affordable housing in the HRA and temporary accommodation within the General Fund as set out in the report be noted.**

- (viii) **the Council's plans for future housing delivery, as set out in Exempt Appendix A to the report which presents projects underway or in consultation phase be noted, and authority be delegated to the Head of Housing, in consultation with the Head of Finance and IT and the Portfolio Holders for Housing and Finance and IT, to vary the programme as necessary.**

220 Bockhanger Consultation Outcomes 2021 and Next Steps

In accordance with Procedure Rule 9.3 Mr Dean, a local resident, spoke on this item. He said he hoped that Cabinet Members would have at least had a chance to skim read the summary report sent to Councillors earlier in the week. This had been produced by the 'Bockhanger and Bybrook Matters' Group, which was a group set up by residents of those two Wards in response to a general dis-satisfaction of residents who felt they were not being listened to or heard by the Borough Council. He realised there may be differing views around this, but this was particularly felt regarding issues related to the old Community Centre and what would replace it. Bockhanger and Bybrook were the two Wards most affected by the loss of the community facility and the Borough Council's last survey had received only 41 replies – a number of which were from a much wider area. As a consequence of this, the Group decided to build its own survey and the Group wanted to ask the Cabinet to consider it properly as it statistically represented the views of the local residents – probably more effectively than the Council's 2020 survey. One example he pointed to was the housing question in the 2020 survey where the response indicated that 28% of respondents (from that wider geographical base) considered affordable housing to be the number one priority. Their own survey had shown that figure to be 18% with 20% pointing to 'social housing'. The survey had shown that residents did have very a clear view about what facilities they would like to see. In conclusion Mr Dean said he would like to ask the Cabinet to consider deferring any final decisions for two months to allow ABC Officers to fully analyse and discuss the survey results produced by the Group. In addition the Group would ask the Council to consider actively researching alternative funding streams for the project, not just HRA funding.

The Deputy Leader advised that this issue had been discussed at the Kennington Community Council meeting the previous evening. The Group had endeavoured to provide further information to the Community Council and a further analysis of their survey early in the New Year. This would include details of other facilities in the area, including their availability and size and a more detailed critique of the consultation, and that would all be most welcome. There would also be further meetings in the New Year between Community Council Members and members of the Group to shape the operation of any new community facilities. One issue from the emerging proposals that had been raised was the size of the proposed hall and the capital costs being met from Central Government affordable housing sources. Therefore there needed to be a clear agreement on what was wanted and how that would be paid for if those sources were not going to be accessed. This was a significant piece of work that could take time, but the costs for this were now budgeted by the

Community Council and that work would proceed at pace in the New Year. He hoped all could work together to achieve the best outcome for the community.

The Ward Member for Bockhanger said he would very much like to commend the Group's survey to the Cabinet. It had been conducted on a very professional basis and had huge buy-in from the community. 28 volunteers had distributed 2500 leaflets and the response level currently stood at 232. A near 10% response rate represented a good level. He considered the results shed a lot of light on the priorities of the residents and what could be included as part of the community facility/hall, so he supported Mr Dean's request to give some time to examine the results in more detail. In terms of funding, he agreed that a range of funding should be considered. HRA funding did come with some 'hoops to jump through' in terms of Secretary of State permission and had certain requirements which may restrict what could be delivered for the residents. He saw no reason not to consider other sources of funding to sit alongside HRA funding in a mix and match approach including perhaps approaching local commercial companies who may be prepared to sponsor some element of the main hall. Perhaps thinking could be more entrepreneurial and "outside the box".

The Portfolio Holder for Housing agreed that there needed to be some further discussion to work out exactly what was required rather than imposing something on the community that was only wanted by one group or another. In his view it was likely that Affordable Housing would be the way to generate the capital for the main facility and ongoing income and he was wary of any solution that was put out to volunteers as this was too reliant on individuals.

The Leader thanked everyone for their comments so far and thought there was a common goal to create a worthwhile and versatile facility for Bybrook and Bockhanger that all could be proud of. He noted the results of the Group's survey and accepted that the response to the second survey had been disappointing, but they had not mentioned that the first survey had received a 13% response. He also understood there had been a lot of negative comment on social media which had been unhelpful and clouded the issue somewhat. With the Community Council in the area, and the Residents' Group, there was a need to work together, particularly with the elected body.

In response to comments about social media, the Ward Member said that the residents were deeply unhappy about the last survey. When it came out people were disappointed as they did not believe it asked them directly what they wanted on that site and there was insufficient space under each of the five questions asked to write the answers in, so he did not think it was unreasonable to argue in an analytical way about a particular piece of work if it was not up to a certain standard. He personally did not feel it was, nor did a huge number of residents, so he felt that was one the Council needed to 'take on the chin' and let residents have their say. The Leader said he understood that, but it was also important to point that whilst social media was often a good tool, it did also have a dark side and people had to be circumspect when making comments on it.

The Leader urged the Cabinet to support the recommendations in the report which he considered did not deflect or detract from the overall objective. There would be

plenty of time for further consideration and current designs for the hall were only iterative, but this would allow the project to proceed to the next stage and for momentum not to be lost. If extra funding became available that would be welcomed, but there were a number of competing pressures and the Council had to be careful when dealing with public money. It was important to continue this journey and work together in a harmonious way and he hoped residents would take tonight's decision positively.

Resolved:

- That**
- (i) the feedback from the consultation event and subsequent mail out be noted.**
 - (ii) further work be undertaken into the viability of an affordable housing-led scheme, which provides a flexible community hub within it.**
 - (iii) the options for delivery of the scheme are developed and agreed in principle with Kennington Community Council.**
 - (iv) any community facilities developed will be delivered only after Kennington Community Council sign a formal undertaking to lease the space provided and take responsibility for its management and coordination of services delivered, following a viability assessment.**
 - (v) the lease includes conditions restricting sub-letting without formal consent**
 - (vi) the final design, to be developed in conjunction with Kennington Community Council, be shared with the local community at a further consultation event before being brought back to the Cabinet for endorsement.**

221 Street Naming and Numbering – Land West of Viaduct Terrace, Warehorne Road, Warehorne

The report advised that the Street Naming and Numbering Policy required that any request for naming a new road after a person, deceased or living, should be agreed by the Cabinet. The name proposed for the development had been considered to be relevant to the site.

Resolved:

That the use of the name Mathews Court, as set out in paragraph 4 of the report, be approved

222 Vehicle Speeds and Vision Zero

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which presented information on road safety and proposed a Council policy on vehicle speed limits. It gave a commitment to support the introduction of lower speed limits where appropriate and took the opportunity to give support to KCC's Vision Zero Road Safety Strategy. Reference was also made to the recent changes to the Highway Code and specifically the new hierarchy of road users. It was accepted that such projects may need a small amount of monetary support and accordingly the Portfolio Holder proposed that a fund of up to £10k be made available from the Improvement Delivery Fund, to assist with supporting approved schemes (subject to a maximum of £2.5k per scheme). This would receive oversight from the Regeneration, Improvement and Infrastructure Co-ordination Board.

Resolved:

- That**
- (i) proposals from Town, Community and Parish Councils to introduce lower speed limits in urban areas and villages where there is an identified demand for safer and vulnerable road users, be supported.**
 - (ii) the introduction of 30mph speed limits through all our villages that meet the relevant Department for Transport and Kent Highways criteria, be supported.**
 - (iii) the introduction of lower 20mph speed limits on the approach to certain rural villages wherever appropriate and where it meets the necessary road safety criteria, be supported.**
 - (iv) the introduction of 20mph speed limits on the approaches to, or in the vicinity of, schools wherever appropriate and where the circumstances meet the necessary road safety criteria, be supported.**
 - (v) the introduction of 20mph speed limits in areas where people and motorists meet or are in close proximity, e.g. the Ashford Shared Space arrangement, be supported.**
 - (vi) the KCC Vision Zero Road Safety Strategy be supported.**
 - (vii) the Council work with partner organisations to publicise the changes in the Highway Code and promote the new enhanced duty of care that road users owe to more vulnerable road users.**
 - (viii) £10,000 be made available from the Improvement Delivery Fund to assist supporting approved schemes (subject to a maximum of £2.5k per scheme). This to receive oversight from the Regeneration, Improvement and Infrastructure Co-ordination Board.**

223 Ashford Festival and Events Framework

The Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Corporate Property introduced the report on behalf of himself and the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Tourism and Leisure. The framework included an overview of Ashford's current offer with a delivery plan that linked to the Corporate Plan 2022-24 and the benefits that festivals and events could bring. The framework included proposals for two key seasonal events for the Council to commit to, and the development of two new seed events each year.

He also gave an update on the Carnival of the Baubles event that had taken place the previous weekend. This had been a great event and increased footfall in the Town Centre significantly (approximately 30% up on the same Saturday in 2019). Positive reports had been received from Town Centre businesses and the voluntary/cultural sector and members of the public.

A Member said she fully supported the framework and hoped it would fully embrace the diverse multi-cultural communities within the Borough.

Resolved:

That the Framework be adopted and the key opportunities to help deliver the Council's Corporate Plan be noted.

Recommended:

That a two year financial commitment of £350,000 be agreed to help build a new events programme for Ashford. First year's costs of £175k be agreed from the Improvement Delivery Fund (Reserves); and the second year budget be allocated from the same reserve, subject to an evaluation of the outcomes of the first years events by the Deputy Chief Executive, in consultation with appropriate Portfolio Holder and subject to budget setting for 2023/24.

224 Levelling Up Fund - Ashford International Studios, Newtown Works

The Leader introduced the report which followed from the announcement of the Council's successful Levelling Up Funding bid for £14,773,745 for the Ashford International Studios development. The report sought Members approval to take on the role of accountable body for this funding and put in place grant agreements with Government and the developer to ensure this funding could be secured.

The Economic Development Manager advised that they had attended their first inception meeting with the team from Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) earlier that week and it had been very positive and they looked forward to more meetings as they moved forward.

Resolved:

- That**
- (i) the Council act as the Accountable Body for the Levelling Up Funding Grants, through a grant agreement with Government and a subsequent grant agreement with the Newtown Works site developer.**
 - (ii) the Chief Executive be authorised, in consultation with the Executive Leader of the Council, the Deputy Chief Executive and the Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer, to negotiate and agree the grant agreements with Government and the Newtown Works site developer, following appropriate due diligence.**
 - (iii) once funding agreements are in place, the Chief Executive be authorised, in consultation with the Executive Leader of the Council, the Deputy Chief Executive and the Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer, to agree expenditure in line with the grant conditions as set out in the financial table and wording in paragraph 8 of the report.**
 - (iv) the allocation of £40,000 of funding from reserves be agreed to undertake the legal agreements and fund monitoring for this project.**

225 Greater Ashford Borough Environment and Land Mapping Commission – Notes of 12th October and 9th November 2021

Resolved:

That the Notes of the Meetings of the Great Ashford Borough Environment and Land Management Commission held on the 12th October and 9th November 2021 be received and noted.

226 Trading and Enterprise Board – 23rd November 2021

Resolved:

- That**
- (i) the new, more inclusive, definition of ‘commercialisation’ as outlined in the report be endorsed.**
 - (ii) it be agreed that the Commercialisation Strategy requires a transition from what has become the testing phase, to one of greater integration within corporate culture (moving to a combined Digital and Commercialisation Board).**

- (iii) KPIs reporting on commercialisation needs to be reviewed to better reflect the breadth of the definition and explicitly explore different types of efficiency savings.

227 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.

Queries concerning these minutes? Please contact Member Services
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