

## Ashford Borough Council : Cabinet

Minutes of a Virtual Meeting of the Cabinet held on Microsoft Teams on the **26<sup>th</sup> November 2020**.

### Present:

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

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

### Also Present:

Cllrs. Anckorn, Burgess, Campkin, Chilton, Cornish, Farrell, Harman, Hayward, B Heyes, Howard-Smith, Knowles, Krause, Ledger, Michael, Mulholland, Ovenden, Spain, Sparks, C Suddards, L Suddards, Walder, Wright.

### In attendance:

Chief Executive, Director of Law and Governance, Director of Finance and Economy, Head of Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications, Head of Personnel and Development, Head of Community Safety and Wellbeing, Head of Culture, Head of Corporate Property and Projects, Head of Finance and IT, Head of Planning and Development, Community Safety and Wellbeing Manager, Accountancy Manager, Cultural Projects Manager, Compliance and Data Protection Manager, Economic Development Manager, Human Resources Manager, Town Centre Regeneration Manager, Environmental Protection and Licensing Team Leader, Team Leader – Spatial Planning, Senior Accountant, Governance and Data Protection Officer, Communications Officer, Member Services Manager (Operational).

## 140 Declarations of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Bartlett	Made a Voluntary Announcement as a Member of Kennington Community Council and Sevington with Finberry Parish Council.	146
	Made a Voluntary Announcement as a Trustee of the Central Ashford Community Forum.	150
	Made a Voluntary Announcement as he lived adjacent to the Sevington Border Control Post site.	153

## **141 Minutes**

### **Resolved:**

**That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 24<sup>th</sup> September 2020 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.**

## **142 Leader's Announcements**

The Leader said that he first wanted to say that he was sure all would be disappointed that Ashford had earlier that day been placed in Tier 3 in the latest coronavirus restrictions, along with the rest of Kent. Although numbers in Ashford were relatively low, he said it was important that numbers remained low and they all continued to follow the rules laid down by Government and playing their part in encouraging others to do so. He hoped they would not be in Tier 3 for very long and said Kent could take some comfort from other areas, such as Liverpool, who were in Tier 3 previously but had now come down to Tier 2.

On a brighter and more pleasing note, the Leader advised that Ashford had been successful in securing a significant grant of £1.45m from the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme to replace the aging power plant at the Stour Centre. The leisure centre was currently undergoing a multi-million pound refurbishment and this grant would help to provide a state of the art power system which would slash running costs and reduce carbon emissions. The money would be spent on replacing the existing gas fired heating plant with hi-tech air-to water heat pumps along with other improvements including the installation of PV solar panels to provide electricity to power the new system. The benefits of this investment were fourfold: - reduction of the Stour Centre's annual carbon emissions by approximately 657 tonnes or 45%; ongoing energy savings of 40% reducing running costs; significant contributions to the Council's goal of a carbon neutral Borough by 2030; and freeing up vital Council funds that would have had to be spent in any event on the existing system, to be used on other projects. This was clearly very good news for the Council that he was pleased to share with colleagues.

## **143 Motion Referred by Full Council – Ashford's Approach to Equalities, Inclusion and Diversity.**

The Leader introduced the report which had been produced in response to a Notice of Motion put to Full Council on the 15<sup>th</sup> October 2020 relating to Ashford's approach to equalities. The Council referred the Motion to the Cabinet for a more detailed report on how the proposals set out in the Motion could be taken forward.

The Ward Member for Rolvenden and Tenterden West, who had submitted the original Motion to Council, thanked the Cabinet for the report. She knew that this was an issue which the Leader was very passionate about and she was delighted with

the response. Another Member thanked Officers for the report and said it was commendable that there had been a commitment to this significant work as part of the Recovery Plan at a time when so many other things were going on. There was a lot of work already going on with the BAME community and anything that could be done to include those communities even more and bring them closer to the work of the Council and others should be pursued.

The Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Wellbeing said that he welcomed the report and considered it highlighted the good work in this area that had been going on for a number of years, evidenced by the recent National Inclusion and Diversity Award given to the Council for its work on the Syrian Refugee Resettlement Project. He also drew attention to the work carried out by the Ashford Volunteer Centre, and funded by the Council, with BAME groups including the Community Connection Project which was currently underway to bring community groups together.

**Resolved:**

- That (i) the Council's current approach to the points raised in the Notice of Motion be noted.**
- (ii) it be noted that a draft Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Policy is in development, which will set out the Council's approach for the future.**

## **144 Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Digital Transformation Task Group**

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which advised that during last year's Budget Scrutiny process, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had agreed to form a Task Group to review the Council's Digital Transformation Programme. The report set out the findings of the Task Group's review and made eight recommendations to the Cabinet. The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee said that one of the very few positives to come from the Covid-19 pandemic had been the move towards more digital working and how well the Council had managed that transition and he wanted to thank everyone involved in both that process and this Task Group.

The Portfolio Holder for Culture reminded Members of the work of the IT and Digital Transformation Advisory Committee which he Chaired, and encouraged everyone to bring forward any questions or suggestions that they had to that Committee.

A Member referred to the decision to supply Members with iPads at the start of this Council term and how this had proved to be a mistake as they were not compatible with the Teams Live Event meetings that were now taking place. The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee advised that the decision was taken on the best advice at the time as iPads were the preferred device for use in the move to Modern.Gov for online meeting papers. This is what they had been intended to be used for rather than Teams meetings and the iPads worked perfectly for that purpose. Nobody could really have foreseen a global pandemic, and moving to Microsoft Teams meetings. Officers had moved quickly to provide alternative

equipment to those Members who needed it and one of the recommendations in the report referred to reviewing the systems to support virtual meetings at the next opportunity.

**Resolved:**

- That**
- (i) the implementation of the digital strategy to date be noted and the emerging digital programme to be delivered up until 2025 be endorsed.**
  - (ii) a digital survey regarding homeworking and virtual meetings be conducted for Members, to find out what lessons have been learnt since the new arrangements were introduced in March 2020 as a result of Covid-19, and what can be improved for the future.**
  - (iii) homeworking, virtual meetings and hybrid meetings continue to be supported as valid ways of running Council services and meetings in the future and the Council ensure that there are adequate IT systems in place to deliver these efficiently.**
  - (iv) a Corporate Etiquette Protocol be created for Microsoft Teams that covered making calls, leaving messages and showing availability.**
  - (v) the online calendar function on Modern.Gov be updated regularly to inform Members of future meetings for at least the next six months.**
  - (vi) the Council proceed with the creation of an online central database for local and national data that residents are able to access and view statistics regarding the Ashford Borough.**
  - (vii) a fact sheet be produced for all Members and staff with advice on broadband and how to check your connectivity whilst working remotely.**
  - (viii) the completion of an IT asset register be prioritised, to ensure that all Council owned equipment is logged and returned to the Civic Centre when appropriate.**

## **145 Corporate Performance Report – Quarter 2 2020/21**

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which summarised performance against the Performance Indicators introduced in the Recovery Plan presented to the Cabinet in July 2020. This detailed the Council's approach to making a timely and successful recovery from the impact of the coronavirus.

**Resolved:**

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

## **146 Medium Term Financial Plan**

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which presented the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) – a budget forecast including underlying assumptions covering the five year period from 2021 to 2026 for the General Fund. The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) would be reported separately in the HRA Business Plan, which would be presented to the Cabinet in December. The Draft Budget was built using the assumptions in the MTFP and the Draft Budget would also be reported to the Cabinet in December.

The Leader clarified that following discussions on the table at Paragraph 35 of the report, it had been agreed to move £679,000 from Unearmarked General Reserves to give some flexibility but also remain at the 15% Unearmarked reserves requirement as dictated by the Council's reserves policy (approximately £2.5m).

### **Resolved:**

- That**
- (i) the forecast and the underlying assumptions be noted.**
  - (ii) it be noted that 2021/22 funding is based on current funding with spending reviews, fair funding and Business Rate changes now to be implemented from 2022/23.**
  - (iii) the Reserves Strategy (as contained at Paragraphs 33 to 43 of the report), and as amended above, be endorsed.**
  - (iv) authority be delegated to the Director of Finance and Economy, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Portfolio Holder for Finance and IT, to agree the Council's continued participation in the Kent Business Rates pool.**

## **147 Council Tax Base 2021/22**

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which advised that the Council was required to approve the tax base used to calculate the level of Council Tax for 2021/22. It was calculated with regard to the number of domestic properties (including a forecast of new properties), which were then converted to Band D equivalents. The tax base had been calculated at 45,173 Band D properties, a decrease of 2,127 (or 4.5%) on the current year.

Members asked about the future of Council Tax Support grants for Parish Councils and it was confirmed that this issue would be considered in future budget reports to the Cabinet and during the Overview and Scrutiny Budget Scrutiny process. The Portfolio Holder encouraged any Members who had any concerns about the budget to attend the Budget Scrutiny meetings and raise those points in good time.

**Resolved:**

- That (i) the 2021/22 'Net' tax base of 45,173 Band D equivalent properties be agreed.
- (ii) it be noted that 2021/22 funding is based on current funding with spending reviews, fair funding and Business Rate changes now to be implemented from 2022/23.

## **148 Financial Monitoring – Quarterly Report**

The report presented the Quarter 2 budget monitoring position for 2020/21 up to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2020. The report also included updates of the Capital Programme, Treasury Management activity and movements from reserves and additional information on a Decarbonisation Scheme (Appendix C to the report) and leisure centre support (exempt Appendix D to the report).

**Resolved:**

- That (i) the forecast outturn position for the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account be noted.
- (ii) the Collection Fund position be noted.
- (iii) the contribution from reserves be noted.
- (iv) the Capital Programme position be noted.
- (v) the Treasury Management position be noted.
- (vi) the grant application for the Decarbonisation Scheme (as detailed at Appendix C to the report) be noted.
- (vii) subject to a positive outcome of the Council's application, the Head of Corporate Property and Projects be delegated authority to expedite the capital expenditure in line with the conditions set out in the grant conditions.
- (viii) the procurement be expedited in line with the requirement to spend the grant funding by the 30<sup>th</sup> June 2021.
- (ix) given the tight timescales for application, it be noted that the Head of Corporate Property and Projects used his delegated powers to procure the consultancy services of Leisure Energy to assess and submit further schemes for Tenterden Leisure Centre and the Civic Centre, through the Single Source Supplier procurement process for the next bidding round in January 2021.

- (x) **the use of the Chief Executive's Urgency Powers for the Leisure Services Support Scheme (as detailed at Exempt Appendix D to the report) be noted.**
- (xi) **the extended procurement exercise for Tenterden Leisure Centre and the revised funding arrangement with Tenterden Leisure Centre Trust (as detailed at Exempt Appendix D to the report) be noted.**

## **149 Taxi Licensing Policy Review**

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which presented a number of amendments to the Taxi Licensing Policy 2017 - 2022 as a result of the issue of 'Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicles Standards' published by the Department for Transport. Each of the amendments was designed to ensure consistency between Licensing Authorities and increase protections to members of the public.

### **Recommended:**

**That the proposed amendments to the Taxi Licensing Policy 2017 – 2022 be adopted.**

## **150 Town Centre Reset**

The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Property and Projects introduced the report which presented the Town Centre Reset. This sought to consolidate areas of focus in Ashford Town Centre. Concentrating on market investment demonstrated from the International Station in the past five years, the report emphasised defining an investment corridor and an area of emphasis along Elwick Road and Bank Street. Corporate, cross-departmental projects would be established to identify areas of opportunity with a clear direction for the future. It was stressed that the report should be seen as a blueprint and a springboard to improve, grow and rejuvenate the Town Centre. Ashford was not unique and Town Centres across the country would have to adapt to the changing circumstances they found themselves in.

Other Cabinet Members commended the report and considered it demonstrated a clear commitment by the Council to rejuvenate and improve the Town Centre. There were clearly a number of issues to tackle, but this report provided a good starting point for that work.

The Leader advised that the Council had been successful in purchasing the NCP Car Park in Park Mall. It would be added to the Council's portfolio of Wilkos and Park Mall itself and be a useful asset in the longer term redevelopment of the Town Centre.

A number of Members made comments and asked questions on particular points of detail on the Town Centre. It was advised that many of these were outside the scope of this initial report, but were topics that could be taken up as the process developed.

During the course of debate the following issues were raised as particular areas that the Town Centre Reset could begin to focus on: -

- Litter in the Lower High Street and vermin, rats and gulls picking at the waste behind the shops in that area.
- It would be vital to reach out to the community and the businesses in the Town Centre and engage them in genuine and meaningful consultation. They had much to contribute to this work. It would also be important to feed back on the outcome of suggestions so even those who made suggestions that were not taken forward did not feel ignored.
- Cultural/Leisure offer.
- Flatted development and associated car parking capacity.
- The future of the former Mecca Bingo Site.
- The Operational Working Group which would be made up of a mixture of Council representatives as well as residents and businesses. It would not just be a Cabinet Member group.
- Green spaces.
- Policing and tackling Anti-Social Behaviour.
- Transport, disabled access and encouraging people from the rural parts of the Borough to use Ashford Town Centre.
- The impact of out of town retail.
- The type of retail offer that was actually wanted in the Town Centre.

**Resolved:**

**That (i) the Town Centre Reset be adopted.**

**(ii) authority be delegated to the Ashford Town Centre Redevelopment Advisory Committee to develop the action plan and monitor the delivery of this document.**

## **151 Personnel Policies (Flexible Working, Remote Working, Flexible Retirement and Virtual Meetings)**

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which sought approval of four personnel policies that materially altered existing policies in the current Conditions of Service.

**Recommended:**

**That the following new policy documents be approved and adopted : - Flexible Working Policy; Remote Working Policy; Flexible Retirement Policy; and Virtual Meeting Addendum (New).**



## **152 Personnel Policies (Sickness Policy Review, New Attendance Support and Management Policy and New Probation Policy)**

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which sought approval of three new personnel policies. Two were brand new policies and the Sickness Policy materially altered the existing policy in the Current Conditions of Service.

**Recommended:**

**That the following new policy documents be approved and adopted : - Probation Policy; Sickness Policy; and Attendance Management and Support Policy.**

## **153 Ashford Borough Council Enforcement at Sevington Border Control Post (BCP)**

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which advised that as a consequence of the EU Transition, the Council would become responsible for delivering port health controls at the new Sevington Border Control Post (BCP). It advised on the new service the Council would be providing, the support being given by DEFRA towards establishing the service, the challenges therein and the collaborative work with Dover District Council. The service was to be introduced on a phased approach with documentary checks starting on the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 and physical checks three months later.

The Cabinet wished to express their thanks to the Portfolio Holder, the Head of Community Safety and Wellbeing, and all of the staff involved for the work they had undertaken thus far at short notice, and would continue to do, to get this up and running at a time when they were already extremely stretched with other work. The Leader said he also wanted to thank the Deputy Leader for his collaborative work with KCC, Ministers and Government Departments on the wider Sevington Inland Border Facility. Another Member said that the amount of time and effort involved in establishing this facility should not be underestimated and he hoped that both Members and members of the public would appreciate this. When individuals were under that sort of pressure to meet certain timescales, work did have to be prioritised and he hoped all would understand and recognise that and be reasonable with their demands.

The Deputy Leader advised that the tarmac being used at the facility was being produced in the Borough at Hothfield and this was a particular benefit to a local company. Those working on the site were doing a really good job at engaging with the local community and they were very keen to ensure they were not impinging too much on their quality of life. As the local Ward Member, this was something that he welcomed.

**Resolved:**

- That
- (i) progress to date in preparation for the Council undertaking port health controls at the BCP be noted.
  - (ii) the Chief Executive and the Director of Law and Governance be authorised, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Wellbeing, to take all necessary steps and enter any necessary agreement:
    - (a) To secure funding for the Council to undertake all required port health functions in relation to Sevington BCP.
    - (b) Use such funding for the agreed purposes, and
    - (c) Establish and manage a service providing all required port health and related or subsidiary functions for the Sevington BCP in accordance with statutory requirements.
  - (iii) the Cabinet express its commitment to implementing the necessary changes that will arise from the UK's departure from the EU as relevant to discharging its port health responsibilities.
  - (iv) subsequent reports on the progress of the BCP be submitted to the Cabinet as necessary.

## **154 Joint Transportation Board – Minutes of 15<sup>th</sup> September 2020**

**Resolved:**

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Joint Transportation Board held on the 15<sup>th</sup> September 2020 be received and noted.

## **155 Trading and Enterprise Board – Minutes of 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2020**

**Resolved:**

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Trading and Enterprise Board held on the 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2020 be received and noted.

## **156 Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group – Notes of 24<sup>th</sup> September 2020**

**Resolved:**

**That the Notes of the Meeting of the Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group held on the 24<sup>th</sup> September 2020 be received and noted.**

## **157 Ashford Strategic Delivery Board – Notes of 16<sup>th</sup> October 2020**

**Resolved:**

**That the Notes of the Meeting of the Ashford Strategic Delivery Board held on the 16<sup>th</sup> October 2020 be received and noted.**

## **158 Civic and Ceremonial Programme Board – Notes of 14<sup>th</sup> October 2020**

**Resolved:**

**That the Notes of the Meeting of the Civic and Ceremonial Programme Board held on the 14<sup>th</sup> October 2020 be received and noted.**

## **159 Compliance and Enforcement Board – Notes of 27<sup>th</sup> October 2020**

**Resolved:**

**That the Notes of the Meeting of the Compliance and Enforcement Board held on the 27<sup>th</sup> October 2020 be received and noted.**

## **160 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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