

Cabinet

Minutes of a Meeting of the Cabinet held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **27th May 2021**.

Present:

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

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

Apologies:

Cllr. Clokie

Also Present:

Cllrs. Harman, Sparks, Walder, Wright.

In attendance:

Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive, Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer, Head of Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications, Strategy and Policy Development Manager, Member Services Manager.

24 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 29th April 2021 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

25 Leader's Announcements

The Leader said that he did just want to mention Councillor Charles Dehnel who would be standing down from his position as Ward Member for Downs North. Charles had a young family and very heavy work commitments and he was sure that colleagues would all wish him well. There would therefore be a by-election for Downs North Ward over the summer. He also advised that as a result, Councillor Callum Knowles would be taking over as the Member Champion for the Military Covenant and Ceremonial Liaison with immediate effect.

26 Rural Housing Working Group – Findings and Recommendations

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which advised that the Deputy Portfolio Holder had chaired a group, consisting of Councillors, Officer and an external expert for a rural housing association, to discuss affordable rural housing in the Ashford Borough. The report: - provided an up-to-date position; discussed the challenges around increasing the number of rural affordable homes and ideas to accelerate delivery; highlighted progress on rural schemes; and discussed how the Council intended to raise awareness of the need for affordable rural housing with Parish Councils and local communities.

A Member said it was important for decisions to be community led and asked that the Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) was kept informed so that Parish Councils could better understand and feed into the process. Another Member mentioned an Officer led workshop that had been held in her Ward which had done much to explain the approach and break down the myths of rural housing provision, and considered, if possible, this should be repeated in other areas. The Portfolio Holder gave a reassurance of that continued communication.

Resolved:

- That**
- (i) the content of the report and the work of the Rural Group be noted and endorsed.**
 - (ii) an increase in the number of rural local needs surveys, aiming for six per annum for three years and then returning to four per annum after that, be agreed.**
 - (iii) a commitment to fund the rural housing surveys until at least 2025/26 be agreed.**
 - (iv) communications to Parish Councils be prepared and authority be delegated to the Head of Housing to agree this, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing.**

27 HRA Acquisition – Chilmington s106

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which asked for endorsement of the acquisition by the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) of a small residential stake in the Chilmington development for affordable housing.

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted and the acquisition of the homes for affordable housing be endorsed, subject to the conclusion of legal discussions between the Council and the developer's solicitors.

28 Street Naming and Numbering – Andrew’s Garage Site, Smeeth

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which advised that the Street Naming and Numbering Policy required that any request for naming a new road after a person, deceased or living, should be agreed by the Cabinet.

Resolved:

That the use of the name Andrews Close be approved.

29 Draft Carbon Neutral Action Plan

The Leader introduced the report which set out the process for consultation on the Council’s draft Carbon Neutral Action Plan and outlined a study to be undertaken to determine the Council’s carbon footprint and pathway to zero carbon. He said he, and the Council’s Officers, were passionate about this subject and said that action taken now would be their legacy for the future. He advised that for the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee in 2022 she had advocated green canopy in the UK and Ashford would take the lead and he mentioned a scheme to plant a tree for every single resident of the Borough - approximately 135,000 new trees over the next 18 months. More details of that strategy would emerge over the coming month.

The Deputy Leader said he supported the report and the future aims and looked forward to the outcomes of the consultation, but said it was also important to be aware of the number of things that were already happening at both a Borough and County level to reduce carbon and he outlined some of those initiatives.

In response to more specific questions, the Head of Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications said that the Council’s strategy would include a whole basket of measures to reduce carbon and whilst the tree planting was only a small part, the scheme would be a powerful sign of the Council’s commitment and hopefully encourage everyone to get involved to do their bit. The consultation would be wide ranging in order to understand what the Borough’s residents wanted and what they were already doing, so they obtained a full picture.

Resolved:

- That**
- (i) the aim to achieve carbon neutrality within the Council’s own estate and operations by 2030 be supported.**
 - (ii) the challenges to achieve carbon neutrality across the Borough by 2030 be recognised, whilst acknowledging national and regional targets, and remaining committed to working in partnership to achieve carbon neutrality across the Borough as soon as possible, supporting the UK Government’s target to reduce emissions by 78% by 2035, compared to 1990 levels.**

- (iii) the draft Carbon Neutral Action Plan be approved for consultation.
- (iv) the appointment of Laser Energy to undertake an emissions baseline and pathways study to inform the final draft action plan be noted.

30 Ashford Strategic Delivery Board – Notes of 30th April 2021

Resolved:

That the Notes of the Meeting of the Ashford Strategic Delivery Board held on the 30th April 2021 be received and noted.

31 Compliance and Enforcement Board – Notes of 27th April 2021

Resolved:

That the Notes of the Meeting of the Compliance and Enforcement Board held on the 27th April 2021 be received and noted.

32 IT and Digital Transformation Advisory Committee – Notes of 16th March 2021

The Chairman of the Advisory Committee said he just wanted to highlight the great amount of work that was being done on digital transformation across the Council. The Leader said he had been astonished to learn exactly how much work IT and others were doing in this area, to transform the way the Council did its work.

Resolved:

That the Notes of the Meeting of the IT and Digital Transformation Advisory Committee held on the 16th March 2021 be received and noted.

33 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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Cabinet

Minutes of a Meeting of the Cabinet held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **24th June 2021**.

Present:

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

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

Also Present:

Cllrs. Sparks, Wright.

In attendance:

Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive, Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer, Head of Housing, Member Services Manager.

53 Declarations of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Bartlett	Made a Voluntary Announcement as he was a Trustee of the Central Ashford Community Forum.	59
Clarkson	Made a Voluntary Announcement as he was a member of the Weald of Kent Protection Society.	61
Clokie	Made a Voluntary Announcement as he was a member of the Weald of Kent Protection Society.	61

54 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 27th May 2021 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

55 Leader's Announcements

The Leader said that whilst he did not have any particular announcements, he did just want to mention that it was pleasing to that whilst the coronavirus figures were showing an increase in cases, the local hospitals were not reporting an increase in admissions and the death rate was still very low. This did not detract from those who had so tragically lost their lives, but it did bode well for the easing of the lockdown and reflected well on the vaccination programme.

56 The Energy Efficiency (Private Rented Property) (England and Wales) Regulations 2015 – Financial Penalty Policy

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which sought approval to implement a Fee Policy Framework to allow the Council to achieve improvements in the private rented sector and reduce fuel poverty.

Resolved:

That the Fee Policy Framework, as attached at Appendix 1 to the report, be approved.

57 Electrical Safety Standards Regulations 2020 – Implementing Financial Penalties

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which advised that the above Regulations required electrical installations in private rented properties to be safe. Landlords who failed to comply could be fined up to £30,000. In order to be able to implement such fines the Council was required to have a Fees Policy. The report sought approval from the Cabinet to adopt the Council's existing Financial Fee Policy.

Resolved:

That the Council's existing Financial Penalty Policy, as contained at Appendix 2 to the report, be adopted.

58 The Mobile Homes (Requirement for Manager of Site to be Fit and Proper Person) (England) Regulations 2020 – Implementing Fee Policy and Charge

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which sought approval to implement a fit and proper person test for site owners or appointed managers to improve park home site management standards and to implement a fee policy.

Resolved:

- That**
- (i) a fit and proper person test for relevant protected sites be implemented.**
 - (ii) the fee to recover the costs in the application process of undertaking a fit and proper person test be formally approved.**
 - (iii) the amendment to the existing Fee Policy to incorporate the proposed fee be formally approved.**
 - (iv) the Head of Housing be given approval to adjust the fees set out in the existing Fee Policy.**

59 Net Carbon Zero Short Stay Housing Accommodation Proposal

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which notified Members of the formal planning application that was due to be submitted and sought endorsement of the potential alternative use of this site, as well as updating on progress with the project to date. He advised that there was a continuing need to respond to those threatened by homelessness and provide them with advice and assistance, including the provision of temporary accommodation. This Council already had two exemplar short-stay accommodation facilities at Christchurch House and Christchurch Lodge, which provided a far more practical and compassionate solution, than the more expensive and unsuitable 'paid for nightly' accommodation, but there were still around 100 people in such accommodation. The proposal to build this imaginative new facility on a much underutilised car park at Henwood would help solve the issue, whilst also providing attractive, net zero carbon homes.

The Deputy Leader said he fully supported the project and advised that the Council's Development Partnership Manager would be presenting to the Central Ashford Forum on the 13th September on this scheme. He hoped that by then they would be back to meeting in person and, in that case, all would be welcome.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development reiterated that it was important to note that this report was not pre-judging the outcome of any planning application. That planning application would be taken on merit by the Planning Committee at the appropriate time.

Resolved:

- That**
- (i) the content of the report and the fact that an application was being made to Planning be noted.**
 - (ii) the exploration of the potential use of the car park at Henwood be endorsed, mindful that the scheme proposed is subject to formal planning consent being obtained.**

- (iii) **expenditure on the project shall not be incurred until planning permission has been achieved, with the exception of £70,000 of preparation works that would be undertaken at risk.**
- (iv) **funding be allocated in accordance with the proposed budget of £4.7m to ensure the delivery of the scheme, with such funding to be met from the use of reserves and borrowing, the extent of which is to be determined by the Deputy Chief Executive.**
- (v) **It be agreed that ZedPods are accessed from the LHC framework, an external procurement framework.**
- (vi) **authority be delegated to the Head of Corporate Property and Projects, the Head of Housing and the Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer, to complete all necessary agreements that would need to be completed in order to expedite the above recommendations.**

60 Digital Transformation of Visitor Information Services at the Ashford Gateway

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which explained how the Visitor Information Service was effectively using the digital transformation agenda, allowing resources to be moved away from needing an Officer located at the Visitor Information Centre in Ashford Gateway to support other visitor economy marketing and development opportunities. The report also advised that Council Officers would work with KCC to agree future alternative use of the space and a possible early release of the Partnership Agreement which expired in 2026.

Resolved:

- That
- (i) **the digital transformation of the Visitor Information Service and the impact on requiring a staffed Visitor Information Centre at the Ashford Gateway be endorsed.**
 - (ii) **authority be delegated to the Head of Corporate Property and Projects to agree future alternative use of the space and, where possible, early release of the Partnership Agreement which expires in 2026.**

61 Ashford's Living Legacy for the Queen's Jubilee

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Land Management introduced the report which advised that, in conjunction with the Queen's Green Canopy initiative for 2022, and the Government's England Trees Action Plan (2021-2024), Ashford Borough Council was planning to plant one tree for each resident living in the Borough in 2022 (approximately 135,000), over the next three winters. This would be a bold an ambitious plan as part of the Council's wider carbon reduction initiatives.

The Leader stressed that the Council would be calling on everyone in Borough – individuals, schools, businesses, Parish Councils etc. to help with this plan and the actual planting. He had dubbed this the “Tree-Army” and it was hoped that such engagement would not only grow trees, but also grow communities.

Resolved:

That (i) the plan be endorsed.

(ii) authority be delegated to the Head of Environment and Land Management, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Land Management and the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development, to decide upon the most suitable sites and species to take this project forward.

(iii) £318,000 be allocated from the Project Fund, to ensure the delivery of this project.

62 Joint Transportation Board – Minutes of 1st June 2021

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Joint Transportation Board held on the 1st June 2021 be received and noted.

63 Trading and Enterprise Board – Minutes of 27th May 2021

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Trading and Enterprise Board held on the 27th May 2021 be approved and adopted.

64 Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group – Notes of 5th May 2021

Resolved:

That the Notes of the Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group held on the 5th May 2021 be received and noted.

65 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.

66 Joint Transportation Board – Nomination of Membership

Resolved:

That the following Members be appointed to the Joint Transportation Board: Councillors Burgess, Cornish, Feacey, Bernard Heyes (Ch), Tina Heyes, Krause and Spain.

67 Exclusion of the Public

Resolved:

That pursuant to Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item, as it is likely in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings that if members of the public were present there would be disclosure of exempt information hereinafter specified by reference to Paragraphs 2 and 3 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.

68 HRA Acquisition

The Portfolio Holder introduced the exempt report which advised of the proposed acquisition and the reasons for it being brought before the Cabinet for approval.

Resolved:

- That**
- (i) the purchase and refurbishment of the property in the report be approved and funded from the existing budget for street purchases.**
 - (ii) the capital expenditure for the renovations be added to the Capital Programme.**
 - (iii) the Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer be authorised, in consultation with the Head of Housing, to execute all documentation in relation to the proposed acquisition.**

Cabinet

Minutes of a Meeting of the Cabinet held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **29th July 2021**.

Present:

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

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

Apologies:

Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive.

Also Present:

Cllrs. Blanford, Clokie, Harman, Sparks, C Suddards.

In attendance:

Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer, Head of Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications, Head of Finance and IT, Head of Planning and Development, Member Services Manager.

83 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 24th June 2021 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

84 Leader's Announcements

The Leader said that he did want to make mention of three matters.

Firstly he said that he thought colleagues would be pleased to note that the Government had announced its intention to scrap its Action Fraud Unit. He considered this was good news as, in his view, it had been particularly ineffective. It would be replaced with a National Fraud and Cyber Crime reporting system and the Police were also keen to start taking more action in this sphere.

Secondly, the Government had also announced that they intended to ban developers from building on land at risk from flooding. This was of particular interest to this Borough with its large area in the flood plain and he knew the Council's Planning

team would be looking at this very closely. Fortunately, during the last serious spell of flooding in the Borough, not a single one of the newer developments that had benefitted from Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems had flooded. This was a great credit to the systems put in place and a sign that they needed to continue to follow this course of action.

Finally, following the devastating flooding in Ashford's twin town of Bad Münstereifel in Germany, the Leader advised that a Just Giving page had been set up and he was pleased to note that donations had now reached nearly £13,000. They had all been shocked at the tragic effect the flooding had had on their friends in Bad Münstereifel and they had indeed flown the Borough flag at half-mast in respect of those who had lost their lives and thoughts remained with them.

85 Financial Outturn 2020/21

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which presented the outturn revenue position for the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account for the 2020/21 financial year. It also presented the outturn for capital works and how these works had been financed, the Collection Fund position, reserves outturn and a treasury management update.

The Portfolio Holder said that as he had just take over the Portfolio, credit for the report should go to previous Portfolio Holder and his staff. The process of logging the financial situation of the last year had been key in trying to properly understand exactly what had happened over the last 12 months, which had clearly been particularly testing. The resulting surpluses were thanks to the Organisation as a whole, with particularly good management from the Finance department. Over the last reporting year some 8000 grants had been processed by Revenues and Benefits totalling £41.5m and 2400 grants had been processed by the Economic Development team totalling £4.9m. This was a significant amount of additional work and deserved particular recognition. Savings across all Services had been delivered and had covered the massive forecasted budget deficits following the COVID pandemic. Projects had been deferred or delayed, vacancy filling had also been deferred, homelessness had become a key priority with a significant additional pressure applied to the budget, and parking revenue had dipped by 62%, therefore it was important to highlight the sheer amount of work and effort that had gone in to producing such a relatively healthy budget outcome on behalf of the residents of the Borough.

The Leader drew attention to the Kent Business Rates Pool update which had resulted in an estimated net benefit of approximately £1.68m to Ashford. This would go in to reserves as the Authority re-embarked on its investment plans and project delivery in the coming years.

Resolved:

- That (i) the financial outturn for 2020/21 be received and noted.**
- (ii) the Capital Outturn, Collection Fund position and Treasury Management update be received noted.**

- (iii) **the reserve transfers and position (as per Tabled 5 of the report) be approved.**

86 Annual Performance Report 2021 and Corporate Plan 2022-2024

The Leader introduced the report which presented the Annual Performance Report for the last year, set against the objectives of the Recovery Plan and the draft Corporate Plan 2022-2024. Building on the three themes of the Ashford Ambition report: - Green Pioneer; Caring Ashford; and Targeted Growth; the draft Corporate Plan's objectives and actions would enable the Council to continue the journey to achieving the Ashford Ambition developed with a wide range of local stakeholders. The report asked the Cabinet to note the 2021 Annual Performance Report and approve the draft Corporate Plan 2022-2024 for consultation.

The Leader thanked Officers for a sterling piece of work and producing a draft plan that linked across all departments and embraced the three themes of the Recovery Plan. The Head of Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications advised that there was a slight change to the report in that the consultation would now run until September, with a report back to the Cabinet in October.

The Deputy Leader said he endorsed the document and particularly the sections on expanding the Ashford economy. On that note, he was pleased to advise that the Kent Resilience Forum had earlier that day agreed to lift Operation Brock on the M20. He thought all colleagues would appreciate this news as, in his view, it had been unnecessary to re-instate it in the first place.

The Leader advised that, on a related note, he was in the process of creating the Greater Ashford Land Mapping Commission. This would be chaired by Councillor Paul Clokie, with the Leader of the largest Opposition Group Councillor Noel Ovenden as Vice-Chairman. The Commission would be about examining the entire land mass of the Borough with a view to protecting the best of Ashford's countryside against inappropriate development, which he considered a moral duty. The Commission would have the task of identifying areas for protection and they would need to establish a sound rationale for such designation in each case, but the Council would have no hesitation in pushing back against and challenging Government where necessary. It would be a non-political group and include representation from the CRPE, WKPS, local AONB Units and KALC, as well as relevant Council Officers. The Commission also had the support of the local MP Damian Green and KCC. He had set a target of December 2022 for production of a final report. Councillor Clokie advised that one of the most important aspects would be working with the Parish Councils and ensuring that they agreed the land suggested in their own areas.

Resolved:

That (i) the Annual Performance Report 2021 be received and noted.

- (ii) **the draft Corporate Plan 2022-2024 be approved for consultation.**

87 Pay Policy Statement – Annual Review

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which advised that the Localism Act 2011 required the Council to publish an Annual Pay Policy Statement. This report was an opportunity to review the current Statement to ensure it was up to date and reflected the Council's approach to pay. The Council also took this annual review as an opportunity to review the rates of the Ashford Living Wage Allowance (ALWA) and the Ashford Apprentice Wage Allowance (AAWA) and the report provided recommendations on rates for the 2021/22 allowances. He reiterated that the ALWA and AAWA were still significantly above the statutory national rates.

Both the Leader and Portfolio Holder said they wanted to take the opportunity to praise the staff in Human Resources for dealing so well with the pressures brought about over the last year, particularly including the recruitment for a whole new Service in Port Health, along with the general pressures of the pandemic.

Recommended:

- That (i) **the updated Pay Policy Statement be approved.**
- (ii) **the Ashford Living Wage Allowance be increased to £9.27 for 2021 and this be backdated to 1st April 2021.**
- (iii) **the Ashford Apprentice Wage Allowance continues to be maintained at 15 pence per hour over the National Minimum Wage rate applicable to the age of the apprentice.**

88 A Nutrient Mitigation Strategy for the Stour Catchment in Ashford Borough

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which outlined the background of advice issued by Natural England in July 2020 with the result that the Council had been unable to grant planning permission for new housing within the Stour Catchment since then, unless the proposal could show it could achieve nutrient neutrality. In response to the gravity of the situation, Officers had been asked to pursue a mitigation strategy as a means to finding a strategic solution within the Borough's boundary. Accordingly, Officers had been working with expert consultants to prepare a Stodmarsh Mitigation Strategy for the Council. The report introduced that draft strategy and explained that the only realistic land based solution involved the creation of new strategic wetlands in the Borough. The Portfolio Holder said he could not overstate the importance and urgency of this issue. The report therefore sought Cabinet agreement to actively pursue a mitigation strategy based on the delivery of new strategic wetlands.

The report was opened up to Members and the following comments were made: -

- In terms of exploring land acquisition options and lobbying Government for financial assistance, it was also worth noting that the Government already owned land in the Borough, particularly adjacent to the International Border Facility, which could contribute to the overall solution.
- This was not a unique situation to Ashford and indeed all of the Districts in Kent, along with Kent County Council, had written to the relevant Government Ministers outlining the situation and seeking funding.
- The situation did present a great opportunity to create impressive wetlands, not only for the benefit of wildlife, but also the Borough's residents.
- The Council would continue to fight 'tooth and nail' against any inappropriate development in areas not affected by the Stodmarsh issue.
- Communications on the issue would be vitally important as would close liaison with Parish Councils and KALC (the Kent Association of Local Councils). The Leader asked if Briefing Notes and press releases could be sent out to keep everyone informed and give them a clear picture of what was happening.

Resolved:

- That**
- (i) the principle of acquiring land within the Borough as a means of creating new strategic wetlands for the purposes of nutrient mitigation be agreed.**
 - (ii) Central Government should be approached for grant and/or loan funding to deliver the mitigation package.**
 - (iii) in the event that (ii) above is unsuccessful, it be agreed that a financial package be set aside by the Council for the purposes of delivering the mitigation package.**
 - (iv) Officers be authorised to prepare a credits-based formula to be considered for adoption as a Supplementary Planning Document as a means of seeking proportionate developer contributions towards the delivery and maintenance of the mitigation package.**
 - (v) the Head of Planning and Development, the Head of Corporate Property and Projects and the Solicitor to the Council be authorised, in consultation with their Portfolio Holders, to negotiate, enter into agreements and complete acquisitions of land and any related documentation, to implement the nutrient mitigation strategy and to make necessary arrangements (subject to all planning and other consents) for works to be undertaken on land to create strategic wetlands, with a view to generating nitrogen and phosphorous credits.**

89 Revenues and Benefits Recommended Write-Offs Schedule

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which proposed the formal write-off of £86,225.20. The proposals were in line with the Council's Revenues and Benefits Service Write-Off Policy. The Deputy Chief Executive had been consulted along with Heads of Service for relevant areas.

Resolved:

- That (i) the action that accounts totalling £21,726.15 had been written-off under delegated powers (Financial Regulations 11.1 refers) be noted.
- (ii) the write-offs listed in the Exempt Appendix to the report totalling £64,499.05 be approved.

90 Civic and Ceremonial Programme Board – Notes of 23rd June 2021

Resolved:

That the Notes of the Meeting of the Civic and Ceremonial Programme Board held on the 23rd June 2021 be received and noted.

91 Economic Regeneration and Investment Board – Notes of 21st May and 29th June 2021

Resolved:

That the Notes of the Meetings of the Economic Regeneration and Investment Board held on the 21st May and 29th June 2021 be received and noted.

92 Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group – Notes of 24th June 2021

Resolved:

That the Notes of the Meeting of the Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group held on the 24th June 2021 be received and noted.

93 Schedule of Key Decisions to be Taken

Resolved:

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

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Decisions effective from the 13th October 2021 unless they are called in or are recommended to the Council for approval

Cabinet

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Present:

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

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

Apologies:

Cllr Clokie.

Also Present:

Cllrs. Harman, Sparks, Wedgbury, Wright.

In attendance:

Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive, Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer, Accountancy Manager, Economic Development Manager, Senior Economic Development Officer, Play and Open Spaces Project Officer, Member Services Manager.

117 Declarations of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Bartlett	Made a Voluntary Announcement as he had used some of his KCC Combined Members Grant to support the Rylands Road play area.	123
Wedgbury	Made a Voluntary Announcement as he had used some of his Member Grant for play equipment in Kingsnorth and he was a Member of Kingsnorth Parish Council.	123

118 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 29th July 2021 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

119 Leader's Announcements

The Leader said that he did want to provide some clarity to one issue. As colleagues would know the NCP car park in Ashford Town Centre had closed last week and it had been reported in the local media that this would be a permanent closure. The local newspaper had also reported this week that the Council had bought the car park over a year ago which was untrue. The reality was that the owners of the NCP car park had chosen to dispose of it, along with a number of its car parks, and once the Council had learned it was being disposed of they had entered negotiations and completed only that previous Friday (24th September).

The Council's intention was to ensure that the car park was fit for purpose. They were going to spend some money refurbishing it, including remedying the current leaks in to Park Mall and resurfacing it, and once those repairs were complete they would be re-opening the car park and reducing parking charges for the community in line with the Council's other car parks. It was hoped this would increase footfall for the premises in Park Mall.

120 Financial Monitoring Report – First Four Months to 31st July 2021

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which presented the first budget monitoring position for 2021/22, up to 31 July 2021. This first update reported the General Fund (GF) as having a small surplus of £42,000. However, this included a pressure of £954,000 in services which was supported by additional investment income of £515,000 and £481,000 being transferred from reserves. The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) was forecasting an underspend of £2.468m against budget, which was due to slippages in planned maintenance works as a result of supply chain issues and continued delays from the Covid-19 Pandemic. The first quarter report also provides an update on the Collection Fund, Capital expenditure, Treasury Management and Reserve movements. The Rough Sleepers Accommodation Programme (RSAP), Courtside and Pitchside fees and charges, and Council write offs were also included within the report.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Land Management said one point that concerned him was that the Housing Services (General Fund) budget was forecast at £914k and had gone up by another £90k. Although this was a modest amount, it did point to the fact that Temporary Accommodation costs for the homeless were still high. He asked if that were to be the end of year figure, would that be reduced down to around £500/£600k after Housing Benefit receipts had been taken into account, or was that roughly a net £1m on Temporary Accommodation? Secondly, with regard to

the Henwood Temporary Accommodation Scheme, he considered this was vitally important to this Council as an 'invest to save' project and thought that, looking at the figures, the Council may need to consider a second facility of this type as this was not something that could be allowed to continue indefinitely and did need to be addressed in the coming years. The Deputy Chief Executive said that whilst he would be happy to provide the Member with a more detailed answer outside of the meeting, it was important to note that the budget for Housing Services that had been highlighted was the budget for the entire budget for the General Fund element of the Service, not just Temporary Accommodation costs. The figure would also be net of Housing Benefit. It was true to say that the chief element of this was pressure from Temporary Accommodation costs and this was partly from delays to the Henwood scheme which had been factored in to the original budget. This was an pressure that was well known and understood and the Council were putting in place a number of measures to mitigate it. It was an important budgetary issue that would continue to be closely monitored. The Portfolio Holder said that the questions did stress the importance of regular Financial Monitoring reports being produced. These highlighted situations in almost real time and did not wait until the end of the year to identify issues and tweak delivery within the budget year if necessary.

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 proposed contributions from reserves be approved and noted.**
 - (iv) the overspend on the capital programme for 'The Poplars' and how this can be funded from programme underspends (Paragraph 47 of the report refers) be noted.**
 - (v) the Treasury Management position be noted.**
 - (vi) a further application to the Rough Sleepers Accommodation Project be approved, which would lead to a request for Council approval for capital expenditure.**
 - (vii) the fees and charges for Courtside and Pitchside, as shown at Appendix C to the report, be noted.**
 - (viii) the HRA write offs totalling £239,583.22, which have been processed under delegated authority, be noted.**
 - (ix) the General Fund Housing write offs made under delegated authority be noted and the amounts over £1,000, as detailed in Exempt Appendix D to the report, be approved.**

Recommended:

That the receipt of £764,235 of grant monies from Round 1 funding be noted and Council approve capital spend of £1.7m for the purchase of 10 General Fund properties.

121 Corporate Performance Report – Quarter 1 2021/22

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. He reinforced that the data within the report belonged to all Members and he encouraged all to interrogate the report where it applied to them.

The Deputy Leader referred to two areas – the proposed new car park in Adley's Yard which he hoped to see a delivery date for soon, and the potential closure of the Flour Mill car park, which he hoped would not again see Council staff parking displaced to the Mill Court residential area. The Leader said that the Adley's Yard Car Park had been approved and was progressing. He could not give an absolute date yet, but it would be delivered at pace. On Flour Mills, the Chief Executive advised that all staff now received free parking at the Civic Centre and the car parks there were big enough, so there would be no reason for displacement in to Mill Court.

Resolved:

That the performance data for Quarter 1 2021/21 be received and noted.

122 Boughton Aluph and Eastwell Parishes Neighbourhood Plan

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which advised that the amended and final version of the Neighbourhood Plan had been the subject of a local referendum in the Parish and 92.67% had voted in favour of the plan. Following the successful referendum it was now the Local Planning Authority's responsibility to formally 'make' (i.e. adopt) the Plan, which would confer full Development Plan status for decision making purposes. This must be agreed by Full Council. He said he wanted to express his thanks to those in the village who had put in the hard work to develop this plan and he was happy to endorse it.

Recommended:

That Full Council 'make' the Boughton Aluph and Eastwell Parishes Neighbourhood Plan 2013-2030 in accordance with Section 38A(4) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, to become part of the Development Plan.

123 Play Area Investment

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which proposed a Capital Play Regeneration Programme alongside a Repairs and Renewals Programme to safeguard appropriate play spaces and facilitate opportunities for ongoing improvement. The Programme included three key priority locations that required significant refurbishment and explained that £1.1m capital investment was required to make them fun, innovative and fully inclusive and accessible. To further safeguard play spaces owned by the Council, an enhanced Repairs and Renewals programme was proposed that included £200,000 in 2022/23 and £100,000 per annum thereafter, for refurbishment and maintenance of existing play, teen and outdoor gym facilities.

A Member said he taken a great interest in play areas over the years and was really pleased to see this report coming forward. He considered most Local Authorities would rely on Section 106 monies to provide play facilities and without proper maintenance these often failed and had to be removed, but Ashford's investment in to play areas was exciting. These were so important to communities and he was also pleased that local Members would be able to have a decent input in to conversations and he hoped that would be extended to Parish Councils as he knew Kingsnorth Parish Council, as one example, had a keen interest in this subject.

The Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Wellbeing said he fully supported this paper and stressed the importance of such facilities. He said he wanted to pay particular tribute to the residents of Rylands Road who he knew had been fundraising for their park and he considered that sort of investment from the local community would ensure a sustainable legacy for these facilities.

The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Property and Projects said he was too excited by the proposals. He had heard anecdotally about people from certain communities having to drive to get to a decent play area and this would ensure that many more people would have a decent play area within walking distance. The addition of cycle racks and Public Rights of Way would also help to enhance the Council's Cycling and Walking Strategy.

The Portfolio Holder thanked everyone for their comments. On engagement with Kingsnorth Parish Council, he knew this was already in hand along with the Park Farm Playground Group. He agreed that such engagement gave a sense of ownership to communities and the play areas were more likely to be respected and looked after.

Resolved:

- That**
- (i) £1.1m be invested for a Play Regeneration Programme from the Improvement and Corporate Projects Fund in three key priority play locations – Rylands Road, Bybrook; Central Park, Bluebell Road, Park Farm; and Spearpoint Recreation Ground, Kennington.**
 - (ii) the Head of Culture, Tourism and Leisure be delegated authority, in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder, to execute and**

complete all tasks and documentation necessary to deliver the Play Regeneration Programme.

- (iii) additional budget of £200,000 in 2022/23, and £100,000 each year thereafter, be allocated to the Repairs and Renewals budget, earmarked for maintenance, repair and replacement of individual play area assets as agreed by the Head of Environment and Land Management, in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder.**

124 Update on Broadband Improvements in the Ashford Borough

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which analysed the latest data on fixed and mobile telecommunications access in the Borough. It also updated Members on the activities undertaken to attract investment and improve infrastructure in the Borough by private sector operators, in particular the implementation of Policy EMP6 within the Ashford Local Plan. Finally, the report set out potential areas for Officers to investigate and work on moving forward given the importance of broadband and telecommunications infrastructure within the Council's Corporate Plan 2022 – 2024.

The Leader advised that following the recent Cabinet reshuffle, Councillor Neil Bell would continue to lead on broadband issues rather than Councillor Shorter.

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 a key priority in the Council's draft Corporate Plan.**
 - (iii) the proposed actions for digital infrastructure (section 34 of the report refers) be incorporated into the final version of the Corporate Plan 2022 – 2024.**

125 Queen's Platinum Jubilee and Albacore Event Programme 2022

Report Withdrawn.

126 The Resettlement of Afghan Nationals Through the Government ARAP Scheme

The report gave an overview of Ashford Borough Council's response to the Government's appeal to Local Authorities to assist in the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP), and to the subsequent emergency evacuation of Afghan Locally Employed Staff (ALES) and their families and other qualifying Afghan

nationals. This showed how the Council continued to play its part in the national commitment to planned refugee resettlement under the UK Resettlement Scheme.

The Leader advised that further to this, a local hotel was being used as a 'bridging hotel' for some of the ALES and their families, before they were rehomed all over the country (not Ashford) - Ashford had made its own separate pledge to settle between five and ten families. The Portfolio Holder for Housing said it was important to acknowledge the amazing work going on at the bridging hotel and the donations and volunteers from businesses and the community and even the hotel staff themselves, that had all been forthcoming to help in all of that. It was really heart-warming to see what had gone on there. It was also important to note that the five to ten families would be provided with private rented accommodation, so there would be no impact on the Council's current housing waiting lists.

The Deputy Leader said that Ashford had really stood out for its speed and decisiveness in getting involved with this scheme and for its community response which had been astonishing. He asked about the size of the families, which were traditionally larger than UK families, and whether the Government were providing sufficient funding for them to be properly accommodated. The Chief Executive confirmed that the Government ARAP Scheme matched the previous Syrian Refugee Scheme in that the allocation of funding was per individual, so there was adequate funding. The intention was that the settlement of the Afghan nationals would be a lot quicker than the previous Syrian Refugees. Many already spoke English, had British passports and already had connections within the UK.

Resolved:

- That**
- (i) debt of gratitude owed by the UK to the Afghan Locally Employed Staff be acknowledged.**
 - (ii) the offer to settle between five and ten families in Ashford under the ARAP scheme be supported.**
 - (iii) the continuing development of projects and infrastructure to promote and enable successful integration and promote community cohesion to benefit the wider Ashford community be supported.**
 - (iv) a future report will come before Members in due course to approve funding for the programme.**

127 Joint Transportation Board – Minutes of 7th September 2021

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Joint Transportation Board held on the 7th September 2021 be received and noted.

128 Compliance and Enforcement Board – Notes of 27th July 2021

Resolved:

That the Notes of the Meeting of the Compliance and Enforcement Board held on the 27th July 2021 be received and noted.

129 Economic Regeneration and Investment Board – Notes of 25th August 2021

Resolved:

That the Notes of the Meeting of the Economic Regeneration and Investment Board held on the 25th August 2021 be received and noted.

130 Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group – Notes of 5th August 2021

Resolved:

That the Notes of the Meeting of the Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group held on the 5th August 2021 be received and noted.

131 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.

132 Exclusion of the Public

Resolved:

That pursuant to Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item, as it is likely in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings that if members of the public were present there would be disclosure of exempt information hereinafter specified by reference to Paragraph 3 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.

133 Review of Housing Options Team

The Portfolio Holder introduced the exempt report which advised that as a result of a review of the Housing Options Service, a new structure had been identified. Cabinet was required to recommend to Council the early release of pension costs associated with the review.

Recommended:

That the early release of pension costs arising from the Housing Options restructure be approved.

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