



## 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, 19th October, 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** 3 - 4

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 20th July 2023** 5 - 22
5. **To receive any announcements from the Mayor, Leader or other Members of the Cabinet**
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 27th July 2023 and the 28th September 2023** 23 - 40
9. **To receive the Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit Committee held on the 3rd October 2023** 41 - 44
10. **Audit Committee Annual Report 2022/23 (to follow)**
11. **To consider Motions of which Notice has been given pursuant to Procedure Rule 11**
12. **Questions by Members of which Notice has been given pursuant to Procedure Rule 10**

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.

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DS  
11<sup>th</sup> October 2023

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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](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 **20<sup>th</sup> July 2023**.

### Present:

His Worshipful the Mayor, Cllr. L W Krause (Chairman);

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

### Also Present:

Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive, Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer, Director of Customer, Technology and Finance, Director Health and Wellbeing, Director of Place, Space and Leisure, Assistant Director of Environment, Property and Recreation, Assistant Director of HR, Customer Services, Communications and Digitalisation, Assistant Director of Planning and Development, Principal Solicitor (Strategic Development), Civic Officer, Member Services Manager.

### Apologies:

Cllrs. Buchanan, Gathern, L Suddards.

Prior to the commencement of the meeting The Reverend Starkings said prayers.

## 81 Exempt or Confidential Information

The Mayor asked whether any items should be dealt with in private because of the likely disclosure of exempt or confidential information. The Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer advised that there were none, however if Members wished to discuss any Minutes which had arisen from exempt reports, or the exempt Appendix to Agenda Item 15, then there would be a need to pass the resolution to exclude the press and public.

## 82 Declarations of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Bartlett	Made a 'Voluntary Announcement' as a Member of Kennington Community Council.	92
Dean	Made a 'Voluntary Announcement' as a former Member and Chair of Kennington Community Council.	92

Feacey	Made a 'Voluntary Announcement' as he was Chairman of the Ashford Volunteer Centre.	88
	Made a 'Voluntary Announcement' that he had a close relative who ran fishing lakes in the Borough.	91
	Declared an "Other Significant Interest" as Chairman of the Ashford International Development Company. He said he would not take part in the debate or vote on this item and he did not do so.	86 (a)
Giles	Made a 'Voluntary Announcement' as a Member of Kingsnorth Parish Council and a signatory to the fishing petition.	91
Hayward	Made a 'Voluntary Announcement' as a Member of Kingsnorth Parish Council and a signatory to the fishing petition.	91
Hicks	Made a 'Voluntary Announcement' as a Member of Kingsnorth Parish Council.	91
Iliffe	Made a 'Voluntary Announcement' as a Member of Kennington Community Council.	92
Pauley	Made a 'Voluntary Announcement' as a Member of Kennington Community Council.	92
Spain	Made a 'Voluntary Announcement' as a Member of Kennington Community Council.	92
Townend	Made a 'Voluntary Announcement' as a Member of Kingsnorth Parish Council and a former member of the Stanhope Angling Society and two other local angling societies.	91

## 83 Minutes

### Resolved:

**That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on the 30<sup>th</sup> May 2023 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.**

## 84 Announcements

### (a) The Mayor

The Mayor said he would like to begin with the Presentation of Long Service Certificates to past Councillors in recognition of their dedicated and, in many cases, long service to the Borough. He wanted to thank and congratulate the past Councillors on their

commitment to their great Borough and for their steadfast service over many years. It was good to see so many of them present. The following former Councillors attended the Meeting and were presented with certificates: - Mr Michael Burgess, Mr Dara Farrell, Mr William Howard, Mr George Sparks and Mr Howard Turner. It was advised that Mr Jim Wedgbury had given apologies as he was away. Separate arrangements would be made for the former Members who were unable to attend this Meeting to receive their certificates in due course.

The Mayor said that the key focus for his time in office would be communicating with their residents to provide the best service they could through reaching out, through networking and through signposting. In Ashford they were doing just this with the Eat Well, Spend Less Roadshow programme and he, the Mayoress and the Deputy Mayor had supported the last two roadshows in the Town Centre and at Farrow Court. Chatting to those attending has enabled them to understand a little better their needs and provide advice, guidance and information to our citizens. He wanted to thank all involved in coordinating the programme and he looked forward to joining them all for the next one.

He and the Mayoress had attended many events in their first few weeks and had been met with such kindness and warm welcomes it had been a real pleasure to represent Ashford since the 30th May. Some highlights included: - attending and arranging a number of awards ceremonies and afternoon tea surprises; joining Councillor Michael for the outstanding Challenger Games (he wanted to give particular congratulations to Councillor Michael for organising such an enjoyable event); along with Councillor Feacey, signing a recommitment to their Armed Forces Covenant, supporting their Armed Forces Community as well as attending a regional conference; raising the Flag for Armed Forces Week, visiting the stalls at the Armed Forces Day showcase and enjoying the REME Open Day; taking part in Big Green Week (an excellent programme to celebrate the action on climate change); launching the superb Ashford's Food and Drink Festival at the Coachworks; plus lots more. In fact between the Deputy and himself they had reached nearly 50 engagements in just 51 days!

The Mayor said that his Civic Service had been a special occasion for him and the Mayoress (who officiated!) and he knew that everyone who attended enjoyed a joyous celebration. He wanted to thank everyone who had attended and the Councillors, Officers and Clergy who had made it a day to remember.

Finally, he wanted to give Member a few dates for the diary. Sunday 19 November for his first fundraiser - The Mayor's Autumn Affair – which would be a relaxed lunch with live music, and Sunday 21 April 2024 for The Mayor's Civic Luncheon – which would be a formal lunch with a Michael Bublé Tribute act for entertainment. Both events would be at the London Beach Hotel starting at midday and he was counting on the support of his fellow Councillors to help him in raising funds for his chosen charities. Further details would be sent round in due course.

#### **(b) Leader of the Council**

The Leader said it had been almost two months since the new Administration was formed – well 51 days, 1224 hours or 73,440 seconds not that he was counting! In that time he had met with other Kent Leaders, East Kent College, the Police Chief Inspector and their MP to name but a few. There had been countless meetings and discussions

with the Council's Senior Leadership Team, Portfolio Holders, Officers and other Members of the Council. Having taken stock of the legacy inherited from the last Administration he had focussed on a number of main areas: -

- Supporting Officers to continue to deliver the savings necessary to support their budget as agreed.
- Working to deliver a financially and risk acceptable scheme to unlock their Local Plan and housing delivery, particularly affordable, social and temporary accommodation.
- And to review the hybrid working practices of the Council and examine solutions to monitor the delivery of services in a modern workplace.

With that in mind, in the past few weeks he had met with other District Council Leaders from across the Country, travelling first to a round table meeting on the fringe of the LGA Conference in Bournemouth, all of whom were affected by the moratorium on housebuilding due to the Nutrient Neutrality regulations (Stodmarsh). Although a very informative meeting, like many they all experienced after an hour and a half it was about to wrap up without actions or resolutions, so he proposed that as a cross-party group they write directly to Number 10. This was unanimously agreed and by the end of that week the letter had been drafted and signed. The following Monday morning the letter was sent and within four hours they had a request to visit Number 10 who promised they would be in listening mode. That past Monday he had travelled to Downing Street to attend the meeting. He asked Government to accept the gravity of the issue and take ownership, further suggesting that they worked together to deliver fully funded solutions. He had been banging on every door he could and they didn't come any more important than that one. They also invited Ashford's MP, Damian Green, to be briefed by Officers so that he might be better informed of the difficulties that they were facing and he had offered his support to this plight.

The Leader advised that on the financial front, the Council was facing precisely the same issues as the rest of the Country - high interest rates, high inflation and high energy costs. Their revenue stream was diminishing and they were faced with a huge hole to plug. In future years they would have a gap of around £3m to be filled with either increased income or reduced costs. This was a year on year problem and as a Council, all 47 of them, they needed to get behind their Officers and help them deliver a solution. He asked Members to be respectful and remember that time was money.

Finally, he said he had one request for a plug. The KCC Prevent Team were coming to Ashford to hold a Prevent Awareness Training event the following day - Friday 21st July from 10am – 3.00pm. This session would cover many topics including Prevent, Radicalisation, Extremist Identities and Incels, all with a local context and information on referral pathways. If Members were free he encouraged them to attend this free of charge event which was being held in the Council Chamber. Members should have received the details by email but if not please contact the Member Services team who would be able to will resend it.

## **85 Questions from Members of the Public**

In accordance with Procedure Rule 9.2 Mr Ransley, a member of the public, had registered to ask a question. He advised that his question related to Minute No 367 of



the Cabinet of 30<sup>th</sup> March 2023 and the release of a further £50m funding for the Newton Works development. He had previously expressed concerns relating to the grant of planning permission and the discharging of pre-commencement conditions for this development. In that context his question was – In light of the proposed £138m in financial exposure to the Council, and the challenges this must cause Officers in remaining impartial, what lessons had been learned and what safeguards had been put in place to reassure residents that the mistakes, or omissions, that had already occurred with this site, would not similarly be repeated with future applications?

The Leader of the Council thanked Mr Ransley for his question. He advised that Minute No. 367 was a recommendation to Council, from the Cabinet meeting of 30 March 2023, to agree a loan facility to the Ashford International Development Company for the construction of film studios and workshops at Newtown Works to the value of £50m, subject to a detailed due diligence process. That recommendation would be considered under the next item on the Agenda and in the meantime, he asked the Solicitor to the Council to give a response to the question.

The Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer advised that the Questioner had referred to a number of legal, financial and planning issues. Clearly it would not be appropriate to give legal advice or confidential financial or commercial advice in a public meeting, so he would avoid doing that. However, to set the context for this issue - previous decisions by the Council have approved a loan facility to the Ashford International Development Company (AIDC) for the construction of residential properties at Newtown Works to the value of £65m. The relevant legal agreements were signed last year and this funding was being drawn down. Thus, if the £50m was approved, the total loan commitment to AIDC would be £115m - not £138m as asserted by the Questioner. Importantly, AIDC was an asset-backed company which owned the site and was developing it. For the residential loan, draw-downs were only permitted against work completed to the appropriate value. Similar arrangements would be negotiated for the £50m studios loan, as part of the due diligence process. Under the Cabinet's recommendation to this meeting, the detailed due diligence arrangements would be delegated to the Chief Executive, taking into account the recommendations of a Due Diligence Working Group of senior Councillors and Officers. At the last Cabinet meeting, the Leader of the Council advised Members that he would be adding Group Leaders to the Due Diligence Working Group. The Questioner had asserted that "mistakes or omissions have already occurred with this site", and sought reassurance with regard to future applications for the site. As most Members would know, all planning applications for new housing and overnight accommodation within the Stour Catchment Area, or that would discharge into a relevant Wastewater Treatment Works, were required to submit a Mitigation Strategy to the Council. This must quantify the nutrient loading associated with the proposed development in line with the latest Natural England methodology, and identify suitable mitigation to achieve nutrient neutrality. The proposed mitigation was then examined by independent consulting engineers instructed by the Assistant Director of Planning and Development. The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, as amended, required the Council to only approve a planning application if it would have no significant effect on Stodmarsh. This was established through carrying out an Appropriate Assessment. Natural England were consulted on the findings of each draft Appropriate Assessment, and the Council was under a duty to consider their response before adopting the Appropriate Assessment. Key to finalising the Appropriate Assessment was the ability to secure the proposed mitigation through planning conditions and/or s.106 obligations. Only when that had

been done to the satisfaction of the Assistant Director would planning permission be granted.

As he had explained, there was to be a detailed due diligence process for the studios loan, in which all relevant risks (including reputational, planning, financial and procedural risks) would be considered by the Due Diligence Working Group and the Chief Executive prior to a final decision being taken. This provided the opportunity for risks to the studios project to be considered, which could include some of those raised by the Questioner. There was therefore no reason to amend or defer the Recommendation from Cabinet to approve the principle of the proposed £50m loan.

## **86 Cabinet – 30<sup>th</sup> March and 29<sup>th</sup> June 2023**

### **(a) Cabinet – 30<sup>th</sup> March 2023**

**Resolved:**

- That (i) the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 30<sup>th</sup> March 2023 be received and noted with the exception of Minute Nos. 363 and 367**
- (ii) Minute Nos. 363 and 367 be approved and adopted.**

### **(b) Cabinet – 29<sup>th</sup> June 2023**

With reference to Minute No. 47 (Final Outturn 2022/23), Councillor Chilton said he has asked about the possible formation of a Medium Term Financial Plan Task Group and asked of there had been any progress. The Leader advised that a report would be coming forward to Cabinet the following week proposing the creation of such a cross party Working Group.

With reference to Minute No. 50 (Severance Costs Associated with Service Review Savings), Councillor Charles Suddards asked if the Portfolio Holder for People and Services could give a guarantee that there would be no compulsory redundancies as part of future savings proposals. The Portfolio Holder advised that she could not give such a guarantee at this time. It was an unknown and something on which further advice would be taken at the time of any proposals coming forward.

**Resolved:**

- That (i) the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 29<sup>th</sup> June 2023 be received and noted with the exception of Minute Nos. 49 and 50.**
- (ii) Minute Nos. 49 and 50 be approved and adopted.**

## **87 Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 13<sup>th</sup> June 2023**

**Resolved:**

**That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on the 13<sup>th</sup> June 2023 be approved and adopted.**

## **88 Selection and Constitutional Review Committee – 13<sup>th</sup> July 2023**

Councillor Bell said that following this meeting there had been a little bit of discomfort that a Cabinet Member had been proposed to Chair the Standards Committee. He pointed to other Authorities, and indeed Westminster, where this was disallowed and he thought this Council should follow best practice. He said the previous Chair was still a Member of the Committee and had a lot of experience having been in this role for the last four years.

He therefore proposed that “Councillor Clair Bell be appointed as Chair of the Standards Committee for the ensuing year”.

This was seconded by Councillor Heyes.

In response to a question, the Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer advised that there was nothing unconstitutional about a Cabinet Member Chairing the Standards Committee but as there were now two valid nominations there would need to be a vote to decide which nominee was appointed. Each Councillor present would have one vote only and the decision would be made on a show of hands by simple majority.

### **Resolved:**

- That (i) **the Minutes of the Meeting of the Selection and Constitutional Review Committee held on the 13<sup>th</sup> July 2023 be approved and adopted, with the exception of the nomination for Chair of the Standards Committee.**
- (ii) **Councillor Mrs Bell be appointed as Chair of the Standards Committee.**

## **89 Audit Committee – 20<sup>th</sup> June 2023**

With reference to Minute No. 41 (External Audit Progress Report), Councillor Charles Suddards referred to the statement that Grant Thornton would be able to complete the 2021/22 Audit very soon and asked if the Portfolio Holder for Performance and Direction had received any communication from Grant Thornton to that effect, and if not, would she be chasing that up? The Portfolio Holder advised that they had not yet received this but would continue to chase and would advise Members when this was received.

### **Resolved:**

**That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit Committee held on the 20<sup>th</sup> June 2023 be received and noted.**

## **90 Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Annual Report 2022/23**

Councillor Ovenden, as Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee during the relevant period, said he would like to thank all Members and Officers involved with Overview and Scrutiny during the past year. It had been a busy year and they had thoroughly investigated a number of issues.

### **Resolved:**

**That the report be received and accepted.**

## **91 Notice of Motion – To Restore Fishing at The Moat, Park Farm**

Councillor Chilton introduced a Notice of Motion that he had given pursuant to Procedure Rule 11 and was detailed in full in the Supplementary Agenda.

He said that following the pandemic the importance of access to outside spaces for leisure and recreation purposes had never been greater. Recent research had shown that there had been a surge in the popularity of reconnecting with nature and hobbies such as fishing. He remembered going to fish at The Moat as a young child with his family, progressing to larger scale fishing as he got older, and it saddened him to think the next generation may lose that opportunity. Tonight the Council had the opportunity to do something about that. Their decision to close The Moat to fishing had upset many residents of Park Farm. A Facebook group objecting to this had attracted some 142 members and the petition started by Kingsnorth Parish Council currently had 792 signatures. He knew the new Ward Member supported the restoration of fishing at The Moat and all candidates who had stood in the recent elections had expressed their support, but he also considered it was a wider issue that should be of interest to all Members as The Moat was an asset for the entire Borough to enjoy. He thanked the current Mayor, Councillor Krause for his efforts to mediate a meeting with all concerned in 2022 and commended the efforts of Kingsnorth Parish Council and others.

Councillor Chilton therefore moved the following Motion: -

That the Council resolves: -

- To undertake a thorough and comprehensive review of the decision to close The Moat to fishing, and the likely negative impact on local residents etc etc.
- To re-consider the options for de-silting The Moat, as put forward to ABC's Management Team in Autumn 2021, with a view to selecting the best option for de-silting The Moat at the earliest opportunity (preferably during the winter of 2023/24).
- To work with the Parish Council and local residents to support the establishment of a community based angling club that will manage the fishery in a sustainable and transparent manner and in accordance with best practice.

- To acknowledge the Council's responsibility to maintain The Moat and commit to set aside funds to undertake de-silting at regular intervals.
- To report back to Full Council within 6 months on the progress made towards restoring fishing at The Moat.
- To follow up on the recommendations made in March 2020 Report by EPS *Design Park Farm Moat, Kingsnorth, Ashford Study concerning Low Water Level*'.

The content of the Motion was seconded by Councillor Spain.

The Mayor said that for clarification, the background papers to the Motion had referred to a potential cost of "at least £200,000" for transporting the silt to landfill and an alternative potential amount of £35,000 for depositing and bunding up locally. He said the former cost would be needed as it was considered toxic waste and had to be securely disposed of at a specialist site in North Kent. Also the 2022 meeting referred to at which he had mediated, had taken place in the second half of 2022 rather than the first, before he had been Mayor and he had been asked to do this by the Deputy Chief Executive, rather than the Leader, in his then role as Deputy Portfolio Holder for Finance.

The Portfolio Holder for Recreation and Public Spaces responded to the Motion. She thanked those who had brought it forward and said it did demonstrate the complexity of this particular site. It was a medieval moat so there had to be consultation with English Heritage and it also acted as a SUDS for the Park Farm Estate. She said she was happy to accept the majority of the motion, but did have some concerns about some aspects including committing to concrete dates (particularly bearing in mind fishing seasons) and whether de-silting would be the best option to commit to, before a thorough and comprehensive review was undertaken. She therefore proposed the following amendments to the Motion: -

- To undertake a thorough and comprehensive review of the decision to close The Moat to fishing, and the likely negative impact on **all** local residents and **users etc etc.**
- To re-consider ~~the~~ all options for ~~de-silting~~ **the health and sustainability of** The Moat, as put forward to ABC's Management Team in Autumn 2021, with a view to selecting the best option for ~~de-silting~~ **the sustainability** of The Moat at the earliest opportunity ~~(preferably during the winter of 2023/24).~~
- ~~To work with the Parish Council and local residents to support the establishment of a community based angling club that will manage the fishery in a sustainable and transparent manner and in accordance with best practice.~~ **The outcome of the full review, including the impact on all residents and users and any costs associated, must come back to Full Council for any future decision.**
- To acknowledge **that The Moat is owned by ABC and is an ABC asset** and the Council's responsibility to maintain it and commit to set aside funds to undertake de-silting at regular intervals **if deemed appropriate.**

- To report back to **Cabinet** Full Council within 6 months on a **future options appraisal** for the progress made towards restoring fishing at The Moat.
- To follow up on the recommendations made in March 2020 Report by EPS Design *Park Farm Moat, Kingsnorth, Ashford Study concerning Low Water Level*.

This was seconded by Councillor Townend.

A number of Members spoke in favour of both the original Motion and the amended Motion. A summary of the comments is outlined below.

There was some concern about de-silting and potential methods and whether this was even the preferred option. It was pointed out that this decision could form part of any review. The Leader said he supported the principle of the original motion, but he knew that investigations were already ongoing and wondered if it would have been better for Members to engage with that work rather than bringing a specific Motion to Full Council. His only concerns were around committing to specific timescales and costs. This was a complex issue and accurate figures were needed – it was unlikely these would be available in time for this year's budget setting process. Some Members also considered there had to be some realism over the financial situation of the Council and not committing to unlimited amounts of funding for certain projects over others which may benefit a wider cross section of the population.

The importance of communities being able to enjoy outside spaces was stressed in terms of health and wellbeing and avoiding anti-social behaviour. It was also emphasised that the purpose for bringing this Motion was to ensure that a way was found to move this issue forward in a timely manner. Costs and finance had been mentioned, but the potential ability for a fishing club to make an income was stressed and some Members said it should not be assumed that the only options were expensive ones.

A vote was then taken on the amended motion. This Motion was carried.

**Resolved:**

- That
- (i) **the Council undertake a thorough and comprehensive review of the decision to close The Moat to fishing, and the likely negative impact on all local residents and users.**
  - (ii) **the Council re-consider all options for the health and sustainability of The Moat, as put forward to ABC's Management Team in Autumn 2021, with a view to selecting the best option for the sustainability of The Moat at the earliest opportunity.**
  - (iii) **the outcome of the full review, including the impact on all residents and users and any costs associated, must come back to Full Council for any future decision.**
  - (iv) **the Council acknowledge that The Moat is owned by ABC and is an ABC asset and the Council's responsibility to maintain it and commit**

**to set aside funds to undertake de-silting at regular intervals if deemed appropriate.**

- (v) a report come back to Cabinet on a future options appraisal for The Moat.**

In accordance with Procedure Rule 15.5 Councillors Feacey and Hicks asked for it to be recorded that they had abstained from voting on this item.

## **92 Notice of Motion – Bockhanger Square Community Facility**

Councillor Spain introduced a Notice of Motion that he had given pursuant to Procedure Rule 11 and was detailed in full in the Supplementary Agenda.

He said that about four years ago this Council had unanimously voted to support a Motion to pursue a new community facility for Bockhanger. This had been put in to the hands of Kennington Community Council who had done a good job to date in undertaking consultations and obtaining information, but they had now got to a stage where they required more support from the Borough Council. Particularly on identifying external funding streams. It was clear that there was demand for a substantial community centre in this area, built sustainably and retaining the green space. Residents did not favour the residential led scheme that had been put forward.

Councillor Spain therefore moved the following Motion: -

That this Council resolves:

- To work with Kennington Community Council, local Borough Councillors, residents and other stakeholders, to develop a detailed plan and proposal for all the community facilities on Bockhanger Square, including a stand-alone community facility building, incorporating amongst other features a function hall distinctly larger than those available currently, of at least 400 sq. metres, on the Bockhanger Square site.
- To take the leading role in seeking funding for the facilities from all available sources, including the Borough Council itself, the Kennington Community Council, and grant-making and other potential national, regional, and local funding sources.
- To facilitate and enable the final design and building of the facilities as soon as possible, in consultation with residents and all other key stakeholders.
- To ensure that the facility is designed to be as sustainable as possible, incorporating technologies including solar panels, rainwater recycling, ground source heat pumps, high levels of insulation, and uses sustainable construction materials, for example is designed as a mass-timber structure.

- To work with local stakeholders including residents, businesses, community groups, Kennington Community Council, and others, to ensure the long-term successful operation of the new community facilities helping to establish strong governance and operational arrangements, potentially including the establishment of a trust to operate the facilities.

The content of the Motion was seconded by Councillor Dean.

The Portfolio Holder for Homes and Homelessness responded to the Motion. He thanked those who had brought it forward for their passion and understood the views of local residents. He said he was broadly supportive of the aims but said it was important to consider Officer time and the Council's finances. He therefore proposed the following amended Motion: -

- That the Council commits to identifying a community facility solution for the residents surrounding Bockhanger Square.
- That the Council provides support to Kennington Community Council to facilitate access to appropriate funding streams.
- That the above support must be considered responsibly, within the resources available and within the limitations on revenue and capital budgets, including the impact upon corporate priorities.
- That a report will be taken through the Cabinet as soon as practicable.

This was seconded by Councillor Harman.

Councillor Bartlett gave a timeline of events since 2021 and outlined that work that had gone on via the Kennington Community Council. He said the views of the local community were clear, there was not support for a housing led scheme and a solution now needed to be found at pace. He said he therefore supported the original Motion.

Councillor Spain thanked Councillor Barrett for his amended Motion, which again he broadly supported, but proposed that his original points 4 and 5, regarding sustainability and governance, be added back in.

This was seconded by Councillor Dean.

A vote was then taken on the amended motion. This Motion was carried unanimously.

**Resolved:**

- That**
- (i) the Council commits to identifying a community facility solution for the residents surrounding Bockhanger Square.**
  - (ii) the Council provides support to Kennington Community Council to facilitate access to appropriate funding streams.**



- (iii) **the above support must be considered responsibly, within the resources available and within the limitations on revenue and capital budgets, including the impact upon corporate priorities.**
- (iv) **a report will be taken through the Cabinet as soon as practicable.**
- (v) **the facility is designed to be as sustainable as possible, incorporating technologies including solar panels, rainwater recycling, ground source heat pumps, high levels of insulation, and uses sustainable construction materials, for example is designed as a mass-timber structure.**
- (vi) **the Council work with local stakeholders including residents, businesses, community groups, Kennington Community Council, and others, to ensure the long-term successful operation of the new community facilities helping to establish strong governance and operational arrangements, potentially including the establishment of a trust to operate the facilities.**

## **93 Questions by Members**

### **(a) Question from Councillor Bell to Councillor Ovenden, Leader of the Council**

“The current recycling target of 50% was regularly exceeded under the last Administration for a number of years and there seems to be a recycling target of 65% in 2035. Will the current Administration put in place slightly more ambitious green plans and targets of, say, 55% by 2025 and 60% by 2030 as stepping stones to the 65% in 2035?”

### **Reply by Councillor Ovenden**

“Mr Mayor, in 2018 the Government set out its Waste and Resources Strategy for England. From that, further proposals have been developed for Deposit Return Schemes (where plastic bottles and potentially other drinks containers will be able to be returned to vendors with money back to the purchasers) and Extended Producer Responsibility, which is effectively driving the reduction in packaging on products to avoid the need to pay to dispose of them as a waste. These initiatives will and are changing what becomes a waste or recycling item at kerbside collections from households. The extent of implementation of these initiatives have been the subject of consultation from Government but a clear way forward for implementation, is yet to emerge. There are also issues around glass recycling which is measured by weight, so removal of that weight could also affect our numbers. Our recycling rate is a percentage of the total of both the recyclates and the waste we collect. This will change in the coming years as a result of the changes mentioned above and the effect of emerging legislative drivers is not yet clear. This is not the time to commit to changes in recycling targets without the benefit of understanding the impact of proposed changes. However, this Administration is committed to both the best environmental outcomes and the best value for money to the Kent taxpayer in the delivery of our waste and recycling services. To that end, this Administration has ensured one of our senior officers has committed to co-chair the Kent Resources Partnership (KRP), to drive change on a Kent wide scale.

The KRP has membership from all Kent Authorities and is being led in a “reset” to deliver the best value to the Kent tax payer and to drive down the carbon impact of the services we deliver. This work will be outlined to Overview and Scrutiny as part of this year’s programme and will encompass the mobilisation of the new waste contract and our plans for the future service.”

**(b) Question from Councillor Bell to Councillor Ovenden, Leader of the Council**

“Will the Council publish useful details showing:

- i. How much time Council staff (by department) work from home and how much time is based in the office?
- ii. Will there always be at least some staff in the office for face-to-face work in every department on every workday (e.g., 50%)?
- iii. Whether our most senior staff are based in the office full-time?
- iv. What assumptions are being made regarding staff working from home in the move to International House?

I’m not saying if home working is a good or bad thing, but it would be useful to have that information.”

**Reply by Councillor Ovenden**

“Thank you, I have also asked this question seeking more clarity on the Council’s Hybrid working arrangements. My understanding is that Overview and Scrutiny have asked for a report on this matter and a report will be coming forward that will review and answer your questions, there is also an International House report due in September. The Council operates as a number of different business units and a one size fits all approach is not appropriate, however managers have been instructed to make sure that there is an adequate presence in the office to meet service needs and data from the desk booking system shows that the larger service units have a presence in the office each day. I do not think that that the public mind where the work is done, only that it is done. Therefore, we need to develop and monitor key performance indicators to ensure services are being delivered to the standards we expect.”

**Supplementary Question by Councillor Heyes**

“I just wanted to ask about access to staff for Members. In the past Councillors had named contact details for individual Officers rather than just departments and responses were generally quicker. Should such a list be re-introduced so all Councillors have that direct access?”

**Reply by Councillor Ovenden**

“Thank you, yes I do also share those concerns and I am keen to enable the best communication lines possible. I am not sure if there should be a physical publication, but I agree there should be better access. Perhaps this would be better directed via Senior Officers initially, but it is something we will look at.

**(c) Question from Councillor Bell to Councillor Ovenden, Leader of the Council**

“I would like to make sure that all the tenants in my ward who are eligible to benefit from the "Right To Buy" are fully aware of the scheme and have all the information they need to make their own informed decision as to whether they wish to take it up. Will the Council support me in this?”

**Reply by Councillor Ovenden**

“Mr Mayor, if I may, I will pass this question to the Portfolio Holder for Homes and Homelessness to respond to”

**Reply by Councillor Barrett**

“Thank you Councillor Bell for your question. This Council is committed to ensuring that everybody on our Borough thrives and achieves their full potential. This of course included financial potential and independence. Our tenants are therefore fully appraised of their rights and our role as a housing provider, including if they qualify under the “Right to Buy” scheme. Indeed we have trained staff in the Housing department that assess and process all Right To Buy applications in a fair and balanced manner. Useful guidance is also provided on our website. Indeed primary evidence of how effective the Council is at processing Right To Buy applications since the 1980s is the fact that our stocks have dwindled from 12,000 homes in the early 1980s, to roughly 5,500 today. A really stark fact that you can interpret in any way you wish. It is nevertheless considered prudent to ensure that tenants with access to a secure tenancy in social housing are aware of the risk associated with buying their own property, such as the fact that if they fail to keep up payments on a mortgage they could lose their home. Tenants would therefore be assisted in an open and unbiased manner when approaching the Council to exercise their right to buy. It is accepted that Ward Members work hard for their constituents and are welcome to reiterate that ABC tenants may have the right to buy their home if they wish. But as Portfolio Holder I feel secure in stating that we exercise our duties in regards to this scheme with all due diligence.”

**Supplementary Question by Councillor Bell**

“So, I suppose my Supplementary Question is, is that a yes?”

**Reply by Councillor Barrett**

“Basically, yes!”

**Supplementary Question by Councillor Brunger-Randall**

“I fully support the Right To Buy and ask whether 100% of the receipts for such sales will be available and put back in to the communities where the houses are lost, or will it go across the Borough? I am a little concerned it will leave certain areas lacking such housing.”

### **Reply by Councillor Barrett**

"Thank you for the question. Yes, receipts will go back into the overall pot and will be used for schemes which will benefit, and be available to, the whole Borough. A lot of thought goes in to this so, yes, 100% of the receipts will be available, but it is important to ensure that best use is being made of that money."

### **(d) Question from Councillor Bartlett to Councillor Wright, Portfolio Holder for Communities and Health**

"KCC have launched a consultation on how the Community Warden Scheme should be updated and made fit for future purposes as the County evolves. Will the new Administration contribute to this?"

### **Reply by Councillor Wright**

"I thank Councillor Bartlett for his question. Community Wardens in the Wards where they are based perform a valued service supporting vulnerable members of our community, particularly working among the elderly. The consultation document is now live and the Council's response is being actively worked on by the Director of Health and Wellbeing in time for the closing date of 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2023. The Administration support the principle of ensuring the current services offers value for money and our response will consider the core objectives and any negative impacts that the changes proposed by KCC may have concerning the residents of the Borough. These core objectives are: - strengthening community resilience to ensure Stronger, Safer Communities – helping residents feel safer and be resilient at times of challenge; supporting the elderly and vulnerable – facilitating access to the right support, care and services; fostering community cohesion and wellbeing – working across communities to help build a sense of community; and assisting residents to navigate public services."

### **Supplementary Question by Councillor Bartlett**

"In view of the perception of our Town Centre including Anti-Social Behaviour, violence, rough sleeping and street drinking, will the new Administration look at setting clear parameters regarding the look and feel of our Town Centre that could be positively supported by the new Community Warden Service?"

### **Reply by Councillor Wright**

"We will certainly look at this in the future and our Officers will address this and propose solutions. You will all be well aware that KCC is facing the same financial pressures as this Council, so I am sure it will be appreciated that it is not possible for me to answer any questions on financial matters at this stage and this will have to be deferred to Officers."

## **94 Exclusion of the Public**

As Members wished to refer to individual Members, the Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer advised it would be necessary to exclude the press and public by passing the appropriate resolution.

**Resolved:**

**That pursuant to Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item, as it is likely in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings that if members of the public were present there would be disclosure of exempt information hereinafter specified by reference to Paragraph 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, where in the circumstances the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.**

## **95 Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Annual Report 2022/23**

The Leader introduced the report which advised that 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 had now been operating successfully for nearly four years. The report now sought approval from Council of the recommended nominations for the conferment of the title of Honorary Alderman from the Group of Councillors who stepped down or were not returned in the May 2023 Local Elections.

During the course of the debate an additional eligible Member was put forward. This nomination was voted on but not carried by the two thirds of Members present at the meeting.

**Resolved:**

**That the following nominees be conferred with the title of Honorary Alderman of Ashford Borough Council in accordance with Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972: -**

**Mr Michael Burgess;  
Mr Gerald Clarkson CBE;  
Mr Paul Clokie OBE;  
Mr William Howard;  
Mr. Neil Shorter.**

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## Cabinet

Minutes of a Meeting of the Cabinet held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **27<sup>th</sup> July 2023**.

### Present:

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

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

### Present:

Cllr. Barrett.

### Also Present:

Cllrs. Bartlett, Bell, Chilton, Dean, Feacey, Gathern, Gauder, Giles, Hallett, Heyes, Meaden, Michael, Pickering, Roden, Spain.

### In attendance:

Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive, Director of Customer, Technology and Finance, Director of Health and Wellbeing, Director of Place, Space and Leisure, Assistant Director of Environment, Property and Leisure, Assistant Director of Planning and Development, Assistant of Director of Housing, Head of Policy and Performance, Head of Economic Development, Service Lead – Finance, Safety and Wellbeing Manager, Grounds Maintenance Operations Manager, Economic Development Manager, Town Centre Regeneration Manager, Project Manager (National Lottery Heritage Fund), Principal Solicitor (Strategic Development), Senior Recovery Officer, Economic Development and Regeneration Officer, Communications Officer, Member Services Manager.

## 96 Declarations of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Feacey	Made a Voluntary Announcement as a Chairman of the Ashford Volunteer Centre.	106
	Made a Voluntary Announcement as a Chairman of the Ashford International Development Company	99
Gathern	Made a Voluntary Announcement as a friend of one of the report authors.	101

## 97 Minutes

### Resolved:

**That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 29<sup>th</sup> June 2023 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.**

## 98 Leader's Announcements

The Leader said that after the Full Council meeting the previous week there had been several observations on the poor state of the Council Chamber microphone system. Some Members may know that this would be the last Cabinet Meeting using the existing Audio Visual equipment. During August there would be extensive renovations carried out which would see new modern meeting equipment installed, including new microphone units, screens, projectors, cameras and, importantly, facilities to livestream and hold hybrid meetings. This would replace the current obsolete and unreliable equipment which was at its "end of life". This would also allow the Council to be able to professionally film and livestream their meetings itself, and be able to hold meetings in a hybrid fashion, with participants genuinely able to join remotely (although voting Members on Committees would still have to attend in person as per current legislation). They would also be able to undertake electronic voting and a number of other upgrades. It was hoped that the equipment would be fully installed and operational for meetings from September and ahead of the first few meetings, there would be training from the installers themselves for Members in how to use the new equipment. He was sure colleagues would agree this was a huge step forwards and reflected their ambitions as a modern and forward thinking Council.

He said that within tonight's agenda they were making proposals for setting up several Working Groups on : - Parking Strategy; Medium Term Financial Plan; Parks Foundation; and Housing Repairs. The make-up for these Groups would be the relevant Officers, Cabinet Portfolio Holder and one Member from each Political Group – which he would expect to be the Shadow Portfolio Holder. This was to ensure a focused conversation and allow continuity with joint portfolio meetings. They also had the Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group, which was open to all Members, and obviously Overview and Scrutiny as well. He considered this was cross-party working and Member involvement on a new and unprecedented scale.

The Leader also advised that he had recently come across one of the schemes supported using money from the Household Prosperity Fund. The Council had approached 10 Primary Schools in the Borough offering £1000 each to help families with things like school uniform for the next school year. He thought this was a really nice scheme, where they were using some Government money to help some of those in most need in the Borough.



## 99 Financial Monitoring Report

The Service Lead - Finance introduced the report which presented the Quarter 1 budget monitoring position up to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2023. The changing economic picture continued to put stress on the original budget assumptions and this was reflected within the report. The Quarter 1 forecast showed an overall pressure to the General Fund of £429,000. A full break down of the key movements since Quarter 2 was shown in the report. The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) was reporting a pressure of £542,000. The report also provided an update on the collection fund, treasury management, reserves and progress on corporate savings identified in the 2023/24 budget.

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

- The Medium Term Financial Plan Working Group would consider the proposed elimination of the capital budget for the Hubert Fountain in Victoria Park, against the merits of proposed capital expenditure on other projects. It was noted that there may also be opportunities to raise funding and gain grants via the proposed Ashford Parks Foundation.
- There was no specific delay on the modular housing solution at Henwood and this would still be delivered to the agreed timescale. The Council had attempted to bring this date forward, but this had not been possible due to the manufacturer's construction timescales.
- The current support for Tenterden Leisure Centre would be in place for 18-24 months. They would be going out to a full procurement for a permanent operator with capital investment and a payback/profit share arrangement so it was hoped this would generate an income in the future. The Portfolio Holder advised that there would be a targeted messaging campaign to ensure that local residents, users and potential users all knew that the Tenterden Leisure Centre was again open for business.

### **Resolved:**

- That**
- (i) the Quarter 1 forecast position for the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account be noted.**
  - (ii) the Collection Fund position be noted.**
  - (iii) the Capital Monitoring position be noted.**
  - (iv) the Treasury Management position be noted.**
  - (v) the provisional reserve allocations, at Table 8 of the report, be noted.**

- (vi) **the amendments to fees and charges, as outlined in Appendices C and D to the report, be approved.**
- (vii) **the proposal to create a Working Group to develop the Medium Term Financial Plan, including Shadow Portfolio Holders, be supported.**
- (viii) **the update on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural England Prosperity Fund, at Appendix E to the report, be noted.**

## **100 Revenues and Benefits Recommended Write-Offs Schedule**

The Senior Recovery Officer introduced the report which proposed the formal write off of £344,479.14. The proposals were in line with the Council's Revenues and Benefits Service Write-Off Policy and the Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer) had been consulted along with Heads of Service for relevant areas. She advised that the Council had robust processes in place for reviewing such debts and a suite of methods for tracing individuals and businesses. She would be happy to meet with any interested Members to explain the process in more detail.

In response to a question, the Leader said it was certainly his intention to continue the previous practice of going through a couple of cases at random with the Officers to provide assurance.

### **Resolved:**

- That
- (i) **the action that accounts totalling £39,032.58 have been written off under the delegated powers (Financial Regulations 11.1 refers) be noted.**
  - (ii) **the write offs listed in the Exempt Appendices totalling £305,446.56 be approved.**

## **101 Ashford Parks Foundation**

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which updated on the position of the £5.1m Heritage Lottery Funded (HLF) project in Victoria Park (this figure was inclusive of uplift, contingencies, and separate British Cycling Pump Track works). The report also sought to set up an Officer and Member Task and Finish Group to further explore, investigate and understand the feasibility, practicality and financial implications of delivering an Ashford Parks Foundation. In order to achieve this the report also sought to extend the employment of the HLF Project Manager to lead on this work.

**Resolved:**

- That**
- (i) the delivery of the National Lottery Heritage Funded (NLHF) capital project at Victoria Park be noted.**
  - (ii) it be agreed to extend the employment of the HLF Project Manager from December 2023 to 30 April 2024, in order to lead and report on a feasibility study for the potential of an Ashford Parks Foundation and to provide continuity with volunteer groups to continue required the legacy works.**
  - (iii) an Officer and cross-party Member Task and Finish group be set up to explore the viability of an Ashford Parks Foundation.**

## **102 Parking Tariff Review**

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which advised that over the last few years, the Council had experienced a significant increase in its costs relating to car parking, mainly driven by increased utility costs. The Council had a policy to review parking charges on a triennial cycle, however the last review had been postponed and so it had been four years since the charges were reviewed. This meant that the charges had now got out of sync with the cost of the service. The specific proposal was to increase all tariffs by an agreed percentage, approximately 10% (rounded to the nearest 10p) whereas CPI has increased by 20.18% since the last increase in charges. The report advised that the proposed charges would still be lower than those of their competitors, but there did need to be a review of the Council's wider parking policy to make sure that, whilst fitting within the budget envelope, the Council's parking provision and charging policies delivered its corporate objectives. The outcome of this review would be the production of a new parking strategy that would come forward to a future meeting of the Cabinet. The Portfolio Holder advised that he established a Working Group to have an oversight of this review and to bring forward proposals later in the year.

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

- Price increases were always regrettable, particularly in a cost of living crisis, however charges had not been increased for four years and the proposals were still significantly lower than the CPI increases during that time and were needed in order to cover operating costs. The new charges would be comparable with neighbouring areas.
- The 'free after 3(pm)' parking would still be in place for the timebeing, but would form part of the wider review.
- There could be no guarantees given about future pricing charges at this time. These would be looked at as part of the wider review. The Working Group would have an important role to play in that, considering all of the issues such as climate change, cycling/walking, bus usage and accessibility. It was

important to take the time to look at the wider picture and consider the matter properly.

- The review would certainly involve extensive consultation with local businesses and well as a wide range of other stakeholders.

**Resolved:**

**That an increase in on-street and off-street parking tariffs, from 1 October 2023, across the borough be agreed, by approximately 10% on current tariffs (e.g. £1.20 to £1.30, £2.40 to £2.60 etc.) and in accordance with the specific rates detailed within the report.**

### **103 Ashford Town Centre Business Grants**

The Portfolio Holder said that following from the last item she was hoping that this report would keep Ashford's car parks in place and busy. Ashford Town Centre should be the beating heart of the Borough and the previous administration had recognised this with the introduction of the Ashford Town Centre Support Grant scheme 2021/22. This had showed some success with £88,000 leading to nearly £250,000 in investment, 75 jobs created or supported, additional Business Rates receipts (£23,000) and six newly-filled premises. Despite current economic challenges, it was recognised that they needed to do more to further revitalise Ashford's Town Centre and create a place of prosperity and opportunity. The report detailed how the Council could continue to support a Town Centre Grant Funding Scheme by utilising Section 106 developer monies - therefore at no additional cost to the Council.

The Head of Economic Development introduced the report which reviewed the trial grant scheme and set out a proposed new Ashford Town Centre Grants policy for the period up to March 2025.

**Resolved:**

- That**
- (i) the content of the report and the work to deliver grants in Ashford Town Centre be noted.**
  - (ii) the Ashford Town Centre Business Grants Policy, to run between 2023-2025, be approved.**
  - (iii) the use of Officer delegation to approve the £140,000 of Section 106 funding to deliver this grants scheme be supported.**
  - (iv) delegated authority be granted to the Deputy Chief Executive to approve grants and administer the scheme.**

## **104 Corporate Enforcement Statement**

The Director of Health and Wellbeing introduced the report which presented an updated Corporate Enforcement Statement - setting out the Council's overarching approach to enforcement and implementing best practice as set out in the Regulators Code. Adopting a refreshed Statement would reiterate the Council's approach to taking fair, proportionate and transparent action when there were breaches of legislation or regulation that it was responsible for upholding.

### **Resolved:**

**That the Corporate Enforcement Statement be approved for publication on the Council's website.**

## **105 Statement of Community Involvement - Update**

The Portfolio Holder advised that she was pleased this update had come forward and it would be a key part of the upcoming Local Plan review. It would also be valid for all other plan-making and planning application processes and they would continue to look to expand to more platforms in the future. An update to the Statement of Community Involvement was required every five years, or prior to the formal examination stages of Development Plan Documents. Updates had been made to the document in accordance with revised legislation and the changing function of the planning service with regard to community planning issues and cooperation with other public bodies. She was also pleased to report that the Arcus system had restored the option to allow residents to sign to weekly email alerts for new planning applications on a ward basis. She hoped in future this could be expanded to a Parish level.

The Assistant Director of Planning and Development introduced the report and stressed that the statement outlined the minimum that the Council will do in different planning consultation situations and they would always look to go beyond that. In addition, for the first time, the statement set out who would be directly consulted on planning applications and that all planning applications would be available on the Council's website.

With regard to consultation on the Local Plan review a Member said he had appreciated the previous 'roadshows' out in the Parishes and hoped these would be repeated this time round.

### **Resolved:**

**That the content of the updated Statement of Community Involvement be agreed and the Assistant Director - Planning and Development, or the Spatial Planning Manager, be authorised to make any grammatical or other changes that are necessary in their opinion, for accuracy and consistency with legislation; and,**

**Recommended:**

**That the updated Statement of Community Involvement, incorporating such changes, be adopted as a local development document.**

## **106 Policy for Funding the Voluntary and Community Sector and Shared Prosperity Fund Criteria**

The Portfolio Holder said that as a Borough they were blessed to have an amazing variety of organisations within the voluntary sector, all supporting residents and this policy provided structure to how those organisations could be financially supported by the Council. The policy had returned to Cabinet having been presented to the previous Administration and then gone out for consultation. They had taken on board the comments from the consultation and also included how they intended to distribute the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural England Prosperity Fund funding they had recently been awarded.

The Head of Policy and Performance introduced the report which updated on outcome of the consultation and presented a final draft of the policy.

In response to a question, the Head of Policy and Performance advised that the consultation had targeted the Voluntary Sector and Parish, Town and Community Councils.

The Leader advised that the final policy would include the two matters discussed by Group Leaders – namely inclusion of being able fund adjacent Wards through Ward Member grants and ensuring that faith based organisations are only funded for projects or services that are available to the wider community.

**Resolved:**

- That**
- (i) the outcome of the consultation for the Policy for Funding the Voluntary and Community Sector be noted.**
  - (ii) the inclusion of UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural England Prosperity Fund grants be noted.**
  - (iii) subject to the addition of Members being permitted to fund adjacent Wards through Ward Member grants, and ensuring that faith based organisations are only funded for projects or services that are available to the wider community, the final draft policy be approved and adopted.**

## **107 Housing Repairs Contract**

The Assistant Director of Housing introduced the report which advised that the provision of a day to day responsive repairs service was currently outsourced by the Council to a main contractor – Equans (formerly Engie). Equans had given six

months' notice to terminate the contract which would end on the 30th November 2023. The report set out the options available to the Council to ensure that the Housing Service's 5,000 tenants continued to receive a service after the end of the contract and explored the most favourable option for delivering an improved and more efficient repairs service, including highlighting the potential for savings in the proposed delivery model to the Housing Revenue Account.

In response to questions it was confirmed that the proposals would give the Council the option to offer more traineeships and apprenticeships as well as potential revenue streams in the future. It would also allow the service to be more flexible and responsive.

**Resolved:**

- That**
- (i) the Responsive Repairs service become an in house operation.**
  - (ii) a cross-party Member Task and Finish Group be set up to include the Housing Portfolio Holder and Shadow Portfolio Holders.**
  - (iii) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader and relevant Portfolio Holders, to make a final decision on proceeding with bringing the repairs service in house - full business case will be developed to support the transfer.**
  - (iv) 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.**
  - (v) it be noted that the TUPE implications for bringing the service in house will be identified and discussed with Human Resources.**

## **108 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.**

## **109 Joint Transportation Board – Nomination of Membership**

**Resolved:**

**That the following Members be appointed to the Joint Transportation Board: Councillors Feacey, Forest, Gathern, Heyes (Ch), Joseph, Michael and Meaden.**

## **110 Trading and Enterprise Board – Nomination of Membership**

**Resolved:**

**That the following Members be appointed to the Trading and Enterprise Board: Councillors Betty (Ch), Harman, Ovenden, Walder. Councillor Bell to be appointed as Observer as the Leader of the largest Opposition Group.**

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Decisions effective from the 11<sup>th</sup> October 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 **28<sup>th</sup> September 2023**.

### Present:

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

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

### Apologies:

Cllr. Walder.

### Also Present:

Cllrs. Bartlett, Mrs Bell, Bell, Chilton, Dean, Feacey, Gathern, Hicks, Leavey, Ledger, Meaden, Michael, Pickering, Roden, Spain, C Suddards, L Suddards.

### In attendance:

Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive, Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer, Director of Health and Wellbeing, Director of Place, Space and Leisure, Assistant Director of Environment, Property and Leisure, Assistant Director of HR, Customer Services, Communications and Digitalisation, Head of Economic Development, Service Lead – Finance, Safety and Wellbeing Manager, Human Resources Manager, Economic Development Manager, Communications and Marketing Manager, Commercial Projects and Recreation Manager, Commercial Portfolio Operations Manager, Estates Manager, Project Manager – Commercial, Community Safety and Resilience Team Leader, Senior Governance and Data Protection Officer, Member Services Manager.

### In attendance (virtually):

Assistant of Director of Housing, Head of Policy and Performance,

## 141 Declarations of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Bartlett	Made a Voluntary Announcement as a Trustee of the Central Ashford Community Forum.	146
Feacey	Made a Voluntary Announcement as a Chairman of the Ashford Volunteer Centre.	147

Made a Voluntary Announcement as a Chairman of the Ashford International Development Company.

Wright                      Made a Voluntary Announcement as a Trustee                      147  
of Repton Connect Community Trust.

## 142 Minutes

A Member asked if there had been any development on the formation of an Ashford Parks Foundation Task Group. The Assistant Director of Environment, Property and Leisure advised that an Officer and cross-party Member Task and Finish had been set up, including the Lead Member and the two Shadow Portfolio Holders, and the first meeting would be held the following day.

Another Member asked for an update on the delayed modular housing solution at Henwood. The Portfolio Holder advised that he believed the project was not delayed and still on course for a May/June 2024 'go live' date, but he said he would provide a fuller update by email.

### Resolved:

**That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 27<sup>th</sup> July 2023 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.**

## 143 Corporate Performance Report

This report summarised performance against the Council's suite of KPIs reflecting the Corporate Plan 2022-24, for the Quarter 1 period 2023/24. The Portfolio Holder introduced the report and advised that this Quarter 1 report detailed the performance from around six weeks of the previous Administration and around six weeks of the current Administration. Therefore, in the spirit of teamwork, he was to introduce the report on behalf of both Administrations. The report had already been discussed at Overview and Scrutiny, a discussion she had missed due to a clash with a Parish Council meeting, but she had read the minutes of that meeting with interest. She wanted to draw attention to Page 18 of the report where the Ambition for Ashford is stated. This was a key statement and worthy of repeating as she believed this should be what guided all Councillors in their roles, regardless of political affiliation. She quoted - *"The Ashford Ambition: to be a thriving, productive and inclusive Borough in 2030 and beyond; a vital part of Kent and the South East where local businesses, social enterprises, communities and the public sector provide collective leadership to promote shared prosperity, happiness and wellbeing.* As Members would be aware, they were looking to achieve this ambition through the underlying principles and key performance indicators in the themes of Green Pioneer, Caring Ashford, and Targeted Growth. The report also highlighted specific activity in each of those theme areas.

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee reiterated the Committee's request to consider raising the recycling target from 50% to 55%. In response the Portfolio Holder advised that the current 50% was a KPI rather than a target and in his view it was indicative of where they should be as an Authority (not too far under or over). There was upcoming legislation that aimed to reduce the amount of waste being produced in general, so this was likely to have an effect on recycling KPIs and targets anyway and he thought it was premature to adjust any targets before that was taken into account. The Director of Place, Space and Leisure advised that a full report and presentation on the new waste contract, changing legislation and the recycling rate was coming to Overview and Scrutiny in October and she thought that would be a good opportunity for them to consider the issue and make recommendations to the Cabinet. The Leader thanked Overview and Scrutiny for their comments on recycling and advised it had sparked discussion with the Cabinet and Officers. He agreed that it was not the time to adjust any KPIs, but over the coming months they would be taking a long hard look at how best to promote and educate on recycling – the next stage of a communications push that in his view was long overdue.

**Resolved:**

**That the performance data for Quarter 1 2023/24 be received and noted.**

## **144 Update on the Broadband and Digital Infrastructure Improvements in the Ashford Borough**

The Head of Economic Development introduced the report which outlined the initiatives worked on, and progress made, by Ashford Borough Council over the past 12 months and set out the recommended actions moving forward.

A Member said he welcomed the report and the priority given to broadband by this Council. One area he hoped that would be pursued was emerging technologies such as Starlink, which would help boost, in particular, rural broadband. The Head of Economic Development advised that they were certainly examining emerging technologies. Project Gigabit and the Gigabit Voucher Schemes were the current focus but there was a need to better inform the public about the breadth of technologies that were available to them. There was some debate about Starlink and similar technologies and the difficulties of getting such schemes up and running, but it was agreed important to advise those with poor broadband of all of the options available to them.

**Resolved:**

- That**
- (i) the content of the report and the Broadband work undertaken in the past year be noted.**
  - (ii) it be noted that the delivery of broadband is, and should remain, a key priority in the council's Corporate Plan.**
  - (iii) the actions set out in section 38 of this report be approved.**

## **145 Updated Senior Structure**

The Chief Executive introduced the report which reviewed her senior management structure and presented a planned update in order to meet the required savings agreed in the Medium Term Financial Plan, and to continue to deliver the Council's Corporate Plan.

A Member said he was not too happy with the proposed structure which he felt was still too "top heavy". He also questioned the use of the title 'Corporate Director' when some of the individuals appeared to have a narrower area of focus than the entire organisation. He said he had an alternative structure in mind that he intended to present to Full Council. The Chief Executive said it would be useful to have an idea of any alternative proposals so that these could be properly priced up in advance. The Member said he would happily engage in that way.

The Leader clarified that Cabinet was being asked to endorse the updated structure. He said he was happy to accept the proposals as presented, but he would also be happy to continue to engage with Members from across the Council on this and, if an alternative structure could be arrived at that worked better, then of course they would consider it.

### **Resolved:**

**That the Chief Executive's recommendations regarding an update to the Senior Structure of the Council be endorsed.**

### **Recommended:**

**That the costs associated with the early release of pension (set out in the exempt appendix of the report), in the event a redundancy results, be approved.**

## **146 Civic Centre Relocation**

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth and Investment and the Deputy Chief Executive introduced the report which advised of a savings to relocate the Civic Centre to International House. The proposal was a unique opportunity for the Council to make significant cuts in expenditure, without reducing the level of services to the Borough of Ashford and there were no redundancies resulting from this move. The proposal looked at rationalising the Council's office space, bringing forward significant savings in the region of £1.3m per annum. Whilst the configuration would be slightly different, the current square footage of office space would be replicated in the new building.

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

- Public access to the Council's offices and meetings would still be maintained within the proposals. The Customer Services function would be relocated to a bespoke area within the ground floor of International House which would be accessible to the public and a floor of the building had been set aside to accommodate a Council Chamber type space of a similar size to house public meetings. The newly installed AV equipment was also fully transportable so could be redeployed at International House.
- The Leader said he would ensure that the questions asked by Central Ashford Community Forum as part of the consultation had been responded to. It was his understanding that they had, but he would check that and re-send the answers if necessary.
- There were no firm plans for re-use of the existing Civic Centre, and a number of options were available, but social housing was certainly one of the options and always had been.
- The Leader considered that discussions around hybrid working, staff working patterns and how many days a week staff were expected in the office were not relevant to the issue at hand in the report and it was not the appropriate forum to have these discussions at this stage. It was acknowledged that Overview and Scrutiny had many questions about this and a report on hybrid working was coming back to the Committee in February. For now, it was important to note that there would be no net loss of office space in the new building and, at International House, the current level of staff could comfortably be accommodated. They also had the flexibility to take on additional space if needed. The Leader thought discussions around staff needed to be more nuanced and he was a bit sad about the route they were beginning to take. Staff worked in different ways and there was a lot of conflicting research and information out there about office/hybrid/home working. It was an issue he also wanted to explore in more detail, but he considered the most important thing was a happy and productive workforce and welfare and respect was vital. It would be important to speak to their own staff and understand what they valued in their employment.
- The desire for more understanding of the figures involved and further detail was acknowledged. The Leader said this was now something he wanted to see worked up further, but that had not happened yet as they had not wanted to use valuable resources working up a detailed plan until there was more of a firm commitment to proceed. Members said they would like to see the combined costs/savings for all three phases of the project, and potential variances, so a final decision could be taken in the round. At the moment, there appeared to be more questions than answers about the finances. The Leader said he accepted the points raised and he could not give the absolute assurances that had been asked for, but as Portfolio Holder for Finance, he said that he would not proceed with a project that started to spiral out of control, and if that happened he would be the first person to "pull the plug" and it would not go ahead. They would share all of the information available when they could and he was open to suggestions from any Member of this

Council about how things could be done better. That was the *modus operandi* of this Administration.

- The Leader said it was important to recognise that ultimately the Civic Centre was an office building to work and hold meetings in and it was dangerous to be too sentimental. Those who stood to suffer from its loss were actually the Council and the Councillors, but not the residents of Ashford. However, any other means of delivering those £1.3m worth of savings was very likely to have an impact on residents. It was a great building and to an extent it would be sad to see it go, but it would be a lot sadder to lose services, just because they had wanted to hang on to their building and their Council Chamber. That did not have the same amount of worth to him. It may have seemed that he had focussed chiefly on the financial savings aspect of this proposal, but it was in that context that he had focused on the finances, because ultimately, in his view, it was in the best interests of the residents of the Borough.

**Recommended:**

- That**
- (i) the relocation of the Civic Centre to International House, including Phase 1 and Phase 2, be approved.**
  - (ii) it be noted that Phase 3 will include a future report to the Cabinet detailing the future use of the Civic Centre.**
  - (iii) 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**

## **147 Anti-Social Behaviour Policy**

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which presented for renewal the Ashford Borough Council Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Policy. The policy provided clarity on how the Council met its responsibilities under the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014. She thanked Officers for their hard work in bringing forward this necessary update to the Policy

The item was opened up to Members and the following points were raised: -

- In response to a question about early intervention, the Safety and Wellbeing Manager advised that this was certainly undertaken by the wider Community Safety Partnership (CSP) which was a strategic group involving all of the relevant agencies. There were limits to ABC's own remit and the areas covered in this particular overarching strategic policy document, but there were a number of policies and procedures underneath that which Officers worked to. ABC did support KCC and the Police via the CSP and there were a number of examples of early intervention projects involving youth. She said she would be happy to share further details of the CSP Action Plan with the Councillor and indeed invite him to future CSP meetings. A Member said that whilst the onus was on other agencies to initiate early intervention he believed

as Councillors they had a moral and societal duty to try and get involved and engage with young people and communities in their areas.

- There were known issues with Kent Police's 101 service over the last six months or so where calls had been unanswered, so there was concern that the policy was predicated on those misleading figures and they may not be getting a true picture of ASB in Ashford.
- In response to a question, the Community Safety and Resilience Team Leader advised that there had been less than five Community Triggers to date, but she would confirm the exact figure to the Member by email.
- A lot of youth ASB was caused by boredom and it was considered important to provide more facilities for older youths, not just play parks for younger children.
- The Portfolio Holder for Homes and Homelessness stressed the housing aspects of the policy and how that related to Council Tenants.

**Recommended:**

**That the renewed Ashford Borough Council Anti-Social Behaviour Policy be approved and adopted.**

## **148 Joint Transportation Board – Minutes of 5<sup>th</sup> September 2023**

**Resolved:**

**That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Joint Transportation Board held on the 5<sup>th</sup> September 2023 be received and noted.**

## **149 Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group – Notes of 26<sup>th</sup> July 2023**

**Resolved:**

**That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group held on the 26<sup>th</sup> July 2023 be received and noted.**

## **150 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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## 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 **3<sup>rd</sup> October 2023**.

### **Present:**

Councillor Gambling (Vice-Chair in the Chair);

Cllrs. Hayward, McGeever, Spain, C. Suddards.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2(c) Councillors Spain and C Suddards attended as Substitute Members for Councillors Dean and Hallett respectively.

### **Apologies:**

Cllrs. Dean, Feacey, Hallett, Krause, Smith.

Director of Customer, Technology and Finance.

### **In attendance:**

Deputy Chief Executive, Head of Policy and Performance, Investigation and Enforcement Support Manager, Member Services Officer.

### **Also in Attendance (virtually):**

Cllr. Mrs Bell.

Finance Service Lead, Head of Internal Audit, Audit Admin Assistant.

Key Audit Partner – Grant Thornton UK.

## **151 Minutes**

### **Resolved:**

**That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 20<sup>th</sup> June 2023 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.**

## **152 Corporate Risk Register**

The Head of Policy and Performance gave a presentation to the Committee, which covered the following areas:

- Risk Management Framework
- Risk Appetite
- Risk Assessment (impact/likelihood)
- Heat Map
- ABC Risk Governance
- Risk Monitoring

She went on to speak about the report which highlighted the risks that sat outside the risk appetite and risks that had increased/decreased in term of their risk profile.

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

- The Deputy Chief Executive explained that the elevated risk for the Newtown Works project could be attributed to the Stodmarsh issue. A recent court case resulted in nutrient neutrality now being brought into any reserved matters application. He acknowledged the commercial risk of the recording studio and said that discussions were currently ongoing with a number of operators, and the price and risk would be assessed by the Due Diligence Task Group which included all leaders of the political parties, to ensure full Member awareness and scrutiny. An update report was due at the next Cabinet meeting and a recent report by Knight Frank on the prospects for the UK studio industry would be circulated for Members to see. He advised that the report to Cabinet could be flagged by the Audit Committee to the Leader, as part of the due diligence process. The Head of Policy and Performance would take this back to the risk owner for the concerns to be factored in.
- A further mitigation was in place so that the land allocated to the studio could be reassigned to other uses, including housing. There was an expectation that the solution to the nutrient neutrality issue would be found shortly and Central Government were expected to table legislation during the next Kings Speech. The Council had also developed plans to find a solution and organised to submit a planning application on a wetlands site, to mitigate up to 10,000 homes.
- Regarding the reduced risk around the economic impact of the cessation of international services, it was explained that the Council remained committed to working towards the return of international services. However, the damage to the local economy had already occurred. Eurostar services had ceased in Ashford around four years ago and therefore the risk of that damage increasing as a result of this action was reduced. A Member said that there were two major impediments concerning the return of Eurostar to Ashford - the company's debt of approx. £964m and the extra checks required now that UK was outside of the European Union.
- It was agreed that the topic of Health & Safety be added to the Tracker after a Member raised concerns that changes in staffing levels could increase the risk of health & safety issues affecting the Council and its Officers. Mandatory e training was in place for staff and Members, and Health & Safety Officers were recruited within the Council, but the Committee agreed it was an important topic to undertake further due diligence on. The Head of Policy and Performance explained that the risk owner would produce a more comprehensive report and then attend a future meeting to explore the matter in more detail with the Committee.

**Resolved:**

- That (i) the Risk Register Report be noted.
- (ii) that Health & Safety be added onto the Tracker for a future meeting.

### **153 Annual Governance Statement – Progress on Remediating Exceptions**

The Head of Policy and Performance introduced this report, which provided an update on the progress made towards the areas of review highlighted by the Annual Governance Statement.

**Resolved:**

That the update report be received and noted.

### **154 Corporate Enforcement Support & Investigations Team Annual Report 2022/23**

The Investigation and Enforcement Support Manager introduced the report that provided an update of the work of the Investigation and Enforcement Support Team for 2022/23.

In response to a question regarding abbreviations, RTB was Right To Buy scheme, SBRR was Small Business Rates Review and SPD was Single Person Discount (for Council Tax).

The 'count of cases – type' pie chart (p.42) featured categories of 'blank' and 'other'. It was confirmed that these related to multiple cases, and the electronic report gave the option to hover over and more detail was displayed. This could be circulated to the Committee after the meeting.

A Fraud Awareness training package had been acquired and Members were asked to look at this and provide feedback. The Investigation and Enforcement Support Manager would circulate a link to Councillors after the meeting.

**Resolved:**

That the report be received and noted.

### **155 Annual Report of the Audit Committee**

The Head of Internal Audit introduced the report. The report outlined how the Audit Committee had discharged its duties during 2022/23. It provided assurance to the Council that important internal control, governance and risk management issues were monitored and addressed by the Committee.

Members highlighted some irregularities on the attendance chart on p.55 and were assured that these would be amended and expanded upon where necessary.

**Resolved:**

**That the report be received and noted.**

## **156 External Audit Progress Report**

The Key Audit Partner – Grant Thornton UK introduced the report. The report advised of the on-going progress with both the 2021/22 audit and the intended timings for the 2022/23 audit work. There had been significant delays to the process and more recently, consultations on how to address the issues contributing to the delays. Proposals involved Central Government setting statutory deadlines for closure of the accounts. Grant Thornton anticipated that the Councils audits for 2021/22 and 2022/23 would be completed ahead of the statutory deadlines.

A Member voiced her frustration over the delays and questioned whether Grant Thornton could provide any assurance that the Council would get the service it was paying for. The Key Audit Partner – Grant Thornton UK said he understood and shared the Members frustrations, and as previously discussed, a number of circumstances including staff recruitment and retention had contributed to the deferrals. This was an industry wide issue and there was a shortage of candidates in the market and across the sector.

## **157 Report Tracker and Future Meetings**

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that Health and Safety would be added to the Tracker for November.

**Resolved:**

**That the report be received and noted**