

Ashford Borough Council

Minutes of a Meeting of the Ashford Borough Council held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **20th July 2023**.

Present:

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

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

Also Present:

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

Apologies:

Cllrs. Buchanan, Gathern, L Suddards.

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

81 Exempt or Confidential Information

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

82 Declarations of Interest

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

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

83 Minutes

Resolved:

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

84 Announcements

(a) The Mayor

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

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

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

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

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

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

(b) Leader of the Council

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

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

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

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

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

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

85 Questions from Members of the Public

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

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

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

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

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

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

86 Cabinet – 30th March and 29th June 2023

(a) Cabinet – 30th March 2023

Resolved:

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

(b) Cabinet – 29th June 2023

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

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

Resolved:

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

87 Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 13th June 2023

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on the 13th June 2023 be approved and adopted.

88 Selection and Constitutional Review Committee – 13th July 2023

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

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

This was seconded by Councillor Heyes.

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

Resolved:

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

89 Audit Committee – 20th June 2023

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

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit Committee held on the 20th June 2023 be received and noted.

90 Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Annual Report 2022/23

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

Resolved:

That the report be received and accepted.

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

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

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

Councillor Chilton therefore moved the following Motion: -

That the Council resolves: -

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

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

The content of the Motion was seconded by Councillor Spain.

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

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

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

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

This was seconded by Councillor Townend.

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

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

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

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

Resolved:

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

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

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

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

92 Notice of Motion – Bockhanger Square Community Facility

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

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

Councillor Spain therefore moved the following Motion: -

That this Council resolves:

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

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

The content of the Motion was seconded by Councillor Dean.

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

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

This was seconded by Councillor Harman.

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

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

This was seconded by Councillor Dean.

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

Resolved:

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

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

93 Questions by Members

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

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

Reply by Councillor Ovenden

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

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

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

“Will the Council publish useful details showing:

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

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

Reply by Councillor Ovenden

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

Supplementary Question by Councillor Heyes

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

Reply by Councillor Ovenden

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

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

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

Reply by Councillor Ovenden

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

Reply by Councillor Barrett

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

Supplementary Question by Councillor Bell

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

Reply by Councillor Barrett

“Basically, yes!”

Supplementary Question by Councillor Brunger-Randall

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

Reply by Councillor Barrett

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

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

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

Reply by Councillor Wright

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

Supplementary Question by Councillor Bartlett

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

Reply by Councillor Wright

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

94 Exclusion of the Public

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

Resolved:

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

95 Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Annual Report 2022/23

The Leader introduced the report which advised that following approval of the Honorary Alderman Scheme by Council in February 2019, and the Council's first intake of Honorary Aldermen in October 2019, the Scheme had now been operating successfully for nearly four years. The report now sought approval from Council of the recommended nominations for the conferment of the title of Honorary Alderman from the Group of Councillors who stepped down or were not returned in the May 2023 Local Elections.

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

Resolved:

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

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

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