

Ashford Borough Council

Minutes of a Virtual Meeting of the Ashford Borough Council held on Microsoft Teams on the **4th May 2021**.

Present:

His Worshipful the Mayor, Councillor J S Link (Chairman);

Cllrs. Anckorn, Barrett, Bartlett, Mrs Bell, Bell, Blanford, Buchanan, Burgess, Chilton, Clarkson, Clokie, Cornish, Dehnel, Farrell, Feacey, Forest, Harman, Hayward, B Heyes, Howard, Howard-Smith, Iliffe, Knowles, Krause, Ledger, Michael, Mulholland, Ovenden, Pauley, Pickering, Shorter, Spain, Sparks, C Suddards, L Suddards, Turner, Walder, Webb, Wedgbury, White, Wright.

Prior to the commencement of the meeting the Reverend John Emmott said prayers. His Worshipful the Mayor said that everyone's thoughts would be with those affected by the explosion that had taken place in Willesborough earlier that morning. Grateful thanks went out to the Emergency Services and the local community for their most heroic endeavours.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Campkin, T Heyes, Rogers, Chief Executive.

Also Present:

Deputy Chief Executive, Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer, Head of Environment and Land Management, Head of Culture, Tourism and Leisure, Head of Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications, Principal Solicitor (Strategic Development), Civic Engagement Officer, Member Services Manager.

1 Election of Mayor

Councillor Pickering nominated Councillor Callum Knowles for election as Mayor of Ashford Borough Council for the forthcoming municipal year.

This was seconded by Councillor Feacey.

Councillor Pickering said it gave him great pleasure to move the nomination of his friend Callum as the Mayor. He wanted to speak about Callum in terms of Margaret Thatcher, inasmuch as she always said that whenever she said something it involved three things in order to make an impact. So, how did this relate to Callum? Well, there were three things he wished to highlight about him. Firstly, he was fiercely intelligent with a great deal of common sense and lots of business nous. Secondly, he was ex-military, which they had in common, and they both had a sense of justice and discipline having been on active service and recognising the need for attention to detail, yet being aware of camaraderie that involved considerable loyalty – leading to skills in teamwork and organisation. This had been demonstrated during the pandemic, where the military had been brought in to organise things impeccably. Thirdly, Callum was compassionate. He cared about the communities he looked after both as an Ashford Borough Councillor and a Tenterden Town Councillor, with a sense of purpose and commitment.

He said that 'Northern Man' Callum was anything but. He was a true blue Scot – born and bred in Scotland, but raised from the age of 12 in Lancashire. From there he joined the Royal Navy and ended up as a Weapons Engineer, running all of the missile systems on warships. Callum continued with his IT background when leaving the Navy, owning and running a company working within the Public Sector. This also allowed him to pursue his hobby of owning lots of special watches and now entering the world of sports cars with his first Maserati! In the early 2000s he met Lisa who came from Staplehurst, but had always wanted to live in Tenterden. Well Dr Lisa Lovelidge got her wish when the couple moved to Tenterden and the rest is history, or was it? Colleagues may not be aware, but Callum had always actively helped community organisations in Tenterden with their fundraising – be that the Royal British Legion, the Tenterden Christmas Market, and many others, to reflect his love of being involved with the community. He had also successfully driven the Tilden Gill Wildlife Project, creating a wildlife area for all to enjoy. Callum's love of nature also extended very much to animals. He and Lisa had two wonderful Setters and you could often see them walking them around Tenterden, or them leading him! With the community in mind, he was especially pleased that Callum's chosen charity would be the Shaw Trust. They had specific projects in Ashford under the title "Live Well Kent" which would help with mental health in the community, homelessness and helping people back in to employment.

In concluding, Councillor Pickering said that Councillor Callum Knowles was a man of the community and a man of principle and was now set to be the First Citizen of the Borough. It was therefore his honour and privilege to nominate Councillor Callum Knowles to be the Mayor for the Borough of Ashford for the upcoming Municipal Year.

Councillor Feacey said he wanted to second the nomination of Councillor Callum Knowles and wish him all the best for his Mayoral year.

There were no other nominations.

Resolved:

That Councillor Callum Knowles be elected Mayor of the Borough of Ashford for the Municipal Year 2021/22.

2 Declaration of Acceptance of Office by the Mayor

Councillor Knowles made his Declaration of Acceptance of Office.

There was then a short interlude whilst the new Mayor was robed and invested with his Chain of Office. Upon his return, His Worshipful the Mayor, Councillor Callum Knowles assumed the Chair.

3 Appointment of Mayor's Chaplain

His Worshipful the Mayor advised that his Chaplain for the coming year would be the Reverend Canon Lindsay Hammond, the Team Rector of Tenterden. The Reverend Hammond then said prayers.

4 Vote of Thanks by the Mayor for His Election

His Worshipful the Mayor began by thanking everyone for joining this virtual Mayor Making Ceremony. It might not quite be the occasion that everyone had hoped for but hopefully they were now moving out of challenging times. He was proud and honoured to have been elected as the Mayor of Ashford for the year ahead and wanted to start by thanking Councillor Alan Pickering for his many kind words in proposing his nomination and Councillor Peter Feacey for seconding. After the most difficult and challenging of times, he felt that his fellow Councillors had bestowed upon him a great responsibility and trust to help in bringing the Borough out of the pandemic and into a most important period of recovery. He did however want to commend Councillor John Link and also Councillor Jenny Webb, who were both affected during their terms of office by the impact of the various lockdowns over the past 14 months. They had worked so hard in doing all they could to lift spirits during such unprecedented times. He also wanted to take a moment to remember all those who had lost family, friends and loved ones in the COVID pandemic and give thanks to the many who worked tirelessly to protect everybody and continued to do so.

He said that he took on the responsibility as Ashford's First Citizen very seriously and was committed to the people and businesses of their great Borough. He assured all present that he would serve them with devotion, enthusiasm and compassion, to the best of his ability. His two main focuses would be Community Wellbeing as well as encouraging greater environmental responsibility. He aimed to work alongside local communities, businesses, organisations and individuals to make a difference through networking and getting everyone talking once more. This led him to announce that his charity for the year ahead would be Live Well Kent's Ashford Projects administered through the excellent Shaw Trust Charity. Their current programme at the Ashford Hub in Canterbury Road ranged from social activities (including arts and crafts, cooking, and outdoor or nature based activities), to structured mental health groups and courses (including condition based groups and Coping with Life courses). Their key aim was to deliver much-needed support services. They assisted in supporting people suffering from mental health issues, which he was passionate about, and to which he would like to help bring better awareness. In fact, he had been discussing a new programme of specific projects across the Ashford Borough through Live Well. This was very exciting and a chance for him to work with his chosen charity on kick-start projects. There were, however, many amazing charities across the Borough that he would be actively supporting and promoting. This was an opportunity for him to flag up all the great work that their local charities and volunteers achieved across this Borough. Over the past year there had been many unsung heroes and many community groups that had started from scratch to help the Borough's citizens and what had been achieved had been totally amazing. Over the years he had been a great supporter of volunteering - getting involved in many of the local charities in Tenterden. These included the British Legion, Highbury Hall Youth Club, the Tenterden Rotary Club and many others and he had thoroughly enjoyed meeting up with those organisations and helping them to both raise money, but more importantly to make a difference in the community. He had made many friends through those activities and he held them quite dear.

Now, as a Councillor, he had represented Tenterden South Ward for the past six years on Ashford Borough Council. He had also been a Tenterden Town Councillor for eight years. He became a Councillor because he kept on rambling on about how he thought the Council could do things better and so people, tired of listening to his

ramblings, told him to become a Councillor to change things for the better, and here he was!

In conclusion, he wished to thank his wife Lisa for her continual support over many long-suffering years. Without her encouragement and sacrifices his journey would have been impossible. She had always gone along with many of his ideas and assisted in many of the projects that they had undertaken together, to the point of Lisa herself joining Tenterden Town Council as a Councillor too. He owed her a great debt for helping him in all that he did. He now looked forward to a busy and exciting year ahead, promoting their exceptional Borough and spending as much time as possible meeting local people and finding out more about everything that made Ashford such a very special place.

5 Vote of Thanks to the Retiring Mayor and Mayoress

Councillor Clokie said he was pleased and honoured to propose a sincere vote of thanks to the retiring Mayor, Councillor John Link, and his Mayoress Jill, after what had been one of the most difficult Mayoral years he had ever witnessed, and he had witnessed a few!

He said that John had had the misfortune to be under the restrictions of the country's lockdown for his whole Mayoral term. This had left their Mayor in the 'video only' world unable to do the job he did best – meeting people and spreading the good word, not only about the Ashford Borough, but also its towns and villages. As if the COVID-19 virus was not enough to contend with, John had also had to deal with his hip operation which had been brought forward in to his Mayoral term because he was suffering. He had battled through his post-op pains and inconveniences like the staunch soldier he was and all were very pleased to see him back on his feet, or they would be were it not for these virtual meetings of which he knew many were now growing very bored!

Councillor Clokie concluded by saying that he wanted offer his many thanks to John and Jill for the hard work they had put in this past year and asked colleagues to support a vote of thanks.

Councillor Feacey said it was his great pleasure to second the vote of thanks to the retiring Mayor, Councillor John Link and his Mayoress Jill, for what had been an extraordinary year.

The Member Services Manager advised that the presentation of badges and gifts to the Retiring Mayor would take place following the conclusion of the meeting.

6 Response by the Retiring Mayor

Councillor Link said that this term of Office as the Mayor of Ashford had been difficult to say the least. All, of course, because of the terrible coronavirus pandemic. They had started the year off Ok, with a visit to the Bexleyheath Borough and their Mayor's fundraising evening and dinner, but it had been really quiet for everyone since then! As he had mentioned at the last Council meeting in April, it had been challenging to get out and about and their opportunities to do so had been limited, but well protected with masks and hand-gel they had taken the chances when they could! He had mentioned a number of these at the April meeting, but he had forgotten to mention the Great Chart Memorial Service to the airmen and women who had

served on the air-strip just off the A28, which had been a particular highlight. All of a sudden though in the past week as restrictions had eased slightly, they had had a few requests to visit shops and businesses in the town centre. They had spoken to shoppers and had a general walkabout with the managers of both the Park Mall and County Square centres. They were both fairly optimistic, pointing out that a few of the empty shops did have interest from businesses looking to fill them and he thought this was very encouraging. Lastly they had visited Macknades who were very upbeat about things. Councillor Link wondered if the Council could help them a bit by looking at the car park charges in Elwick Place to help encourage people to use their shop.

Councillor Link said he wanted to thank colleagues for giving him the chance to be Mayor again. Every term was different and this one had certainly been the most challenging because of the pandemic. As everyone would know, because of the lockdown they had been unable to hold the normal Mayor's Civic Service, but they had been able to hold a small church service in St Mildred's, Tenterden, that past Sunday. He hoped as many as possible had been able to view it online and he wanted to offer a few 'thank-yous' before he closed. Firstly to his good friend, his Chaplain, the Reverend John Emmott, who not only said prayers at meetings but had also accompanied him and supported him at various events. He also wanted to thank the Reverend Lindsay Hammond for allowing them to use St Mildred's Church for their service. Thanks must also go to Sandra, the driver, who got them everywhere on time and finally a big thank you to Donna for all her support in the office, as well as all Officers and Members. He lastly wanted to thank his wife Jill for her understanding and help throughout. She would know what he meant!

He now wanted to welcome Councillor Knowles as the new Mayor and congratulate him on his election. He hoped the virus would soon clear so that he and Lisa could have a very happy and enjoyable year.

The Member Services Manager advised that the presentation of gifts to the new Mayor and Mayoress would take place following the conclusion of the meeting.

7 Election and Appointment of Deputy Mayor

Councillor Clarkson proposed that "Councillor Jenny Webb be elected Deputy Mayor of the Borough of Ashford for the forthcoming Municipal year". He said it was only right to recognise that Jenny's previous year in office had been interrupted quite gravely by the pandemic and it seemed quite fitting that she should get another chance. Jenny, like the new Mayor, and many others, had the welfare and care of the people of Ashford in her heart and as a caring person was always striving to assist and help everyone in the Borough. He was sure that Jenny would be a very supportive Deputy and her enthusiasm, along with the Mayor's, would make them both a force to be reckoned with this year!

This was seconded by Councillor Clokie.

There were no other nominations.

Resolved:

That Councillor Jenny Webb be elected Deputy Mayor of the Borough of Ashford for the Municipal Year 2021/22.

8 Declaration of Acceptance of Office by the Deputy Mayor

Councillor Webb made her Declaration of Acceptance of Office.

The Deputy Mayor was then invested with her chains of office. The Member Services Manager advised that the presentation of gifts to the new Deputy Mayor and Consort would take place following the conclusion of the meeting.

9 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on the 15th April 2021 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

10 Announcements

His Worshipful the Mayor advised that he had several events that he would be attending in the coming weeks and months. Firstly, something that was very close to his heart, Armed Forces Day on the 21st June when there would be a flag raising ceremony at the Civic Centre. There would also be the newly formed NHS and Front-Line Workers Day on Monday 5th July, with another flag raising ceremony at the Civic Centre.

On a happier note, he was very hopeful that he would be able to host some charity and fundraising events soon, which all colleagues would be able to attend and enjoy together. The first was scheduled for Tuesday 21st September with an evening at the Everest Inn. Invites would follow from the Mayor's Office and he would love to see as many colleagues there as possible.

11 Confirmation of Cabinet Arrangements for 2021/22 by the Leader of the Council

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Clarkson, confirmed that the make-up of his Cabinet for 2021/22 would be as follows:-

Member	Portfolio	Deputy Portfolio Holder
Clarkson	Leader (including Corporate Policy, Ec Dvpt and Comms and Legal and Democracy)	N/A
Bartlett	Deputy Leader (including Port Health)	N/A
Barrett	Housing	Mulholland
Bell	Finance and IT	Krause
Buchanan	Environment and Land Management	Howard
Clokie	Regeneration and Corporate Property	Iliffe

Feacey	Community Safety and Wellbeing	Howard-Smith
Forest	Culture, Tourism and Leisure	Webb
Pickering	HR and Customer Services	Mrs Bell
Shorter	Planning and Development	Blanford

The Leader said he had discussed this matter with Group Leaders and they had agreed that given the by-election that was taking place later that week, it would be inappropriate to make any major changes to Cabinet posts or Committee membership at this stage. Following the outcome of the Election, Group Leaders would be contacted about their allocated seats and all Members would be advised of the Committee make-ups in due course.

12 Selection and Constitutional Review Committee – 26th April 2021

Councillor Clarkson proposed that “the Minutes of the Selection and Constitutional Review Committee meeting held on the 26th April 2021 be approved and adopted”.

This was seconded.

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Selection and Constitutional Review Committee held on the 26th April 2021 be approved and adopted.

13 Cabinet – 29th April 2021

Resolved:

That subject to the expiry of the period by which decisions arising from the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 29th April 2021 may be called in, i.e. 12th May 2021:-

- (i) the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 29th April 2021 be received and noted with the exception of Minute Nos. 316 and 317.**
- (ii) Minute Nos. 316 and 317 be approved and adopted.**

14 Short Term Changes to the Constitution of the Council to Assist Decision Making During the Coronavirus Crisis

The Principal Solicitor (Strategic Development) and Deputy Monitoring Officer introduced the report which recommended a short-term extension to the powers of the politically-balanced Selection and Constitutional Review Committee, to enable it to make appropriate decisions that would otherwise require a meeting of the Full Council to be convened in a very large off-site venue. He apologised for the hurry in which the report had been produced, to ensure that the Council was able to continue in its decision making effectively in the new circumstances they currently faced.

There had been some small hope that an ongoing High Court case might have produced a judicial statement that Virtual Meetings were lawful all the time, not just when there were emergency regulations in place because of the coronavirus crisis, but many Members will have heard that that hope was dashed that previous Wednesday, when the High Court ruled that the existing legislation requiring “meetings” required physical meetings in a room, not just online. As a result, the 6th May 2021 would be the last day on which it would be legal to hold Virtual Meetings, unless and until Parliament decided to change the legislation. He therefore commended the recommendations to Members.

A Member asked how the report fit with the Government’s intentions to return to normality on the 21st June? He wondered if the measures in the report were therefore overkill and unnecessary. The Leader said he had some sympathy with those comments and he had asked similar questions on first reading the report, however he had been assured by Officers that this was the correct way to proceed as they came out of lockdown. It was hoped that this would be a very short term policy to get them through the next couple of months, and if it did not have to be used it wouldn’t, but they had to be prepared and cautious. The Principal Solicitor (Strategic Development) and Deputy Monitoring Officer confirmed that the point made by the Leader was reflected in the recommendations inasmuch as the proposals did have a ‘sunset clause’ and as soon as it became possible to hold Full Council Meetings in the Council Chamber again, in a covid-secure way, then these proposals would cease and all normal business would pass back to Full Council. It was seen as a short term ‘bridge’ to get the Council to the other side and it was hoped that the ‘chasm’ would not be too wide. It was seen as prudent though to have a ‘bridge’ in place.

Another Member said she also had concerns about these proposals. Whilst she recognised it may only be temporary, she did not consider it democratic in that it excluded the two Independent Councillors who had not formed a Group on the Council. She therefore was opposed to it.

Resolved:

That until the Annual Meeting in the year 2022, or until it becomes possible to hold Full Council Meetings in the Council Chamber in a COVID-secure way (whichever is earlier): -

- (i) the Constitution be amended to add to the Terms of Reference of the Selection and Constitutional Review Committee decisions on the matters highlighted in yellow in the Appendix to the report;**
- (ii) the Monitoring Officer and the Deputy Monitoring Officer be authorised to make all necessary consequential amendments to the Constitution to give effect to the above;**
- (iii) the Chief Executive be authorised, in consultation with the Monitoring Officer, the Executive Leader of the Council and the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to : -**
 - (a) Extend (with or without modifications) the Procedure Rules for Virtual Meetings, and the Scheme of Public Participation for Virtual Meetings, to facilitate the continuation of Virtual Meetings (if permitted by law); and/or**

(b) Adapt the Procedure Rules for Virtual Meetings, and the Scheme of Public Participation for Virtual Meetings, to suit in-person meetings held with COVID-secure arrangements from time to time.