

Agenda Item No:**Report To:** Full Council**Date of Meeting:** Thursday 16 July 2026**Report Title:** Community Governance Review of Ashford's unparished area**Report Author & Job Title:** Charlotte Hammersley
Head of Policy and Performance**Summary:**

This report sets out the recommendations of the Community Governance Review to introduce a town council in the unparished area of the borough.

The review was undertaken by the Council's Local Government and Polling District Task Group and followed the Terms of Reference adopted at Full Council in October 2025.

The Task Group recommended a Town Council for the unparished area of Ashford be introduced. Their recommendations for an Ashford Town Council were consulted upon, considered and endorsed by the Selection and Constitutional Review Committee and are now recommended to Full Council in this report.

Recommendation: That Full Council:

- (i) Adopt the outcomes of the review as set out in Sub-Paragraphs a) – m) of Paragraph 5 of this report plus the map at Appendix A;
- (ii) Note the statutory transfer of allotment land set out in Paragraph 6;
- (iii) Agree that the next steps set out in Paragraph 10 be taken; and;
- (iv) Give delegated authority to the Head of Policy and Performance in consultation with the Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer (and also in the case of the budget and anticipated precept of the new Town Council in consultation with the Assistant Director of Finance), to take all necessary steps to give effect to the Council's resolution in consultation with the Ashford Town Council Advisory Group where appropriate.
- (v) Approve spend up to £80,000 to be funded from reserves with the intention to recharge the Town Council once formed.

Policy Overview:

The review has been conducted in accordance with its adopted Terms of Reference. The County Council and the Local Government Boundary Commission for England were notified of the review in accordance with the guidance.

The proposed changes to community governance arising from the review will take effect in stages during the next year, with elections taking place in parallel with the next ordinary elections for Ashford which are currently scheduled to take place in May 2027.

The recommendations of the review will be given effect through a Reorganisation of Community Governance Order. This Order may cover any consequential matters that appear to the Council to be necessary or proper to give effect to the Order (such as transfer of functions or assets). In these matters, the Council will be guided by the 2007 Act and the relevant regulations.

Financial Implications:

There are longer term impacts and funding considerations that arise from the review, such as costs to the council of engaging with a new town council and carrying out any transfer of services and assets.

Some costs are expected to be incurred by the Council in advance of the Town Council coming into being. These may include the appointment of interim clerk support, as recommended by the Kent Association of Local Councils, and other costs associated with the administration of meetings that will take place to prepare for the new Town Council. The estimated cost is not expected to exceed £80,000 and this will initially need to be funded from Borough Council's Reserves. The intention is that these costs will be held in a holding account with the plan to recharge them to the Town Council once formed. There is a risk that the new Town Council does not agree to meet those charges.

Ashford Borough Council currently generates a gross income of approximately £31,000 from the allotments in the review area, which will transfer to the new Town Council on 1 April 2027. The Town Council will need to make arrangements for providing an allotment service after that date.

The Task Group have given full consideration to Value for Money principles when making its recommendations. Specifically they have considered the:

- **Viable Administration:** An area must have a large enough population and tax base to be a viable unit of local government without placing an unsustainable financial burden on residents.

- **Economies of Scale:** Larger or unified parish structures can maximize efficiency, distribute fixed administrative costs over a broader base, and lower the overall cost per household.
- **Best Value Duty:** Under the Local Government Act 1999, authorities are legally bound to deliver continuous improvement in how work is carried out, balancing cost containment against service quality.

Legal Implications: The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, Part 4 Chapter 3 provides for a principal council to undertake community governance reviews and take decisions on parish areas.

Ashford Borough Council is the principal authority for the review and has been guided by and had regard to:

Local Government Act 1972

Local Government (Parishes and Parish Councils) (England) Regulations 2008

Local Government Finance (New Parishes) Regulations 2008

The Legislative Reform (CGR) Order 2015

Guidance from the Department of Communities and Local Government and the Local Government Boundary Commission for England on Community Governance Reviews in accordance with section 100(4) of the 2007 Act.

The review has been conducted in accordance with the legislation and the Government's published guidance.

Equalities Impact Assessment: The consultations included equality monitoring questions so impacts or views of particular groups were understood. The EqlA is attached at Appendix B for Members' consideration.

Data Protection Impact Assessment: The review has used property and elector data already held by the Monitoring Officer. There are no additional risks or considerations arising.

Consultation was conducted in accordance with the council's consultation framework which includes information handling.

Risk Assessment (Risk Appetite Statement):	The review has sought to ensure we have the most effective community governance arrangements considering that proposals for unitary authorities in Kent could create a wider gap between residents and their elected representatives. Disparity could be felt between parished and unparished areas under the new arrangements.
Sustainability Implications:	None.
Other Material Implications:	None.
Exempt from Publication:	NO
Background Papers:	None.
Contact:	charlotte.hammersley@ashford.gov.uk

Report Title: Community Governance Review of Ashford's Unparished area.

Introduction and Background

1. A Community Governance Review (CGR) has assessed the governance arrangements for the unparished part of the Urban area of Ashford. A CGR is the process by which consideration may be given as to whether parish council arrangements in an area should be introduced or changed.
2. Full Council at its meeting on 16 October 2025 resolved to undertake a Community Governance Review of the unparished area of Ashford and adopted the Terms of Reference at that meeting. The review was instigated by the council to assess local governance arrangements in advance of Local Government Reorganisation.
3. The Local Government and Polling District Task Group undertook the review and made recommendations for the creation of an Ashford Town Council, which following consultation were reported to the Selection and Constitutional Review Committee. The final report to the Committee and minutes of the meeting are published on the council's website: Selection and Constitutional Review Committee 11 June 2026.
4. Following consideration, the Selection and Constitutional Review Committee made recommendations to Full Council for an Ashford Town Council as set out in the minutes of its 11 June 2026 meeting. The recommendations are set out in full in the next section of this report.

Community Governance Review recommendations

5. The following are the final recommendations of the Selection and Constitutional Review Committee:
 - a) a parish of Ashford be established;
 - b) the boundary of the parish of Ashford be drawn as outlined in the map shown at Appendix A;
 - c) The name of the established parish be Ashford;
 - d) The style of the established parish be that of a town;
 - e) The parish should have a parish council in the style of a town council;
 - f) The name of the town council should be Ashford Town Council;
 - g) Ashford Town Council should consist of 16 councillors;
 - h) The Town Council should consist of five wards named Furley, Godinton and Repton, North Willesborough, Victoria and Beaver;
 - i) The number of councillors elected to each of ward should be:

Ward names	No of councillors
Furley	3
Godinton and Repton	3
North Willesborough	4
Victoria	3
Beaver	3

- j) The Vesting Day for Ashford Town Council be 1 April 2027;
- k) The first elections of councillors to Ashford Town Council be held on the ordinary day for elections in May 2027.
- l) The following people be appointed, with their consent, to constitute the initial members of Ashford Town Council from 1 April 2027 until the first elected members take up office:

The elected Borough councillors representing the Borough Wards of Aylesford and East Stour (2), Beaver (2), Furley (2), Norman (1), Repton (2), Victoria (2), North Willesborough (2), Godinton (1) and Highfield (1)

and;

One representative nominated in writing to the Council by each of Central Ashford, South Ashford and North Willesborough Community Forums.

- m) The above persons be also appointed with immediate effect to constitute an Ashford Town Council Advisory Group, which shall exist until 31 March 2027, to: -
 - (i) advise upon an outline budget for the new Town Council and the precept which is to be anticipated by this Council from the Town Council;
 - (ii) prepare policies, procedures, codes, constitutional and insurance arrangements, etc., and employment contracts and delegation arrangements with staff, which the new Town Council will be invited to formally adopt on 1 April 2027 or as soon thereafter as practicable.

Allotment Transfer

6. Parish Councils have a concurrent power to provide allotments in their area, and it is a statutory requirement that all land in a newly created Parish that is held or used by a District Council for allotment purposes is transferred to the new Parish Council. In the case of Ashford, the following allotments must therefore be transferred to the new Ashford Town Council:

Allotment	No of Plots	Status
Musgrove Farm	83	In use
Repton	16	In use
Jemmett Road	8	In use
Orion Way	41	In use
Henwood	44	In use
Musgrove New	11	In use
Beaver Field	19	In use
Westrees	80	In use
William Road	62	In use
Christchurch Road	18	In use

Equalities Impact Assessment

7. Equalities Impacts have been considered during the course of the review. Specific consideration has been given when analysing the consultation responses (see Appendix B of the report to the Selection and Constitutional Review Committee on 11 June) - in particular, how different demographics responded to the consultation and how persons with protected characteristics would be affected by the recommendations of the review.

Consultation Planned or Undertaken

8. There is a statutory duty to consult with electors and interested parties, which has taken place across two consultations, including upon the recommendations of the review. Details of the consultations and the responses provided were considered by the Task Group and Selection and Constitutional Review Committee.

Reasons for Supporting Option Recommended

9. The Stage 1 and 2 consultations have indicated support for a town council for Ashford's unparished urban area in terms of a majority of the small number of respondents to the consultations.

Next Steps

10. Subject to the recommendations being approved, the following steps will be taken:

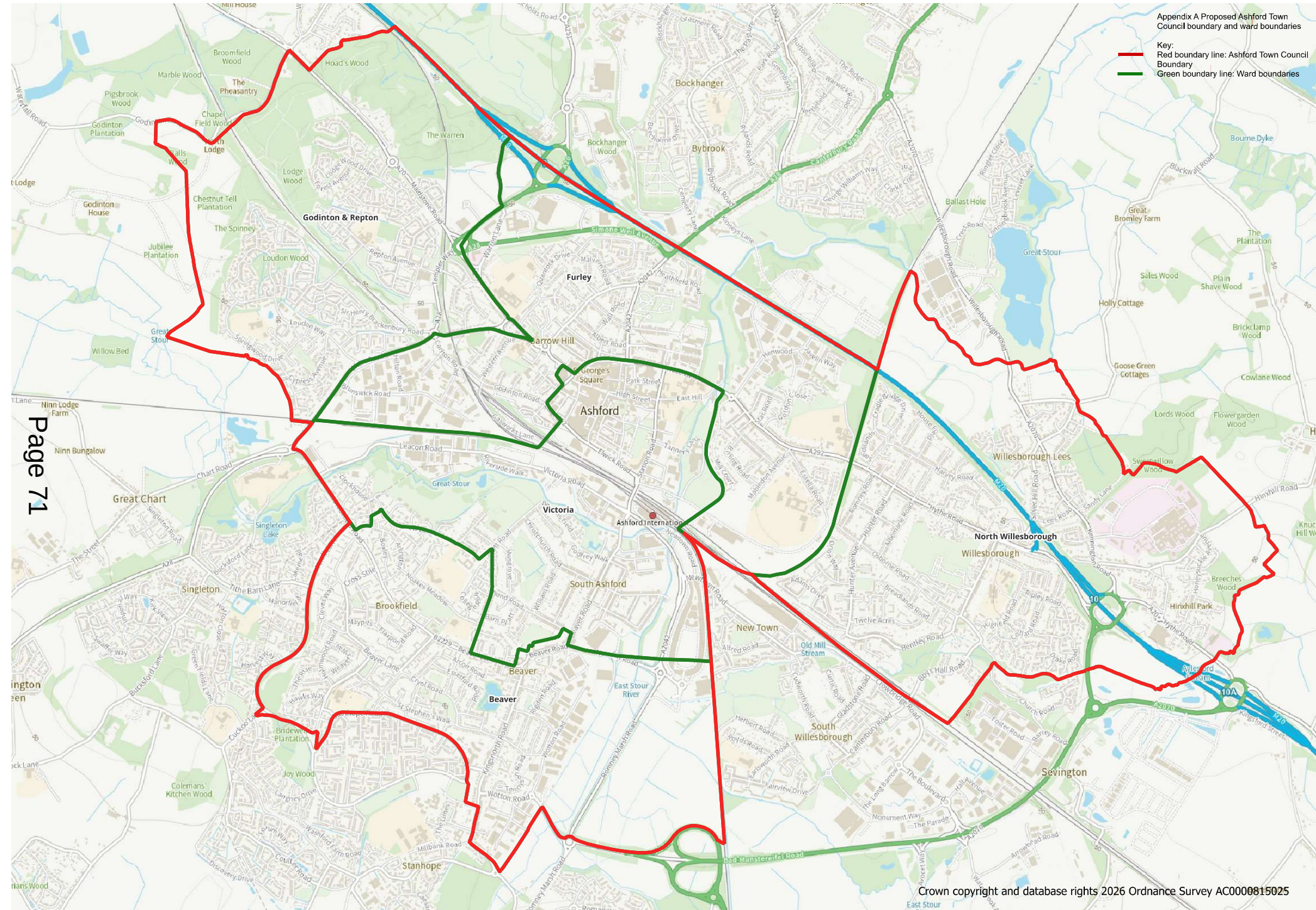
- The Local Government Boundary Commission for England will be made aware of the review outcome.
- The Council will make a Reorganisation of Community Governance Order - the Order officially establishes the Ashford parish and its town council, and sets their boundaries, councillor numbers and election cycles. It also formally sets the anticipated precept from the new Town Council, the calculation of which is recommended to be delegated to Officers in consultation with the Ashford Town Council Advisory Group.
- On the establishment of the Town Council on 1 April 2027, allotments within its area will be passed over to the Town Council as legally required. In line with government guidance and the Kent-wide approach, further asset transfer beyond allotments is not being proposed. The potential future transfer of any other assets can be discussed between the new Town Council and the Council or any new Unitary Authority.
- The council will seek to create a Job Description, recruit and appoint an officer on a short-term basis to assist the Advisory Group and the Head of Policy & Performance to prepare for the formal establishment of the new Town Council on 1 April 2027.

Conclusion

11. Establishing a town council for the unparished area of the borough is recommended to enhance local democracy, improve service delivery, and strengthen community engagement. This recommendation was the subject of statutory consultation which showed a majority of respondents in favour.

Report author: Charlotte Hammersley, Head of Policy and Performance

- Key:
Red boundary line: Ashford Town Council
Boundary
Green boundary line: Ward boundaries



Equality Impact Assessment

1. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is a document that summarises how the council has had due regard to the public sector equality duty (Equality Act 2010) in its decision-making. Although there is no legal duty to produce an EIA, the Council must have **due regard** to the equality duty and an EIA is recognised as the best method of fulfilling that duty. It can assist the Council in making a judgment as to whether a policy or other decision will have unintended negative consequences for certain people and help maximise the positive impacts of policy change. An EIA can lead to one of four consequences:

- (a) No major change – the policy or other decision is robust with no potential for discrimination or adverse impact. Opportunities to promote equality have been taken;
- (b) Adjust the policy or decision to remove barriers or better promote equality as identified in the EIA;
- (c) Continue the policy – if the EIA identifies potential for adverse impact, set out compelling justification for continuing;
- (d) Stop and remove the policy where actual or potential unlawful discrimination is identified.

Public sector equality duty

2. The Equality Act 2010 places a duty on the council, when exercising public functions, to have due regard to the need to:
- (a) Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
 - (b) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - (c) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it (ie tackling prejudice and promoting understanding between people from different groups).

3. These are known as the three aims of the general equality duty.

Protected characteristics

4. The Equality Act 2010 sets out nine protected characteristics for the purpose of the equality duty:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership*
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

*For marriage and civil partnership, only the first aim of the duty applies in relation to employment.

Due regard

5. Having 'due regard' is about using good equality information and analysis at the right time as part of decision-making procedures.
6. To 'have due regard' means that in making decisions and in its other day-to-day activities the council must consciously consider the need to do the things set out in the general equality duty: eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations. This can involve:
- removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.
 - taking steps to meet the needs of people with certain protected characteristics when these are different from the needs of other people.
 - encouraging people with certain protected characteristics to participate in public life or in other activities where it is disproportionately low.
7. How much regard is 'due' will depend on the circumstances. The greater the

potential impact, the higher the regard required by the duty. Examples of functions and decisions likely to engage the duty include: policy decisions, budget decisions, public appointments, service provision, statutory discretion, decisions on individuals, employing staff and procurement of goods and services.

8. In terms of timing:

- Having 'due regard' should be considered at the inception of any decision or proposed policy or service development or change.
- Due regard should be considered throughout development of a decision. Notes shall be taken and kept on file as to how due regard has been had to the equality duty in research, meetings, project teams, consultations etc.
- The completion of the EIA is a way of effectively summarising this and it should inform final decision-making.

Armed Forces Community

9. As part of the council's commitment to the Armed Forces Community made through the signing of the Armed Forces Covenant the council's Cabinet agreed in November 2017 that potential impacts on the Armed Forces Community should be considered as part of the Equality Impact Assessment process.

10. Accordingly, due regard should also be had throughout the decision making process to potential impacts on the groups covered by the Armed Forces Covenant:

- Current serving members of the Armed Forces (both Regular and Reserve)
- Former serving members of the Armed Forces (both Regular and Reserve)
- The families of current and former Armed Forces personnel.

Case law principles

11. A number of principles have been established by the courts in relation to the equality duty and due regard:

- Decision-makers in public authorities must be aware of their duty to have 'due regard' to the equality duty and so EIA's must be attached to any relevant committee reports.
- Due regard is fulfilled before and at the time a particular policy is under consideration as well as at the time a decision is taken. Due regard involves a conscious approach and state of mind.
- A public authority cannot satisfy the duty by justifying a decision after it has been taken.
- The duty must be exercised in substance, with rigour and with an open mind in such a way that it influences the final decision.
- The duty is a non-delegable one. The duty will always remain the responsibility of the public authority.
- The duty is a continuing one so that it needs to be considered not only when a policy, for example, is being developed and agreed but also when it is implemented.
- It is good practice for those exercising public functions to keep an accurate record showing that they have actually considered the general duty and pondered relevant questions. Proper record keeping encourages transparency and will discipline those carrying out the relevant function to undertake the duty conscientiously.
- A public authority will need to consider whether it has sufficient information to assess the effects of the policy, or the way a function is being carried out, on the aims set out in the general equality duty.
- A public authority cannot avoid complying with the duty by claiming that it does not have enough resources to do so.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission has produced helpful guidance on "Meeting the Equality Duty in Policy and Decision-Making" (October 2014). It is available on the following link and report authors should read and follow this when developing or reporting on proposals for policy or

service development or change and other decisions likely to engage the equality duty. [*Equality Duty in decision-making*](#)

Lead officer:	Charlotte Hammersley, Head of Policy and Performance
Decision maker:	Full Council
Decision: • Policy, project, service, contract • Review, change, new, stop	Community Governance Review
Date of decision: The date when the final decision is made. The EIA must be complete before this point and inform the final decision.	16 July 2026
Summary of the proposed decision: • Aims and objectives • Key actions • Expected outcomes • Who will be affected and how? • How many people will be affected?	This proposal relates to the outcomes of a Community Governance Review (CGR) conducted by the council. A CGR is a statutory process that allows the council to review and make changes to the governance arrangements locally. It is designed to ensure that these arrangements: • Reflect the identities and interests of the communities within the area under review. • Are effective and convenient for local residents and stakeholders
Information and research: • Outline the information and research that has informed the decision. • Include sources and key findings.	Consultations to gauge public opinion on the proposed Town Council have been conducted (see next section). The review has been guided by legislation and guidance when developing recommendations. Research into considerations including Value for Money and the benefits and disbenefits of town councils has been conducted and presented to the task group overseeing the review.
Consultation: • What specific consultation has occurred on this decision? • What were the results of the consultation? • Did the consultation analysis reveal any difference in views across the protected characteristics? • What conclusions can be drawn from the analysis on how the decision will affect people with different protected characteristics?	There was majority support for a town council across two public consultations held during the course of the review. The report to the Selection and Constitutional Review Committee 11 June 2026 sets out details of the consultation responses at Appendix B including the demographic breakdown of responses.

Assess the relevance of the decision to people with different protected characteristics and assess the impact of the decision on people with different protected characteristics.

When assessing relevance and impact, make it clear who the assessment applies to within the protected characteristic category. For example, a decision may have high relevance for young people but low relevance for older people; it may have a positive impact on women but a neutral impact on men.

Protected characteristic	Relevance to Decision High/Medium/Low/None	Impact of Decision Positive (Major/Minor) Negative (Major/Minor) Neutral
<u>AGE</u> Elderly	Low	Positive
Middle age	Low	Positive
Young adult	Low	Positive
Children	Low	Positive
<u>DISABILITY</u> Physical	Low	Positive
Mental	Low	Positive
Sensory	Low	Positive
<u>GENDER RE-ASSIGNMENT</u>	Low	Positive
<u>MARRIAGE/CIVIL PARTNERSHIP</u>	Low	Positive
<u>PREGNANCY/MATERNITY</u>	Low	Positive
<u>RACE</u>	Low	Positive
<u>RELIGION OR BELIEF</u>	Low	Positive
<u>SEX</u> Men	Low	Positive
Women	Low	Positive
<u>SEXUAL ORIENTATION</u>	Low	Positive
<u>ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY</u> Regular/Reserve personnel	Low	Positive
Former service personnel	Low	Positive
Service families	Low	Positive

Mitigating negative impact: Where any negative impact has been identified, outline the measures taken to mitigate against it.	The creation of a town council is intended to facilitate a local democratic voice to represent people living in the review area. This is intended to have a positive impact on community cohesion, reflect the identities and interests of the communities within the area under review and ensure local government is effective and convenient.
---	--

Is the decision relevant to the aims of the equality duty? Guidance on the aims can be found in the EHRC's Essential Guide , alongside fuller PSED Technical Guidance .	
Aim	Yes / No / N/A
1) Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation	Yes
2) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it	N/A
3) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it	Yes

Conclusion: - Consider how due regard has been had to the equality duty, from start to finish. - There should be no unlawful discrimination arising from the decision (see guidance above). - Advise on whether the proposal meets the aims of the equality duty or whether adjustments have been made or need to be made or whether any residual impacts are justified. - How will monitoring of the policy, procedure or decision and its implementation be undertaken and reported?	It will be for the proposed town council to consider how it best meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and delivers the aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty. The principal authority (Ashford Borough Council) considers a Town Council will aid local representation and the convenience of local government which should meet the aims of the Duty.
EIA completion date:	7 July 2026

This page is intentionally left blank