

Ashford Borough Council

Minutes of a Meeting of the Ashford Borough Council held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **21st July 2022**.

Present:

Her Worshipful the Mayor, Cllr. J A Webb (Chairman);

Cllrs. Anckorn, Barrett, Bartlett, Mrs Bell, Blanford, Buchanan, Burgess, Campkin, Chilton, Clokie, Cornish, Feacey, Forest, Hayward, B Heyes, Howard, Howard-Smith, Illiffe, Knowles, Krause, Ledger, Meaden, Michael, Mulholland, Ovenden, Pickering, Shorter, Smith, Spain, Sparks, C Suddards, L Suddards, Turner, Wedgbury, Wright.

Also Present:

Deputy Chief Executive, Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer, Director of Health and Wellbeing, Civic Officer, Member Services Manager.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Bell, Clarkson, Farrell, Harman, Link, Nilsson, Pauley, Rogers.

Prior to the commencement of the meeting Members remained standing in respect of the late Dr Robert Thomas Taylor CBE, Mr Simon Rigby Foster, and Mr Serge Joseph "George" Koowaree, all former Members of this Council who had passed away recently. The Reverend Starkings then said prayers.

102 Exempt or Confidential Information

The Mayor asked whether any items should be dealt with in private because of the likely disclosure of exempt or confidential information. The Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer advised that there were none.

103 Declarations of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Feacey	Made a 'Voluntary Announcement' as he was Chairman of the Ashford Volunteer Centre	
Webb	Made a 'Voluntary Announcement' as a Director of the Ashford Volunteer Centre.	
	Made a 'Voluntary Announcement' as her husband had previously been in receipt of a Disabled Facilities Grant.	113 (d)
Wedgbury	Made a 'Voluntary Announcement' as a paid Shop	

Steward for the USDAW Trade Union.

104 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on the 19th May 2022 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

105 Announcements

(a) Deputy Leader of the Council

The Deputy Leader said he would like to start his announcement by referring to agenda item 14 – the Motion that had been submitted. He accepted he could have chosen his words better in response to allegations from a leading opposition Council colleague who had lost faith in the Leadership of the Council, who accused the Leadership of having to rely on senior Officers to guide them on key decisions and there had also been accusations of infighting and sniping at meetings. He was happy to apologise for his words. It had now been two months, and he was now confident that the majority of colleagues were now fully behind the Leader and any infighting and sniping had disappeared like snowflakes in a heatwave.

He said he was delighted that opposition parties and the leading group had now come together to secure control of the Newtown Works site by a mortgage so that they could move on with deploying the £14.7m of Government Levelling Up funding. Their appointed Councillor, who was Chair of the Board of their majority owned company, Ashford International Development Company Limited, Councillor Feacey, would work hard to deliver the project. It would create a sought-after film studio space, provide thousands of jobs and make the town a hub for the creative arts industry, which was set to grow significantly in the future. Other important developments in the last two months included work that had begun on accessing further Levelling Up funds from the Youth Opportunities Fund for those Wards that qualified, including Stanhope and Bockhanger.

The Deputy Leader said that if two months was a long time in Ashford politics, two weeks seems even longer. He could not let events in Westminster pass without comment. It's was a fortnight since Boris Johnson had resigned and they were now down to a contest between two superb candidates to be the next Prime Minister. The decision would be made by a highly engaged electorate and he had attended the first hustings earlier that day at the Local Government Association to hear the candidates' proposals for Local Government. He considered that whoever ended up with whatever job in Government in the next few weeks needed to look urgently at the funding for Local Government, devolution, house building targets and how to carry the community with them. What he had heard was a laser like focus on the cost-of-living crisis from the Government and there was news on that with regard to Ashford.

He advised that KCC had received Household Support Funding from the Government and had now confirmed an allocation of £374,179 for Ashford. This was split into £290,700 to support pensioners with energy bills and £83,479 to support vulnerable adults. The details of the Ashford scheme were as follows – To provide all pensioners

who were in receipt of the £150 Council Tax Energy Rebate for properties in bands A to D with a payment of £100 towards their energy costs. It was important for colleagues to be aware that the Council was not able to use the data obtained via the Council Tax Energy Rebate Scheme to make direct payments from this funding. Therefore a letter would be sent to all 2,840 eligible pensioners in the Borough to advise them of the opportunity to claim this £100 and to provide their details to enable payment. This meant that this new £100 must be claimed and it was partly down to colleague Councillors to make sure their residents were aware and claimed what they were entitled to. This had been announced in the month when those in receipt of means-tested benefits also started to receive one off cash payments. The earlier £150 Council Tax Energy Rebate must be claimed by those who have not received a direct payment by 31 July 2022, and he urged colleagues to spread the word as that deadline was fast approaching. Support for other vulnerable households of up to £100 per household, for assistance for energy or food, could be applied at the website address <https://www.ashford.gov.uk/benefits/claiming-benefits/household-support-fund-1-april-30-september-2022/>

Again it was important to note that this must be claimed by 30 September 2022. He urged all Members to get behind this so they could ensure they deployed all the funds made available to them. Around 850,000 people in the UK were missing out on Pension Credit and £1.7bn was going unclaimed. This was an opportunity to remind residents through Councillors of the need to register for Pension Credit by 18th August 2022 if they were not already claiming and they wished to claim the £650 payment from the Government to support them in the cost of living crisis. They needed to ensure that all residents who were eligible and had not already claimed to do so by calling 0800 99 1234. If they applied for Pension Credit by 18th August 2022, they would receive £326 straight away, £324 in October and may be eligible for the £300 warm homes discount in December, plus of course the Pension Credit itself which could include a free TV licence and significant reductions in broadband charges.

The Deputy Leader said there was further issue he wanted to address which was recent reports of delays in answering the Police 101 number - particularly distressing during this week, Anti-Social Behaviour Awareness Week. It had been suggested that these were BT issues and outside Police control, but in these circumstances the Police highly recommended their live chat facility which offered all the benefits of speaking to someone, but with the speed of response residents were seeking from the 101 system. The chat was not an automated system unlike other systems, and operators could respond immediately to multiple calls via this method. It was receiving a lot of positive feedback. The website could be accessed at

<https://www.kent.police.uk/ro/report/ocr/af/how-to-report-a-crime/>

He urged colleagues to spread the message and he knew the Police could not over emphasise the importance of “report it, report it and report it again”. That way they would get the resources they needed in Ashford. Chief Inspector Nick Sparkes had agreed to attend the next Kennington Community Council meeting on 10th August at St Mary’s Community Hall, Rylands Road, Kennington to provide an update and would also provide an opportunity for questions. As he had already said, this week was Anti-Social Behaviour Awareness Week. The Community Safety Unit had continued to work in partnership with the Police to raise awareness of Anti-Social Behaviour. There had been a “Safer Summer” event in the Town Centre the previous day where the Police and ABC staff had engaged with the public and provided advice.

Finally, he advised he had agreed with the Mayor that he would take questions on anything he had said but that he would wait to address the current issue with South East Water in the formal question session later.

Councillor Campkin asked with regard to Newtown Works, would the Council or the new Directors commit to putting a two-way communication system in place involving local residents, representatives and businesses? He also wanted to take the opportunity to remind everyone that both South Willesborough and Newtown Community Council and Kennington Community Council were legally and statutorily equivalent to Parish Councils.

The Deputy Leader said he full agreed with what had been said. He had already discussed this with the Clerk, Chairman and Members at South Willesborough and Newtown and they had tentatively agreed to have a meeting every six months or so to discuss progress on the project with key stakeholders. He hoped this would satisfy any concern about information flows on this very important project for the town.

(b) Councillor Steve Campkin

Councillor Campkin said he wanted to say a few words about George Koowaree. He firstly wanted to contest the implication of George's death being sad. Anyone who had seen the recent video on Facebook would agree that there was nothing sad about it. George had served this Council and the Willesborough area for a very long time, some 30 years. George was HIS Councillor - they knew he loved them and he knew they loved him. He said he got out "while the going was good" - stepping down in 2019 at a time of his own choosing and on his own terms. At KCC level he stepped down in 2021, again at a time of his own choosing and on his own terms. He had been awarded Honorary Alderman at KCC and Councillor Campkin had appreciated the opportunity to pay tribute to him but, most importantly, to look him in the eyes and say, on behalf of everyone in Ashford, "thank you, sir" - There were tears!

He had heard that George spent the past year travelling around saying goodbye to his extensive family, and just that past weekend he had attended his granddaughters wedding. The video he mentioned showed him dancing at the event, in his wheelchair. The following morning he checked out, at a time of his own choosing, and on his own terms.

Councillor Campkin said George would be missed but to try not be sad that he was no longer among us - just be glad that he had been.

(c) The Mayor

The Mayor said that Councillor Campkin had paid a fitting tribute to George Koowaree which she though he would have appreciated. He was a man with a great sense of humour, who enjoyed life, enjoyed being a Councillor and enjoyed being with his residents. He had lived a very happy life and positively impacted many people.

As part of her announcements this evening she firstly wanted to note that she was tonight wearing the new robes with the synthetic fur. As she had stated at the last meeting they were being adjusted to fit her properly so she didn't trip. The original robes would stay in the Mayor's Parlour as they were part of Ashford Borough Council's

heritage, but she would be wearing the new robes at all occasions she attended going forward.

What a start it had been to her Mayoral year! It had begun with a full programme of events and celebrations to mark the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. Not just in Ashford but Tenterden and across the Borough too. The Queen's Platinum Jubilee – 'Ashford Celebrates' had been an incredible programme for Ashford to be so proud of. It has begun with the Beacon Lighting event with the Vision Signing Choir performing with local songwriters and performers Chris Symons and Jenny Bailey. It had been wonderful to see so many people attending this event and enjoying the festivities with jubilation. Second was the fabulous Thanksgiving Service to celebrate the life and achievements of our sovereign – Queen Elizabeth - with St Mary's Primary School Choir and a performance from the special Ashford Community Choir. There were readings and music from each decade of the Queen's reign and it had been a truly majestic occasion. The final event of the weekend had been the dedication of the new HMS Albacore Memorial to mark the 80th Anniversary of both Ashford's Warship and the Ashford Sea Cadets. There had been some incredible work from the Council's Aspire team to design the memorial, with generous sponsorship from local citizens and companies to donate the anchor, stones and plaque as well as the work to prepare the anchor. The dedication ceremony had been attended by the Captain of the Sea Cadets, Captain Neil Downing RN, who was also representing the Royal Navy. The Band of the Sea Cadets played and presented the Mayor and Ashford Borough Council with a specially designed HMS Albacore flag. She encouraged anyone who was yet to see this spectacular memorial to go and have a look at it in the Memorial Gardens.

The Mayor said that past Sunday had seen her Civic Service at St Mary's Church. It had been a socially and culturally diverse celebration with Choirs from St Mary's Church and the recently established Fountain Church's Restore Ministry performing along with the Musical Director of the Church on the organ. The procession had also been led by a Nepalese bagpiper. At her Civic Service she had pledged to focus on uniting communities and regenerating businesses, to encourage the rekindling of the community spirit that had been a focus during the pandemic and to encourage everyone to hold out hands of friendship to each other to break down barriers and to work together looking forwards not backwards. She believed that by working together with the Borough's incredible youth, youth organisations and Cadet Forces they would build a wonderful future for Ashford and its diverse Borough, because they were the future. It was everyone's responsibility to make Ashford a stable, and environmentally safe place to live and raise families.

With those principles in her heart she felt most humbled and honoured to take on the role of Mayor for a second term and had already embarked on an exciting voyage of engagements. She also wanted to thank Councillor Krause and his wife Sue, her Deputies for stepping in too where necessary and they had been excellent. She had been working with her charity Singleton Spaces to create a programme of fundraising events including a Bat Tour and Buffet in September, a Murder Mystery evening in the autumn, a Concert and Supper around Christmas, and a New Year Quiz – all at the centre. There would also be her opening dinner at the Everest Inn and Donna would circulate the dates and times shortly.

In conclusion, the Mayor said she wanted to give a fleeting glimpse of just some of the engagements she had attended since May. These included: - Home-Start Ashford's

presentation of a special Queen's Platinum Jubilee handmade wall hanging – created by the children and families at the Centre; a Biodiversity Day and Butterfly Count events at Singleton Environment Centre; the Fabric of Ashford – a Community Arts project in the town centre and at the Environment Centre; joining the Morning Worship at St Mary's Primary School following their wonderful performance at the Thanksgiving Service at St Mary's Church in June where the children sang for her again; the opening of Miles and Barr in Ashford Town Centre; visiting Ark Drama's "young people in action"; and a concert at Godinton House to celebrate and raise funds for the Ashford and Tenterden Samaritans on their great achievement of 50 years of listening to those in crisis - they did incredible work. She had also had the privilege of attending Kent and East Sussex Railway's 150th Anniversary. It had been fabulous to see the new engine and to have a ride on it too. She looked forward to colleagues' support in the days and months ahead and exciting times ahead for Ashford for all to enjoy.

106 Regulatory Committee – 19th July 2022

The Chairman of the Committee said he wanted to thank Officers for their hard work in bringing the exceptional review of fares forward and the two representatives of the industry who had attended the meeting and gathered useful evidence which had helped the Committee with their deliberations.

Resolved:

- That (i) the Minutes of the Meeting of the Regulatory Committee held on the 19th July 2022 be received and noted with the exception of Minute No. 96.**
- (ii) Minute No. 96 be approved and adopted.**

107 Cabinet – 26th May and 30th June 2022

(a) Cabinet – 26th May 2022

Resolved:

- That (i) the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 26th May 2022 be received and noted with the exception of Minute No. 20**
- (ii) Minute No. 20 be approved and adopted.**

(b) Cabinet – 30th June 2022

With reference to Minute Nos. 75 (Climate Change Action Plan) and 85 (Notes of the Climate Change Advisory Committee), Councillor Campkin said he acknowledged the acceptance of the recommendations however, since both the meeting of the Committee and the Cabinet, they had experienced unprecedented temperatures here in Britain and indeed across the world, including forest fires across Europe and floods in Australia where it was currently winter. He said he spent every single day worrying about climate change, which was probably not healthy, and he was actually outside working in the extreme temperatures all day that past Tuesday, but even he had been shocked and

terrified at the scenes on the news when he got home of more than four extreme fires in London. He wanted to pay tribute to the citizens and firefighters who, he believed, were still working as they spoke to control the destruction. Despite this, they had still seen comments from senior politicians and of course self-appointed climatologists on social media, indulging in what he viewed as delusional climate change denial - claiming that actual climate scientists were wrong and "it was just summer". They had also seen all of the Prime Ministerial candidates presenting the false dichotomy during a climate crisis and a cost of living crisis that they must choose between environment and economy. He thought these commentators were correct that climate scientists were wrong in their predictions - they were far too conservative. The temperatures experienced that past Tuesday were higher than in 1976 by several degrees, and were not expected until 2050. The Cabinet minutes, along with the aforementioned candidates, had set 2050 as a target date for Carbon neutrality, in line with the Paris agreement. He said 2050 was far too late. In fact, judging by this week's weather, 2022 may be too late. To compound this, neither Britain nor any other country except Bhutan, was on track to meet even those inadequate targets. Climate change was there, now. It was indeed an "emergency" and he said he took no pleasure in saying "I told you so". The Cabinet reports had been completed and submitted before these events made mainstream news, so he apportioned no blame, but he did want to ask that Members of this Council were mindful that it was later than they thought. He said he was however genuinely pleased to see the Deputy Leader call for an increase in Council funding on his own social media earlier that day and thought this was the kind of leadership that was needed. If Local Authorities were to take action to reduce carbon emissions to zero by 2030 by the absolute latest, and address the cost of living crisis, he considered they must implement a Green New Deal, and this would require, at the very least, an end to austerity and a restoration of Council funding to pre-2011 levels including adjustment for inflation. In addition, as Local Authorities, they must be making those demands crystal clear to both the Government and opposition members in Parliament. He said the sun shone down on rich and poor alike, and it was getting hotter.

Resolved:

- That (i) the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 30th June 2022 be received and noted with the exception of Minute Nos. 80 and 84.**
- (ii) Minute Nos. 80 and 84 be approved and adopted.**

108 Selection and Constitutional Review Committee – 30th June 2022

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Selection and Constitutional Review Committee held on the 30th June 2022 be approved and adopted.

109 Audit Committee – 21st June 2022

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit Committee held on the 21st June 2022 be received and noted.

110 Appointments Committee – 27th May and 21st June 2022

(a) Appointments Committee – 27th May 2022

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Appointments Committee held on the 27th May 2022 be received and noted.

(b) Appointments Committee – 21st June 2022

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Appointments Committee held on the 21st June 2022 be received and noted.

111 Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Annual Report 2021/22

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Ovenden, said he would like to thank all Officers and Members involved with Overview and Scrutiny this year. It had been a very busy year and everyone had worked hard and achieved good results.

Resolved:

That the report be received and accepted.

112 Notices of Motion

Councillor Wright had submitted a Notice of Motion pursuant to Procedure Rule 11. This was detailed in full in the Supplementary Agenda.

The Mayor asked if, following the Deputy Leader's apology earlier in the Meeting, Councillor Wright was prepared to accept this as a response to the original Motion.

Councillor Wright said that a lot had been said at the start of the meeting and she had not quite picked everything up. She asked if the Deputy Leader could repeat that part of his statement.

The Deputy Leader said he was pleased to provide some clarity and was sorry if he had not been clear. First of all, he had dealt with the unacceptable attack on leading

Councillors by the opposition for being rudderless and dependant on others and then there was the accusation of in-fighting and sniping which he considered was beyond the normal cut and thrust of politics. He apologised for any conduct from Conservative Members that had offended and now welcomed the opportunity that other Group Leaders had to make a similar statement on behalf of their own Members who said the things he referred to.

Councillor Wright said that this did not really address the specific point of her Motion which was that there had been a public insult in the press and online calling the opposition Members “odds and sods”. That was the point she wanted addressed. She was unaware of any previous exchanges and she felt the Deputy Leader’s comments stood on their own. It was not a matter of causing offence but she considered it was a breach of the Code of Conduct and brought the Council and the whole democratic process in to disrepute at a time when it really needed defending. She said it had come from one the last people she would have expected it from.

The Deputy Leader said there had been an exchange in the press where leading opposition Councillors had made certain statements about the way that the leadership operated in this Council. He considered that those comments were unacceptable but wanted to draw a line under what was said by both sides. He agreed that exchanging such comments via the Kentish Express was not acceptable. He confirmed that he did regret using the words “odds and sods”.

Councillor Wright confirmed that she accepted the apology.

113 Questions by Members

(a) Question from Councillor Michael to Councillor Bartlett, Deputy Leader of the Council

“Can the Deputy Leader inform Council what action will be taken to ensure the recent loss of water supply to residents does not happen again? Residents were without water for days. What due diligence does the Planning Department exercise to verify that water capacity and supply is in step with future ABC housing numbers? Here we are in the 21st century and it appears the water company is still operating as in Victorian times with unsatisfactory pipework, pumping stations and water storage facilities; and completely absent of future housing and commercial growth. The last few years has witnessed incredible population growth, and the coming years will see even more, so are stand-pipes and water shortages going to become a normal occurrence for residents not only during hot weather but other times too?”

Reply by Councillor Bartlett

“Madam Mayor, I would like to thank Councillor Michael for his question which gives me the opportunity to update Council on the current situation in affected areas. But first we need to remember that the heatwave earlier this week was unprecedented and whilst we need to factor this experience into our future planning, we can’t let this distract us from supporting the communities that are currently affected.

The water supply issues are being caused by the increased demand for water due to the unrepresented hot weather we have experienced over the last week. As an example Monday's demand was over 25% higher than normal within Kent. Although the ground source collection reservoirs are not depleted, South East Water struggled to pump and treat enough water for the current demand. Challock and Molash are on higher ground so to start with had intermittent loss of supply. This loss was managed by South East Water, with the supply being turned on in the morning and turned off during the day to allow for the pumped and treated water to be replenished. Unfortunately, on Wednesday, South East Water did not have sufficient supplies to turn the water on until 5pm. However the water is now back on and although there may be some small disruptions we are expecting a full recovery of water supplies over the next day or so. To add to the pressure on demand, South East Water have had a number of burst pipes that they have been responding to. This is due to weather drying out the ground causing pipes to shift and burst. The situation is moving back towards being stabilised but this has taken six days.

The Council has given mutual aid to South East Water at the Challock water station, where residents have collected water, and we have identified vulnerable people to enable South East Water to drop supplies to those residents. From this morning Freedom Leisure offered residents affected by the water issues the opportunity to use the shower facilities at the Stour Centre. While this is a completely unsatisfactory situation, I wanted to confirm that we have been assisting where we can. Our Emergency Planning team has been in liaison with South East Water and other partners to offer support and ascertain what the issues are. The bottled water station will be manned until 9pm tonight and will operate as long as it is needed. The pumps refilling the local underground reservoir have run for a much longer period today so storage will recover and the situation will improve. Media outlets across Kent, including our own communications channels, are sending out consistent messages to households across social media and other platforms, supporting the South East Water messaging and we should use this forum to encourage our residents to use water responsibly during the heatwave to ensure that there are adequate supplies.

Turning towards how we engage with statutory providers in the planning process, water companies (along with the other utility companies) are statutory consultees when the Council prepares a new Local Plan and they would advise at that stage on whether they foresee any constraints to development arising from a predicted lack of water supply over the Plan period. The Companies themselves are then under their own obligation to show how they intend to plan for and deliver supply in their Water Resource Management Plans (which cover five year periods) and are then assessed by OFWAT. These Plans take account of planned housing numbers across different Districts within their water supply areas and are increasingly factoring in climate change variables.

Turning to how the water companies are operated, it has been interesting today to hear how the two Tory Leadership contenders are fond of quoting the late, great Prime Minister but I wonder what Mrs Thatcher would make of the legacy of her privatisation programme. 'Public to private' was supposed to expose the utilities to free market disciplines and competition, shake out bloated workforces and encourage innovation. What I suspect she could never have envisaged is within just a few decades many would end up being sold from the London Stock Exchange into overseas hands. South East Water is now jointly owned by overseas private venture and an Australian infrastructure fund. Many overseas owned water supply companies are now facing

enforcement action from the Environment Agency. Other than a rush of cash for shareholders and executives, nothing positive can ever come from the loss of local ownership. If Levelling Up is ever to happen the next Prime Minister needs to get a grip, and fast.”

Supplementary Question by Councillor Michael

“I’d like to thank Councillor Bartlett very much for that. There are a couple of points I would like make. First of all some time ago there great concern about water supply going forward and a new reservoir was proposed at Broad Oak, Canterbury as it had been identified that without that we would not have the supply. So whether we have hot weather or not, we already knew there was a problem with supply but we still haven’t got Broad Oak and we’re still dealing with the same supply we had many years ago. So I would ask Councillor Bartlett if he would consider looking at the business continuity plan of South East Water? A lot of us are involved in areas, myself with three schools, where business continuity plans are important, so I would like to know what South East Water’s says. They should have a number of “what if” scenarios. What if it gets too hot? What if pipes or pumping stations fail? So I would ask Councillor Bartlett if he could make an enquiry of South East Water and whether we can see their business continuity plan and what it includes? I cannot accept that because we’ve had extreme heat that is the cause of the problem. It seems to me that lack of proper management, business continuity planning and consideration of the “what ifs” is the cause of the problem.”

Reply by Councillor Bartlett

“Madam Mayor, the new reservoir at Broad Oak, Canterbury is still in the long-term plans I believe but it was put on the backburner somewhat when the new channel was dug from Bewl reservoir to the underground reservoir in Kingsnorth some three or four years ago. But the point is well made. I think that matter is probably best taken up by Overview and Scrutiny and the Chairman of that Committee is here this evening.”

Supplementary Question by Councillor Mrs Bell

“My question does somewhat follow on from Councillor Michael’s on the point of communication between the Council and the water companies. Does the Deputy Leader welcome the fact that the Leader intends to invite the water companies to the Ashford Strategic Delivery Board to discuss how liaison with Ashford Borough Council could be improved in terms of planning and delivering infrastructure to support growth?”

Reply by Councillor Bartlett

“Yes, I completely endorse that and I think with the work that we’ve outlined this evening we should all be assured that the matter is under control.”

(b) Question from Councillor Michael to Councillor Bartlett, Deputy Leader of the Council

“Please will the Deputy Leader clarify the regulations regarding parking of electric vehicles in charging bays? I ask as I was alerted to a parking ticket issued to a hybrid vehicle in another town because it was said the bays were for electric only cars. Should

charging bays be used to only charge electric only vehicles, but thereafter vacated?
Publication of regulations would be prudent if this could be done as soon as possible."

Reply by Councillor Bartlett

"Thank you for the question. The wording of Ashford's contravention is "Parked in an electric vehicles' charging place during restricted hours without charging". Therefore, we do not need to worry about what kind of vehicle. As part of any Electric Vehicle Charging Point installation, we have to ensure that the Parking Order/TRO reflects the contravention. In Ashford's case, the TRO explains an electric vehicle as any vehicle powered by electricity so hybrids are fine, we don't need to be more specific.

Supplementary Question by Councillor Feacey

"I was just going to ask the Deputy Leader if he could give us an update on where we are with the EV charging points and also let us know about the ANPR systems in Ashford."

Reply by Councillor Bartlett

"Thank you, yes this is an important matter and it is useful to remind colleagues that work is being done to expand the offer of EV charging points in other car parks along with work to support the rollout of Automatic Number Plate Reading equipment and the review of the layout of parking in our car parks to improve their use and amenity impact, including that on residents. The first car parks will be at Waitrose/Recreation Ground in Tenterden and Vicarage Lane car park in Ashford."

(c) Question from Councillor Lyn Suddards to Councillor Bartlett, Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Safety and Wellbeing

"Given the social issues facing us as a Council, post pandemic, the recorded deterioration in mental health and wellbeing of the local population, particularly children and young people, the unprecedented demand on food banks, families now facing fuel poverty and the continued attack on women when walking on our streets, does the Portfolio Holder for Safety, Health and Wellbeing agree that it is time for the Health and Wellbeing Reference Group to involve other elected Members - a cross party group to best serve the needs of our residents because currently it just seems that it is the Portfolio Holder who is involved? The context for this is that I keep meeting other Members concerned about the same or similar issues and I think there needs to be more co-ordination on these issues."

Reply by Councillor Bartlett

"Thank you again for the question. The Health and Wellbeing Reference Group has not met for two years. This is because other Groups meet to cover the work of the Reference Group. First, the Ashford Community Safety Partnership is addressing the subject of tackling violence, as well as Domestic Abuse. The Partnership brings together a range of statutory and voluntary sector services to jointly determine how they can work together to reduce crime, fear of crime and Anti-Social Behaviour. The aim of the Partnership is to make Ashford a safer place to live, work and visit. The membership of the Partnership board includes: - the Local Authority including the Portfolio Holder; the

local Police; the Fire and Rescue Service; the Kent, Surrey and Sussex local community Rehabilitation Company; the Clinical Commissioning Group (now ICP); Kent County Council's Community Safety Partnership; the Head Teachers' Forum chair; and the Chairs of the Partnership subgroups. The Partnership is not a politically balanced Committee on which places are offered according to how well the parties do in the elections, however, there is politically balanced representation on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee which has looked at a number of related themes including, in April and July 2021 support to the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector, in June 2021 - Youth Unemployment and in September 2021 - Young Peoples Mental Health. The Council is also a member of the East Kent Food Poverty Group who are running the following events: -Stanhope Community Pantry (Fare Share) on 5th August; Repton Community Trust next monthly meeting of the University of the third age on 24th August; and a third event is also planned at the One You Shop with the date to be confirmed. The One You shop also provides a large number of health checks and interventions together with food parcels for those in need. Again, the East Kent Food Poverty Group is not a politically balanced Committee of this Council but I would have no objection if Overview and Scrutiny was to investigate the work of the Partnership and the reports to it (or Cabinet if it preferred) and it could be updated to reflect current local priorities."

Supplementary Question by Councillor Lyn Suddards

"Thank you, but I don't think what you have said actually addressed what I was asking. You said that the Health and Wellbeing Reference Group hasn't met for two years, so I suppose my question is are you saying that there isn't a place for it? If not I am wondering why. All of the things you've said that the Council is doing or are involved in are obviously excellent and needed, but there is reason why we're all Elected Members and I believe in order to serve our residents in our own Wards we should be involved in steering these committees and representing our constituents. So why did this Group stop meeting? Was there a discussion about it and maybe could we have a report back on if/when it will be re-started?"

Reply by Councillor Bartlett

"Thank you for the opportunity to be able to clarify. The Group referred to has indeed not met for the last two years as the work has been undertaken by other Groups. That work has been reported to Overview and Scrutiny and they have been able to pass views on what has been good and bad. What Councillor Suddards is suggesting is to re-create the Reference Group that existed up until about two and a half years ago. I don't have any objection to that but it would obviously have to be dealt with properly, possibly through Selection and Constitutional Review and we will need to decide if it is to be politically balanced or not. That will be a discussion for elsewhere rather than here tonight. It is important to note though that if we did set up a separate committee, the reports that are currently going to Overview and Scrutiny, and I mentioned four tonight that went through in the last year, may no longer go there so it is important to take views from everyone so we don't duplicate work. But I'd have no objection to the principle suggested."

Supplementary Question by Councillor Bernard Heyes

"On the question of fuel poverty, does the Deputy Leader agree that with the £650 the Government having started to pay people on benefits, the £250 to pensioners in bands

A to D and the £160 in warm home discounts, this is over £1,000 which is starting to mitigate the effects of fuel poverty? And would he welcome any further interventions from the new Prime Minister whoever that is?”

Reply by Councillor Bartlett

“Yes, I think this is a really important point that I made earlier that there are a number of very important inflection points coming up. If a potential claimant of pension credit does not make their claim by the 18th August, then they lose the opportunity of claiming the £650 from the Government. I think it is incumbent on us to make sure we get the message out there that there is £1.7bn of benefits which are not being claimed. I am not sure how much of that is in Ashford, a small percentage of course, but the point is that we have an opportunity here to get the message out that there is money that people just sometimes have to make a claim for before they get it. It’s down to us to get the word out.”

(d) Question from Councillor Spain to Councillor Bartlett, Deputy Leader of the Council.

“A number of issues relating to Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) and Ashford Borough Council (ABC) and its disabled tenants have been brought to my attention. Given the seriousness and complexity of these issues, and the statutory duties of ABC towards disabled tenants under legislation including the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996, human rights legislation, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), I am asking the Deputy Leader of the Council, the following questions: - I ask that the Deputy Leader commit to a thorough, open, and constructive investigation of all of these issues engaging an independent domain expert to advise; I ask the Leader to engage an acknowledged domain expert of the calibre of someone such as Michael Mandelstam so that the Council is certain that it is getting the best possible independent advice on these critically important and complex issues; and I also ask the Leader that the investigation produces a full report into all of these issues to be brought back to the next Full Council meeting.”

Further information on this question was tabled for Members.

Reply by Councillor Bartlett

“Thank you to Councillor Spain for the question. It might be helpful to remind colleagues that leading Members and Officers welcome discussions related to service issues and will consider any ways of improving the service if issues are highlighted to us. There are already processes in place for individual cases to be highlighted to the Council via the Council’s complaints process so individual concerns should rightly be raised via that process. We are keeping track of the pattern of complaints made to identify if there are wider issues to be kept under review. The question of course does not provide the number or detail of the cases which have resulted in the issues raised and having only given quite general points it may be better for these individual issues to be raised directly with the Assistant Director for Housing so that responses can be supplied in the context of the specific issues raised. There has, despite the pandemic impacts, been a marked improvement in wait times for disabled adaptations both in terms of DFG’s and adaptations in the Council housing stock, and a review of these issues quite a few years ago found that the processes the Council was following were fit for purpose.”

Supplementary Question by Councillor Spain

"I have to say I am somewhat disappointed by the answer. The issues that I have identified are systemic issues. They are very clear and I have laid out a number of points of law against each issue so they do not require the support of individual cases to justify them. They are very clear and I believe that all of us as Councillors signed up to the Nolan Principles when we became Councillors. These include very important aspects of our behaviour in public life and corporately, as the Borough Council we should also uphold these principles. Our residents expect us to do the best we possibly can and provide the best services and our Council Officers also sign up to these principles. Whilst I have no doubt that everyone is doing their absolute best against these vital principles of our democracy, sometimes despite our best efforts we don't end up in quite the right place and I would urge the Deputy Leader to consider taking these issues with the seriousness they deserve. The Council will be side-swiped with legal issues, possibly by the Ombudsman and eventually the Courts, if we do not address these issues. To be a stronger Council that serves our community better I would again ask the Deputy Leader if he would please consider engaging an independent expert to look in to this and review these issues?"

Reply by Councillor Bartlett

"Well, I would just re-iterate what I said a few moments ago. These issues have been raised before and a review has found that the processes the Council is following are fit for purpose. I think at this stage we would be better advised to allow these issues to be considered in depth by the Assistant Director for Housing so that responses can be provided in the context of the specific issues raised, before looking for a report from an independent consultant."

Supplementary Question by Councillor Michael

"I just wanted to add something here. I too was contacted by an individual, perhaps the same one who contacted Councillor Spain, but when I did some investigation I found we had a certain amount of funding for such adaptations – it's not a bottomless pit – and my understanding was that we were spending right up to the limit on that money and we were giving a good service. So is that the case? Are we using all of our funding to do that and if we have more adaptations that funding, then where do we go with that?"

Reply by Councillor Bartlett

"This is a good point well-made and I think we should take that point on board and ask the Assistant Director for Housing to undertake a review with the Portfolio Holder and include Councillor Spain as well."

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