



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 Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford, Kent, TN23 1PL on **Thursday, 22nd December, 2022 at 7.00 pm.**

Yours faithfully

T W Mortimer
Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer

Agenda

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| 2. | To consider whether any items should be dealt with in private because of the likely disclosure of Exempt or Confidential Information | |
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| | To declare any interests which fall under the following categories, as ex the attached document: | |
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| | b) Other Significant Interests (OSI) | |
| | c) Voluntary Announcements of Other Interests | |
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| 4. | To confirm the Minutes of the Council Meeting held on the 20th October 2022 | 3 - 14 |
| 5. | To receive any announcements from the Mayor, Leader or other Members of the Cabinet | |
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public (being resident of the Borough) which in the opinion of the Mayor are relevant to the business of the Meeting

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NOTE: - If debate on any item included within this Agenda gives the need to exclude the press and public due to the likelihood of or Confidential information being disclosed the following resolution be proposed and seconded and if carried, the press and public will be requested to leave the meeting for the duration of the debate.

That pursuant to Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of this item as it is likely that in view of the nature of the business transacted or the nature of the proceedings that if members of the public were present there would be disclosure of exempt information as specified by reference to the appropriate paragraphs of Schedule 1 of the Act, where in the circumstances the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

14th December 2022

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Agenda Item 3

Declarations of Interest (see also “Advice to Members” below)

- (a) **Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI)** under the Localism Act 2011, relating to items on this agenda. The nature as well as the existence of any such interest must be declared, and the agenda item(s) to which it relates must be stated.

A Member who declares a DPI in relation to any item will need to leave the meeting for that item (unless a relevant Dispensation has been granted).

- (b) **Other Significant Interests (OSI)** under the Kent Code of Conduct relating to items on this agenda. The nature as well as the existence of any such interest must be declared, and the agenda item(s) to which it relates must be stated.

A Member who declares an OSI in relation to any item will need to leave the meeting before the debate and vote on that item (unless a relevant Dispensation has been granted).

However, prior to leaving, the Member may address the Committee in the same way that a member of the public may do so.

- (c) **Voluntary Announcements of Other Interests** not required to be disclosed under (a) and (b), i.e. announcements made for transparency alone, such as:

- Membership of amenity societies, Town/Community/Parish Councils, residents' groups or other outside bodies that have expressed views or made representations, but the Member was not involved in compiling or making those views/representations, or
- Where a Member knows a person involved, but does not have a close association with that person, or
- Where an item would affect the well-being of a Member, relative, close associate, employer, etc. but not his/her financial position.

[Note: Where an item would be likely to affect the financial position of a Member, relative, close associate, employer, etc.; OR where an item is an application made by a Member, relative, close associate, employer, etc., there is likely to be an OSI or in some cases a DPI. ALSO, holding a committee position/office within an amenity society or other outside body, or having any involvement in compiling/making views/representations by such a body, may give rise to a perception of bias and require the Member to take no part in any motion or vote.]

Advice to Members on Declarations of Interest:

- (a) Government Guidance on DPI is available in DCLG's Guide for Councillors, at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/5962/2193362.pdf
- (b) The Kent Code of Conduct was adopted by the Full Council on 19 July 2012, and a copy can be found in the Constitution alongside the Council's Good Practice Protocol for Councillors dealing with Planning Matters. See <https://www.ashford.gov.uk/media/2098/z-word5-democratic-services-constitution-2019-constitution-of-abc-may-2019-part-5.pdf>
- (c) Where a Member declares a committee position or office within, or membership of, an outside body that has expressed views or made representations, this will be taken as a statement that the Member was not involved in compiling or making them and has retained an open mind on the item(s) in question. If this is not the case, the situation must be explained.

If any Member has any doubt about any interest which he/she may have in any item on this agenda, he/she should seek advice from the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer, or from other Solicitors in Legal and Democracy as early as possible, and in advance of the Meeting.

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Ashford Borough Council

Minutes of a Meeting of the Ashford Borough Council held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **20th October 2022**.

Present:

Her Worshipful the Mayor, Cllr. J A Webb (Chairman);

Cllrs. Barrett, Bartlett, Mrs Bell, Blanford, Brooks, Buchanan, Burgess, Campkin, Chilton, Clarkson, Feacey, Forest, Hayward, B Heyes, T Heyes, Howard, Howard-Smith, Iliffe, Ledger, Link, Michael, Mulholland, Pauley, Pickering, Shorter, Spain, Sparks, C Suddards, L Suddards, Turner, Wright.

Also Present:

Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive, Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer, Director of Health and Wellbeing, Policy and Democratic Services Assistant, Member Services Manager.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Anckorn, Bell, Clokie, Cornish, Farrell, Harman, Knowles, Krause, Meaden, Nilsson, Ovenden, Rogers, Smith, Walder, Wedgbury.

Prior to the commencement of the meeting Members remained standing in respect of the late Mr Michael John Bennett, the Borough Council Member for Rolvenden and Tenterden West from 2011 to 2019, who had passed away recently. Councillor Lyn Suddards then said prayers.

186 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 Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer advised that there were none.

187 Declarations of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Bartlett	Made a 'Voluntary Announcement' as a Member of Kennington Community Council and Sevington with Finberry Parish Council, which were both mentioned in one of the reports.	191
Webb	Made a 'Voluntary Announcement' as her husband had previously been in receipt of a Disabled Facilities Grant.	194

188 Minutes

Councillor Bartlett advised that the Minutes of the last Full Council meeting of 21st July 2022 recorded his response to a question from Cllr Lyn Suddards which included his statement that "The Health and Wellbeing Reference Group had not met for two years". Here, he was referring to an internal (ABC) Member interest group which had met on a few occasions to discuss specific time-bound NHS issues. There was however an **Ashford** Health and Wellbeing Reference Group, which was chaired until 30th June 2022 by Chris Morley. This included representatives from Patient Participation Groups in the Borough, Community Forums, Parish Councils, and other interested parties. That group had met virtually each month, with periodic joint meetings with other similar groups across Kent. The move to a single Integrated Care Board and a single Health and Care Partnership covering East Kent would no doubt influence the arrangements for that Group and others on how to get involved in shaping how healthcare was planned and delivered. He just thought it was important to make that clarification to avoid any confusion.

Resolved:

That, subject to noting the clarification above, the Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on the 21st July 2022 be approved and confirmed as a correct record,

189 Announcements

(a) The Mayor

The Mayor said that the last couple of months had seen the loss of a much loved and respected Monarch in Queen Elizabeth II. Her commitment and duty knew no bounds, especially when it came to communities and our sacred planet. The world had lost a champion and a true diplomat. They now had a new King but she considered that their commitment to communities and the environment must never waiver and must continue to be embraced as they welcomed King Charles III.

She said she had been fortunate over the past months to meet some amazing individuals, attend some wonderful events and be a part of welcoming new businesses. These included Estate Agents Miles and Barr and their colourful new offices in the Town Centre and Kennington Boutique - another amazing and beautiful restaurant belonging to Ash Miah. Throughout the summer she had attended a number of delightful and rewarding events. To name a few these included: - a visit to Rylands Road to open the outside Gym; attended 'Eco Activity' with the children at Singleton Spaces and managed to paint a small bug box (at least the children had been impressed!); a 100th Birthday party at Ashford Active Retirement; the Fabric of Ashford Tapestry launch; Proms at the Jean Mealham Pop in Centre; Appledore Flower Festival with this year's theme of nursery rhymes; the Sagamantha Gurkha Nepalese annual football tournament; the opening of the Big Green Week with Councillors Barrett, Feacey and Claire Norman; and the Big Sleep Out with Benita of Specsavers. It had also been a pleasure to attend the Civic Ceremony of the Mayor of Tenterden, John Crawford, and this month, the fun filled Tenterden Folk Festival.

The Mayor said that her and her husband had been sad to be unable to attend the Twinning visit to Fougères this year due to ill health. They had been looking forward to meeting up again with old friends. She wanted to give a big thank you the Deputy Mayor and Mayoress for stepping in at the last minute to represent Ashford at this Civic event.

Recently, she had paid a visit to Downsvie Amber where she had been so impressed with the help and support provided to young homeless people - giving them the opportunity to start afresh, learn new skills and have the confidence to face the world and its challenges. It was amazing what was on their doorstep that they didn't always know about. It had been inspirational to learn of the good that people did without reward or sometimes recognition and this was highlighted at the Platinum Jubilee Civic Awards night which had been a fabulous evening and enjoyed by all who attended. One addition to her schedule had been earlier that day when she had been invited to give out awards at the Pubwatch 'Best Bar None' event. This was a joint initiative of the Police, Ashford Borough Council Licensing and the licensed trade. It had been great to see how many local businesses were committed to doing great work, keeping people safe in the night-time economy.

Finally, The Mayor said it had given her enormous pleasure to be able to recognise four individuals who had worked towards making Ashford a safe, colourful and cultural experience, by presenting them with Certificates of Achievement. Michael Claughton and Susan Mansfield of Ashford Access, who had worked tirelessly over the years towards highlighting and rectifying the issues that disabled individuals faced going about town, Melissa Dawkins for her outstanding work in making Ashford colourful, inviting and her ability to make creative art seem easy, and Debra McGee for her outstanding work in diversity in creative arts and music, and her commitment to Revelation St Mary's and its performances.

Her first charity event at the Everest Inn had been a real success and, as always, the Everest Inn had provided a wonderful evening and she wanted to thank everyone who supported this event. Her next event posed the questions - Do you like Bats? Or would you like to know more about them? If so, she encouraged all to book tickets to the "Let's Talk Bats and Buffet" on the 29th October at Singleton Environment Centre. She thought Donna had sent everyone an invite, but if anyone needed more information please contact her. She thanked everyone for their support and looked forward to letting everyone know about future events they had planned. There were exciting times ahead!

(b) Leader of the Council

The Leader said at this time he wanted to dwell on a pertinent issue for Local Authorities. He said the most important thing for all Elected Members in terms of governance, be it at Central Government, County or Third Tier Authority level, was the safety and wellbeing of the people they were responsible for. This must always take top priority over everything else they did. That is why he wanted to spend a little time at this meeting covering just some of the many things Ashford Borough Council was doing to discharge these vitally important responsibilities.

They all knew what a problem crime and anti-social behaviour could be and that everyone had the right to feel safe. They were fortunate to have a CCTV monitoring centre, located at the Civic Centre, which watched their streets 24 hours a day to prevent and detect criminal activity and anti-social behaviour. They proactively

monitored just under 100 cameras across the Borough and they had a direct radio link to Kent Police to report incidents and summon a response. They monitored cameras for other authorities and were installing an additional 12 cameras within the Town Centre, paid for by Safer Streets Funding. They were also currently working with Charing Parish Council on their installation of CCTV cameras which they would monitor. In Autumn 2021, following a successful bid to the Home Office, Ashford was awarded almost £550,000 from the Safer Streets Fund to make the streets of its Town Centre safer, particularly for women and girls. Officers from ABC and Kent Police had been working to spend this money wisely and to achieve the most effective interventions. In addition to the aforementioned additional CCTV, the funding had also paid for: - the creation of the Ashford Streetwise App; the Active Bystander training delivered to over 180 front line staff working in businesses operating in the town centre; presentations to schools on key safety messages; and improvements to the Underpass between the Station and the Outlet Centre, which included new lighting. Other areas had also been improved.

The Leader advised that the Council had teamed up with Charlton Athletic Community Trust on a four year-long project funded by ABC, the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Premier League. The project has engaged with young people in some of the Borough's most high-need areas, using the power of sport to create safer and more respectful communities. Ball Court sessions had taken place at Stanhope and Victoria Park and Premier League Kicks sessions had taken place at Towers School. More than 380 hours of mentoring had been provided to young people, including those giving cause for concern regarding anti-social behaviour, poor school attendance and carrying offensive weapons. The eradication of domestic violence had also been high on their agenda and they had given added financial support to those involved in tackling this sensitive problem. It was far from easy to address and skill and understanding were necessary.

He knew that many people were now also facing a very real challenge in terms of the cost of living increasing, especially in relation to food and energy costs. The Council was taking positive action to help residents during the cost of living crisis. He called a meeting of the Ashford Critical Emergency Resilience (ACER) group, at which he had announced the creation of the Welfare Advisory Group, which was now already underway and looking at ways the Council could help. Indeed, the Welfare Intervention Officers were now providing a drop in service at the One You shop every Wednesday afternoon and they were also actively connecting people with the various support they were entitled to, such as the Pension Credit Take up Campaign. During August and September the Council had taken part in the 'Eat Well, Spend Less' Roadshow held across three locations, namely the Ray Allen Centre Car Park, Repton Community Trust Centre and the One You Shop. The roadshow brought partners together to provide practical advice, information and support on key areas such as: - healthy eating on a budget; benefits advice; free school meals and healthy start vouchers; support available from foodbanks and other voluntary sector provisions. The roadshows had been so successful that they planned to repeat them with another event on the 7th of December in Park Mall. They had also been approached by Parish Councils with a view to holding events in the rural areas, and this was receiving active consideration. The One You Shop had been a base for some of these initiatives but had also been a success in its own right. When it opened in Park Mall in 2017 it was initially set up as a six month pilot. The shop helped people to lose weight, become more active, quit smoking and feel better about their health and lifestyle. The concept was designed so that visitors could simply drop in for advice about their health and wellbeing. It was now used by a whole

host of agencies to provide vital wellbeing support and advice. It had proved so popular right from the start that the shop moved to a larger unit within Park Mall and since then had gone from strength to strength.

The Leader said they were blessed to have the Ashford Volunteer Centre, which the Council very much recognised and supported. This long established Centre, right in the very heart of the town, facilitated volunteering across the whole Borough. It had been running for 40 years and was still going strong. The Centre helped to maximise the impact of volunteering and its projects included the successful Men in Sheds (which ran on Tuesday mornings), the Befriending Scheme and the Volunteer Car Scheme that helped so many in the Borough. They also had the Care Navigators who served at the William Harvey Hospital and provided a vital integrated resource. Help was available to get people out and about and enjoy the day-to-day activities many took for granted. Whilst this was a pivotal Centre, they also had many other volunteering individuals and groups across the Borough - all giving of their time and energies to help others. Ashford also had the highest number of Changing Places toilets in Kent, with a further three in the pipeline. To assist with this programme, the Council had secured £160,000 through the Government's Changing Places Fund. Wellbeing in the home was equally important and they recognised the need for disabled adaptations to be dealt with in a timely manner. In 2017, at his personal intervention, they had made the decision to engage an Occupational Therapist to improve the assessment and authorisation of adaptations funded through the Disabled Facilities Grant programme. This had been successful in reducing the waiting times and had significantly improved their overall service and sped up delivery. The Council's housing stock was well maintained with energy efficient measures put in place over the years. These were now keeping people warm and helping with household bills. The Council's own stock included 'A' rated boilers in 90% of properties. In addition, there was mineral wool cavity insulation and an established PVCu window and door replacement programme.

Finally, the Leader advised that the Council was always testing emergency planning arrangements to safeguard its residents. Recent desktop exercises had taken place, as well as live role playing scenarios, to test emergency planning arrangements on the ground. These exercises included the Council's Command and Control Centre working with those at the incident on ground operations and extending to include the provision of rest centre and resource arrangements and recovery. Operation Golden Arrow had been the most recent such exercise undertaken in the last quarter.

They were never complacent and there was always more to do. They took these matters very seriously indeed, because he considered caring for people should run through the very core of their existence as a Local Authority.

190 Cabinet – 28th July and 29th September 2022

(a) Cabinet – 28th July 2022

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 28th July 2022 be received and noted.

(b) Cabinet – 29th September 2022

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 29th September 2022 be received and noted.

191 Selection and Constitutional Review Committee – 29th September 2022

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Selection and Constitutional Review Committee held on the 29th September 2022 be approved and adopted.

192 Audit Committee – 19th July and 4th October 2022

(a) Audit Committee – 19th July 2022

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit Committee held on the 19th July 2022 be received and noted.

(b) Audit Committee – 4th October 2022

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit Committee held on the 4th October 2022 be received and noted.

193 Audit Committee – Annual Report 2021/22

Resolved:

That the report be received and accepted.

194 Notices of Motion

Councillor Spain had submitted a Notice of Motion pursuant to Procedure Rule 11. This was detailed in full in the Supplementary Agenda. The Motion specifically asked for four resolutions namely: -

“1. To undertake a full, thorough, and objective review into how the Council is currently addressing its statutory Disability Facilities Grants (DFG) responsibilities towards its tenants with disabilities.

2. That this review is conducted in an open, objective, and honest way and with the required expertise to ensure that Members, Officers, and residents are completely certain of the current legal position with regards to how ABC meets its statutory DFG duties towards its tenants, and that all necessary corrective actions are identified.

3. That corrective actions for all issues identified during this review are undertaken within the shortest possible time frame and that no issues remain uncorrected by the end of 2022.

4. That above all, it will ensure that all laws and guidelines, including those which have been considered and adjudicated on by the Courts, relating to DFGs and Council tenants with disabilities are fully complied with.”

This was seconded by Councillor C Suddards.

Councillor Buchanan, Portfolio Holder for Housing responded to the Motion. He thanked Councillor Spain for his motion, not least because it allowed him to explain the Council's caring position on disabled people's housing adaptations, and that they were rightly proud of their position on these matters, as they strived to go above and beyond their statutory obligations. Neither himself, nor any of the Housing Team, would ever wish to believe that any disabled person had been disadvantaged as a result of their current practices. They took every step on the front foot to ensure applications were dealt with as quickly as possible. He had hoped to be able to provide Councillor Spain with a largely written reply, of which he would have had sight prior to this meeting, however, as this was a Motion, he was legally required to address the points in detail verbally.

He advised that the Assistant Director of Housing was conducting a review of the policies and procedures for DFGs and also for Council house adaptations for the disabled. The review involved seeking external advice from the Occupational Therapy (OT) Service at Kent County Council and the local Home Improvement Agency who currently provided a service to assist applicants with DFG's. She was also seeking independent advice from Foundations who could provide expert advice in this context. In addition, the Council's Legal department had been asked to provide guidance to the review regarding the legislation and application of law. The outcome of the review would be reported to the Cabinet, and any recommendations arising from the review would also be presented at the same time. It was anticipated that the review would be completed fully before the end of the year. Councillor Spain had been asked to meet with the Officers and furthermore he had been invited to submit details of cases that he believed may have been disadvantaged by the Council's approach, however, so far, he had refused to meet Officers, and had not supplied any actual examples of cases that had caused his concern.

Councillor Buchanan said it was important to note that the application process for a DFG and Council Tenant's adaptations for the disabled were two separate work strands and should not be confused. Whilst this review was ongoing, however, he could offer some information on findings so far. While it was open to Local Authority tenants to apply for a DFG and go through the formal application process, DFG funding was restricted to private sector properties and any spend on Council adaptations must be funded via the ring-fenced Housing Revenue Account. In 2014, a policy was adopted for Council house tenants to be able to apply directly to the housing department, as their landlord, for assistance with adaptations. By taking this direct approach, it did not require tenants to

have to go through the formal DFG process and allowed them to access direct support. If an applicant felt that they wished to apply for a DFG this would not be refused, but they would explain that they did not need to go through the formal DFG route to access support. Most so far had chosen to take the more direct route. The Council's legal advice was that policies seek to act as a guide, not a bind and that each application should be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. For Council tenants, the HRA identified a budget each year, which had been increased over recent years for this purpose, but they did not restrict tenants in need and would process applications that were necessary and appropriate, even if the budget had been exceeded. This was evidenced this year as the budget was £500,000, however due to some very high cost adaptations this year it had been exceeded and they had to date spent or committed to spend over £1M on adaptations from the HRA. Minor works applications were processed within 28 days and were completed on average within 40 days. Their target was 28 days to completion and they were working towards that. KPIs were reported on Pentana. Minor adaptation issues, such as grab rails, were sometimes processed without the need for an OT referral to expedite delivery and reduce the burden on the OT service. Each case was assessed on its own merits. Some properties required major adaptations and would obviously take longer. With all applications, Officers would seek advice and recommendations from the OT Team who were the experts in the field for identifying applicant's needs and for specifying certain works or type of equipment that may be needed. It was appropriate to do this so that the adaptation provided was suitable and safe for the disabled tenant as well as being appropriate and providing a comprehensive healthcare service for the wellbeing of the tenant. This practice was widespread across the Country and so far the offer had not identified any tenant who had been disadvantaged by obtaining this advice before acting on delivering adaptations.

In terms of applications for DFGs for private properties, Councillor Buchanan advised that there was an identified process for considering applications and this was supported by national guidance, updated by the Government earlier this year. Applicants could apply for a DFG but it had been practice to recommend that they do also approach the OT team for an assessment right at the start of the process. Guidance required the Local Authority to take advice from a suitably qualified person regarding the adaptations required. Applications could only be approved once there was a complete application and as part of this it was important that the client received appropriate advice about the ways in which their disability could be addressed and assisted in the home. The Local Authority recognised that applicants could choose to apply without having obtained this advice and also that they may wish to engage a private OT, but no application could be approved without the appropriate recommendations being received from a suitably qualified expert.

In terms of DFGs the average wait time was around six months which had significantly improved on the position from a few years back where the wait time could have exceeded 18 months to 2 years. The Council's DFG budget this year was £1.5m and they were currently projecting a spend of approximately £1.2m for this year, but this was of course dependent upon the volume of applications received. In this context they had no pressures of cases delayed due to budgetary issues. They were also informed that at this present time the OT service had around 11 cases awaiting an assessment and these were generally being dealt with swiftly, and well within the statutory timescales for considering an application for approval. There was also no delay in works being progressed via the Home Improvement Agency, other than the national problems being experienced currently with supplies of materials and labour. Despite these national

issues, the HIA, the OT service and the Council were working very well together to ensure a speedy consideration of cases. In short they had not found any evidence that applicants for DFG's had been disadvantaged by their current practices.

The Council would of course take every opportunity to identify improvements and did accept that they needed to review the information on the website and information in general. They would also be obtaining advice from 'Foundations' in this regard as an independent agency to further enhance their processes where this is necessary and appropriate.

Finally, the housing department previously had worked in partnership with the OT service to provide a dedicated OT service for Ashford applications, to enable them to further improve the speed and communication for applicants for both DFG's and Council tenant adaptations. Sadly the Covid pandemic had presented some exceptional challenges and meant that this could not be maintained, but the Officers were working with KCC for a proposal for this to be reinstated and progress on this would be included within the report to Cabinet.

So, as a response to the four specific points in the Motion presented by Councillor Spain, Councillor Buchanan advised the following: -

1. *To undertake a full, thorough, and objective review into how the Council is currently addressing its statutory Disability Facilities Grants responsibilities towards its tenants with disabilities.*

Councillor Buchanan said that the review was previously confirmed at the last Full Council and was underway already and therefore he questioned whether this motion is necessary.

2. *That this review is conducted in an open, objective, and honest way and with the required expertise to ensure that Members, Officers, and residents are completely certain of the current legal position with regards to how ABC meets its statutory DFG duties towards its tenants, and that all necessary corrective actions are identified.*

Councillor Buchanan said this was absolutely their intention so this was not disputed and agreed.

3. *That corrective actions for all issues identified during this review are undertaken within the shortest possible timeframe and that no issues remain uncorrected by the end of 2022.*

Councillor Buchanan considered this should be amended to read that "a report should be presented back to Cabinet with the outcome of the review and recommendations to address any areas identified, by the end of the year."

4. *That above all, it will ensure that all laws and guidelines, including those which have been considered and adjudicated on by the Courts, relating to DFGs and Council tenants with disabilities are fully complied with.*

Councillor Buchanan said that review would of course ensure that all relevant legislation and guidance had been taken in to account. The Council's Legal department had already been asked to provide advice to this effect within the scope of the review and

would have a role in providing input to the review and the recommendations as part of the Cabinet process.

Councillor Spain thanked the Portfolio Holder for his comprehensive response. As a point of personal explanation, he advised that he had only refused to engage with the Assistant Director for Housing in terms of her request to provide specific details on cases, as there may be residents who had court cases against the Council and he did not consider that appropriate. Additionally, the Portfolio Holder had asked under Point 1 of the Motion whether this Motion was necessary and he wished to clarify that he believed it was necessary to make sure that the review was held to a high standard of quality. He said he was pleased to note that both Officers and Members were engaging with it.

The Leader of the Council thanked Councillor Spain for bringing forward this Motion on an important subject that was close to all their hearts. He said he was largely in agreement with what had been put forward, but following the response of the Portfolio Holder he proposed the following amendments to Councillor Spain's original motion.

"Point 1 be amended to read *"To **complete** a full, thorough and objective review into how the Council is currently addressing its statutory Disabled Facilities Grants responsibilities towards its tenants with disabilities"*.

Point 3 be amended to read *"To report back to Cabinet, and any recommendations identified during this review are undertaken within the shortest possible timeframe."*

Points 2 and 4 to remain unchanged.

This was seconded by Councillor Bartlett.

Councillors Spain and C Suddards as mover and seconder of the original Motion confirmed they were happy to accept those amendments.

Councillor Campkin considered it important the both Members and residents were aware of what was available in terms of these types of grants and accordingly he considered the ABC website needed to be updated to make this more obvious. He thanked Councillor Spain for bringing this matter to the Council's attention. This point was echoed by Councillor C Suddards as seconder of the original Motion. Councillor Buchanan advised that the need to update the website, and information more generally, was accepted and would be part of the ongoing review.

In response to a question from Councillor Barrett, Councillor Buchanan advised that he was not aware of any complaints regarding DFGs from members of the public during his time as Portfolio Holder for Housing.

Councillor Spain, as mover of the original Motion, concluded the debate by thanking the Council for their reasoned debate on this issue and giving it the attention it deserved. He wanted to ensure that the ongoing review was held to the highest possible standards, with a level of objectivity which at times may seem uncomfortable, but was necessary.

Resolved:

- That**
- (i) the Council complete a full, thorough and objective review into how it is currently addressing its statutory Disabled Facilities Grants responsibilities towards its tenants with disabilities.**
 - (ii) this review is conducted in an open, objective, and honest way and with the required expertise to ensure that Members, Officers, and residents are completely certain of the current legal position with regards to how ABC meets its statutory DFG duties towards its tenants, and that all necessary corrective actions are identified.**
 - (iii) a report come back to Cabinet, and any recommendations identified during this review are undertaken within the shortest possible timeframe.**
 - (iv) above all, the review will ensure that all laws and guidelines, including those which have been considered and adjudicated on by the Courts, relating to DFGs and Council tenants with disabilities are fully complied with.**
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Cabinet

Minutes of a Meeting of the Cabinet held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **27th October 2022**.

Present:

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

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

Apologies:

Deputy Chief Executive.

Also Present:

Cllrs. Burgess, Harman, B Heyes, Sparks, C Suddards, Wright.

In attendance:

Chief Executive, Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer, Director of Place, Space and Leisure, Assistant Director of Planning and Development, Assistant Director of Environment, Property and Recreation, Head of Strategic Projects, Service Lead – Finance, Principal Solicitor (Strategic Development), Housing Asset Manager, Senior Communications Officer, Policy and Democratic Services Assistant, Member Services Manager.

195 Declarations of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Feacey	Made a Voluntary Announcement as Chairman of the Ashford International Development Company.	197, 203
	Made a Voluntary Announcement as Chairman of the Ashford Volunteer Centre.	197

196 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 29th September 2022 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

197 Medium Term Financial Plan 2023 - 2028

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which presented the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP), a budget forecast including underlying assumptions, covering a five year period from 2022 to 2027 for the General Fund. The Draft Budget would be built using the assumptions in the MTFP and would be reported to Cabinet the following month. He said it was based on best estimates available at the end of September 2022, but the wider economic picture was currently so uncertain and volatile it was worth stressing that the budget process would have to be extremely flexible this year.

In response to questions, Officers confirmed that they would be examining the Chancellor's statement (due for 17th November) very carefully and there would be a lot of interaction and transparency with Portfolio Holders and Members as service budgets came forward.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development asked for a reassurance that the new refuse contract would not be looking to move to a four weekly collection for residual waste as appeared to be being considered in some other areas. It was confirmed that this was not the case.

The Portfolio Holder for HR and Customer Services considered there would be value in producing some extra communication with residents outlining ABC's portion of the Council Tax and what a small percentage of the overall total that charge was. This was a message that still did not seem to be getting through.

Resolved:

- That**
- (i) the forecast be noted and the underlying assumptions be accepted, noting economic volatility.**
 - (ii) it be noted that the 2023/24 Government funding allocation was forecast to be the same as last year, a real term cut.**
 - (iii) the reserve position be noted and the proposed use of reserves to fund the 2023/24 budget deficit be supported.**
 - (iv) authority be delegated to the Deputy Chief Executive, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance and IT, to agree the Council's continued participation on the Kent Business Rates pool.**
 - (v) Management Team, in conjunction with Members, be supported in developing a sound and robust schedule of savings to bridge the funding deficit highlighted within the report.**

198 Broadband Wayleave Agreements for Council Housing

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development introduced the report which explained that Officers were finalising wayleave agreements which would grant access to the Council's housing properties for the purpose of installing Fibre to the Premises (FTTP). As Openreach and Netomnia were rolling out FTTP across the Ashford Borough, thousands of the Council's residential properties would be in scope for this infrastructure upgrade. To ensure the Council facilitated and supported the wider FTTP rollout, Officers were seeking to streamline the wayleave agreement process, reducing the amount of documents and, therefore, the amount of time spent agreeing terms.

Resolved:

- That (i) the adoption of a flexible wayleave system for Fibre to the Premises (FTTP) access to the Council's residential properties be approved.**
- (ii) authority be delegated to the Solicitor to the Council to approve the form of these agreements based on Officers' recommendations (whether as deeds or ordinary agreements).**

Recommended:

- That (i) the principle of recovering reasonable costs for the Council's work on wayleaves and FTTP installation in the Council's owned residential properties be agreed.**
- (ii) authority be delegated to the Assistant Director of Housing to approve the final costs level to be included in these wayleaves, prior to them being signed.**

199 Corporate Property Performance – Annual Report 2021/22

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which included market update, revenue and asset performance data for the financial year 2021/22, as well as an overview of the ongoing activities of Estates Surveyors to ensure positive progress for the next financial year and onwards. The report also identified progress on the delivery of the Corporate Asset Management Strategy 2020 – 2024 and provided a summary of how the Council's main commercial assets were performing. The Portfolio Holder particularly highlighted, to the Cabinet, the recommendation for charging fees.

Resolved:

- That
- (i) **the performance of the Council's Corporate Property portfolio during the financial year 2021/22, as stated at Appendix 1 to the report, be noted.**
 - (ii) **external factors affecting the commercial market conditions be noted.**
 - (iii) **the Estates team be authorised to charge fees and delegated authority be granted to the Assistant Director of Environment, Property and Recreation to negotiate on those fees where necessary.**
 - (iv) **the charging on non-refundable deposits on Land Enquiries be authorised, to cover administrative costs and Officer time, with the deposit being deducted from the consideration upon completion of the resulting transaction.**
 - (v) **the implementation of new processes and procedures in line with best practice according to the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), be supported.**

200 Council Tax Base 2023/24

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which advised that the Council was required to approve the tax base used to calculate the level of Council Tax for 2023/24. It was calculated with regard to the number of domestic properties (including a forecast of new properties), which were then converted to Band D equivalents. The tax base had been calculated at 48,906 Band D properties, an increase of 242 (or 0.5%) on the current year.

Resolved:

- That
- (i) **the 2023/24 'Net' tax base of 48,906 Band D equivalent properties be agreed.**
 - (ii) **the possibility of further Cabinet and Council decisions being required before the end of January, should any material change in the tax base be required as a consequence of any further relevant funding announcements from Government, be noted.**

201 Stodmarsh Update

The Chairman directed Members attention to the tabled papers which included an alternative Paragraph 23 to the report.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development introduced the report which provided an update on the progress of catchment wide strategy, the Council's own

strategic wetlands solution and recent updates from Government and Natural England on the nutrient neutrality issue. He said this was important update, demonstrating what the Council was doing as a Borough and providing assurance.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, IT and Digital said the complexity of what it would take to deliver the solutions should not be underestimated and he wanted to acknowledge the collaborative work with other agencies and the time and effort that had gone in to this.

In response to a question, the Leader confirmed that all Districts were involved with strong lobbying of the water companies to upgrade water treatment plants, but this would take time. In Ashford they had begun inviting the water companies to the Ashford Strategic Delivery Board meetings to aid closer working relationships. It was clear that the water companies were part of the overall solution, along with Local Authorities, the Environment Agency and Natural England. This Council had always achieved success by working closely in conjunction with others, such as the Government and KCC, and that would continue here. It was an extremely complex process, but the right people were involved and the next step would be ensuring that the Council's planning application was as robust as it could be. Retaining control of the issue was considered vital.

Resolved:

- That**
- (i) the work done to date by Officers progressing new strategic wetlands in the Borough be noted and supported, subject to planning permission being sought and obtained for them in due course.**
 - (ii) the urgency and importance of this project to the Council continue to be recognised, subject to both planning permission and permitting approval.**
 - (iii) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Planning and Development and Finance, IT and Digital, to negotiate and agree the details of the commercial structure (including any joint venture) associated with the provision of new strategic wetlands in the Borough and their delivery, management and maintenance.**
 - (iv) the Chief Executive be authorised to submit an expression of interest to DEFRA/Natural England/other Government bodies as appropriate, to receive funding in order to assist with the delivery/management/maintenance of the strategic wetlands, and**
 - (v) the Solicitor to the Council be authorised, in consultation with the Chief Executive, the Assistant Director of Planning and Development and the Head of Strategic Projects, to negotiate, finalise and enter into any funding, commercial or other legal agreements and documentation to implement the above.**

202 Greater Ashford Environment and Land Mapping Commission – Notes of 23rd August 2022

Resolved:

That the Notes of the Meeting of the Greater Ashford Environment and Land Mapping Commission held on the 23rd August 2022 be received and noted.

203 Trading and Enterprise Board – Minutes of 11th October 2022

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Trading and Enterprise Board held on the 11th October 2022 be received and noted.

204 Ashford Strategic Delivery Board – Notes of 23rd September 2022

Resolved:

That the Notes of the Meeting of the Ashford Strategic Delivery Board held on the 23rd September 2022 be received and noted.

205 Climate Change Advisory Committee – Notes of 20th September 2022

Resolved:

That the Notes of the Meeting of the Climate Change Advisory Committee held on the 20th September 2022 be approved and adopted.

206 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.

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Decisions effective from the 7th December 2022 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 **24th November 2022**.

Present:

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

Cllrs. Bell, Feacey, Forest, Iliffe, Shorter.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Buchanan, Pickering.

Also Present:

Cllrs. Campkin, Harman, Sparks, C Suddards.

In attendance:

Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive, Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer, Director of Place, Space and Leisure, Director of Customer, Technology and Finance, Director of Health and Wellbeing, Assistant Director of Planning and Development, Assistant Director of Environment, Property and Recreation, Assistant Director of HR, Customer Services, Communications and Digital, Head of Economic Development, Head of Policy and Performance, Service Lead – Finance, Human Resources Manager, Communications and Marketing Manager, Principal Accountant, Senior Accountant, Senior Governance and Data Protection Officer, Member Services Manager.

218 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 27th October 2022 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

219 Leader's Announcements

The Leader said that most present would be aware that after 17 years as an Elected Member, and 10 years as the Executive Leader of the Council, he would not be standing in the forthcoming Local Elections in May 2023. Accordingly it had been his intention, albeit that he had not formally done so, to stand down as Leader at the next Full Council Meeting on 22nd December 2022, with effect from 1st January 2023.

He would have remained on the Council as a backbench Member for the Charing Ward until the Election. However, the Conservative Group had asked him to remain as Leader of the Council until the end of this four year term and he had accepted their request and would now remain until the May Local Elections.

220 Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Consultation and Engagement Task Group

The Leader thanked the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their report and a good piece of work which was appreciated by the Cabinet. He said recommendation (vii) would need to be handled carefully, but the Cabinet fully supported the recommendations.

Resolved:

- That**
- (i) the corporate consultation guidance be produced to provide Services with good practice for setting up future consultations. The guidance should include details on the different methods of consultation and set out some minimum standards that need to be complied with before and after a consultation has concluded.**
 - (ii) non-conventional methods of consultation should continue to be explored by the Council in order to increase levels of engagement from residents such as video and Hello Lamppost.**
 - (iii) the use of easy-read versions of consultation papers should be considered for all public consultations.**
 - (iv) an internal advisory group should be formed for Officers to review consultations before they are published. The group would meet informally to test and feed back to Services about proposed surveys.**
 - (v) a calendar of consultations is produced to ensure that the Council can oversee how many consultations are issued to residents during one period**
 - (vi) work to increase subscribers to ABC publications should continue to be developed by the Council.**
 - (vii) the Council explore options around creating a Citizens Panel to encourage local residents to give their views and options on services and issues that affect the Borough.**
 - (viii) residents are engaged with the Scrutiny work programme each year, using the Council's communications channels.**

221 Corporate Performance Report – Quarter 2 2022/23

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which summarised performance against the Council's updated suite of Key Performance Indicators reflecting the Corporate Plan 2022-24 for the Quarter 2 period.

Resolved:

That the performance data for Quarter 1 2022/23 be received and noted.

222 Data Protection Policy Suite (Periodic Review)

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which advised that to ensure the Council's Data Protection Policy Suite remained relevant and fit for purpose, it required periodic review. The current policy was reviewed and agreed in March 2019 and this report provided a reviewing opportunity, with amendments proposed to reflect changes to the legislative data protection landscape and best practice guidance issued by the supervisory authority (ICO), since the policy was last reviewed.

Resolved:

- That**
- (i) the amended Data Protection Policy Suite be approved.**
 - (ii) the Data Protection Officer be authorised, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder, to approve minor amendments to the policy in-line with working arrangements and/or legislative change.**

223 Draft Budget 2023/24

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which presented the draft budget for 2023/24 for the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account. He advised that the draft budget had been balanced by funding the £2.87m deficit from the Economic Risk Reserves and was broadly in line with the figure highlighted within the Medium Term Financial Plan presented to the Cabinet in October, and which formed the basis for this draft budget. He reiterated that funding the 2023/24 deficit from reserves came with the expectation that Management, in conjunction with Portfolio Holders, would undertake a thorough and well considered piece of work to determine where the Council could make savings to reduce the deficit. This was a challenge of similar scale to the one faced at the height of austerity and would need the co-operation and vision of both Officers and Members to tackle the situation.

The budget would now be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for review as well as the formal budget consultation processes and the Portfolio Holder stressed that any responses received during the consultation period would be welcomed and looked at closely. He also drew attention to the tabled paper which included some minor updates to the report and thanked the Finance Team for their hard work in pulling the report together against the backdrop of so much change nationally.

There was discussion amongst the Cabinet about the breakdown of budgets by Service and some concern that Portfolio Holders were being asked to 'sign up' to savings targets without the required level of detail. Officers clarified that there would be a full budget breakdown provided to Portfolio Holders before the scrutiny process. The Leader said whilst he was content to wait and have that sort of discussion as a Cabinet, he did have some concerns about the timetable and did not believe Budget Scrutiny should start until the Cabinet had had that opportunity to discuss the budget in more detail. Officers advised that savings targets were more about future years rather than the coming year but there may be a need to adjust the Budget Scrutiny timetable to take in to account the wishes of the Cabinet.

Resolved:

- That**
- (i) the draft budget for 2023/24 be approved.**
 - (ii) the Cabinet, as Portfolio Holders, be informed and involved in progressing the savings required to reduce the budget deficit.**
 - (iii) the draft Housing Revenue Account budget for 2023/24, at Section 2 to the report, be approved.**
 - (iv) this report be used as the basis for budget consultation with the public, the business community, Parish Councils and staff.**
 - (v) the draft budget as set out in the report be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Budget Task Group for formal scrutiny.**

224 Financial Monitoring – Quarter 2 Report

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report and drew attention to the tabled papers which included his updated Portfolio Holder comments. The report presented the Quarter 2 budget monitoring position to 30th September 2022. The economic outlook had significantly changed since the budget was set, and had continued to be volatile throughout the second quarter and this was reflected within the report and the projections it contained. The forecast position to 31st March 2023 indicated an overall pressure on the General Fund of £2.1m (£1.7m at Quarter 1), with a pressure in services of £1.7m (£1.2m at Quarter 1). The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) was reporting a total underspend in year of £492,000 (£356,000 at Quarter 1). A full breakdown of movements was shown in the report. The report also provided an update on the Collection Fund, Treasury Management, Reserves and progress on savings identified in the 2022/23 budget.

Resolved:

- That**
- (i) the Quarter 2 forecast position for the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account be noted.**
 - (ii) the Collection Fund position be noted.**

- (iii) **the Treasury Management position be noted.**
- (iv) **the provisional reserve allocations as highlighted at Table 6 of the report be noted.**

225 Right to Buy Lease Extensions

The report set out the basis for introducing a non-statutory route to simplify the lease extension process. In the absence of an agreed non-statutory route at present, leaseholders only had the option of the formal route which could be a cumbersome and time consuming process for all parties. The report set out a proposal to bring the formal and informal routes into line and provide each Right to Buy applicant a Right to Buy lease of 125 years.

Resolved:

- That**
- (i) **the introduction of a non-statutory or informal Right to Buy Lease extension process be agreed.**
 - (ii) **the proposal to grant all new Right to Buy leases the minimum term of 125 years be agreed.**

226 Ashford Town Centre Reset – Strategy and Action Plan

The Leader said that before consideration of this item he wanted to address the headline on the front page of that day's Kentish Express referring to future use of the former Debenhams building. This had been taken completely out of context from a paragraph in the report and there were no such plans as described in the newspaper. He considered it was wrong to completely mislead the public in such a way.

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which introduced the Ashford Town Centre Reset Strategy and Action Plan. This would be delivered alongside other large scale strategic Town Centre projects such as the regeneration of the former Odeon building and the Masterplanning of the redevelopment of Park Mall shopping centre. He said he was excited to bring this report to the Cabinet and thanked Officers for their hard work in pulling this all together.

Resolved:

- That**
- (i) **the Town Centre Reset Strategy be adopted and the key strategic priorities be noted.**
 - (ii) **the Town Centre Reset Action Plan be adopted and the recommended financial commitment as set out in the Action Plan from the range of identified funds be approved to help deliver a programme of project activity, physical interventions and outputs.**

227 Residents Survey 2022

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which advised that the Ashford Borough Council Residents' Survey was a biennial piece of research that aimed to capture the broad opinion of residents regarding Council services and engagement as well as their local area. The report outlined the response rate and summarised the results received, which would be used for the purpose of continued monitoring of public opinion regarding the Council and to gauge progress in key areas. The results would also be used by Services for the purpose of continued improvement and he thanked the Officers involved.

In response to a question, the Portfolio Holder advised that people had been contacted in writing to participate in the survey and were given the option to complete it on-line or to have a hard copy survey sent out. A Member said it was important to keep a close eye to ensure that all were catered for and that those who could not participate on-line were not left behind. The Leader said he agreed and considered there was no substitute for making yourself available to speak to people.

Resolved:

- That (i) the results of the 2022 Residents' Survey be noted.**
- (ii) a future campaign through Ashford For You Magazine and social media on ways to get involved in volunteering be endorsed, including easily accessible and smaller scale opportunities.**

228 Pre-Planning Application Advice – Revised Service and Charging Structure

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which introduced proposed changes to the Council's pre-planning application advice service, which had been largely suspended since April 2022. It set out a revised approach to dealing with pre-application advice for different types of proposals and an amended charging regime that sought to place the service on a broad cost recovery basis, whilst improving the quality and reliability of the advice being provided for the benefit of customers.

Resolved:

That the proposed customer service plan as set out at Appendix 3 to the report be endorsed.

Recommended

That the new fees and charges set out in Appendix 3 to the report be approved and adopted and the Assistant Director for Planning and Development be given discretion to grant fee exemptions/reductions as listed with effect from: -

- **1st January 2023 for developments of 10 units or above, where not covered by separate PPA arrangements, and**
- **1st April 2023 for all other proposals, but this date may be brought forward (or delayed in exceptional circumstances) by the Assistant Director for Planning and Development, in consultation with the Director of Place and Space, and the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development.**

229 Port Health Service - Restructure

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which advised of the need to amend the staffing arrangements concerning the Port Health Service, due to directions given by DEFRA. It was important to note that DEFRA was underwriting all costs involved with the changes to the staffing and structure and there was no financial implications for the Council.

Recommended:

- That
- (i) **the proposed new Target Operating Model be adopted.**
 - (ii) **the potential redundancy costs (as set out in the Exempt Appendix to the report), in accordance with Section 10 of the Retirement, Redundancy and Discretionary Compensation Policy Statement, be noted.**
 - (iii) **the costs associated with the early release of pension (as set out in the Exempt Appendix to the report), in the event that a redundancy results, be noted, and the costs associated with early release of the Local Government Pension benefits be approved.**
 - (iv) **it be noted that KCC Pensions have not been able to fully assess historical scheme membership for postholder 6571 and the pension strain costs may change. DEFRA have undertaken to underwrite all costs associated with this reduction in headcount and it is on this basis that the Council is recommended to approve the release of the pension and the Deputy Chief Executive be given delegated authority to authorise any other additional costs that may be incurred once KCC Pensions have the full historical scheme membership details for this postholder.**

230 Civic and Ceremonial Programme Board – Notes of 26th October 2022

The Leader said he wanted to draw attention to a couple of matters from this Meeting. Firstly it had been extremely interesting to learn of the connection between Ashford and the 59th (Newfoundland) Heavy Regiment Royal Artillery during Second World War. This was part of Ashford's forgotten history and he looked forward to the findings of the informal working group that was being set up to investigate further. Secondly, the announcement of the Coronation of King Charles III being set for

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Saturday 6th May 2023, meant that with the Local Elections on Thursday 4th, and Election Count on Friday 5th, it promised to be a busy weekend for all involved at the Council.

The Vice-Chairman of the Board wanted to draw attention to AIMREC's programme of events to recognise the 180th anniversary of the Railway arriving in Ashford in November 1842. This had been a great success and he said it was important to recognise that AIMREC had arranged this programme themselves, with the Council's support. It was very positive that they had taken the lead and he reminded Members that the photographic exhibition at the Ashford Gateway would remain on display until the 30th November.

Resolved:

That the Notes of the Meeting of the Civic and Ceremonial Programme Board held on the 26th October 2022 be approved and adopted.

231 Compliance and Enforcement Board – Notes of 25th October 2022

Resolved:

That the Notes of the Meeting of the Compliance and Enforcement Board held on the 25th October 2022 be received and noted.

232 Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group – Notes of 24th June and 16th September 2022

Resolved:

That the Notes of the Meetings of the Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group held on the 24th June and 16th September 2022 be received and noted.

233 Member Training Panel – Notes of 18th October 2022

Resolved:

That the Notes of the Meeting of the Member Training Panel held on the 18th October 2022 be received and noted.

234 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.

235 Economic Regeneration and Investment Board – Notes of 12th October 2022

Resolved:

That the Notes of the Meeting of the Economic Regeneration and Investment Board held on the 12th October 2022 be received and noted.

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Ashford Borough Council: Audit Committee

Minutes of a Meeting of the Audit Committee held in Committee Room 2, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **29 November 2022**.

Present:

Cllr. Krause (Chair)
Cllr. Buchanan (Vice-Chair);

Cllrs. Campkin, Hayward, Mulholland, Shorter, Spain.

Apologies:

Cllr. Wright.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2(c) Councillor Campkin attended as Substitute Member for Councillor Wright.

Also in Attendance (virtually):

Cllrs. Harman, Ledger

Finance Service Lead, Interim Head of Internal Audit.

Audit Manager – Grant Thornton UK

In attendance:

Deputy Chief Executive, Assistant Director of Planning and Development, Finance Service Lead, Team Leader – Planmaking and Infrastructure, Member Services Officer, Policy and Democratic Services Assistant.

236 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 4 October 2022 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

The Minutes of the Meeting of 15 March 2022 had contained a page numbering error; this had been corrected and the Minutes were re-signed by the Chair.

237 Statement of Accounts 2020/21 and External Auditors Findings

The Finance Service Lead gave a verbal update. Although there had been an unfortunate delay to the finalisation of the Statement of Accounts 2020/21, the External Auditors had now confirmed their satisfaction and the Accounts were ready for the formal delegated sign-off process to begin. The Chair agreed to commence this process as soon as possible.

A Member expressed his relief that the process was now complete, and on behalf of the Committee, thanked all those involved for their diligence.

238 Section 106 Audit – Weak Assurance Report – Follow Up

The Assistant Director of Planning and Development gave a verbal update, referring to the report previously circulated. There were five outstanding actions identified within the Mid Kent Audit report; of these, three related to the introduction and implementation of the Arcus software. On the evening of the meeting, a Section 106 data migration was in progress, to be tested for accuracy and visibility by Officers in the next few weeks, with a proposed review in April 2023. Officers were in consultation with Arcus regarding functionality and what was possible in this respect. It was impossible to predict the short-term results from testing, but Members were reassured that the process was under way. With regard to the two other actions, the review of the pre-2010 Section 106 process was on target for completion by 31 December 2022, and the controls required to ensure the Section 106 funds were appropriately spent were under discussion, to align systems, protocols and processes, which would lead to greater clarity; this second action was on target for delivery by the end of the year, or early January 2023. He confirmed that Arcus had been given fixed timescales to complete, and the specifications that had been provided were clear.

The Chair asked for the Interim Head of Internal Audit to check progress in February, and highlight any concerns at that point. This was agreed, with a report to be brought to Audit Committee in March 2023.

A Member sought reassurance that Officers were working to complete the actions in advance of the long target of April, as the embedded issues were causing significant concern. The Team Leader – Plan Making and Infrastructure confirmed that the April deadline corresponded with the timeline for the Mid Kent Audit quarterly review. In the meantime, paper and other system records were being maintained and monitored, for probity. The fixes were expected to be in place before April 2023.

A Member asked how trigger points in the Section 106 process were monitored and enforced. The Assistant Director of Planning and Development responded that developers did not always supply the necessary information, and sometimes on-site counting was needed; Officers were aware of what was required to ensure developers complied with the agreed release of funds or infrastructure commitments.

A Member asked if responses from Arcus were swift. The Assistant Director of Planning and Development replied that communication between the two parties had been a learning curve with regard to expectations versus the potential functionality of the system, but there was now clearer understanding on both sides.

It was known that the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group was in the process of concluding the Arcus implementation project review, and that their findings would be independent of any recommendations from Audit, respecting the boundaries of each Committee. It was expected that, on conclusion, the two Chairs would liaise to bring any recommendations into alignment.

Resolved:

That

- (i) the report be received and noted.**
- (ii) a further progress report be presented to the Committee in March 2023.**

239 Internal Audit Interim Report

A report had been circulated with the Agenda. The Interim Head of Internal Audit updated the Committee on the difficulties experienced in recruiting and retaining trained/experienced staff. The staff shortfall has been covered off by contractors. A new Head of Internal Audit is due to commence employment and will immediately focus on the delivery of the outstanding audits to take a view as to whether there will be sufficient work to deliver the opinion at the end of the year..

A Member asked for clarity regarding the continued struggle to resource the team. It was confirmed that the current recruitment pools in a range of business fields lacked suitably-qualified job seekers, and some trained staff had been lured away to more lucrative positions elsewhere; this was mirrored by the Planning team's difficulties in recruiting and retaining officers. It was confirmed that the new Head of Internal Audit was aware of the situation and would work in collaboration with partner authorities to find ways to address this; new agreements would be drawn up, which might be more costly, but any agreed increase would be shared amongst the partners. The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that the service that had been provided was broadly in line with ABC's expectations.

The Committee underlined its commitment to encourage apprentices and graduates to be recruited and trained to professional standards, and to perhaps then enter the wider pool of qualified individuals according to their aspirations. This strengthened and broadened the overall job market. The Interim Head of Internal Audit explained that they were looking at innovative ways of recruiting, advertising widely and promoting the benefits of employment with Mid-Kent.

The Committee expressed their appreciation for the hard work and diligence shown by the Interim Head of Internal Audit whilst she had been in that post.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

240 2021/2022 Audit Plan (External Audit)

A report had been circulated with the Agenda, and the Audit Manager of Grant Thornton gave a verbal update. He confirmed that, whilst minor issues had been identified, they were not exclusive to ABC and had not elicited concern.

A Member commented that an error in the report concerning ABC's climate change aspirations needed amendment. Also there was a blank space in the table regarding a Better Choice for Property Ltd, where suitable text needed to be entered for clarity regarding the responsibility for financial audit. Another Member mentioned that the

report stated a target of 2050 for zero carbon, whereas ABC's commitment was to this by 2030. The Audit Manager and the Deputy Chief Executive agreed to work together to correct the errors.

It was agreed that the strength of the Committee lay in collaboration and the spread of scrutiny of reports, to identify and challenge points, for quality assurance.

A Member questioned the audit fees of £9K for additional work to deliver value for money and whether that work should represent a saving. The Audit Manager responded that in 2021 a new framework of expectation for audit had been introduced nationally, to investigate if correct and robust arrangements were in place to deliver to responsibilities; that work had been completed, and it was not the intention for it to assess any potential saving areas.

A discussion took place regarding the apparent lack of resource to deliver to target date. The delay had been regrettable, the auditors had experienced staffing pressures as previously debated, and overseas resources had been employed. The Chair expressed concerns regarding the priority given to this work versus other contracts which had been secured; this was acknowledged by the Audit Manager, and reassurance given.

A Member asked if the Finance team supplied strong accounting data to facilitate audit. The Audit Manager confirmed that the relationship and understanding of what was required was good, the support from the Finance team was praised and there had been an efficient workflow. The Finance Service Lead confirmed that the team reflected on what had gone well, and any lessons learned, which strengthened their performance year on year. The Deputy Chief Executive noted that the auditors' focus altered from time to time, and so clear communication of expectations was needed to manage the changing requirements.

The Chair asked that Grant Thornton be clearly focused on delivery to target in future.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

241 Report Tracker & Future Meetings

The Chair asked for the Senior Member Services Officer to complete and circulate the Tracker to the Committee Members after the meeting.

The next meeting was scheduled for 21 March 2023 at 5pm.

Queries concerning these minutes? Please contact Member Services:
Telephone: 01233 330499 Email: membersservices@ashford.gov.uk
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Appeals Committee

Minutes of a Meeting of the Appeals Committee held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **7th December 2022 at 10am.**

Present:

Cllr. Sparks (Chair);

Cllr. Campkin

Apologies:

Cllrs. Howard, Knowles.

Also Present:

Appellant.

HR Manager, Senior HR Officer, Principal Solicitor, Senior Member Services Officer.

248 Election of Chair

Resolved:

That Councillor Sparks be elected as Chair for this Meeting of the Appeals Committee.

249 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meetings of this Committee held on 4th May 2018 and 9th May 2019 at 10am and 11.30am be confirmed as a correct record.

250 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 paragraphs 1 and 2 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.

251 Appeal – Staff Grievance

The Councillors and Officers present were introduced. The Chairman welcomed all present and explained the procedure to be followed. The Committee confirmed that they had received and read the agenda papers.

The HR Manager had submitted a report which outlined the case. She went through the case and explained the chronology of events that lead to the grievance being brought before the Committee.

The Appellant then put their case to the Committee.

The HR Manager and the Appellant then answered questions from Councillors.

The Committee then retired to make its decision.

On the Committee's return, the Chair read out the 'Decision and Reasoning's Statement' that had been prepared by the Appeals Committee. Copies of this were given to all parties at the close of the meeting.

Resolved:

The Appeals Committee found that the grievance procedure was followed reasonably, fairly and appropriately.

The findings of both the Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints were upheld. The acknowledgements made by Management were noted.

The Appeals Committee recommends that independent mediation is entered into by both parties and that this is done as soon as practically possible.

Agenda Item 13



Agenda Item No: 13
Report To: Council
Date of Meeting: 22nd December 2022
Report Title: Councillors Clokie and Smith – Request for an Extension of Period of Absence
Report Author & Job Title: Terry Mortimer
Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer
Portfolio Holder: N/A
Portfolio Holder for: Cllr Gerry Clarkson – Leader of the Conservative Group
Cllr Noel Ovenden – Leader of the Ashford Independent Group

Summary:	To consider a request for an extended period of absence for Councillors Clokie and Smith under the provisions of Sections 85 and 86 of the Local Government Act 1972.
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Key Decision: NO

Significantly Affected Wards: Tenterden North and Aylesford and East Stour.

Recommendations: **The Council is asked to consider the request.**

Contact: terry.mortimer@ashford.gov.uk – Tel: (01233) 330210

Councillors Clokie and Smith – Request for an Extension of Period of Absence

Introduction and Background

1. Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972 provides that, subject to certain exceptions, (which do not apply in this case), if a Member of a Local Authority fails throughout a period of six consecutive months from the date of his/her last attendance to attend any Meeting of the Authority, he/she shall, unless the failure was due to some reason approved by the Authority before the expiry of that period, cease to be a Member of the Authority.
2. In the event of the above occurring, Section 86 of the Act requires the facts to be reported to the next Meeting of the Authority, which shall, subject to other exceptions, (which do not apply in this case), declare the office to be vacant.

Proposal/Current Position

3. Councillors Clokie and Smith, as Members will aware, have been unwell recently and have not been able to attend Council Meetings either physically at the Civic Centre, or on-line. Both the Conservative and Ashford Independent Groups (as those that hold the Tenterden North and Aylesford and East Stour Wards respectively) have put arrangements in place for ward business to be covered. Their last attendances were both at the Full Council Meeting on 21st July 2022. The six month period expires on the 21st January 2023, so at present, it is likely that this may pass without either being able to attend a Meeting.
4. The Act of 1972 allows the Authority to grant an extension of the period of absence, subject to the request being made and consent being given within the six month period. Consent cannot be given retrospectively.
5. Approaches have been made by the Leaders of the Conservative and Ashford Independent Groups, Councillors Clarkson and Ovenden, asking the Council to grant Councillors Clokie and Smith extended leave of absence from Council meetings up to and including the Borough Council Elections in May 2023, at which point the issue can be reviewed.

Conclusion

6. The Council is asked to consider the request.
7. If the Council is minded to grant the request it is suggested that the period of absence be extended to the 4th May 2023

Contact and Email

Terry Mortimer, Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer,
terry.mortimer@ashford.gov.uk



Agenda Item No: 14

Report To: Council

Date of Meeting: 22nd December 2022

Report Title: **A Decade of Challenges, Opportunities and Change**

Report Author: Cllr Gerry Clarkson
Job Title: Executive Leader of the Council

Summary: This report is a final synopsis and review of the challenges, opportunities and changes that have occurred leading into and during the tenure of office of the Executive Leader of the Council which, by May 2023 will have spanned over a decade.

Members of the Council are asked to particularly reflect on the quite unusual national and international background to what has been achieved. We have had the demise of both the South East England Development Agency and the Ashford Future Company. The Referendum that resulted in a vote to leave the European Union, a worldwide Pandemic that sadly caused the death of so many and brought about significant economic and social disruption. We have the climate change issues, including the Stodmarsh situation. Then more recently we have the tragic invasion of Ukraine and the sorrow for the people there and the continuing armed conflict which is greatly impacting on world markets.

The Members are asked to receive and note this report and to reflect upon this past decade in the life and activities of our Borough Council on behalf of those we serve.

Key Decision: NO

Significantly Affected Wards: Borough Wide

Recommendations: **The Council is recommended to receive the report and note the contents.**

Background Papers: N.A

Contact: gerry.clarkson@ashford.gov.uk

A Decade of Challenges, Opportunities and Change

Introduction

1. As Members will know I shall not be standing again at the May 2023 elections and had intended to stand down as Leader at the end of this year. This formal Report from me, was therefore planned for this Full Council meeting, which was to be my last as Council Leader. However, my Conservative colleagues have prevailed upon me to remain as the Executive Leader until the elections in May 2023, and I have agreed to do so.
2. Clearly when we return after the Christmas break, there will only be one further Council meeting in early March, which would be very close indeed to the Pre-Election Period as prescribed in law, and in my considered opinion it would be inappropriate to present this report at that time. That is why this Report, recording the challenges, opportunities and change over the last decade, with which many members will have been much engaged, is being tabled at this time.
3. As you all know I am quite passionate about our delightful Borough right here in the Garden of England. We have our urban town of Ashford and our delightful rural town of Tenterden, both are surrounded by necklaces of charming rural villages. This report will however, concentrate on a fairly condensed synopsis and review of the challenges, opportunities and changes that have occurred leading into and during the tenure of office of the Executive Leader of the Council which, by May 2023 will have spanned over a decade. There is quite a lot to cover.

Background to the Core Challenges

4. The "Ashford Future" Company, under the stewardship of Judith Armit, was created in 2008 just two years after my election to Council. Its objective was to assist Ashford with economic growth. Unfortunately, very little progress was made and when its main partner the "South East England Development Agency" (SEEDA), was abolished in 2012 its fate was sealed. A year later, on the 11th February 2014, the "Ashford Future Company" was dissolved.
5. There was now a serious vacuum in terms of our economic progress, but it was also a very real opportunity for us to step in and drive the Ashford economy forward at pace. We needed to set up a structure, to facilitate and accelerate the economic transformation of our Borough.
6. Ashford had a number of sites earmarked for development, namely the Ashford FE & HE College "SITE" - the Commercial Quarter "SITE" - the Old Cattle Market "SITE" and the Town Centre "SITE" at Vicarage Lane ". All dormant for years - now clearly time for change.
7. The Homes and Community Agency, (now Homes England), was holding most of the land intended for the regeneration of urban Ashford, but delivery on the sites had been extremely slow. This was a real barrier to the economic growth of

Ashford and we now needed to intervene if we were to make progress in the economic transformation of our Borough.

8. We needed to build upon our excellent connectivity with the introduction of the High Speed 1 network coming into operation in 2007 at a cost some £5.8 Billion. With services from our new International Station to London in just 38 minutes and linking us directly to the continent, with Paris being but just over two hours away. The Channel Tunnel that opened much earlier in May 1994 and was now well used, as was our good road network with the M20 and A20. I have always maintained that we are the most International District in the UK. This has been re-enforced more recently by our 2022, participation in the French Presidential Elections and a few weeks later with the French Legislative Elections.
9. We need to bear in mind that throughout this last decade we have always worked to a sound Five Year Corporate Plan, which sets out and reviews our priorities, to achieve the ambition for the Borough that we developed in collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders. Although we had to pause the immediate progression of this work, to respond to the coronavirus pandemic, we didn't lose sight of our long term objectives to be a greener, more caring and prosperous Borough for everyone.
10. The financial acumen of our professional officers has also been of a high order, and that has sustained us as we have navigated the challenges of the last decade. We have a strong financial core and sound reserves, but there is always the need to be vigilant.
11. Kent County Council clearly has its much larger range of responsibilities and given the financial pressures they face, does mean that it impacts on the District Councils. This was particularly true in terms of certain land management duties, including the highways in our own Borough. We needed to work closely with the County Council to really gain effective meaningful change.
12. The voluntary sector have so much to give and can greatly assist our Council. We should never forget that we are blessed with having the Ashford Volunteer Centre right in the very heart of our Urban Town of Ashford and they provide such a varied range of services. They been charged by KCC with assisting in co-ordinating the volunteer sector across the districts, which is an extension of the co-ordinating role they have in Ashford.
13. There was a lack of Civic Pride, which was odd given our rich history and heritage and whilst it was pleasing that the Grade I listed Church of St. Mary The Virgin had been "Re-ordered" in 2011, to provide a performance space, there still remained a lack of creative arts and culture. Interestingly a church has been on that site since at 1086, as mentioned in the Domesday Book.

The Start of our Journey of Transformation

14. The first step on appointment as Leader, was to have a frank and engaging conversation with the then Chief Executive Officer, John Bunnnett, who was an experienced CEO, who had been in-post since he joined our Council in 2009. This was the start of an excellent working relationship that was built on mutual respect and a really good understanding and appreciation of what was needed.

15. We agreed that we needed to appoint a marketing company, to assist us in promoting Ashford as an entrepreneurial organisation with ambitious aspirations. Firstly needed to sharpen the focus on the economic expansion of Ashford, by attracting significant inward investment. We had to act like a business, in line with Government policy, and the reducing Government grant.
16. Once our newly appointed marketing company Pillory Barn, was in place, they arranged for us to attend a major national marketing exhibition in London. This allowed us to attract serious inward economic investment and we followed up by running our own marketing event at the German Gymnasium in London. The success of both of these events, soon caused Ashford to be quite independently recognised as the "Number One Business Location in Kent".
17. In order to release the land that was being held in the ownership, of what was then the Homes and Community Agency but destined for the redevelopment of Ashford - there was a pressing need to meet with them. At that meeting with myself and the then CEO John Bunnett, we firmly explained our wish to put this land into productive use to transform Ashford. This was in line with a Treasury letter sent to all Homes and Community Agencies across the UK, advising them to either action the use of their land holding or sell off the land. We further explained to them that we intended to drive forward the economic transformation of Ashford, and were prepared to buy the land holdings from them.
18. Within a few days, the Council received a formal invitation to purchase most of the land being held by them. This included the, hugely important, Commercial Quarter site and land along Elwick Road that included the old cattle market site. The invitation also included the purchase International House opposite the International Station. We immediately accepted their offer.
19. We now needed to sharpen our approach to economic development and accordingly in 2013, I formed the "Ashford Strategic Delivery Board". Such a properly constituted Board allowed us to hit the ground running. We started by identifying what we call the "Big 8" most important strategic projects that needed a multi-agency input to effectively deliver them. The Board Members consisted of key players drawn from a range of partners. Our local MP, the Rt. Hon Damian Green MP was a key member.
20. There can be little doubt that many significant achievements have been made in the last decade by our collective efforts in collaboration with our strategic partners. Whilst many of these changes are now self-evident, I believe that it is right and proper to record and remind ourselves of them, starting with the "Big 8".

Jasmin Vardimon 2013:

New Creative Dance and Laboratory Hub now at Javelin Way. We had already attracted, the internationally renowned Jasmin Vardimon Dance Company to relocate to Ashford and we soon realised that their longer term aspirations would greatly assist us in the promotion of creative arts in Ashford. In 2019 the Arts Council England awarded a grant of over £3 million for their New Creative Dance and Laboratory Hub, which has now been built at Javelin Way in Ashford, and to which we have additionally contributed nearly £1 million. The Hub formally opened on the 7th December 2022.

Chilmington Green Outline Planning Permission for 5,750 new homes 2014:

Planning Permission was granted in 2017 for the development of a Garden Community of 5,750 homes, plus a countryside park, secondary school, four primary schools, supermarket and a new high street and market square on rural land to the south west of Ashford.

New Ashford College 2017:

For over a decade we had spoken about a new Ashford College, but still only had an earmarked site. We worked with the Department of Education and others to ensure a new and first class FE & HE Ashford College, right near to the International Station. ABC contributed three million pounds to the build. Recent further Government funding has been given and work is well underway on the two new extensions of the College which are due to open in September 2023.

Construction of Junction 10A - Cost over £100 million 2017:

The Government granted a Development Consent Order for the M20 Junction 10A in December 2017. This was a huge civil engineering infrastructure project costing well over £100 million. The new Junction was officially opened in December 2019.

Ashford International Station - New Signalling April 2018: (Big 8 Project)

This major project costing circa £10 million to up-grade the signalling to take the new rolling stock on our High Speed 1 rail link. We secured nearly £10 million of investment for the up-grading of our signalling, (Spurs Project), to enable Eurostar's new Siemens Class 374 'e320' trains to call at Ashford International Station. Covid has unfortunately interrupted Eurostar's service which we are now seeking to have re-instated at the earliest possible opportunity.

New Cinema Complex Elwick Road 2018:

Investment in the New Cinema Leisure and Commercial scheme to stimulate our economy and to create vibrancy was an act of faith and belief in Ashford. In 2018 we turned an old derelict Cattle Market site into a meaningful area of public realm with a state of the art Cinema with units under. This was in a designated public Shared Space, which still has yet to reach its full potential.

Commercial Quarter - Connect 38 Building 2018:

In 2018 we saw the first new landmark office building on the designated Commercial Quarter in over a decade - a derelict site being used as a temporary carpark.

Designer Outlet Expansion 2020:

We worked hard with the Outlet Centre to ensure that we would only approve their £90million pound expansion, which opened on the 7th of November 2019, if it moved towards the Town Centre, thus adding to the cohesion of Ashford's more dynamic central core, which it did. The expected footfall is set to rise from about 3 million a year to about some 6 million.

21. This strategy paved the way for considerable change, but it came with many challenges. It was pleasing that Cabinet Colleagues, Elected Members across all Parties and our Officers came together to support the ambition on this exciting journey. However, all the achievements documented in the Report to Council have only been delivered by the concerted efforts and commitment of our professional council officers, led from the outset by the CEO John Bunnnett, but

for the last seven years continued with our current CEO Tracey Kerly who has been pivotal in this journey of transformation.

22. It would be quite remiss of me not to mention the other Group Leaders and their Member Colleagues, who have worked closely with the Conservative Administration, in a constructive way to bring about these meaningful changes which have been of significant benefit to our Borough.
23. Given the nature of Local Government, it was also clear that we needed to work closely with Paul Carter, the then Leader of the Kent Country Council. Accordingly I approached Paul to suggest that we agreed a formal joint delivery pact.
24. Communication, both internally and externally, are always extremely important elements, but more so when embarking on such a transformational journey. Group Leaders also needed to work together in a spirit of mutual respect and co-operation, all in the best interests of the electorate.

Ashford Borough Council – Other Major Projects

25. There were of course a number other very significant "Major Projects" that Ashford could be largely delivered through our own efforts or by assisting others using our influence as a progressive Borough. The phrase "Fortune Favours the Brave" is applicable when considering some of these projects, as I very briefly explained each in chronological order: -

Ashford Recycling 2013:

When appointed Leader of the Council in early 2013, Ashford was formally recorded as the worst Council in the UK for recycling. It needs to be said that such a listing was both unfair and inaccurate given the system being used. Nevertheless, within two years Ashford was and remains the very best district in Kent for "Recycling" and one of the best in the UK. Our contracted out Waste and Recycling collection service has proved extremely robust, very reliable and much appreciated by the public. We are now currently out to tender for a new contract.

Christchurch House Purchased in late 2013:

Property purchased at Auction for £278,000 which was filmed on "Homes Under the Hammer". Once adapted it opened in September 2014, providing 8 units of temporary accommodation and sits in the General Fund. This has both saved money on the General Fund and has provided a better standard of temporary accommodation. The adaptations ensures a wheelchair accessible unit and has storage space and a pleasant courtyard. The project paid for itself in just 3 years.

A Better Choice for Property Ltd Company - 2014:

With Government cutting core funding and encouraging Local Authorities to become more commercial and entrepreneurial, we created an arms-length Property Company. To date we have 105 units under management, and 340 units within development plans, raising £3.2m of net interest for the General Account since inception. The progress of this company has sadly been blighted by the Stodmarsh issue that needs to be resolved.

Phase 1 - Farrow Court Completed in November 2015:

The whole Project was for 104 homes made up from 82 independent living homes, 14 homes for those with learning disabilities, 7 Home-bridge dwellings which prevents "Bed Blocking" in hospitals. There is also one guest accommodation. It has an Age UK Day Care Centre. Project cost some £17m which was supported by grants from Homes England and KCC. The second and final Phase 2 was completed in October 2017. These homes are fully dementia friendly.

Acquisition of Park Mall December 2015:

The acquisition of Park Mall was another fairly bold step to enliven an important town centre retail area. A third of the 34 outlets were empty, unsightly and depressing. The acquisition was achieved, at a very advantageous purchase price. We immediately filled the empty units and thus revitalised the area and are planning to redevelop in the short term.

Aspire Landscaping Management formed in October 2016:

Creating In-House grounds maintenance in October 2016, was a bold and decisive move. By working with Paul Carter, the KCC Leader, and in-line with the District Deal, Paul was persuaded to allow us to take on-board this work directly. It meant transferring 20 staff onto our pay-roll and purchasing a new Depot at the cost of £1.1 million, plus buying all new vehicles, and equipment. This has been a huge success and has transformed the curation of our Borough.

The One You Health Care Shop - February 2017:

The "One You" shop, is a partnership between Ashford Borough Council, Kent County Council and Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust. Opened in Park Mall in February 2017 and was the only physical location in the country where visitors can just pop in to get advice on a range of personal health matters. Within a year it was being so well supported that we needed to move to a larger unit, which we did in 2019. The new unit has a "Changing Places" toilet for those with extra needs, as well as a family friendly area for parents to sit, relax feed their babies.

Largest Overnight HGV Truck Stop 2017:

Our one and only Overnight Truck Stop at Waterbrook with 300 spaces was totally inadequate to accommodate the number of HGV's needing overnight provision. It was pleasing to persuade the owner to develop and to the extent that it more than doubled the size of the Truck Stop to 650 spaces, thus giving us a new Truck Stop with all modern overnight facility. This opened in December 2021 and is the largest in Europe.

HGV Clamping 2017:

By lobbying the Department of Transport we were the first and only Authority in the UK to be allowed to clamp HGV's for inappropriate overnight parking. This followed an 18 Month Trial started in October 2017 and we started clamping in 2019. Now virtually no HGV's are found parking inappropriately, particularly overnight in Lay-bys on the A20 at Hothfield.

Noakes Meadow Development completed in February 2018:

Provides 2 newly built 2 bedroom semi-detached bungalows at the cost of £390,000. These were designed and built as wheelchair friendly dwellings. The construction included fully adjustable height worktops and the provision of heavier joists fitted to allow for a later hoist provision.

Christchurch Lodge Purchased June 2019 for £430,000:

This property, adjacent to Christchurch House, once purchased was adapted and completed in 2020. Due to Tier 4 Covid, the first tenant occupied in January 2021. It provided for 8 temporary homes that could accommodate up to 25 people.

Victoria Park - Heritage Lottery Award August 2019:

ABC successfully awarded £3m from Heritage Lottery Fund for revitalisation of Victoria Park, and although Covid has delayed work, we were awarded further lottery funds to compensate for the interruptions. Work is now well underway and should open in the spring of 2023.

The Coachworks Opened in August 2019:

The "Meanwhile Use" of the old Coachworks - another brownfield site has turned out to be a success even with the Covid 19 restrictions, interrupting its progress and as we move forward we will be able to judge just how it continues to develop and contribute to our economy.

New "Curious" Brewery Opened in May 2019:

We worked with the developer to deliver a New Brewery on a brownfield a site, in the centre of Ashford, right by the International Station. This compliments what has been happening around the central area of Ashford and has been well received and supported.

Danemore HRA - Independent Living Scheme Opened February 2019:

This scheme provided 34 homes at a cost of £7.85m. The scheme was opened by Her Royal Highness the Princess Royal in February 2020. These homes are fully dementia friendly.

Planning Approval for New International Film Studios April 2020:

The planning approval was granted for the redevelopment of the old Newtown Railway works, which had been derelict for decades, to create four International Film Studios and Creative Art Works. This is a hugely positive for Ashford and a catalyst for our economic growth and indeed that of the County and indeed the UK plc. To this end the Government has seen fit to grant Ashford £14.75 million of Levelling Up Funding towards this particular project. We were one of only two districts in the whole of Kent to be awarded Levelling Up Funding.

New Winery & Visitor Centre - July 2020:

Planning permission granted for New Winery and Visitor Centre near Chilham Castle, with over one million vines planted already by Domaine Evremond in collaboration with Taittinger & UK Partners Hatch Mansfield, to make Ashford Vineyards, become a Wine Region of the UK. Construction work is now well underway.

Roundabout Design May 2020:

Ashford was the first district in Kent to have its roundabouts re-designed as "Drive On - Drive Off" for maintenance purpose, thus avoiding the need to cone them off for safety reasons. The five gateway roundabouts are to be themed to provide more relevance and interest. We have received national recognition for the Landscaping of the Flanders Roundabout with the Soldiers and WWI Tank and the Orchard Heights Roundabout with the Steeplechase Horses depicting

the Charing Race Course. Both of these featured in the "Best of Britain Roundabouts 2021 Calendar".

Two New Apartment Blocks Purchased in Nov 2020 - Affordable Homes for Key Workers:

During the Pandemic we bought two newly constructed apartment blocks of 109 apartments at a cost of £18.65m, for Key Workers at an affordable rents, (Somerset Heights 44 homes in November 2020 and Stour Heights 65 homes in May 2021). Once purchased we were successful in receiving over £2 million in grants from Home England towards our outlay.

Stour Centre Major Renovation & Successful Eco Grant - November 2020:

The Council secured nearly £1.5 million of grant to install new eco-friendly heating as part of the multi million renovation of the Stour Centre, this has had a major environmental impact on one of our most important large public facilities.

Hampton by Hilton Hotel – Opened August 2021:

The global value hotel brand announced the opening of the Hampton by Hilton Ashford International Hotel. The hotel appears to be doing very well.

New Rebuild of East Stour Court completed September 2021:

This complete rebuild provided 29 independent living homes - 24 one bed apartments and 5 two bed. This cost of £7.1m for which we received £1.21 million grant from Homes England. All fully dementia friendly.

Ashford Awarded £550,000 from the Safer Streets Fund - Autumn 2021:

This funding allowed us to greatly improve the safety of Ashford town centre. A range of measures were delivered that included, network of safe places, additional radios purchased, more CCTV cameras, wall-mounted mirrors and personal safety equipment. Ashford Streetwise App launched in April 2022 and can be downloaded at no charge via the Apple or Android app store.

Regeneration of the Poplars to create Berry Place - February 2022:

Complete new development of 31 independent living homes at a cost of £7.9m and towards which Homes England gave grant of £1.4m. These were built to high energy efficiency standards with EPC rating of B, PV Panels and underfloor heating. All fully dementia friendly.

Brompton the UK Largest Bicycle Manufactures, to Locate in Ashford - March 2022

Brompton's have decided to re-locate both their Factory and business Headquarters here in Ashford. This will be a state of the art high-tech factory set in a wetland Park with its business headquarters also built on site. Brompton's have now submitted their Planning Application for a new revolutionary Factory, which has been validated and will now come before the Planning Committee for consideration.

The Brickworks at Halstow Way Completed in June 2022:

Construction of 17 stunning apartments, consisting of 6 one bedroom apartments, 7 two bedroom apartments and 4 duplex three bedroom apartments, built to EPC 'B' rating. This cost £4.3m, of which we received £1m grant from Homes England.

Planning approval for new 92 bed hotel in New Rents – July 2022:

A new 92 bed hotel, with a bar, restaurant and spa received planning permission.

Planning Approval for the Henwood Short Stay Development - August 2022:

This development will provide for 23 temporary homes in a modular form using state of the arts technology, which allows for net zero carbon in operation. This utilises an under used car park, to provide quality temporary accommodation, which reduces the cost to the General Account.

Tenterden Leisure Centre Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme – November 2022:

We were awarded circa £2m in Round 3 of the PSDS Grant, all of which will be spent on Tenterden Leisure Centre and ABC are topping this up with a further £400k to install PV panels, air source heat pumps and more.

Other Important Ashford Borough Council Actions

26. There are matters that could be described as more general or perhaps more domestic, but they are nevertheless significant in painting a more complete picture of the progress made in the last decade at Ashford Borough Council by us all pulling together. What we do both internally and externally does influence Central Government's opinion of Ashford and its standing as a progressive Local Authority.

Ashford Civic Awards - 2012:

The Council introduced the first Civic Awards in 2012 to recognise our community champions. This was in the year that Her Majesty, our late Queen celebrated her Diamond Jubilee. Six years later in 2018, and once again hosted the Civic Awards to highlight our wonderful communities. In this year of our late Queen we hosted the Platinum Civic Awards, held at Chart Hills Golf Club, Biddenden on Friday the 23 September 2022. This was such a fitting and poignant occasion, following the sad death of our much loved Queen Elizabeth II.

Members Grants 2013:

Since the introduction of the Ward Member Grants a decade ago, over £1.14 million has been given to support a range of differing charity and volunteer groups across all the Wards in Ashford.

Community Services Grants 2013:

The amount issued from this fund over the last decade has totalled over £1.9 million.

Capital & Small Revenue Grants 2013:

Amount issued from this third fund over the last decade has totalled over £725,000.

These three above grants total over £3.77 million.

Pioneered Housing Space Standards 2013:

In 2013 we boldly introduced Housing Space Standards to eliminate the building of small cramped homes with very small gardens. In March 2015 the Government followed our lead and introduced National Space Standards, but they did not include garden sizes.

Lord Heseltine's Comments at Ebbsfleet Development Event July 2014:

Tracey Kerly and I attended the event, where I was asked to explain just how Ashford was achieving such success in delivering economic growth and quality housing. As I ended my address, Lord Heseltine turned to the assembled audience and firmly said "That is how it should be done – clearly Ashford is unstoppable".

The Chancellor of the Exchequer Invites Ashford to address the Treasury July 2014:

I wrote to the then Chancellor George Osborne, after one of his Budgets supporting what he was proposing, but indicating my disappointment regarding the execution and delivery. In doing so I advised him of the success we were having using the "Ashford Model" for the economic delivery and measured quality housing growth. The Chancellor was most interested and invited us to meet with Senior Officials at the Treasury, to advise them about the success of the "Ashford Model". Those present included the Chancellor's Special Adviser Mr Neil O'Brien together with David Silk, Deputy Director of Housing Planning and Cities and Katy Baldwin, Head of Housing Supply and Planning Team. This visit resulted in the Government reversing its decision regarding £3 million of funding for affordable homes.

Framework Documents 2014:

In order to promote a more collective and well informed approach involving all elected Members, especially following local elections, "Framework Documents" were introduced. These gave both existing and newly elected Members, a much clearer understanding of the Council, its various departments together with contact details of key officers.

Leader and Borough Briefings 2014:

The Leader's Briefings were introduced to communicate and inform all Members and Officers of the Authority about a range of matters. Borough Briefings were also introduced and circulated to all Parishes, Community Councils and Forums. Our representative in Parliament, the Rt. Hon Damian Green MP, was included in this communication network.

Group Leaders Meetings 2015:

Regular monthly meetings with the Opposition Group Leaders were established, whereby the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive would meet with Group Leaders to discuss forthcoming Cabinet Reports and other relevant business.

Ashford & KCC District Delivery Deal 2015:

This signed District Deal mentioned in the opening paragraphs, has assisted us in our partnership working to deliver the best quality outcomes for our residents, businesses and visitors.

The Town Centre Action Team (T-CAT) introduced in February 2015:

A dedicated town team introduced to focus on the cleanliness and curation of our town centres. After a few years T-CAT was integrated into the newly formed Aspire Landscape Management.

The Ashford Bandstand Renovated 2015:

We renovated and installed a new permanent canopy at a cost of £65,000. This was funded from the New Homes Bonus budget. The new canopy replaced the bright yellow parasol that previously offered shelter to performers, but was in a poor state of disrepair and no longer operated.

Creation of the Civic Park 2018:

The North Park, right in the heart of the Civic Centre was renamed our "Civic Park". It was greatly improved by Aspire, and we erected a dignified sign with our Armorial Bearings.

New Memorial Civic Beacon October 2018:

We commissioned the design and construction of our gas fired Civic Beacon, to be sited in the Civic Park. The Beacon was lit for the first time at a Remembrance Service on Sunday the 11th November 2018, to mark the centenary of the end of the First World War. The National Tribute was called "Battle's Over - A Nation's Tribute". Our Beacon is also a memorial in memory of the 17th century Cavalier Poet, Richard Lovelace (1617 - 1657), the Lord of the Manor at Lovelace Place, Bethersden - an extract from one of his poems are the words "With Stronger Faith" which we have used as the Motto on our Coat of Arms and the poem is reproduced on the base of the Beacon.

Ashford - Snow Dogs 2018:

The wonderful Ashford Snow Dog Trail lasted from the 12th September until the 18th of November 2018. This was a wonderful lead-up to Christmas. So many adults and children enjoyed this uplifting project and we raised nearly £150,000 for our Pilgrims Hospice.

"Ashford For You" House Magazine Introduced Spring 2018:

It was our CEO, Tracey Kerly, who suggested that we introduce our quarterly House Magazine to engage and inform all our residents about what is happening in our Borough. The magazine is distributed quarterly, to every household in the Borough and has been a great success.

Local Government Chronicle Awards 2018:

Ashford Shortlisted as "Council of the Year" and as the most "Entrepreneurial Council".

Local Plan Adopted February 2019:

It was good to have our Local Plan to 2030, approved and adopted. This ensures that the housebuilding and the business development is located in the most appropriate sites that does not harm our countryside. In addition we have been working with Parishes on Neighbourhood Plans.

Honorary Alderman Created July 2019:

The introduction of the above award to recognise long and meaningful public service given by a number of elected members of the Authority. This award was a recognition of the dignity of civic office.

The Ashford Borough Council - Honorary Ambassadorial Award - October 2018:

The introduction of the above award was to recognise and honour those making a significant contribution to the development, wellbeing and/or civic dignity of the Borough.

Changing Places Toilets 2019:

We made a conscious decision to have many more Changing Places toilets in Ashford. These are the fully accessible toilets that are designed to help bring major, life enhancing freedoms to the disabled people living in and visiting our Borough. We want to have one in every area of public realm across our Borough - we now have a very significant number and will be creating more.

Covid 19 Pandemic March 2020:

The handling of this tragic pandemic on behalf of our residents, businesses and interface with Central Government and other partners has been highly professional. Our caring and commitment together with our readiness to work so closely with emergency planning and our "Ashford Critical Emergency Resilience" (ACER) committee and its relationship with the excellent Voluntary Sector and other local caring people across our whole Borough has been first class.

Queen's Green Canopy 2021/22:

Ashford has undertaken to plant 135,500 trees - one for every person residing in our Borough as part of the Queens Platinum Jubilee - Green Canopy. This will take some time and should be achieved over the next two years. We have to-date planted over 106,000 trees in our Borough.

Forestry Commission Trees 2021:

The provision of 6,666 trees by the Forestry Commission assisted in our tree planting and it is a clear indicator of the standing we have, in that we were awarded such a significant number. These particular trees will effectively create a new forest at Discovery Park, on the Chilmington Green Development and they greatly contribute of our total 135,500 trees for our population.

Government approved the re-naming of Discovery Park to Honour our late Queen - 2021:

Following discussions with Cabinet Colleagues, Principal Officers, Group Leaders and the Civic and Ceremonial Programme Board, I wrote to Government in late 2021 seeking formal permission to re-name the 147 acre Discovery Park, which was currently being formed as part of the three "Garden Settlements", in honour of Her Majesty's forthcoming milestone Platinum Jubilee. I was pleased that, in July 2022 we were granted formal Government permission to re-name Discovery Park "The Queen's Platinum Jubilee Park". The Civic and Ceremonial Programme Board unanimously support that we rename the park accordingly. The Cabinet, at their meeting of the 24th of November 2022, formally endorsed the renaming of the Boroughs Discovery Park.

Charlton Athletic Community Trust Project (A Sporting Chance) - September 2021:

A programme aimed at using the power of sport and physical activities to create safer, stronger and more respectful communities by engaging with young people

in high need areas. The feedback, reported to Elected Members in March 2022, has been extremely positive.

Greater Ashford Land Mapping Commission - October 2021:

With the ever increasing demand by the Government for more and more housing growth, the elected colleagues and senior officers, agreed to the establishment of an independent Greater Ashford Land Mapping Commission. On the 6th December their Formal Report was submitted.

Launch of Ashford Community Lottery in January 2022:

The Ashford Community Lottery was launched in January 2022 and after the prizes and administration costs have been deducted, the remaining 60% of sales will go to good causes.

The G line bus Service Rerieved - April 2022:

The vital G line bus route in Ashford that was due to be scrapped was saved by the intervention of the Council. The G line, which runs from Godinton Park to South Willesborough, was due to end on 19th April after operator Stagecoach claimed the service was 'unviable'.

Additional Funding for three Play Areas - May 2022

Following the opening of the Hunters Avenue play area, a further budget provision of £1.1 million was made for major upgrades and improvements to three play areas. These were at Central Park in Park Farm Ward, Spearpoint Recreational Ground in Kennington and Rylands Road Open Space in Bockhanger. This is part of our wider commitment to strengthen our sport activities and play areas across the entire Borough.

80th Anniversary – HMS Albacore & Ashford Sea Cadets – June 2022

Service of Remembrance and the unveiling of a Memorial to HMS Albacore in the Memorial Gardens took place on the 4th June 2022. HMS Albacore was adopted by Ashford on the 16th June 1942 following fundraising for the War effort. Later that month the Ashford Sea Cadet Unit was established.

New Athletics Track for the Julie Rose International Stadium - August 2022:

The completely new Athletics Track, at a cost of some £300,000, was opened in August 2022. This investment is just part of a larger budget provision for sport and leisure that extends to Stour Leisure Centre, Spearpoint, Waterside and Pitchside as well as at the Tenterden Leisure Centre.

Low Tax & Low Unemployment:

We have been and remain, the lowest Council Taxing district in Kent and one of the lowest in the UK, but are still providing a wide range of quality services. We are a low unemployment area.

Ashford International Involvement and Participation

27. It was very important given our geographical location, with a High Speed Rail Service and the Channel Tunnel Link, that we embraced our international status that rather goes hand in hand with our history and heritage. That is evidenced by a number of milestones: -

Syrian Refugee Programme 2015:

In 2015 we undertook to play our part in supporting the Government by being one of the first to take about 10 to 12 families a year from the war torn Syria. Their integration into the community has worked extremely well and we take pride in our approach and handling of this sensitive matter. Indeed, the Home Office made a video of our approach and circulated it widely.

Ashford Economic Resilience Reserve 2016:

Following the "Brexit Referendum" in 2016, the Finance Department were instructed, to create a new £3 million reserve, to counter any market fluctuations or financial impact. Our dedicated finance staff did create a reserve of some £2.9 million by the end of our Term of Office in 2019. The immediate financial impact of Brexit was less than expected, but we then faced the serious Pandemic, where this reserve fund proved to be a very useful source of additional funding.

The Queen Marie Statue 2018:

Following an approach by Romania Government, we agreed to the erection and unveiling of a full sized statue of late Queen Marie of Romania - the Granddaughter of Queen Victoria and who was born at Eastwell Park (Manor) in Ashford in October 1875.

Fields of Battle, Lands of Peace - External Exhibition in the Guildhall London 2018:

We were quite honoured to be invited by the City of London to jointly host the inaugural "International Fields of Battle, Lands of Peace" Commemoration Exhibition in the Courtyard of the Guildhall London, before coming to Ashford and then moving to other national and international venues.

Correspondent of New York Times visits Ashford – 2018

Peter Goodman, Global Economic Correspondent for the New York Times, visited Ashford on 14th December 2018 and spent the day with us researching why Ashford appeared to be doing so well as a local authority. He returned on 28 January 2019 to take photos and do follow up interviews. The article, duly appeared in print on 23 June on Page A6 of the New York Times edition with the headline: "An Austerity Workaround for U.K. Cities: Going Into Business".

Eurostar Service Halted 2020:

Due to the Pandemic the Eurostar services were halted and remain so. Every effort needs to be continually made to ensure the return of that service.

Port Health September 2020:

Following our exit from the EU, Government purchased the Sevington site, earmarked in our Local Plan for economic development. The site was needed to, set up an Inland Port Facility. We have been charged with running part of that facility. We now have to deal with all the HGV traffic coming through the Channel Tunnel together with perhaps some coming from Dover. Government are rethinking the scope and nature of the facility and thereby created a good deal of uncertainty.

Afghan Refugee Programme 2021:

Once again we were to the fore in accepting Afghan Refugees who assisted our armed forces.

French Elections 2022:

In 2022 we were designated as a "Polling Station" for both the French Presidential elections and thereafter for the French Legislature elections.

Ukrainian Refugees 2022:

More recently we are working with Government to resettle refugees from the war torn Ukraine.

Conclusion

28. All that has been shown in the presentation and embodied in this Report to Council, is empirical evidence that shows just how much effort has been put in by so many to bring about such a lengthy list of our collective achievements over the last decade. This Administration has, by working with our elected colleagues, dedicated officers and our external partners, been able to deliver a wide range of economic projects. We have also delivered the much needed housing that has been carefully sited in line with our Local Plan which has at its very core, the protection of our wonderful countryside. We have at the same time endeavoured to create more civic pride and a greater appreciation of our history, heritage and the protection of our planet. All of this has only been achieved by the dedication and support of our principal officers who, in turn have been well served by hard working and dedication of all of our professional staff and indeed our residents and businesses have in many ways also contributed.
29. The most recent major projects, under the banner of "The Super 6", include: - the new Studios at Newtown Works; the new Brompton Bike Factory/Headquarters; Ashford College Phase 2; South Ashford Garden Community; Stodmarsh nutrient neutrality; and the development in the Town Centre. Many of these will be well underway by the time I stand down as Executive Leader of Ashford Borough Council following the May 2023 Local Elections. Even as I write other projects are emerging that will require our future consideration
30. After a 30 year career in the UK Fire Service, I spent a further eight years as an Independent Member of the Kent Police Authority and will by May 2023 have spent over 17 years with Ashford Borough Council. This gives a total of some 55 years of public service - it is now time to embrace the final four months remaining of this term of office.
31. It has been an honour and a privilege to have served the people of Ashford both as an elected Member of this Authority and for the last decade as the Leader of the Council. I believe it has been a challenging but fruitful and productive journey that we have all shared. I have enjoyed working with so many good and hardworking people all striving to make Ashford a safe and a more vibrant place to live, work and most importantly enjoy. It only remains for me and my wife Rose, who has been the "Wind Beneath My Wings", to wish you all the very best for the future in your stewardship of this very special Borough.
32. **I commend this report to Council and would ask that it be received, noted and formally recorded.**

Cllr Gerry Clarkson, Executive Leader of Ashford Borough Council