

# Ashford Borough Council

Minutes of a Meeting of the Ashford Borough Council held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **30<sup>th</sup> May 2019**.

## Present:

Her Worshipful the Mayor, Councillor Mrs J E Blanford (Chairman);

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

Prior to the commencement of the meeting the Reverend Cathie Aldis said prayers. The Mayor then asked Members to remain standing in respect of Councillor Stephen Heywood Dehnel MBE the Borough Council Member for Downs North since 2015, and Antony John Maltby who was the Borough Council Member for Great Chart from 1991 to 2003 and Great Chart with Singleton North from 2003 to 2007, who had both passed away recently.

## Apologies:

Cllr Rogers.

## Also Present:

Chief Executive, Director of Law & Governance, Director of Finance and Economy, Head of Environment and Land Management, Head of Culture, Head of Finance and IT, Senior Communications Officer, Member Services Manager (Operational).

## 1 Election of Mayor

Councillor Feacey nominated Councillor Mrs Jenny Webb for election as Mayor of Ashford Borough Council for the forthcoming municipal year.

This was seconded by Councillor Clarkson.

Councillor Feacey said he had first met Jenny when he had received a call from a worried Council Officer telling him that they had a resident complaining over a licensing issue who would not take no for an answer. As Chairman of the Licensing Committee he thought the best course of action was to go round and see her. An hour and a half later he had left the property, head spinning, knowing just where he had gone wrong and what he needed to do to rectify it! During that meeting he had formed a friendship with Jenny and David and knowing that she was part of the Neighbourhood Watch scheme he invited her to a ceremony of the Street Pastors at Christ Church where the Police Inspector for Ashford was speaking. After the meeting, Jenny had made a bee-line for him, pinning him between the font and a pillar, telling him where he and his force had gone wrong and how they were failing to deliver the services Ashford had come to expect. What had struck him over the two meetings was Jenny's passion to improve the lives of the residents of the

Borough and when they were looking for candidates for the Local Elections he asked Jenny if she would stand as a Councillor. A decision she had never totally forgiven him for!

He said that they were both Directors of Ashford Volunteer Centre and her work and support had helped to drive the charity forward. She had always found time for staff and volunteers and had been an active member of the Centre. Directors meetings had never been the same since Jenny started providing the cakes and refreshments – he did recommend the lemon drizzle!

Jenny was born in Canterbury and educated at St Thomas' Roman Catholic School under the very watchful eye of the nuns, whose priority was to make sure she became a virtuous and caring individual – well one out of two wasn't bad! She worked for many years in Canterbury, mainly in finance and customer service. Her first job was as an Accounts Assistant at Bing Mineral Water, famous for their swing top. It was a very happy time for Jenny as she walked to work each morning down Broad Oak Road, Canterbury surrounded by chickens and wildlife, which made her realise the value of open space and the beauty of nature, values she had always tried to maintain. She moved to Ashford in 1993, re-married in 1994 and had lived in Ashford since then with her husband David. They had five children between them and many grand and great-grandchildren.

She became a Councillor in 2015 and she had enjoyed meeting all of the people and organisations she had come in to contact with during the time. Her admiration for all volunteers in the Borough was unbounding and she was grateful to call many of them her friends. This was why when it came to nominating the charities for her Mayoral Year it was such an easy decision to make. As a Director of Ashford Volunteer Centre she was fully aware of the numerous services the Centre provided. The drivers and befrienders provided a selfless and valuable service and she had decided that the befriending service warranted her first choice as it provided friendship and continued support to some of the Borough's elderly, lonely and vulnerable residents – providing a caring and listening ear to individuals who may not see anyone on a regular basis. The befrienders helped to alleviate the depression that loneliness could cause and replaced it with a sense of worth and wellbeing. In addition, whilst being the Council's representative on the Board of Home-Start she equally recognised the benefit and support that this charity and its volunteer base provided to families and in particular, as they were so often overlooked, the importance of Dads – hence the 'Chill with Dads' service warranted her second choice. Events were arranged to allow Dads to have fun and quality time with their children and bring love and understanding in to what could sometimes be a strained and demanding relationship. Jenny was also passionate about the amazing youth in the Borough and she had decided that the time given by volunteers through the Cadet service also needed to be recognised as they worked tirelessly to give young people events and life skills that helped them become ambassadors and ultimately, Ashford's Future. The Sea Cadets would therefore be her third charity as the service was close to her heart, with her Father having served in the Royal Navy for several years during the Second World War, and he knew that he would be proud to know that Jenny was recognising the Sea Cadets in this way.

Councillor Feacey said that Jenny would make a perfect first citizen of the Borough. She was vivacious and gregarious and totally down to earth. She said it as she saw it and there were no airs or graces with her – which he found very refreshing. He was

sure Jenny and David would excel in this challenging new role and he hoped she would have a thoroughly enjoyable year as Mayor.

Councillor Clarkson said that first and foremost Councillor Jenny Webb really did care passionately about people and actioned anything that they needed on their behalf. In addition, as Councillor Feacey had so rightly said, she was not slow in coming forward and banging the drum to make sure she got action! He thought this was great and that Jenny and David would be a marvellous pair as the First Citizens of the Borough. He was therefore delighted to second the nomination.

There were no other nominations.

**Resolved:**

**That Councillor Mrs Jenny Webb be elected Mayor of the Borough of Ashford for the Municipal Year 2019/20.**

## **2 Declaration of Acceptance of Office by the Mayor**

Councillor Mrs Webb made her Declaration of Acceptance of Office.

The Leader of the Council said he wanted to make a brief statement at this point of the meeting. They had already had prayers and observed a minutes silence for the sad and unexpected passing of their colleague and dear friend Stephen Dehnel – a man of immense integrity, loyalty and a strong sense of duty. Stephen had excelled in his military career, serving with distinction in the Grenadier Guards and was clearly able to transfer many of his skills to the service of this Council and to the people of Ashford. A perfect gentleman who he believed had enriched the lives of all those who came in to contact with him. There would be further opportunities in the coming weeks to mark and celebrate the relatively short but inspiring life of Stephen Dehnel, however he was acutely aware that Stephen was the Council's Military Covenant Champion and Ceremonial Officer. All knew how meticulous he was about Civic ceremonies and tonight would have been no exception. Having just elected Councillor Mrs Webb as the new Mayor and First Citizen of the Borough, Stephen would have insisted that tonight be a pleasant and joyous occasion. Therefore, when the newly elected Mayor re-entered the Council Chamber to discharge the Civic business of the evening and when they retired thereafter for the reception to mark the Mayor's installation, all should remember that Stephen would have insisted that this be a happy and uplifting occasion.

Councillor Chilton said that on behalf of the Labour Party and Group in Ashford he wanted to express condolences and sympathy to the family of Stephen Dehnel. He had always had a very reassuring presence, perhaps because of his military background, and gave you supreme confidence that everything was going to be alright when he walked in to a meeting or was around you. He was a great credit to the Council and his Ward and he would be sorely missed.

Councillor Ovenden said that on behalf of the Ashford Independent Group he wanted to echo the sentiments expressed by Councillor Clarkson and Councillor Chilton and express their condolences to Stephen's family.

Councillor Campkin said he would also like to pass on condolences from the Green Group. They had only met Stephen that previous week and he had been very warm and welcoming so they wanted to pass on condolences to friends and family.

The retiring Mayor, the Chief Executive, the newly elected Mayor and the Mayor's Chaplain then left the meeting. Upon their return, having been invested with her chains of office Her Worshipful the Mayor, Councillor Mrs Jenny Webb assumed the Chair.

### **3 Appointment of Mayor's Chaplain**

Her Worshipful the Mayor advised that her Chaplain for the coming year would be the Reverend John Mackenzie. The Reverend Mackenzie then said prayers.

### **4 Vote of Thanks by the Mayor for Her Election**

Her Worshipful the Mayor began by thanking Councillor Feacey for his glowing nomination, encouragement and friendship. One thing he had failed to mention was that he had told her that one day she would be the Mayor – something she had never thought possible. She could now publically announce that he was fully forgiven!

When the Leader had first approached her to consider being nominated for Deputy Mayor, although she felt honoured she was also apprehensive and did not know if it was a role that she would be up to. How glad she was that she decided to listen to the encouraging voices and accepted. The Mayoral role was such an important part of the Council's Civic responsibilities. It provided the Council with the means to engage and take part in all of Ashford's diverse communities. Her and David had had an amazing year as Deputies. They had met and been welcomed so warmly by all communities and faiths. David had even experienced his first selfies with the children of the Muslim community on one of their fun days!

As Councillor Feacey had already explained, it was easy to choose the charities she had as she was always amazed and humbled by the voluntary sector. These were individuals who willingly gave support and helped tirelessly with unselfish commitment to so many organisations. So she thanked them all from the bottom of her heart. Being a director of the Volunteer Centre had really made her aware of all the important work that Beth Peal and her team did. Likewise with the Home-Start team who constantly went above and beyond their responsibilities. She also wanted to have a third charity to recognise the young members of society and Ashford's future - the Sea Cadets, who along with their mentors made everyone proud of their disciplines and their representation of Ashford.

The Mayor said that she had so many people to thank for their help and kindness over the past year and she would especially like to thank John Mackenzie for agreeing to be her Chaplain for her Mayoral year. She knew she would be encouraged by his guidance and good counsel.

She said that she felt extremely privileged and honoured to have been elected as Mayor. Her and David both looked forward to the coming year, working with all communities and celebrating the wonderful Borough of Ashford.

Like all former Mayors, Jessamy was going to be a hard act to follow. She had had an amazing year and she had been astounded at how many events she had attended. Her passion for the environment would indeed be her legacy. She knew she would continue the good work she had been involved in and the wildlife and environment in local areas would be her priority as would keeping in contact with all of the organisations and schools that she had attended. She knew how important it was to her that children learned about the beauty of nature, our rivers and the importance of our green spaces and that educating everyone that it was their responsibility to preserve and maintain this biodiversity and this was imperative if they would be able to be enjoyed by future generations. On behalf of her and David she wanted to thank Jessamy for all of her achievements and hard work during her Mayoral Year and hoped that she could, for a while at least, put her feet up and relax.

## **5 Vote of Thanks to the Retiring Mayor and Mayoress**

Councillor Buchanan said it was his great pleasure to propose a vote of thanks to the retiring Mayor Councillor Jessamy Blanford.

He said that he was in the possibly unique position of proposing this vote of thanks as he had been the Mayor's Escort for many of the key events over the last year. When Jessamy was invited to consider becoming Mayor, she was concerned that, having been widowed a number of years ago, she would not have anyone to accompany her. The Leader, with his usual forthright decisiveness, said that this would not be a problem as he would conscript a number of willing volunteers to accompany her. Upon hearing that he was in the line-up he had made it very clear that there would be an even distribution of the duties 50/50: He would take on: - Dinners; Balls; Drink Receptions; Cocktail Parties; Lunches; Vineyard Tours; and Brewery Visits. The others should take on the school visits, prizegivings, Church services etc. He thought this was the fairest way to go about it!

Councillor Buchanan said that the year had started off with a 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday visit, always a very special occasion, with his own Grandmother having also achieved 'going round the clock' and he had continued to accompany the Mayor on a huge variety of events over the year. There was the Blessings of the Seas in Margate, when a young boy is thrown into the sea on a freezing cold day, the Opening of the fabulous new facility at Repton Connect and the night recently when they were all in the woods listening for Nightingales and having a fantastic talk. There was the Summer Ball, when unfortunately, the waiter, who was mortified, spilt quite a quantity of gravy over Jessamy's dress! He found himself in the position of being on all fours, under the table, desperately trying to sponge off the stains using a napkin and water from an ice bucket for about ten minutes. He thought that by the time of her speech there was no sign of the earlier catastrophe! They had also had the surreal experience of being chauffeur driven, in a limo, with Jessamy probably wearing several thousand pounds worth of silver, to attend a litter pick, as well as attending two carol services in one day, along with the Poppy Tribute and the Fields of Battle display. There was also the Mayor's 'horse racing' night in Great Chart Village Hall. Due to a misunderstanding, there were no glasses available and to his horror he had found most of the Mayors of Kent sipping prosecco out of small, crinkly, white, disposable plastic beakers! Fortunately, he had the keys for the Conservative Association offices on him, so Sandra, the Mayor's driver had whisked him off there in the Mercedes, to get a gross of Paris wine goblets, and save the day! At the end

of the evening, and after several glasses of wine, one of the other Mayors was clearly under the misunderstanding that Donna, the Mayor's PA, was his wife! He thought they both agreed to disagree, however, the night was still but young!

The highlight of the year was the visit to the Buckingham Palace Tea Party, which coincided with Jessamy's Son's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, who also attended. Jessamy spoke to Princess Anne, saying that she was from Ashford, Kent and our Leader was Princess Anne's friend Gerry Clarkson. Jessamy also added that Gerry owned her old Rolls Royce, to which Princess Anne replied, "goodness me, is that old thing still going!" – he thought she was referring to the car! The final visit of the year for him had been a day at Chartwell. Towards the end of the day Sandra came running over. At the start of the year, the Mayor had politely reprimanded him for looking at his mobile phone too much. So, after that, he had left it in the car to avoid temptation. Sandra said "you and Jessamy need to urgently ring Linda Stringer within the hour – and that was 55 minutes ago". The experience of being summoned to see Gerry Clarkson, while representing the Borough, in Churchill's home, would be another memory he would never forget!

Councillor Buchanan said that it been an honour and a privilege to be the Mayoral Escort and they had had great fun. Jessamy had been a wonderful and energetic Mayor. She had done a huge amount for her chosen charities and had represented the Borough in an exemplary way, which only a former debutant could have carried off with such style.

Councillor Clokie said he was very pleased to be asked to second the motion of a vote of thanks to the retiring Mayor, Jessamy Blanford.

He said Jessamy had worked extremely hard for the Borough this year and he had personally enjoyed the occasions when he had been her Escort. He particularly remembered a trip to a play in Rainham where their feet had been virtually on the stage! The wonderful performance of the Verdi Requiem in tribute to Mark Deller by the Ashford Choral Society, of which the Mayor was Patron, and the amazing performance of Twelfth Night at Chilham Castle had been particular highlights. The Mayors certainly did get out and about and had an amazing time, and he wanted to thank Jessamy for taking him with her. He so seconded the vote of thanks.

## **6 Response by the Retiring Mayor**

Councillor Mrs Blanford said she had now finished her Mayoral Year – one year and two weeks – and she was both sad and glad that it was over!

It had been a most interesting year, involving her in a number of different outings. Visiting Buckingham Palace with her Son Nicholas, Councillor Buchanan and Matthew Forest as previously mentioned, she thought she presented a rather alarming aspect surrounded by tall young men in smart suits and dark glasses – they looked like 'Spooks' from MI5! Other highlights in terms of venues visited had included Penshurst Place – the home of the Lord Lieutenant, the Archbishop's Palace at Canterbury, Chartwell – the home of Winston Churchill, the House of Lords and Chilham Castle. She had also attended many musical evenings, eaten innumerable dinners and danced the night away, sometimes with Andrew – his dancing style was unknown to anybody else!

Councillor Mrs Blanford said that last year they had commemorated the end of the First World War with their own Remembrance services, the laying of the paving stone in Charing for Private Coppins VC, the opening of the Fields of Battle Lands of Peace photographic exhibition, and of course The Battles Over poppy celebration and lighting of the beacon in North Park for the first time. For all of these activities they had been extremely grateful for the hard work and professional knowledge of Councillor Stephen Dehnel. Not only had he organised these events with Cultural Services to a very high standard, using his expertise and knowledge, but he had also accompanied her to other events outside the Borough where she could see how highly regarded he was in military circles.

She said that the 2018/19 year had been particularly rich in terms of events in Ashford. She had opened a bank, several businesses from Aldi in Victoria Road, to wedding dresses, baby clothes and a bakery. She had visited several schools, colleges and vineyards – which had shown that Kent was no longer just famous for hops but also for vines, and very successfully too! One rather successful event in amongst all of this was the unveiling of the statue of Queen Marie of Romania with a member of her Royal Family present and several other dignitaries. She had also been invited to the recent ‘soft’ opening of the Curious Brewery. She had attended several charity events throughout the year including the WI at Smarden, Hi-Kent at Port Lympne and given out awards to the Kumon students on several occasions. She also could not forget the Snowdogs, which had been a tremendous success. She knew that some people in high places had initially been rather doubtful about the project, but those colourful dogs and pups had brought people in to Ashford and it had been wonderful to see some of them retained in Elwick Place and, their own pup ‘Snowy’ which had been bought at the very last minute by Great Chart with Singleton Parish Council and was now residing in his basket at the Singleton Environment Centre.

Every Mayor always commented on the amount of voluntary activities that went on in the Borough and she would be no different. If it wasn’t for the voluntary sector and the volunteers themselves an awful lot of things would not get done and she particularly wanted to commend the Ashford Volunteer Centre – the lifeblood of the town.

Councillor Mrs Blanford said that her theme for the year had been The Environment, which had fortunately chimed with the 2019 Year of The Environment. Along with Amy Casey from Environmental Services, she had visited ten Primary Schools to address their assemblies and meet the various members of their Eco-Warriors and Green Teams. Without exception, these young people had been extremely enthusiastic about their environmental work and had been fully clued up on environmental issues. She hoped this would continue through secondary school in to adult life. At the end of March they had handed out prizes and certificates at an Environmental Awards ceremony held in this Council Chamber.

She also wanted to thank her two charities for their support this year. The Paula Carr Diabetes Trust, with Gary Fagg and Helen who had held a fundraising ‘horse racing’ evening which had been great fun, and Helen and her partner had also attended her recent Spring Ball. Also the Kent Wildlife Trust, which already did a lot of valuable work in the Borough. Mike Bax, the Chairman, had opened up his environmentally friendly farm at Shadoxhurst twice. Once last Summer when they had been able to admire the wildflower meadows in full bloom, and ten days ago to hear the Nightingales in the woods. She had never seen a group of people sit for so long, in the middle of the woods without speaking a word! Being honest it was unlikely she

would be Mayor again, but if she was she would like to spend more time on her charities, particularly as there was much one could do to enrich Ashford and its surroundings.

She wanted to give special thanks to two people who had been a lifeline and support to her during the year. Firstly, Sandra Sutters, the Mayor's driver. She was an endless source of information and advice and it was such a joy not just because she did not have to worry about driving to events around Kent, which some Mayors did have to, but also not having to worry about parking and knowing that at the end of the event Sandra would be waiting to drive her home again. There was one occasion when an event had ended early and Sandra was not waiting and she had disappeared to the Pub with her Escort. When Sandra was told "the Mayor is in the Pub" she could not believe it, but she didn't know why! She wanted to thank Sandra for her support. The other person who deserved special thanks was Donna Sowerby, her PA. She could not thank her enough for the constant work she had put in to arranging the diary. Everyone had seen how many events she was asked to fit in and this meant endless chasing for vital information. She had also been responsible for working with Wyevale and Aspire to provide the wonderful shrubs and flowers for her Civic Service and reception. Donna was extremely knowledgeable about social events and she owed her special thanks for helping her to raise funds for her charities.

Finally, she came to her last paragraph – The Escorts! She could not express enough thanks to the various Councillors and others who had accepted invitations to attend events with her. It had made the occasions much more enjoyable. In no particular order the list was Councillors Clokie, Dehnel, Buchanan, White, Bennett, Feacey, Neil Bell, Simon Howard-Smith, Knowles and Pickering, along with the Chair of Great Chart with Singleton Parish Council Ian McClintock and John Pullen, a Chilmington Green resident. They had all been good company, been prepared to join in the general chat with other Mayors and their Escorts, bought drinks and made sure she had been in the right place at the right time. She had initially said she would be giving points out of ten and whilst this was not strictly true she had made some assessments and she would now like to announce that the Escort who had come top of the list by a small margin was.... The Member who had attended many events whilst running a Local Government Election, and had washed the gravy off her dinner dress – Councillor Andrew Buchanan. She thanked him for his company and presented him with a gift.

In closing she wished the new Mayor, Councillor Jenny Webb, and her husband David, the best of luck during their year of office and she hoped she would have as an enjoyable time as she had.

## **7 Election and Appointment of Deputy Mayor**

Councillor Clokie proposed that "Councillor John Link be elected Deputy Mayor for the Borough of Ashford for the ensuing year".

This was seconded by Councillor Clarkson.

There were no other nominations.

**Resolved:**

**That Councillor John Link be elected Deputy Mayor of the Borough of Ashford for the Municipal Year 2019/20.**

## **8 Declaration of Acceptance of Office by the Deputy Mayor**

Councillor Link made his Declaration of Acceptance of Office. The Deputy Mayor was then invested with his chains of office.

## **9 Minutes**

**Resolved:**

**That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on the 25<sup>th</sup> April 2019 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.**

## **10 Announcements**

Her Worshipful the Mayor welcomed everyone present to the meeting, especially new Councillors. She said that all were welcome to join her at her Civic Service and Ceremony which would be held on the 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2019 at 2pm at St Mary's Church in the centre of Ashford. She wanted the event to celebrate Ashford so it would be great to see as many Members there as possible. She also wanted to invite all present for refreshments served in the Committee Rooms downstairs after the meeting.

## **11 Election of the Leader of the Council for a Four Year Term**

Councillor Bartlett proposed that "Councillor Clarkson be elected as Leader of the Council".

This was seconded by Councillor Buchanan.

**Resolved:**

**That Councillor Clarkson be elected Leader of the Council for a four year term.**

## **12 To Note the Names and Number of Members to be Appointed by the Leader to the Cabinet**

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Clarkson, said he wished to thank colleagues for re-appointing him as Leader of the Council. He took that responsibility and role very seriously and he was sure all knew how passionate he was about the Members collectively, and individually, serving the people of Ashford. It would also be remiss of him not to publically thank all former Members of the last Cabinet for their service and commitment and he particularly wanted to thank his former Deputy, Councillor Neil Bell, who had served him extremely well.

Circumstances now necessitated quite a number of changes to the Cabinet as they moved forward with their work over the next four years. Under the Local Government Provisions he was permitted to have a Cabinet of himself, and up to nine other colleagues. Given the size of the Borough and the range of activities they were addressing, he had decided to fill all nine of those positions as follows:-

<b>Member</b>	<b>Portfolio</b>	<b>Deputy PH</b>
Clarkson	Leader (including Corporate Policy, Ec Dvpt and Comms)	N/A
Bartlett	Legal and Democracy	N/A
Barrett	Housing	Mulholland
Bell (Neil)	Finance and IT	Knowles
Buchanan	Environment and Land Management	Howard
Clokie	Regeneration and Corporate Property	Iliffe
Feacey	Culture, Tourism and Leisure	Forest
Gideon	Community Safety and Wellbeing	Krause
Pickering	HR and Customer Services	Wedgbury
Shorter	Planning and Development	Mrs Blanford

### **13 Deputy Leader of the Council**

The Leader said that he was pleased to announce that he had appointed Councillor Paul Bartlett as Deputy Leader of the Council. Councillor Bartlett was a long serving and experienced Member of this Authority and he was very much looking forward to working closely with him, his Cabinet colleagues and indeed all Members and Officers of this Authority in the best interests of the people of the Borough.

### **14 Selection and Constitutional Review Committee – 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2019**

Her Worshipful the Mayor directed Members attention to the addendum paper which had been tabled.

Councillor Clarkson proposed that “the Minutes of the Selection and Constitutional Review Committee meeting held on the 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2019 be approved and adopted subject to the amendments outlined in the addendum paper”.

This was seconded.

Councillor Chilton asked that appointments for Vice Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the River Stour (Kent) Internal Drainage Board be dealt with separately to the rest of the recommendations. The Council agreed to clear the rest of the recommendations and deal with those two issues separately.

Councillor Chilton believed that the two particular recommendations referred to could set a precedent to the functions of this Council. Firstly, with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee it was a convention at this Council that the Chairmanship was

awarded to the largest Opposition Group, in this case the Ashford Independents and they were very pleased to support that appointment, and the Vice-Chairmanship to the second largest Opposition Group, which was the Labour Group. In the last Council this had certainly been the case, but this time round it had not and the proposal was to award both the Chairmanship and Vice-Chairmanship to the Ashford Independent Group. He believed this would break the convention of an inclusive and co-operative Council. Secondly, with regard to the appointments to the River Stour (Kent) Internal Drainage Board, former Councillor Aline Hicks had been proposed to be appointed to represent the Council in one of its five positions. Whilst he personally bore no ill will towards Mrs Hicks, he believed this would again set a dangerous precedent of appointing non-elected Members of this Authority as Council representatives on external bodies. It would appear very un-democratic to appoint somebody who was not elected to this Council to represent this democratic body on an external body.

Councillor Clarkson said he had no recollection of such a convention as stated. In the past there had been two broadly similar sized small Opposition Groups and the Chairmanship and Vice-Chairmanship had been divided. Now however, following the elections, the situation was different with the Ashford Independents having 11 elected Members and Labour having seven, which was quite a distinct difference. The Selection and Constitutional Review Committee had voted on this matter, proposing Councillor Ovenden as Chairman, and quite reasonably he had wanted to appoint one of his own Members as his Vice-Chairman. This had prevailed at the meeting and he therefore urged Members to support that recommendation.

Councillor Farrell proposed that "Councillor Brendan Chilton be appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the ensuing year".

This was seconded by Councillor Anckorn.

Councillor Clarkson proposed that "Councillor Winston Michael be appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the ensuing year".

This was seconded by Councillor Bartlett.

The Director of Law and Governance explained that as there were 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.

With regard to the Council's fifth appointment on the River Stour (Kent) Internal Drainage Board Councillor Chilton moved that the appointment be referred back to a future meeting of the Selection and Constitutional Review Committee to consider a more democratic appointment.

This was seconded by Councillor Clarkson.

**Resolved:**

**That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Selection and Constitutional Review Committee held on the 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2019 be approved and adopted subject to the following:-**

- (i) Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Councillor Michael be confirmed as Vice-Chairman.**
- (ii) the Council’s fifth appointment on the River Stour (Kent) Internal Drainage Board be referred back to a future meeting of the Committee.**

## **15 Petitions**

In accordance with Procedure Rule 9.1 Councillor Spain presented a petition to the Council which called for Bockhanger to be given a new Community Centre.

Councillor Spain said that the petition now stood at over 1700 signatures from Ashford residents (although there were more signatures from further afield). As a bit of background, on Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> March 2018 the Bockhanger Community Centre was closed. This was a facility that served the local population not just of Bockhanger but also Bybrook and the surrounding areas for over 50 years. It was closed citing spiralling repair and operating costs and an estimated cost of £150,000 was quoted for demolishing the facility. Many local people were very displeased at this decision, having felt that the facility had been allowed to rundown during the eight to ten years beforehand and in fact the Kennington Community Forum (the local forerunner to the new Community Council) said in its final minutes that “its state of dereliction was, in major part, due to ABC lack of investment over the years”.

He said that the facility did perform a vital function and, according to the Local Plan, facilities of this kind should not be removed unless provision could be duplicated elsewhere. He would put it to the Council that those facilities were not duplicated. Whilst there were a number of smaller one or two roomed facilities scattered around such as St Mary’s Church Hall at Rylands Road, there was not a substantial community facility available elsewhere. The Local Plan stated that the provision of quality community infrastructure and services designed around people and their cultural, leisure, social, health and wellbeing needs, was fundamental to the creation of strong, vibrant, healthy and sustainable communities. So, you could look at this issue in the abstract, but he wanted to give two brief stories he had heard whilst collecting the signatures for the petition.

Firstly, an older retired lady, who said that she had taken part in various activities at the Centre and that since its closure she now very rarely left her house was now often “staring at her own four walls”. That experience of an older person with increased loneliness was, he thought everyone could agree, not desirable, and this was a story he had heard time and again. The second example was of a young mother whose two daughters went to dance clubs at the Centre before it closed and in order to keep them dancing she was having to take them to facilities in South Ashford because there was nothing north of the M20 that allowed them to offer that type of activity.

Councillor Spain considered that the fact that the petition had over 1700 valid signatures testified the strength of feeling and need for the people of Bockhanger, Bybrook and the surrounding areas had for such a facility. He thought it would be easy for the Council to be overawed by the need for more and more housing and sometimes this could distract from the public duty to provide more social facilities. He was sure all would agree that such facilities were immensely important and the lack of this facility was already leading to real problems such as loneliness and a lack of

physical and mental outlets which he believed led to behavioural problems, petty crime and vandalism. None of this was desirable and would create costs to the Council. In conclusion, from an outside perspective, when people saw the Council spending for example, £5m on the Matalan site, or costed up the money spent at Repton, he believed they would be entitled to think we could have had a Community Centre in our local area so why are we not deserving? He asked Members to accept this petition and think very carefully about their duties to residents and to provide them with proper social facilities and not let the pressure to provide housing on every spare piece of land override those cultural and social needs.

The petition was then received and the Mayor advised that it would be dealt with appropriately in accordance with the provisions set out in the Council's constitution.

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