



To the Members of the Borough Council

Dear Sir/Madam

You are hereby summoned to attend a Meeting of the Ashford Borough Council, to be held in the Council Chamber - Ashford Borough Council on **Thursday, 20th July, 2023 at 7.00 pm.**

Yours faithfully

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

T W Mortimer
Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer

Agenda

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1. **Apologies**
2. **To consider whether any items should be dealt with in private because of the likely disclosure of Exempt or Confidential Information**
3. **Declarations of Interest** 5 - 6

To declare any interests which fall under the following categories, as explained on the attached document:

 - a) Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI)
 - b) Other Significant Interests (OSI)
 - c) Voluntary Announcements of Other Interests

See agenda item 3 for further details
4. **To confirm the Minutes of the Council Meeting held on the 30th May 2023** 7 - 14
5. **To receive any announcements from the Mayor, Leader or other Members of the Cabinet**

During this item His Worshipful the Mayor will present Past Service Certificates to former Members of the Council.

6. **To receive any petitions**
7. **To receive any questions from, and provide answers to, the public (being resident of the Borough) which in the opinion of the Mayor are relevant to the business of the Meeting**
8. **To receive, consider and adopt the recommendations set out in the Minutes of the Meetings of the Cabinet held on the 30th March 2023 and 29th June 2023** 15 - 32
9. **To receive, consider and adopt the Minutes of the Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on the 13th June 2023** 33 - 38
10. **To receive, consider and adopt the Minutes of the Meeting of the Selection and Constitutional Review Committee held on 13th July 2023 (to follow)**
11. **To receive the Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit Committee held on the 20th June 2023** 39 - 42
12. **Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Annual Report 2022/23** 43 - 56
13. **To consider Motions of which Notice has been given pursuant to Procedure Rule 11**
14. **Questions by Members of which Notice has been given pursuant to Procedure Rule 10**
15. **Conferment of the title of Honorary Alderman** 57 - 72

NOTE: - If debate on any item included within this Agenda gives rise to the need to exclude the press and public due to the likelihood of Exempt or Confidential information being disclosed, the following resolution may 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 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 the appropriate paragraphs of Schedule 12A to the Act, where in the circumstances the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

12 July 2023

Queries concerning this agenda? Please contact Member Services

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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 **30th May 2023**.

Present:

Her Worshipful the Mayor, Mrs J Webb (Chairman);

Cllrs. Anckorn, Arnold, Barrett, Bartlett, Mrs Bell, Bell, Betty, Blanford, Brunger-Randall, Buchanan, Campkin, Chilton, Dean, Feacey, Forest, Gambling, Gathern, Gauder, Giles, Hallett, Harman, Hayward, Heyes, Hicks, Iliffe, Joseph, Krause, Leavey, Ledger, Link, McGeever, Meaden, Michael, Mulholland, Nilsson, Ovenden, Pauley, Pickering, Roden, Shilton, Smith, Spain, C Suddards, L Suddards, Townend, Walder, Wright.

Apologies:

Director of Place, Space and Leisure.

Also Present:

Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive, Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer, Director of Customer, Technology and Finance, Director of Health and Wellbeing, Assistant Director of Environment, Property and Recreation, Principal Solicitor (Strategic Development), Communications and Marketing Manager, Member Services Manager, Senior Member Services Officer.

1 Election of Mayor

Her Worshipful the Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting and congratulated all new Councillors on their Election to the Council. She said that the Council had an important decision to make later that evening, to elect a new Leader of the Council and she hoped Members would make the right decision for the welfare of the people of the Borough, and put that ahead of personal ambitions.

Prior to the Election of the Mayor, the Retiring Mayor, Mrs Jenny Webb, presented certificates to her outgoing Mayor's Cadets and thanked them for their contributions over the past year: - Leading Cadet Ross Lumsden - Ashford Sea Cadets; Cadet Corporal Grace Ball - Royal Marines; Cadet Warrant Officer Harvey Helme - Army Cadets; and Lance Corporal Regan Gould – Air Training Corps.

Councillor Feacey nominated Councillor Larry Krause for election as Mayor of Ashford Borough Council for the forthcoming municipal year.

This was seconded by Councillor Bartlett.

Councillor Feacey said he was pleased to nominate Councillor Larry Krause as the 50th Mayor of Ashford. Larry was born and raised in Brisbane, Australia and had worked for many years in finance and sales before moving to Ashford in 2001. He was married to his lovely wife Sue, who he was sure would give him pastoral care and guidance throughout his term. Larry had been a Parish Councillor for ten years, serving his community, before becoming a Borough Councillor in 2015.

Councillor Feacey said that one of the Mayor's chosen charities was very close to his own heart – "Men in Sheds" at the Ashford Volunteer Centre. This was among other great fundraising projects which he knew Larry would be supporting this year.

Larry had a great personality and an easy nature which he was sure would be an asset during his Mayoral year.

Councillor Feacey said he was therefore pleased to nominate Councillor Larry Krause and he hoped he would have an enjoyable year representing the residents of the Borough.

Councillor Bartlett said that Larry would be a hardworking and dedicated ambassador for Ashford who would do all he could to promote the Borough. He was therefore pleased to second the nomination of Councillor Larry Krause as Mayor of Ashford Borough Council for the forthcoming municipal year.

There were no other nominations.

Resolved:

That Councillor Larry Krause be elected Mayor of the Borough of Ashford for the Municipal Year 2023/24.

2 Declaration of Acceptance of Office by the Mayor

Councillor Krause made his Declaration of Acceptance of Office.

The retiring Mayor, the Chief Executive, the newly elected Mayor and the Mayor's Chaplain then left the meeting. Upon their return, having been invested with his chains of office His Worshipful the Mayor, Councillor Larry Krause assumed the Chair.

3 Appointment of Mayor's Chaplain

His Worshipful the Mayor advised that his Chaplain for the coming year would be the Reverend Dr Sue Starkings. The Reverend Starkings then said prayers.

4 Vote of Thanks by the Mayor for His Election

His Worshipful the Mayor began by thanking Members for granting him the honour of becoming the 50th Mayor of the Borough. He wanted to welcome back all previous colleagues and to welcome those newly elected Councillors. He hoped new Members would find out that they were actually a pretty nice bunch! He also wanted to extend thanks to all those previous Councillors who had not been re-elected on this occasion and thank them for their hard work over the years. He said that the main thing for new Councillors to be aware of was that the most precious thing they had to offer people was their time. Giving that time to people and the new responsibilities they had taken on would support both this Council and the residents of the Borough. It would be important to attend training events and Committee Meetings for Members to familiarise themselves with the activities of the Council, so

he encouraged new Members to embrace those opportunities and if in any doubts, to ask plenty of questions! Group Leaders, colleague Members and Member Services were all there to help and give guidance. But perhaps the most important piece of advice was to enjoy it. Being an elected Councillor was a great privilege and there was nothing better than joining in, being part of the community and truly engaging.

As Councillor Feacey had touched upon, he had chosen two charities to support during his Mayoral year. Firstly, "Men in Sheds" at the Ashford Volunteer Centre which was a small Ashford based organisation offering mental health support to people in Ashford. Secondly, one which he hoped all would be aware of, the Friends of William Harvey Hospital, and he thought anyone who had been present at the hospital would recognise the valuable work they undertook for patients, companions and visitors.

The Mayor said that he would appreciate the support of all Members throughout his Mayoral year. He intended to visit as many Wards as he could to undertake his Mayoral duties and he was keen to help the people of the Borough better understand what the Council did. He would therefore welcome Ward Members to join him and support him and the Council in their Wards when he was present.

He said he and the Mayoress intended to be very busy this year and they already had engagements in the diary dating right up to March 2024. One date he wanted to flag was his Civic Service at St Mary's Church, Ashford on Sunday 2nd July at 2pm. This would be a great afternoon and an opportunity for colleagues to attend and show their support, all at no monetary cost to themselves!

The Mayor concluded by again thanking colleagues for his Election and advising that he would be appointing his Mayor's Cadets later in the meeting.

5 Vote of Thanks to the Retiring Mayor and Mayoress

Councillor Forest said it was his great pleasure to propose a vote of thanks to the retiring Mayor Mrs Jenny Webb and her Consort David Webb.

As many would know, Jenny's first term as Mayor in 2019/20 had been abruptly interrupted by the Covid pandemic. However, 2022 had seen the opportunity return and Jenny had wasted no time in resuming her duties - reaching out and reconnecting to the individuals and communities still dealing with the aftermath of the virus.

Jenny had served their Borough with dedication, passion, and enthusiasm, not only during her two terms as Mayor, but since she had been elected as Ward Member for the Norman Ward in 2015. Jenny had been a champion of community engagement for people of all ages and backgrounds, and for the environment and sustainability. He said it had been a huge privilege to accompany Jenny on some of her visits, and he thanked her for those opportunities. A particularly memorable example for him was their outing to the Jean Mealham Pop in Centre in Woodchurch for their Christmas Carol event where they had been treated to a live rendition on the Wurlitzer organ by world-renowned organists Chris and Jayne Powell. He could still remember the look of surprise on her face when she noticed that he knew the words to every verse of "Roll-out-the Barrell"! On another visit, dressed in her full regalia, a little girl had asked Jenny if she was the Queen. "No", she said, "I'm much more

important than that, I'm the Mayor of Ashford!" These visits served as a reminder of how important it was that they all worked together to support their Borough, and the incredible efforts that went on outside this Chamber to help people in their daily lives.

Councillor Forest said that on behalf of himself, those gathered today, their former colleagues, and the residents and organisations from across the Borough, he wanted to give a sincere "thank you" to Jenny for her work, and he wished her and her husband David a safe, happy and long retirement. He so moved the vote of thanks.

Councillor Gambling said that she was pleased to second the motion of a vote of thanks to the retiring Mayor, Jenny Webb

6 Election and Appointment of Deputy Mayor

Councillor Chilton proposed that "Councillor Lyn Suddards be elected Deputy Mayor for the Borough of Ashford for the ensuing year".

This was seconded by Councillor Feacey.

There were no other nominations.

Resolved:

That Councillor Lyn Suddards be elected Deputy Mayor of the Borough of Ashford for the Municipal Year 2023/24.

7 Declaration of Acceptance of Office by the Deputy Mayor

Councillor Lyn Suddards made her Declaration of Acceptance of Office. The Deputy Mayor was then invested with her chains of office.

8 Appointment of Mayor's Cadets for 2023/24

The Mayor introduced his four Mayor's Cadets for 2023/24. As Members were aware, each Mayor had the opportunity to appoint an outstanding Cadet from each of the four armed services for their term of office. For this year those individuals were: -

- **Lance Corporal George Chisnall – Royal Marines**
- **Cadet Ewan Lumsden – Ashford Sea Cadets**
- **Cadet Liam Burgess – Army Cadets**
- **Cadet Evie Hathaway-Batt - Air Training Corps.**

The Mayor gave a short citation for each Cadet and then called them forward individually to present them with their badge of office for the year.

9 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on the 27th April 2023 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

10 Announcements

His Worshipful the Mayor said that all that remained to be said was to invite all present for refreshments to be served in the Committee Rooms downstairs after the meeting.

11 Election of the Leader of the Council for a Four Year Term

Councillor Bartlett proposed that “Councillor Bell be elected as Leader of the Council”.

This was seconded by Councillor Mulholland.

Councillor Spain proposed that “Councillor Chilton be elected as Leader of the Council”.

This was seconded by Councillor Lyn Suddards.

Councillor Harman proposed that “Councillor Ovenden be elected as Leader of the Council”.

This was seconded by Councillor Campkin.

As there were three valid nominations the Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer advised of the procedure to be followed. The election of the Leader would be decided by a simple majority of those Members present and voting in the room at the time the question was put. If there was not a clear majority of votes in favour of one candidate after the first round of voting then, under Procedure Rule 15.6, the name of the candidate with the least number of votes would be taken off the list by the Mayor, and a new vote taken between the remaining nominees. The process would continue until there was a majority of votes for one person.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 15.4 Councillor Bell asked that a recorded vote be taken on this item. This was supported by at least six other Members (i.e. a total of at least seven) who indicated their support by standing.

A recorded vote was then taken on the Election of the Leader of the Council for a Four Year Term and the Members voted as follows: -

In favour of Councillor Bell: Councillors Bartlett, Mrs Bell, Bell, Blanford, Brunger-Randall, Feacey, Forest, Heyes, Hicks, Iliffe, Krause, Link, Mulholland, Pickering, Roden, Shilton, Smith.

Votes For - 17

In favour of Councillor Chilton: Councillors Anckorn, Chilton, Dean, Gathern, Gauder, Hallett, Joseph, Leavey, Spain, Charles Suddards, Lyn Suddards.

Votes For - 11

In favour of Councillor Ovenden: Councillors Arnold, Barrett, Betty, Buchanan, Campkin, Gambling, Giles, Harman, Hayward, Ledger, McGeever, Meaden, Michael, Nilsson, Ovenden, Pauley, Townend, Walder, Wright.

Votes For – 19

As there was no clear majority in favour of one candidate after the first round of voting, in accordance with Procedure Rule 15.6 the name of the candidate with the least number of votes, Councillor Chilton, was taken off the list by the Mayor and a second vote was taken between the remaining nominees. The Members then voted as follows: -

In favour of Councillor Bell: Councillors Bartlett, Mrs Bell, Bell, Blanford, Brunger-Randall, Feacey, Forest, Heyes, Hicks, Iliffe, Krause, Link, Mulholland, Pickering, Roden, Shilton, Smith.

Votes For - 17

In favour of Councillor Ovenden: Councillors Arnold, Barrett, Betty, Buchanan, Campkin, Gambling, Giles, Harman, Hayward, Ledger, McGeever, Meaden, Michael, Nilsson, Ovenden, Pauley, Townend, Walder, Wright.

Votes For – 19

Abstentions: Councillors Anckorn, Chilton, Dean, Gathern, Gauder, Hallett, Joseph, Leavey, Spain, Charles Suddards, Lyn Suddards.

Abstentions - 11

Resolved:

That Councillor Ovenden be elected Leader of the Council for a four year term.

12 To Note the Names and Number of Members to be Appointed by the Leader to the Cabinet and the name of the Deputy Leader

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Ovenden, said that having just been elected Leader he was not in a position to appoint his Cabinet or Deputy Leader at this stage. As this was such an important decision given that this was the first change in Leadership for a very long time, he would like to take time to consider the names of Members to be appointed to the Cabinet, and indeed the number of Members and the Portfolios that they would hold. He would advise further in due course.

13 Selection and Constitutional Review Committee – 25th May 2023

His Worshipful the Mayor said that given the decision that had just been made in relation to the Leader of the Council, he would like to refer to the Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer for his advice on how to deal with these Minutes.

The Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer advised that the election of the new Leader would have some knock on effects for the proposed membership and chairmanship of some Committees as contained in the Selection and Constitutional Review Committee Minutes, and therefore asked the Council if they would like to consider adjourning this meeting for a period to give time to identify and make the necessary changes.

The Leader of the Council was unsure if an adjournment on the night would be sufficient to resolve all of the outstanding issues, particularly as no Cabinet appointments had yet been made.

Members noted that the Joint Transportation Board and Planning Committee were due to meet the following week and it would be useful to have Chairs/Vice-Chairs in place for those meetings at least. The Council therefore agreed to propose 'Interim' appointments for those positions. It was suggested that other Chairs/Vice-Chairs could be elected on a meeting by meeting basis until such time when the Full Council could meet again to appoint permanent Chairs/Vice-Chairs for all Committees etc.

The proposed membership of Committees, Boards and Groups was outlined in the Minutes and this was in the gift of Group Leaders so could be changed by way of a notification to the Monitoring Officer.

Other matters in the Minutes could be dealt with at this meeting.

Councillor Bell proposed that "the Minutes of the Selection and Constitutional Review Committee meeting held on the 25th May be approved and adopted with the exception of Minute No. 406 (iii) which would be considered by future Selection and Constitutional Review Committee and Council Meetings".

This was seconded.

Votes were then taken for the appointment of an interim Chair and Vice-Chair of the Planning Committee and an interim Chair of the Joint Transportation Board.

Resolved:

- (i) the Minutes of the Meeting of the Selection and Constitutional Review Committee held on the 25th May 2023 be approved and adopted with the exception of Minute No. 406 (iii).**
- (ii) Consideration of Minute No. 406 (iii) be deferred to future Selection and Constitutional Review Committee and Council Meetings.**

- (iii) the following 'Interim' appointments be made until such time that the Council can make permanent appointments for 2023/24: -

Chairman of Planning Committee – Cllr Jessamy Blanford
Vice-Chairman of Planning Committee – Cllr Bernard Heyes
Chairman of the Joint Transportation Board – Cllr Winston Michael.

Decisions effective from the 12th April 2023 unless they are called in or are recommended to the Council for approval

Cabinet

Minutes of a Meeting of the Cabinet held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **30th March 2023**.

Present:

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

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

Apologies:

Cllrs. Barrett, Bell, Pickering.

Also Present:

Cllrs. Burgess, Harman, Sparks.

In attendance:

Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive, Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer, Director of Customer, Technology and Finance, Director of Place, Space and Leisure, Head of Economic Development, Head of Strategic Projects, Spatial Planning Manager, Human Resources Manager, Senior Communications Officer, Principal Solicitor – Strategic Development, Member Services Manager.

360 Declarations of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Feacey	Made a Voluntary Announcement as Chairman of the Ashford Volunteer Centre.	365
	Declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest as Chairman of the Ashford International Development Company. He left the Council Chamber during consideration of this item.	367
Head of Strategic Projects	Declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest as a Director of the Ashford International Development Company. He left the Council Chamber during consideration of this item.	367

361 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 23rd February 2023 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

362 Leader's Announcements

The Leader advised that on Sunday 23rd April, a new mobile alert system was to be tested that would sound an alarm on people's phones warning them of imminent danger. The UK-wide trial of a new Government system meant that everyone in the country would receive a test alert on their mobile phones.

He was pleased to inform Members that on 24th March, the Council had completed on the acquisition of a parcel of land at Repton. That parcel had been earmarked in the Section 106 agreement as being for a range of primary healthcare uses, but the developers had not taken this forward. The Council had stepped in and negotiated a good price for the land which had now bought from the development consortium. They were already working with colleagues in the healthcare sector to bring forward a scheme that would provide a range of health benefits to the local community and which would ease the pressure on ever-stretched GP surgeries. The land had been acquired in the Council's Housing Revenue Account and, subject to planning, would also include 15 apartments for applicants with an identified need on the waiting list. This took the fusion of health and housing agendas to a new level and they were excited to see how the scheme progressed from this point.

The Leader also advised that the Council had been successful in bidding for £5m of Government funding to help fund a major retro-fitting project for 727 of their Council homes and thus significantly improving energy efficiency. He knew Officers had worked extremely hard for many months on this application to the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund and he had been told that this was one of the largest awards made to a single bidding Authority this year. He wanted to give his thanked to all involved.

Members would also be aware that the Council had received £14.7m of Levelling Up Funding for the International Film Studios project at Newtown Works, which was on the agenda later that evening. With the scheme underway he had recently written to the Minister for Levelling Up, Dehenna Davison MP, to brief her on progress and invite her to Ashford to see for herself this transformational project. She had replied saying that "Ashford is a great example of Levelling Up in action" and had confirmed that she would be delighted to visit Ashford this summer. He was sure that all would be pleased to welcome the Minister to their town.

As this was the last Cabinet meeting under his leadership, the Leader said he wanted to thank colleagues and Officers who had made the Cabinet such a productive forum during his ten years as Leader. He said he would miss everyone.

363 Pay Policy Statement – Annual Review

The Human Resources Manager introduced the report which advised that the Localism Act 2011 required the Council to publish an Annual Pay Policy Statement. This report would review the current Pay Policy Statement, ensuring it was up to date and reflected the Council's approach to pay. The Council also took this annual review as an opportunity to review the Ashford Apprentice Wage Allowance and the report therefore updated the position in relation to Apprentice pay for 2023/24.

The Leader said he welcomed the report and thanked those involved in the pay negotiations for both Council staff and waste contractor staff this year, which had both reached a pleasing outcome, against a difficult national backdrop.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, IT and Digital drew attention to the focus on Apprenticeships and said he was pleased to see that the Council continued to set an example in this regard.

Recommended:

- That (i) the updated Pay Policy Statement be approved**
- (ii) the continuation of the Ashford Apprentice Wage Allowance at a rate of 20 pence per hour over the National Minimum Wage rate applicable to the age of the apprentice, be approved.**

364 Update on the Council's Strategic Nutrient Mitigation and Proposed Pathway for Nutrient Neutrality Supplementary Planning Document

The Spatial Planning Manager introduced the report which advised that since July 2020, certain planning applications located in the Stour catchment and/or which discharged foul water into the catchment, had been put 'on hold' until they could achieve nutrient neutrality. In response to this issue the Council had been working proactively to deliver strategic nutrient mitigation. This was in the form of identifying suitable land in the Borough for strategic wetlands, which could generate off-site nutrient mitigation that could then be secured by developments, allowing them to be granted planning permission. This work had progressed and was now subject of an update to Cabinet. The report also outlined what a future Nutrient Neutrality Supplementary Planning Document was likely to cover and sought delegated authority to publish and consult on a draft document when appropriate.

Resolved:

- That (i) the Cabinet continue to support the acquisition of sites for, and delivery of, strategic wetlands in the Borough as a means of providing off-site nutrient mitigation, subject to planning permission being sought and obtained for them in due course.**

- (ii) the proposed contents and broad scope of a future Nutrient Neutrality Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) be agreed.**
- (iii) authority be delegated to the Director of Place, Space and Leisure and the Assistant Director of Planning and Development, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development, to determine the final contents and scope, and finalise the wording of the draft Nutrient Neutrality SPD, to determine the timing, length and methods of consultation, and the publish the draft SPD for consultation at the appropriate time.**

365 Policy for Funding the Voluntary and Community Sector

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which presented a draft policy for funding the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS). The purpose of the policy was to provide a consistent and co-ordinated approach to funding the VCS and it set out how funding would be awarded to ensure it would contribute towards the Council's corporate priorities, improve efficiency and give greater clarity, certainty and stability to the VCS organisations. The report also included a proposal to bring together a revenue funding stream which would include Ward Member grants and Strategic/Service grants (formerly Community/Service grants) in two distinct funding streams.

Resolved:

- That**
- (i) the draft policy be noted and the proposed funding streams agreed.**
 - (ii) the Head of Policy and Performance undertake a consultation on the draft policy with Ward Members and the Voluntary and Community Sector, reporting the outcome back to Cabinet.**

366 Digital Accessibility Policy

The Portfolio Holder for Environment, Property and Recreation introduced the report on behalf of the Portfolio Holder for HR and Customer Services. The report advised that the Council was committed to providing a digital experience that was accessible to as many people as possible. This included those with disabilities, older people, people from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds and people with varying levels of digital literacy. To this end, the Digital Accessibility Policy had been developed to ensure that the digital services the Council provided were available to all members of the public. He said that he had also been involved in this work as Chairman of the IT and Digital Transformation Advisory Committee and knew that both he, and the Portfolio Holder for HR and Customer Services would like to thank the staff involved in this and the wider Digital Transformation work, in particular the Digital Transformation Manager.

Resolved:

That the proposed Digital Accessibility Policy be adopted.

367 International Film Studios/Newtown Works

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development introduced the report which sought to agree the funding for the Studios phase of the Newtown Works development and asked Members to note that Ashford International Development Company was in negotiations with a major studio operator. He said that this development was one of the most exciting economic projects for this Borough in decades and thanked all involved in getting the project to this stage. With the Council's support, together with the Levelling Up Funding from Central Government, this provided a once in a lifetime opportunity to redevelop a nationally significant railway heritage site into a thriving economic driver for the whole area.

Other Cabinet Members spoke in support of the proposals and expressed their excitement to what was seen as a "game-changer" for Ashford. Particular focus was given to the "de-risking" of the project through due diligence and forward selling of a majority of the residential units and early discussion with studio operators. This was along with the wider community benefits through the Section 106 agreement including a town centre play area, indoor and outdoor sports facilities, GP services, highway improvements and importantly, the engagement of Ashford College through its curriculum and training programmes.

Recommended:

- That**
- (i) a loan facility to the Ashford International Development Company be agreed in principle, for the construction of the International Film Studios and workshop space, to the value of £50m, subject to the terms set out in Paragraph 17 of the report and subject to the completion of the due diligence process set out in the report, and to the granting of planning permission satisfactory to the film studio operator.**
 - (ii) the loan facility for the International Film Studio and workshop will either be repaid on completion of the works from the sale proceeds, or through a lease to an operator on a long-term basis.**
 - (iii) the Ashford International Development Company be financially supported at risk, to proceed with the redesign of the studio facility (subject to the Chief Executive being sufficiently confident that the overall deal is secured), up to the value of £30,000, in order to submit a revised planning application. This cost would initially be met from a reallocation within the Business Rate Retention Reserve.**

- (iv) responsibility for finalising the deal and sign off be delegated to the Chief Executive, taking into account the recommendations of a Due Diligence Working Group, which would include the Leader of the Council, the Section 151 Officer, the Solicitor to the Council, the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and the Portfolio Holders for Finance, IT and Digital and Economic Development.
- (v) a budget of £100,000 be allocated to carry out the due diligence required to finalise the transaction.
- (vi) the Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer be authorised to negotiate, finalise and complete all necessary legal agreements and other documents to give effect to the above.

368 Joint Transportation Board – Minutes of 7th March 2023

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Joint Transportation Board held on the 7th March 2023 be received and noted.

369 Climate Change Advisory Committee – Notes of 2nd February 2023

Resolved:

That the Notes of the Meeting of the Climate Change Advisory Committee held on the 2nd February 2023 be received and noted.

370 IT and Digital Transformation Advisory Committee – Notes of 31st January 2023

Resolved:

That the Notes of the Meeting of the IT and Digital Transformation Advisory Committee held on the 31st January 2023 be received and noted.

371 Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group – Notes of 3rd February 2023

Resolved:

That the Notes of the Meeting of the Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group held on the 3rd February 2023 be received and noted.

372 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 12th July 2023 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 **29th June 2023**.

Present:

Cllr. Ovenden (Chairman);
Cllr. Campkin (Vice-Chairman);

Cllrs. Barrett, Betty, Harman, Hayward, Nilsson, Walder, Wright.

Also Present:

Cllrs. Bartlett, Mrs Bell, Bell, Brunger-Randall, Chilton, Dean, Feacey, Forest, Gambling, Gathern, Gauder, Hallett, Leavey, Meaden, Michael, Roden, Shilton, Spain, C Suddards.

In attendance:

Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive, Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer, Director of Customer, Technology and Finance, Director of Place, Space and Leisure, Assistant Director of HR, Customer Services, Communications and Digitalisation, Assistant Director of Environment, Property and Leisure, Assistant Director of Planning and Development, Assistant of Director of Housing, Head of Policy and Performance, Service Lead – Finance, Safety and Wellbeing Manager, Senior Governance and Data Protection Officer, Senior Communications Officer, Member Services Manager.

43 Declarations of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Spain	Made a Voluntary Announcement as a resident of Charing who had voted in the Neighbourhood Plan local referendum.	49

44 Minutes

The Leader advised that none of the current Cabinet had been present at the previous Meeting as Members of the Cabinet, but he had received no comments in objection to the Minutes.

He also advised that with regard to Minute No. 367, International Film Studios/Newtown Works, under recommendation (iv) he would be adding Group Leaders to the Due Diligence Working Group.

A Member asked if the new Administration would be allowing access for all Members to any meetings set up, including Boards, which had not always been the case under the previous Administration. The Leader responded that this Administration would be as transparent as it could be and fully understood the need to involve as many Members as possible in decision making. The new Cabinet was made up of a majority of Members who knew exactly what it was like to be in opposition, so they understood the position and fully intended to allow as many appropriate Members to attend appropriate meetings as possible. There could not be a blanket position as there may need to be meetings from time to time that had a more restricted attendance, but they did not intend to set up as many of these types of Boards as there had been previously as he preferred a cross-party working group approach.

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 30th March 2023 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

45 Leader's Announcements

The Leader welcomed all Members, both new and returning, to this first Cabinet Meeting of the new Administration. He also wanted to extend a thank you to Council Officers for their patience and guidance in bringing the new Cabinet Members up to speed over the last few weeks.

In terms of announcements, he wanted to thank Councillor Hayward and 'Find a Voice' for stepping in to get the Ashford Festival in the Park back on track. With the charity taking on administration of the event, and along with the support of Council Officers, Festival in the Park would now be able to go ahead over the weekend of 25th – 27th August.

The Leader also advised that Ashford's first Food and Drink Festival would be happening during July, with the launch event at Coachworks tomorrow (Friday 30th June). There was a full programme of events across the Borough throughout July, but the opening weekend would feature ASHFOOD! – A two-day event at Elwick Place on Saturday 1st and Sunday 2nd July, celebrating the producers, restaurants, pop-ups, and bars from Ashford Town Centre and beyond. This would include live music, children's crafts, DJs and more and be a great family-friendly celebration of food and drink. Everyone was invited to the free launch at Coachworks where there would also be live music, family-friendly pizza making workshops, an independent food and drink market, as well as Coachworks' regular fantastic food and drink offerings. Coachworks would also have a full line-up of activities during the month.

46 Ashford Borough Council Annual Performance Report 2022/23

The Head of Policy and Performance introduced the report which summarised some of the achievements and milestones the Council had realised over the year in the

context of the Corporate Plan 2022 – 2024 and summarised performance against the Council's suite of Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) for the year 2022 – 2023.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 9.3, Mr Ransley, a local resident had registered to speak on this item. He said that the Annual Report stated that £400,000 had been spent on the Park Farm playground, but he understood that the actual figure was £313,000 (plus bike racks which had not yet been installed). He asked why investment had been overstated by ABC in the run up to the Elections and had still not been corrected in this report.

The Head of Policy and Performance thanked Mr Ransley for his question. She said that she understood responses had been issued to his Freedom of Information request and Accounts query on the same matter, but for clarity - Central Park, Park Farm play area had been officially opened during the period covered by this Annual Report. This regeneration project was one of three play areas now regenerated as part of the Play Area Investment report presented to and approved by Cabinet in September 2021. The report presented in 2021 had a budgetary figure of £1.1m to regenerate three key priority play locations – Central Park – Park Farm, Rylands Road and the Spearpoint Recreation ground. The report indicatively broke down the budget for the project across the three sites and allocated circa £400,000 to the Park Farm site. It was those budgetary figures that had been utilised in the Annual Report. To date, approximately £954,000 of the budget had been spent, with further works to be completed – notably the provision of cycle racks and a MUGA surface at Rylands Road. With the inclusion of this it was expected that the final figure will be closer to the budgeted £1.1m than the current circa £954,000. She would however be happy to amend the Annual report to indicate “a budgeted £400,000” in respect of the Park Farm Play Area.

The Portfolio Holder for Recreation and Public Spaces said that the figures had been indicative and savings had actually been made on procurement. She assured that in such circumstances any remaining funds would be put back in to the overall budget for parks and play areas.

Members asked a number of questions on the report and the following responses were given: -

- In terms of measures to reduce the number of local car journeys and how the success of cycling initiatives had been measured, the Head of Policy and Performance advised that there had been lots of activity to encourage cycling, including the recent 'Cars vs Handlebars' campaign. There was a good network of local cycling routes, but there was perhaps a need to better promote them and this would be part of the work of the Climate Action Team. There was also a recognised need to better collect and monitor data on reducing car journeys as part of the Performance Report process. The Deputy Leader advised that they intended to resurrect the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) and he would be happy to invite the Shadow Portfolio Holders to be involved in this important initiative.

- With regard to the Residents Survey, the Head of Policy and Performance advised that the response rate had given a statistically valid sample size. She would be happy to share details of the methodology with Members.
- The current Corporate Plan ran to 2024. Officers would shortly begin work on the new Plan which would be worked up over the next year and come into effect during 2024. All Members would be kept fully involved in the process as it developed, as this Administration wanted to be as inclusive as possible.
- With regard to KPI 56, number of live planning cases, Members were assured that it was a key priority to continue to reduce the backlog of cases. There had been a significant reduction in the last quarter, but the target of 550 probably still remained unachievable all the time the Stodmarsh issue remained live as it certainly inflated the situation. Irrespective of that, the Service was working as hard as it could to get the number down to a more manageable level.
- In terms of the KPIs around Affordable Housing (New Build and On-Street Purchases) it was recognised that the numbers were low. The chief reason was that the pipeline of new affordable housing coming on board had been caught by the Stodmarsh issue. The property market had also not offered suitable properties for purchase. A resolution to the Stodmarsh issue would release more new build properties and they were then looking to up Business Plan targets from 50 new units of social housing per year to 100+. New developments were already being looked at closely for available properties.
- Recycling rate targets would remain at 50% and were not increasing to 65% until 2035. Rates were dropping across the County, but Ashford's aim was to continue to exceed 50%. Final quarter figures from 2022/23 were still awaited from DEFRA to give the complete year's position. The Leader said that figures would be shared with Shadow Portfolio Holders once received. A Member said there was an element of recycling 'fatigue' amongst residents and it was important to recognise that and find new ways to re-energise and engage residents going forward.

Resolved:

That the contents of the Annual Performance Report be noted and its publication on the Council's website be approved.

47 Final Outturn 2022/23

The Service Lead - Finance introduced the report. It advised that 2022/23 had been a very challenging financial year for the Council, with inflation and interest rates rising rapidly and unexpectedly. The General Fund had reported a deficit of £484,000 for the year overall with a £1.8m pressure in operational budgets. There was also significant draw on reserves in year with operational reserves reducing by £1.8m. The report also contained some commentary on the challenges looking forward to 2023/24. The Leader said it was recognised that the Council faced

significant budgetary issues and there would be a need to make difficult decisions. This Administration was prepared to tackle that head on and continue to follow the direction and methodology that had been set previously.

A Member asked about the £68k provision in the previous budget to protect the G-Line bus service and asked if that would be retained to assist wider Stagecoach bus provision in and around the town. He knew KCC would be using a proportion of Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) funding for this purpose, but it was likely to concentrate on home to school provision which was a statutory responsibility, so he felt the Districts also had a role to play. The Service Lead – Finance confirmed that the £68k was still committed in operational reserves. The Leader said that there was a delicate balance. He knew the provision had been made originally to support the G-Line but he thought it was inappropriate for the Districts to ‘prop up’ services that were KCC’s responsibility to deliver. It would need careful consideration and a sustainable solution. There seemed to be a number of local Members meeting Stagecoach in different capacities and he hoped one co-ordinated meeting could be arranged. Another Member mentioned the disbanded Quality Bus Partnership (QBP) meetings which had been a useful forum and asked if these could be revived. The Safety and Wellbeing Manager advised these had been cancelled during the pandemic, but she understood that KCC wanted to re-establish these as ‘District Bus Focus Groups’ and ABC would welcome that.

A Member said that there had previously been a Medium Term Financial Plan Task Group involving Members from across the Council, which had met quite regularly. In light of the current budgetary position he asked if any thought had been given to resurrecting that in order to monitor finances. The Leader said this was something he would certainly consider.

Resolved:

- That**
- (i) the financial outturn for 2022/23 be noted.**
 - (ii) the Capital Outturn, Collection Fund position, and Treasury Management update be noted.**
 - (iii) the provisional reserve transfers and position (Table 2 of the report refers) be approved.**
 - (iv) the Looking Forward section of the report be noted.**
 - (v) responsibility be delegated to the Chief Financial Officer to make any minor changes to reserves, in consultation with the Leader of the Council.**
 - (vi) the update and continued support for Tenterden Leisure Centre, while a new long term operator is tendered for, be noted.**

48 Business Continuity Policy

The Safety and Wellbeing Manager introduced the report which presented the Borough Council's updated Business Continuity Policy for adoption. The Policy highlighted the roles and responsibilities for Business Continuity as required by the Civil Contingencies Act 2004.

In response to a question about cyber-attacks, the Safety and Wellbeing Manager advised that there were separate IT policies on cyber security and this was an area where the Council was very well covered.

With regard to testing, this was obviously vitally important and there were regular 'real life' and table top exercises on both business continuity and emergency planning. They worked closely with the Kent Resilience Forum and the effectiveness of arrangements had been demonstrated over the last few years with several planned and unplanned incidents such as the Covid-19 pandemic, preparing for the exit from the EU, and responding to other emergency events. There would be a Member training session on business continuity and emergency planning later that year to aid Members' understanding.

The Safety and Wellbeing Manager outlined the process that would be followed in the event of an emergency scenario, particularly out of hours, involving Operational Officers, Strategic Leads, Portfolio Holders and Control and Command liaison with the Emergency Services.

Resolved:

That the Ashford Borough Council Business Continuity Policy be approved and adopted.

49 Adoption of Charing Neighbourhood Plan

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing Delivery and Communications introduced the report which recommended that the Council formally 'make' (i.e. adopt) the Charing Neighbourhood Plan following the independent examination and referendum process. This would grant the Plan Development Plan status for decision making purposes. She said she was delighted to see another Parish bringing a Neighbourhood Plan forward and thanked those involved for their hard work throughout the process.

In response to a question the Portfolio Holder said they would encourage any local community to bring forward Neighbourhood Plans. It was appreciated that there was a huge amount of work and time involved and it relied on individuals who were dedicated to the process and they were not always easy to find.

Recommended:

That the Charing Neighbourhood Plan 2011 – 2030 (incorporating the modifications recommended by the Examiner) be 'made' by Full Council, in

accordance with Section 38A(4) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

50 Severance Costs Associated with Service Review Savings

The Director of Customer, Technology and Finance introduced the report, the key purpose of which was to adhere to the requirements of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) whereby post-holders who satisfy LGPS criteria around age and length of service, are entitled to the early release of their pension in the event they are made redundant. In some circumstances there is a cost to the Council associated with the release of the pension (known as a 'pension strain'). These costs must be approved by Elected Members and the report therefore sought approval of pension strain costs in the worst case scenario that the Council was not able to re-deploy affected post holders.

A Member said that at the Budget setting Full Council meeting, he had requested sight of the full programme of savings, for this year and the years ahead, and this had been denied. He asked if that was yet available. The Leader responded that the full list of ongoing savings was still being worked on and not 'set in stone'. This would be analysed differently as a new Administration and the Full Council would have some tough decisions to make. Work was ongoing and there would be an update in the Financial Monitoring report to the next Cabinet meeting in July.

A Member recognised that it was a tough time for staff and was concerned about the effect cuts were having on the wellbeing of remaining staff. The Assistant Director of HR, Customer Services, Communications and Digitalisation advised that a staff wellbeing survey was planned for later this year and support was in place for staff wellbeing. They did keep a close eye on statistics related to sickness etc.

Resolved:

That (i) the potential redundancy of the following post holders be noted:

- a) 5057 Business Support Officer Finance and Customer Services**
- b) 3030 Funding & Partnerships Officer or 6403 Policy & Scrutiny Officer**
- c) 6680 Project Manager (Commercial) or 6197 Cultural Projects Manager.**

(ii) the delivery of £320k towards the corporate savings target as a result of these changes be noted.

Recommended:

That the pension strain costs of up to £206,223, resulting from early release of up to three post holder's Local Government Pension Scheme benefits due to redundancy in the event the Council is unable to redeploy effected post holders, be approved. This to be funded from reserves.

51 Acquisition of Trafalgar House – Use of Chief Executive’s Delegated Authority

The Assistant Director for Housing introduced the report which notified Members of a decision the Council took during the pre-election publicity period. This was actioned using the Chief Executive’s urgency powers and secured the freehold of the Trafalgar House building on the corner of Bank Street and Elwick Road. The acquisition was subject to strict time pressure and although the Chief Executive’s delegated authority was used to sanction the deal, the then Leader, Deputy Leader, the Portfolio Holder for Housing (who remained in post into the new administration), the Portfolio Holder for Finance, the Portfolio Holder for Property, and the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (now Leader) were briefed about the decision to move forward with the project and all agreed with the decision, subject to due diligence. The report contained an exempt appendix covering much of the sensitive detail related to the acquisition. This was exempt in order to protect various commercial interests and significant sensitivities, which were outlined in that section of the report. The Council exchanged contracts on Trafalgar House on Wednesday 24th May 2023 and completed on Tuesday 30th May 2023.

The Portfolio Holder for Homes and Homelessness advised that he continued to support this purchase. The need for Temporary Accommodation was clear and Council management of this site should improve the overall situation there. The site had been inspected by the fire service and they had received assurances on fire safety.

In response to a question, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that the Council would be receptive to any viable sites for Temporary Accommodation across the Borough, not just in and around the town centre.

Resolved:

- That**
- (i) it be noted that the Chief Executive has exercised her urgency powers to secure the acquisition.**
 - (ii) it be noted that all relevant due diligence has been undertaken by Officers.**
 - (iii) the content of the exempt appendix be noted.**

52 Joint Transportation Board – Minutes of 6th June 2023

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Joint Transportation Board held on the 6th June 2023 be received and noted.

53 Trading and Enterprise Board – Minutes of 4th April 2023

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Trading and Enterprise Board held on the 4th April 2023 be approved and adopted.

54 Ashford Strategic Delivery Board – Notes of 21st April 2023

Resolved:

That the Notes of the Meeting of the Ashford Strategic Delivery Board held on the 21st April 2023 be received and noted.

55 Compliance and Enforcement Board – Notes of 25th April 2023

Resolved:

That the Notes of the Meeting of the Compliance and Enforcement Board held on the 25th April 2023 be received and noted.

56 Climate Change Advisory Committee – Notes of 28th March 2023

Resolved:

That the Notes of the Meeting of the Climate Change Advisory Committee held on the 28th March 2023 be received and noted.

57 IT and Digital Transformation Advisory Committee – Notes of 23rd March 2023

Resolved:

That the Notes of the Meeting of the IT and Digital Transformation Advisory Committee held on the 23rd March 2023 be approved and adopted.

58 Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group – Notes of 17th March 2023

Resolved:

That the Notes of the Meeting of the Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group held on the 17th March 2023 be received and noted.

59 Schedule of Key Decisions to be Taken

In accordance with Procedure Rule 9.3, Mr Ransley, a local resident had registered to speak on this item. He said that from a simple on-line search he had not been able to find a Council policy on Corruption, Fraud and Whistleblowing. He thought this was an unusual situation as all other Local Authorities in Kent had one and asked if the Cabinet would be receiving a policy on Corruption, Fraud and Whistleblowing soon?

The Portfolio Holder for Performance and Direction advised that this had been included in Mid-Kent Audit's work plan for the year and they would be reviewing the policy this year and this would be reported to the Audit Committee (date TBC).

The Head of Policy and Performance confirmed that the Council did have Corruption, Fraud and Whistleblowing policies within its Constitution and she could provide details to Mr Ransley. There were also internal policies for staff within their Conditions of Service.

Resolved:

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

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a Meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held in Committee Room No. 2, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **13th June 2023**.

Present:

Councillor Bell (Chair),
Councillor Chilton (Vice-Chair).

Cllrs. Bartlett, Feacey, Joseph, Ledger, McGeever, Shilton, C.Suddards.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2(c), Cllr McGeever attended as Substitute Member for Cllr Michael.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Giles, Michael.

In attendance:

Cllrs. Gathern, Mulholland.

Head of Policy & Performance, Policy & Scrutiny Officer, Senior Governance & Data Protection Officer, Member Services Officer.

Also in Attendance (virtually)

Cllr. Forest.

30 Election of Chair

Resolved:

That Councillor Bell be elected as Chair for this Meeting.

31 Election of Vice-Chairman

Resolved:

That Councillor Chilton be elected as Vice-Chair for this Meeting.

32 Declarations of Interest

Cllr	Interest	Minute No
Feacey	Made a Voluntary Announcement that he was Chair of Ashford Volunteer Centre	34

33 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 14th March 2023 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

34 O&S Work Programme 2023/24

The Policy & Scrutiny Officer introduced the report, and provided a brief summary of the Work Programme and the process for topic selection. She asked Members to primarily consider whether the Freedom Leisure Contract item should remain, since an internal audit was underway which would result in a report going to the Audit Committee for review. In addition, the Cabinet Schedule of Key Decisions had been included and would be a standing item on the agenda going forward.

The report was then opened up to the Committee and the following questions and points were raised: -

- A Member noted that the general cleanliness and maintenance of the Stour Centre had deteriorated, and suggested a review of this be undertaken. The Policy & Scrutiny Officer would take this forward.
- It was suggested that the Savings Schedule was made a high priority and presented for the Budget Scrutiny Task Group to review. With the Council having to make significant savings, it was prudent for the Schedule to be studied prior to the formulation of the budget in September time. The Chair added that the Leader had stated that pre-scrutiny be undertaken in regards to the savings needed. A report was due to go to Cabinet and more information would be made available following that. The Head of Policy & Performance added that it was a recommendation that came out of the preceding budget scrutiny.
- The Chair and Vice-Chair spoke to the Committee about the opportunity to review Council procedures following the election and new administration and Leader of the Council. A new Corporate Plan would be formed in 2024 and it was proposed that the new Leader be invited to attend a Committee meeting to offer some pre-scrutiny and outline the initial findings and layout for the new Corporate Plan. He acknowledged that Officers would be assessing what had been delivered to date, the new priorities and focus on current circumstances such as the Cost of Living Crisis, and a typical timeframe for the process was 6-8 months.
- Housing Delivery and Management was put forward as another topic for the Committee to scrutinise.
- The Chair went onto speak about ensuring resources were utilised efficiently during this period of financial restraint and pressure and another idea was to review staff motivation in terms of effective, smart working, productivity, and incorporate working from home procedures. The Policy & Scrutiny Officer

referred to the review of hybrid and remote working undertaken in the previous year and highlighted that a follow up report would be presented to the Committee this year, which could be built into that topic. The Chair agreed and highlighted that he wanted the focus to be on outcomes and about eliminating any un-necessary procedures.

- With a new refuse contractor in place, the topic of refuse collections and recycling rates was another suggestion for the Work Programme. It was understood that the routes could be changing, and so the Chair felt it would be useful to scrutinise in order to ensure the same mistakes weren't repeated, as had been previously whereby many bins were not emptied. The headline following from that would be anticipated recycling rates and what ABC would like it to be. In addition, the Vice Chair requested that the measures for refuse in blocks of flats to be included and a Member also asked that the rule concerning bulk collections be revised, with regards to where items may be slightly more than 6 inches abutting the Highway.
- The subject of Mayoralty was discussed, in particular finding volunteers and the length of term for the Mayor. The Vice-Chair acknowledged the importance and demanding role, and considered extending the term could ease the difficulties often encountered with the annual shifting of the Mayor. The Chair highlighted that this may be a constitutional change and was happy to be advised with regards to the protocol followed for this type of amendment to be approved. The Committee voted and were in favour of this proposal.
- Another change proposed by the Chair and Vice Chair was to the length of term for the Leader of the Council. He proposed that it revert back to a yearly term as opposed to the current 4 yearly term which was implemented by the former Leader. Again, the Chair highlighted that this may be a constitutional change and was happy to be advised again with regards to the protocol followed for this type of amendment. A Member voiced his concern about this change, stating that it was too soon following the recent change in leadership. Another opinion was that Group Leaders were elected on an annual basis and therefore Council Leaders should also be.
- A discussion took place regarding how the current four year term had come about.
- The Committee voted with seven in favour and two opposed to the recommendation. The Motion was carried.
- A Member spoke about residents' difficulties obtaining GP appointments and suggested that this topic be put forward for consideration by the Committee. Cllr Bartlett added that as KCC Member he would be attending a meeting in July, concerning GP appointments in the County and invited Members to attend that meeting virtually or in person. The Head of Policy and Performance highlighted that KCC had the statutory duty for health scrutiny within Kent, and the O&S Committee needed to be mindful of their influence over the outcomes.

- In response to a question around anti-social behaviour and inviting Kent Police along, it was confirmed that this was a standing item on the agenda and reviewed annually.
- The percentage of population identifying as 'non-white' had doubled since the 2011 Census. A Member asked the Committee to consider the ways in which ABC could engage to support those residents with integration within the community and utilising local services efficiently. The Head of Policy and Performance highlighted some tools that could be useful when considering this issue, e.g. the Borough Profile document and a deprivation study that had been previously been undertaken. The Council's Equality Objectives was soon due for review, which would provide a good opportunity to address the subject. The Vice-Chair suggested BAME and democracy as a more specific topic and noted that during the election-canvassing period there were numerous households that were not registered to vote, many of which the residents were BAME.
- The Head of Policy and Performance had stated that all of the topic suggestions would be taken away and put through the matrix system in the usual way. The Chair and Vice-Chair confirmed that they were happy to be kept informed of the progress of those topics.

Resolved: that the proposed topics be assessed using the scrutiny topic selection criteria and a report be made back to the next meeting of this Committee.

Recommended to Full Council:

That (i) a report be prepared for the Selection and Constitutional Review Committee to consider extending the term of office of the Mayor to up to two years.

(ii) a report be prepared for the Selection and Constitutional Review Committee to consider amending the term of office of the Leader of the Council from four years to one year.

35 O&S Annual Report 2022/23

This report was introduced by Policy & Scrutiny Officer, and outlined the work carried out by the Committee for 2022/23. Reviews and recommendations were contained within the report and Cabinet had been supportive of all the recommendations made.

The Chairman and Committee thanked the previous Committee Members and Officers for their work during that time and for the report.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

36 Corporate Annual Performance Report

The Senior Governance & Data Protection Officer presented the report Which was the annual performance report reflecting the corporate plan 2022-24. The annual report was made up of two parts, a narrative section that summarised some of the milestones and achievements made across the year, expressed against the Corporate Plan themes. The second section was the annual Key Performance Indicators, which displayed the Councils performance against the Corporate Plans suite of KPIs.

The performance framework was an important pillar in monitoring performance, showing where the Council had performed well and also highlighting where the focus needed to be drawn in order to continue to offer the services expected by residents and broader stakeholders.

The report was then opened up to the Committee and the following questions and points were raised: -

- The Chair drew attention to Council Tax Collection rates (KPI44), and considered whether the slight decrease was that a reflection of the Cost of Living Crisis.
- KPI09 for recycling or composted waste had dipped owing to the Q4 data not yet being made available.
- A Member queried whether the Council anticipated an increase in the number of Fly Tips registered, owing to the departure of an Enforcement Officer. Highway
- The Chairman asked about the process around introducing more KPI's into the report and it was explained that they do tie in with the Corporate Plan, so with the new Corporate Plan on the horizon, new KPI's could be considered.

Resolved:

That the report 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 No. 2, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **20th June 2023**.

Present:

Cllr. Krause (Chair);

Cllrs. Mrs Bell, Dean, Gambling, Hallett, Hayward, McGeever, Smith.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2(c) Councillor Mrs Bell attended as Substitute Member for Councillor Feacey.

Apologies:

Cllr. Feacey.

In attendance:

Cllr. Bartlett.

Deputy Chief Executive, Head of Internal Audit, Member Services Manager.

Also in Attendance (virtually):

Finance Service Lead.

Key Audit Partner – Grant Thornton UK.

37 Election of Chair

Resolved:

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

38 Declarations of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Hayward	Made a Voluntary Announcement as a Member of Stanhope Parish Council.	40

39 Minutes

A Member quoted from the last Minutes and references to Eurostar International services not stopping in Ashford under the Corporate Risk Register item. He asked what the latest position on this was. The Deputy Chief Executive advised that in the context of the Corporate Risk Register, it had been more of a technical discussion about the status of the risk, but perhaps this did need to be reframed as it was now

more about when services would start again. The Council had a limited sphere of influence as it was ultimately a commercial decision but the Chief Executive held regular meetings with the Chief Executive of Eurostar and they were lobbying, including via MPs, to recommence the International services from Ashford. The Council's Head of Economic Development would be able to provide a fuller update should any Members so wish.

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 21st March 2023 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

40 Internal Audit Annual Report and Opinion 2022/23

The Head of Internal Audit introduced the report. She drew particular attention to the recommendations, her Opinion Statement and the reconciliation of the approved 2022/23 Internal Audit Plan. She explained that the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards required her to deliver an annual opinion that the Council could use to directly inform its Annual Governance Statement. This annual opinion provided a conclusion on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's framework of corporate governance, risk management and system of internal control. She advised that her opinion was that Ashford Borough Council had "adequate and effective management, control and governance processes in place to manage the achievement of their objectives" – and this was the highest assurance rating that she could give.

The Head of Internal Audit confirmed that with regard to Internal Audit coverage, there had been a reduced number of audits due to knock on effects of the late completion of the previous year's work and the significant churn of staff. They had however been able to deliver a significant amount of work during 2022/23 (outlined at Annex D to the report) with only one audit with a partial weakness and had been able to rely on other sources of assurance. With regard to the IT Backup and Recovery Audit, this had now been completed and received a 'sound' assurance. She was also pleased to advise the Committee that they had now appointed two new Auditors.

The item was opened up to the Committee and the following responses were given to questions/comments: -

- The Head of Internal Audit said she was confident of being able to deliver a full audit service going forward. It was a difficult market in which to recruit/retain staff, but the two new starters meant she expected the team to be able to complete a higher volume of work in the coming year.
- The audit of PFI Management of the Stanhope Estate had been dropped during 2022/23 due to a change of the programme management staff. This would remain in the five year rolling plan and would be picked up again in the future.

- A new contractor had been appointed for parking cash collection and the Council had a good working relationship with them. This had been a 'sound' element of the follow up report and would continue to be monitored.
- Following on from the Data Breach audit, all elected Members had been required to undertake Cyber Security training following the May 2023 Elections and the Member Services Manager advised that they were now almost at 100% completion.

Resolved:

- That (i) the Internal Audit Report and Annual Opinion be noted. The opinion states that, for the 12 months ending 31st March 2023, the Council operated an effective framework for corporate governance, risk management and internal control.**
- (ii) it be noted that the work to support the opinion was completed with sufficient independence and in conformance with Public Sector Internal Audit Standards.**

41 External Audit Progress Report

The Key Audit Partner – Grant Thornton UK introduced the report. The report advised of progress with both the 2021/22 audit and the intended timings for the 2022/23 audit work. It also highlighted other areas of interest in the sector.

A Member asked about the implications of the staffing shortfall in the audit sector and questioned whether Grant Thornton could provide any assurance that the Council would get the service it was paying for. They were still waiting for the 2021/22 financial statements audit to be completed and she asked if Grant Thornton were doing anything to try and improve the situation and resolve their staffing issues.

The Key Audit Partner – Grant Thornton UK, advised that they were doing their best to resolve their staffing situation, but as previously discussed, staff recruitment and retention was an industry wide issue and there was a shortage of candidates in the market and across the sector. Grant Thornton was constantly recruiting staff and they were active in the market, but there was a need to try and make it as attractive a career as possible to assist retention. They did recognise the situation, and were looking to tender for less work through the PSAA process, but they remained the biggest individual supplier in the industry. They were still delivering services, although not at the pace they would like. He advised that they should be in a position to complete the 2021/22 audit very soon.

Resolved:

That update be received and noted.

42 Report Tracker and Future Meetings

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that work was ongoing to review the timetable of meetings and to structure agendas to make sure that the relevant timings worked for everyone, so there may be some changes going forward and the Committee would be advised if that was the case.

The issue of Meeting start times was raised and the Committee unanimously agreed to revert to a 6pm start time.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted and Audit Committee Meetings commence at 6pm going forward.

Queries concerning these minutes? Please contact Member Services:
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An aerial photograph of a large, calm lake with several small, tree-covered islands. The surrounding landscape is lush with green grass and trees. In the distance, a small town or village is visible. The overall scene is peaceful and scenic.

Overview and Scrutiny 2022/2023 Annual Report

Report Author:
Abi Sheppard

Chairman:
Cllr. Noel Ovenden

Chairman's Report

I am pleased to present the annual report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the 2022/23 year. The report details work carried out by the Committee over the year in line with the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme.

The Committee prioritised two in depth reviews and concluded these by the end of 2022. Firstly, a task and finish group was set up to understand the council's approach to consultation and engagement. Members noted the ongoing work being undertaken to explore new approaches to consultation and one recommendation supported that the option to set up a citizen's panel in the Borough be considered.

Important work was also undertaken by another task group to understand the lessons learnt from the implementation of the new planning IT system with Arcus Global. Members examined the different stages of the implementation and made recommendations to help improve the way that the council rolled out transformation projects in the future.

I would like to thank Members of the Committee for their attendance and contribution at meetings. Additionally, on behalf of the Committee, thanks are extended to Officers who have taken the time to present and participate at meetings over the year and in particular during in depth reviews.

Cllr. Noel Ovenden

Introduction and Background

The Local Government Act 2000 (the Act) introduced a requirement that councils with a 'Leader and Executive' arrangement must include the provision of one or more Overview and Scrutiny Committees within their council structure. Under section 21 of the Act, the council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee has power to submit reports and make recommendations to the Cabinet or full Council on any aspect of council business or any matter affecting the Borough or its residents.

The constitution of Ashford Borough Council contains provisions for a single Overview and Scrutiny Committee to carry out the functions detailed in the Act, although the Committee may assemble task groups from its membership for specific reviews.

In the 2019/20 municipal year the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had 12 members, appointed in line with the broad political balance of the council. The roles of Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee were appointed to opposition members, although the Committee operates apolitically in its discussions, with all members of the Committee working together to ensure that the council and its services are acting effectively and efficiently.



Methods of Scrutiny

Issues can be scrutinised by the Committee in the following ways:

By considering reports produced by Officers and having the opportunity to ask questions about the different aspects of the council's business.

Inviting representatives from outside bodies or Parish and Community Councils to talk about topics of interest to residents.

Using the 'call in' method to bring forward matters of urgency for considerations by the Committee, and which are of interest to the public.

The Committee welcomes and encourages Cabinet Members and other non-Committee Members to attend meetings as and when appropriate.

Call in

The call-in process allows the Chair of the Committee, or five members of the Committee, to call in a decision of the Cabinet to a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Committee is able to recommend that the Cabinet reconsiders the decision or is able to refer directly to Council.

There have been no called in items this year.



Hybrid Meetings and Public Participation

Overview and Scrutiny is open to participation from the public and involvement in the process is actively encouraged. Throughout the year, scrutiny has been committed to being open and accessible by the public and therefore has been kept as a hybrid meeting. This has meant that residents have been able to access the meeting either in person or watch live online.

We have been encouraging involvement from residents by publishing a news item in the summer edition of the Ashford For You magazine. The item aims to inform residents how they could become involved in scrutiny and suggest potential topics for the work programme.

Some of the other ways the public could get involved include providing evidence to or at a meeting or being co-opted on to a Task Group. The Committee is keen to see more public participation both in its task and finish groups and in its committee meetings.

Council under scrutiny

If you are interested in scrutinising the work of the council here's how to get involved...

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee looks at council decisions and requires us to be open and accountable. The committee may look at any matter affecting the borough or its residents. It is made up of 12 councillors, reflecting the political balance of the authority. You can get involved by:

- Sharing your views in writing with the committee.
- Suggesting topics for future reviews; do you have a pressing issue that is affecting your local community which you think could be looked into? Scrutiny is not a forum to raise individual complaints, as we have a separate procedure for that.
- Attending a meeting, in person or watch the meeting virtually online.

If you feel there is an issue affecting residents that the committee should look at, email overviewandscrutiny@ashford.gov.uk or call 01233 330394. If you want to speak at a meeting, contact our Member Services team on 01233 330491.



Consultation and Engagement Review

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to review the council's approach to consultation and engagement. Members were particularly interested in how the council consulted with residents regarding current issues, new policies and projects. Members also wanted to understand what the challenges were with engaging hard to reach groups and compare best practice with other local authorities. It was agreed consultation and engagement would be a priority topic for the scrutiny work programme during the 2022/23 municipal year.

A scope was initially compiled for the review to establish where scrutiny could be beneficial. A scoping document was agreed which outlined 5 key aims for the review:

- What methods of engagement and communication are used by council services and could they be improved to engage with hard to reach groups?
- How is the council engaging with hard to reach groups in the Borough and what are the obstacles.
- To understand the council's public consultation process and how this contributes to decision making.
- To explore best practice and the tools used by other Local Authorities to carry out public consultations.
- Identify ways that Overview and Scrutiny could engage more with residents to increase public participation at Committee meetings.

The Task Group recognised the importance of consulting residents on various issues. Although public consultations had been undertaken for many policies, strategies and developments, a high response rate was not always received. Members agreed that new ways could be explored to help reach all types of residents in the Borough which may involve looking outside of traditional surveys and questionnaires. The creation of a Citizens Panel was also considered as a new way to increase regular engagement with residents.



Creating a corporate approach to consultations was seen as key for ensuring their quality. The Task Group concluded that more could be done to guide Officers when considering consultation methods and a wider group of consultation experts in the council could be formed to help with this.

The Task Group found that public participation at public facing committees had improved due to the new hybrid working arrangements. However, it was suggested that more work could be done to engage residents with the work of the O&S Committee through social media and the council's resident magazine.

Recommendations

I. 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 feedback 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 opinions 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.

Delivery of the Planning IT System Review

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee identified that there had been issues with the delivery of the new planning IT system with Arcus Global. It was agreed that a review should be prioritised in the work programme and undertaken by a dedicated Task and Finish Group.

The aim for the review was to understand what issues had been experienced during the project and also what lessons could be taken forward in future transformation projects and system rollouts. In particular, Members were aware of plans in 2023 to develop the Arcus Global system further with the Planning and Development Service and also upgrade the system used by the Safety and Wellbeing Service. Therefore, it was important for the Task Group to understand the lessons that could be learnt from the delivery of the planning IT system project.

The Task Group assembled 5 Members; Cllr Ovenden (Chair), Cllr. Ledger, Cllr. Harman, Cllr. Mulholland and Cllr. Hayward to review the success of the project delivery of the new IT system in the Planning and Development service and, if required, make some recommendations to improve the process for future system rollouts or projects.

A scope was initially compiled for the review to establish where scrutiny could be most beneficial. During discussions about the scope, it was important to Members that the purpose of the review was not to apportion blame for issues that occurred throughout the project, but to understand any lessons that could be learnt to inform similar projects in future.

The Task Group agreed that speaking to key individuals involved in the project would be the best way to understand issues completely. It was proposed that three or four 'Witness Sessions' would take place for Members to have a question and answer style discussion with the various individuals involved, for example, the project manager.

Recommendations

I. Projects of a certain size or importance require a professional project manager and this role should not be in addition to normal duties.

II. Unnecessary and historic data should not be transferred to new systems and any data migration should be considered during the early stages of a project. A data retention policy should be agreed and adopted for implementation in the project.

III. Internal and external user testing should be thoroughly scoped, agreed through PMG and carried out for any future system implementation or upgrade.

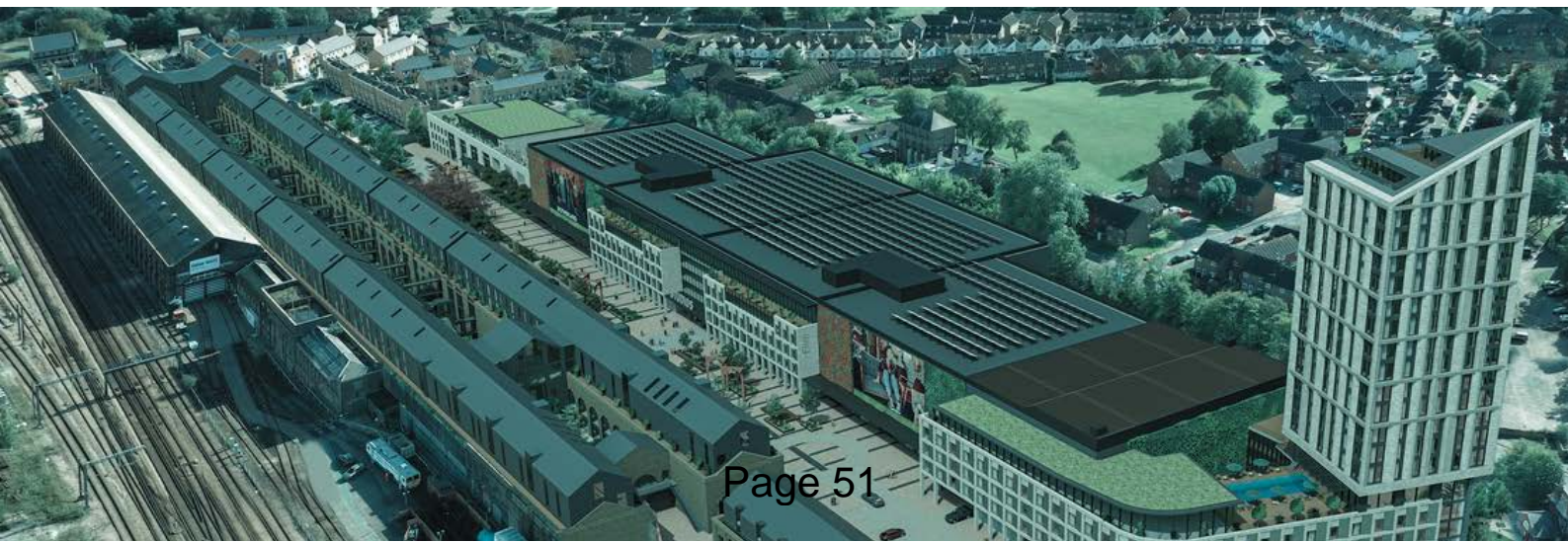
IV. Detailed scoping of Officers time should take place when considering project resources.

V. Consultation with external customers should take place at the outset of a project to inform its delivery.

VI. PMG should determine the governance arrangements of future projects, including frequency of highlight reports setting out key risks and challenges.

VII. Portfolio Holders should be kept informed of project updates for key projects in their Service on a regular basis, which is defined from the outset of a project.

VIII. System rollouts should foremost be designed to improve the customer experience and processes need to be mapped with this in mind.



Budget Scrutiny Task Group

The budget scrutiny sessions yielded much information on the financial and resource challenges facing the authority and the Task Group focused on a number of key risks relating to the achievability of next year's budget.

The draft budget for 2023/24 was presented to the Task Group at its first meeting; this included all service budgets and financial risks. The purpose of this session was to assist Members in determining which areas to dedicate additional scrutiny time. The following topics were identified and were discussed over three meetings:

- The council's reserves positions and forecast.
- Savings within the budget not yet identified
- Details on the borrowing portfolio and the expected borrowing interest rate increases.
- Housing Revenue Account Maintenance Programme
- Homelessness provision and housing options
- The risks around the maintenance of assets.
- Risks linked to the commercial property portfolio.



Recommendations

The Overview and Scrutiny Budget Task Group recommended to the Cabinet that:

- I. The council's draft budget for 2023/24 is sound and deliverable (noting recommendation II).
- II. The Task Group supports the proposal to use reserves to fund the 2023/24 deficit.
- III. The Task Group notes that in order to mitigate against the challenges presented by the current economic climate, a savings strategy needs to be developed to bridge the budget gap.
- IV. The Task Group note that work should be undertaken to assess the council's estates portfolio to determine whether assets should be retained.
- V. Resources should be allocated to ensure the council continues to deliver more than the minimum requirement of 10% for fire safety checks in homes.
- VI. A presentation is provided to the wider council regarding the Housing Revenue Account.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the report and recommendations at their meeting on 14 February 2023. It was noted that the recommendations made by the Task Group within the report reflected views of Members at the time when they met previously. However, the Committee made further recommendations to reflect the changes to the draft budget since it was scrutinised. It was additionally recommended that;

VII. The Committee approve the findings of the budget scrutiny task group at the time of writing.

VIII. That consideration should be given to increasing the council tax levels in line with government recommended levels to protect service delivery in the coming and future years.

IX. The Committee would like to monitor the delivery of the proposed savings identified on an ongoing and regular basis.

VII. £500,000 is earmarked from the Economic Resilience Reserve to safeguard against expected income from the international development company not being forthcoming.

Other Priority Topics

S106 Process Review

Process Mapping Update

The O&S S106 Task Group set out eight recommendations, which were endorsed by Cabinet in November 2021. The first recommendation sought a process mapping exercise of the way S106 agreements are prepared from start to finish to provide clarity and guidance to Officers and Members involved in the Section 106 process. It was anticipated that this would then inform the remaining recommendations.

An update on progress was reported to the Committee in May, which concluded that a further update would be brought back to the Committee within 6 months, with the task of completing the process mapping exercise a priority.

In September 2022, a report was prepared to update the Committee in respect of the process mapping exercise. It also updated the Committee in respect of progress towards the Mid Kent Audit actions following the publication of their report into the S106 process in 2021 and other tasks that had been progressed by the Plan Making and Infrastructure Team that were relevant to the S016 review.

Hybrid Working

Members of the Committee were interested in exploring how well the hybrid arrangements were working and in particular wanted to consider this in terms of performance, customer satisfaction, savings, human resources and recruitment. A Hybrid Working update report was prepared and aimed to review the progress of hybrid working.

The overarching conclusions were that hybrid working was here to stay across the country, but it needed sustained effort to ensure it continued to work efficiently. Management Team were keen to remain agile, keeping customers' needs at the forefront of decisions and continuing to work flexibly. It was agreed that an update report would be presented to the Committee in the future.

Performance Reporting

Quarterly reports were presented to the Committee to demonstrate the council's performance across all services and highlight any areas of concern.

Annual Reports

Corporate Sickness Report

This report provides members with sickness absence figures for the financial year 2021/22 (01 April 21 to 31 March 22). It was noted that similar data was provided to Management Team on a six-monthly basis in order that the Council's senior management team have an up-to-date overview of key HR Metrics.

The reported figures for Ashford Borough Council employees were from sickness absences recorded on the iTrent Payroll and HR system. The figures were presented as the average number of working days lost due to sickness absence per Full Time Equivalent (FTE) employee during the year, starting 1 April 2021.

Community Safety Partnership

This report provided the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with the community safety annual update. The report paid particular regard to the council's statutory obligation to work in partnership to reduce crime and disorder, this work being progressed through the Ashford Community Safety Partnership (CSP).

The report detailed crime statistics for the Borough and its positioning against other districts within the

county. Ashford showed as being a safe Borough as the level of recorded crime remained low, and there was a reduction in many crime types, including serious violence offences. The report highlighted an overall decrease in reports of anti-social behaviour.

The report also provided information on current community safety priorities, actions that were taken to meet priorities and raise awareness of emerging issues. It also supported the delivery of the priorities set by the Police and Crime Commissioner through his Safer in Kent plan 2022/2023.

Safeguarding

This update provided the Committee with the council's annual safeguarding update. The report focused on the council's obligation to work in partnership to protect children, young people and adults at risk from abuse or neglect, preventing impairment of their health and development. It gave information on the safeguarding activity that had been undertaken and raised awareness of emerging issues. It also supported the delivery of the priorities set by the Kent Safeguarding Children's Multi-agency Partnership and the Kent and Medway Safeguarding Adults Board.

Committee Membership 2022/23

Cllr. Ovenden (Chairman)
Cllr. Chilton (Vice Chairman)
Cllr. Ledger
Cllr. Hayward
Cllr. Burgess
Cllr. Howard-Smith
Cllr. Blanford
Cllr. Farrell
Cllr. Meaden
Cllr. Mulholland
Cllr. Brooks
Cllr. Barrett

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**SCRUTINY REPORTS
& PRESENTATIONS**

7

COMMITTEE MEETINGS

3

TASK AND FINISH GROUPS



Agenda Item No:	15
Report To:	Council
Date of Meeting:	20 th July 2023
Report Title:	Conferral of the title of Honorary Aldermen
Report Author & Job Title:	Danny Sheppard Member Services Manager
Portfolio Holder:	Cllr. Ovenden
Portfolio Holder for:	The Leader and Portfolio Holder for Prosperity and Resource

Summary: Following approval of the Honorary Alderman Scheme by Council in February 2019, and the Council's first intake of Honorary Aldermen in October 2019, the Scheme has now been operating successfully for nearly four years.

This report seeks approval from Council of the recommended nominations for the conferral of the title of Honorary Alderman, from the group of Councillors who stepped down or were not returned in the May 2023 Local Elections.

Key Decision: NO

Significantly Affected Wards: Not applicable

Recommendations: **The Council is recommended to:-**

Agree that the nominees as listed in the exempt Appendix to the report be conferred with the title of Honorary Alderman of Ashford Borough Council in accordance with Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972.

Policy Overview: Not applicable

Financial Implications: The Portfolio Holder has made it clear that whilst this is an important recognition for long service of previously elected Members, the costs must be reasonable in all the circumstances.

The bulk of the initial set up costs was borne in 2019 including robes, regalia and the Honorary Alderman Board in the Council Chamber. The purchase of the appropriate Honorary Aldermen Badges for this year is estimated to be between £2000 and £2200 and has been included within operational budgets. In addition to this there would be the cost of hosting a small reception immediately following the

award which is considered could be contained within the Mayoral entertainment budget for Civic events.

Legal Implications

The establishment of an Honorary Alderman Scheme is in accordance with Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972.

Equalities Impact Assessment

Not Required because the criteria for bestowing the awards are equally applicable to all elected Members.

Exempt from Publication:

The appendix is not for publication by virtue of Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 and the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in discussing the information.

Background Papers:

None

Contact:

danny.sheppard@ashford.gov.uk

Report Title: Conferment of the title of Honorary Aldermen

Introduction and Background

1. Members will recall that the establishment of an Honorary Alderman Scheme was approved at Council on 21st February 2019. As reported at the time, the Local Government Act of 1972 allows for a Council to confer the title Honorary Alderman on persons who have, in the opinion of the Council, rendered eminent services to the Council. This Scheme has been adopted by Ashford Borough to recognise and award Past Members that have demonstrated long term and dedicated service to this Council.
2. The Council agreed that eligible Past Members would need to have achieved certain criteria during their service as Councillor. In summary, a nominee will need to have served at least twelve years or three terms as Councillor of Ashford Borough. In addition, all eligible Past Members should have a good attendance record at Council and at their various Committee meetings. Furthermore, all responsibilities undertaken by nominees as representatives of their Ward and their wider participation in outside organisations will be considered.
3. The adopted scheme provides for Honorary Alderman to be invited by the Council to attend various civic events from time to time. The names of individuals awarded the title will also be included on a dedicated Honours Board which will be placed in the Council Chamber.

Nominations

4. The Civic Honours and Awards Board met on 11th July 2023 to consider and recommend the nominees for the title of Honorary Alderman to Full Council. The Board comprises of the following members;
 - Jo James OBE, Chief Executive of the Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce.
 - Christine Drury, South East Regional Chair and Vice Chair of Campaign to Protect Rural England.
 - Cllr Noel Ovenden, Leader of the Council.
 - Tracey Kerly, Chief Executive of Ashford Borough Council.
5. All eligible Past Members were put forward as potential nominees to the Civic Honours and Awards Board. The outcome of this meeting is presented in the exempt Appendix to this report, listing the names of the recommended nominees to receive the Honorary Alderman title. Subject to the Council agreeing to the suggested list of former Members, their names will reproduced in the minutes of the meeting.

6. The exempt Appendix also contains a short summary of each nominee's service to the Borough. Prior to this Extraordinary Meeting, all nominees have been contacted to ascertain that they wish to accept the title of Honorary Alderman.
7. Members should be reminded that the recommendations for the title of Honorary Alderman should be passed as a Council Resolution and receive support of not less than two thirds of the Members at the meeting. Therefore, all Members are asked to consider the nominees compiled in the exempt report.
8. Subject to approval of the suggested nominations arrangements will be made to hold a special Ceremony that confers the title of Honorary Alderman to the awarded nominees. The ceremony has been planned to take place following the conclusion of the Full Council meeting on 19th October 2023. We will also present each Honorary Alderman with a heraldic badge to symbolise their achievement.

Portfolio Holder's Views

9. The Portfolio Holder is the Leader of the Council and he fully supports the recommendations of the Civic Honours and Awards Board.

Recommendations: The Council is recommended to:-

Agree that the nominees as listed in the exempt Appendix to the report be conferred with the title of Honorary Alderman of Ashford Borough in accordance with Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972.

Contact and Email

Contact: Danny Sheppard
Email: danny.sheppard@ashford.gov.uk

By virtue of paragraph(s) 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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