

Cabinet

Minutes of a Meeting of the Cabinet held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **8th May 2025**.

Present:

Cllr. Ovenden (Chair);
Cllr. Campkin (Vice-Chair);

Cllrs. Betty, Harman, Hayward, Nilsson, Walder, Wright.

Apologies:

Cllr. Chilton.

Also Present:

Cllrs. Bartlett, Gathern, Gauder, C Suddards, Spain.

In attendance:

Chief Executive; Deputy Chief Executive; Corporate Director of Health and Wellbeing; Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer; Interim Assistant Director of Housing; Head of Economic Development; Principal Solicitor – Strategic Development; Environmental Protection and Licensing Team Leader; Communications Officer; Democratic Services Manager.

408 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 20th March 2025 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

409 Leader's Announcements

The Leader said that as everyone would know, today marked the 80th anniversary of VE Day. A day when after years of War peace was finally declared in Europe. On the 8th May 1945 people across Britain took to the streets in celebration, but behind the joy laid great sacrifice by the men and women of the Armed Forces, by those on the home front and by communities like theirs in Ashford which gave so much and lost so many. Many here would have family members who served, endured and who rebuilt and their stories were woven into the fabric of their towns and villages. It was thanks to their courage and resilience that they enjoyed the freedoms and democracy that they had today.

The meeting then observed a period of silence to remember those who served, those who fell and all those whose lives were forever changed by the War.

410 Corporate Complaints 2024/25

The Portfolio Holder introduced the first annual report presented to Cabinet outlining the complaints received corporately during the financial year from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025. The report detailed the number of complaints, the reasons for those complaints, the timescales for handling them and the associated staff and financial costs. It was a requirement of the Council's Complaints Handling Policy that this information was reported to Cabinet annually and reported on the Council's website.

She advised that the Council was committed to delivering high-quality services that met the needs and expectations of their residents, businesses, and communities. They recognised that, from time to time, things may not go as planned and when they didn't, it was important that residents had a clear and accessible way to tell the Council. This report provided insight into the feedback they had received over the past year, the actions they had taken to resolve the issues, and the improvements they had made as a result. She considered that complaints were not just challenges, they were opportunities to listen, learn, and do better. By understanding where things had gone wrong, they could strengthen their services and ensure greater accountability across the organisation. They valued transparency and used the findings in the report to guide continuous improvement efforts. Whether highlighting successful resolutions or identifying areas for change, every complaint helped shape a more responsive and effective Council. She thanked all who had taken the time to share their feedback and said their voices would help make Ashford a better place for everyone.

Resolved:

That the Corporate Complaints report 2024/25 be received and noted.

411 Annual Complaint Handling Performance Report (Housing) 2024/25

The Portfolio Holder for Tourism, Culture, Policy and Performance introduced the second annual report presented to the Cabinet outlining the complaints received in relation to the Housing Service. Following on the 2023/24 report, the report covered the financial year from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025, and evaluated the service's performance in complaints handling. The report detailed the number of complaints, the reasons for the complaints, the timescales for handling them, learning from complaints and the associated staff and financial costs for complaints handling. It was a requirement of the Housing Ombudsman that these figures were published annually. The report also gave Members an understanding of what the Housing Service was working towards and the measures it had put in place to ensure continuous improvement in complaints handling across the service.

She said that the Council understood that having a safe, secure, and well-maintained home was fundamental to residents' wellbeing. They were committed to delivering a high standard of housing services and just as importantly, they were committed to listening when things did not go as they should. The report reflected their ongoing efforts to be transparent, accountable, and resident-focused. Complaints, while sometimes challenging, were a vital part of how they learned and improved and they provided real world insight into the experiences of tenants and leaseholders and helped identify where services needed to change, adapt, or strengthen. Over the past year, they had taken significant steps to improve how they managed and responded to housing complaints, not only in terms of speed and efficiency, but also in how they communicated, took ownership, and put things right. It was also important to note that they discussed performance on complaints with the Regulator for Social Housing at their monthly meetings so they had their external critical input into this too. They were grateful to residents who took the time to provide feedback. Every complaint was an opportunity to improve the housing service they provided, ensuring it better met the needs of their community, today and in the future.

The Leader, who had Portfolio Responsibility for Housing and Homelessness, said he welcomed the report.

Resolved:

- That (i) the Housing Complaints Performance Report be received and noted.**
- (ii) publication of the report be approved.**

412 Ashford Town Centre Market Review

The Portfolio Holder for Tourism, Culture, Policy and Performance introduced the report. She advised that Ashford Town Centre was evolving and with it, so to must the way they used and activated public spaces. Vibrant, welcoming and dynamic street trading was a key part of that transformation - helping to create a town centre that attracted residents, visitors, and businesses alike. This Market Review Report set out their vision to modernise and revitalise Ashford's Street Trading provision through the creation of new trading pitches and the enhancement of existing ones. Their goal was to support a thriving, diverse marketplace that reflected the character of Ashford, offered opportunities for local entrepreneurs, and brought new energy to their streets. Through careful planning, consultation, and design, they were identifying locations that not only maximised visibility and footfall but also complemented the wider Town Centre offer. From fresh local produce to artisan goods and street food, they aimed to encourage a mix of traders that added vibrancy and choice, while maintaining high standards of quality, safety, and presentation. The report outlined the work undertaken so far, the proposed updates and the opportunities ahead. It marked an exciting step towards reimagining Ashford's Street Trading scene as a modern, flexible and people focused asset, central to the Town's future identity and success.

The Portfolio Holder for Communities, Health and Wellbeing said she wholeheartedly supported the report and thanked all those Officers and Members involved in the Task Group's review.

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

- The Environmental Protection and Licensing Team Leader explained what informal 'grandfather' rights were and how these applied to the Ashford Town Market.
- The key learnings from visiting other local markets had been the importance of quality, visually appealing and uniform gazebos, a good variety of stalls, a potentially expanding offer and a colourful and vibrant scene.
- The Market Manager for the monthly 'Makers Market' had a key role and was noted to be doing an outstanding job associated with the expansion of that Market.
- It was seen as preferable to retain some element of flexibility over stalls, rather than insisting on completely uniform gazebos across the board which may not suit all trader types.
- Members who had visited the Market the previous weekend said that they had been impressed and were pleased to see it busy and 'buzzing' and a happy set of traders on site.

Recommended:

That Council agree to the publishing of statutory notices with reference to an intention to redesignate the existing 'licensed streets' as 'consent streets' in line with Sch.4 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982.

Resolved:

- That**
- (i) the creation of street trading pitches in the 'display area' be approved as proposed.**
 - (ii) the modification of existing street trading arrangements in the Lower High Street be approved as proposed.**
 - (iii) funds allocated to the original market motion, to the value of £10,000, be assigned to the purchase of gazebo units, where necessary, to incentivise the uptake of new pitches by professional traders.**

413 Joint Transportation Board – Minutes of 4th March 2025

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Joint Transportation Board held on the 4th March 2025 be received and noted.

414 Trading and Enterprise Board – Minutes of 4th March and 29th April 2025

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meetings of the Trading and Enterprise Board held on the 4th March and 29th April 2025 be approved and adopted.

415 Civic Events Advisory Committee – Notes of 5th March 2025

Resolved:

That the Notes of the Meeting of the Civic Events Advisory Committee held on the 5th March 2025 be received and noted.

416 Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group – Notes of 12th February and 26th March 2025

Resolved:

That the Notes of the Meetings of the Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group held on the 12th February and 26th March 2025 be received and noted.

417 Schedule of Key Decisions to be Taken

Resolved:

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

418 Exclusion of the Public

Resolved:

That pursuant to Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item, as it is likely in view of the nature of the business to be

transacted or the nature of the proceedings that if members of the public were present there would be disclosure of exempt information hereinafter specified by reference to Paragraphs 1, 3 and 5 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.

419 Economic Regeneration and Investment Advisory Committee – Notes of 8th April 2025

The Leader directed Members' attention to the exempt tabled paper which included an amended recommendation.

During confidential session, Cabinet Members and Officers responded to questions about the future of the One You Facility in Park Mall and proposals for the Elwick Place development.

The Leader confirmed that no firm proposal was on the table for Elwick Place yet and no final decisions had been made. These would all come to Full Council at the appropriate time.

Resolved:

That the Notes of the Meeting of the Economic Regeneration and Investment Advisory Committee held on the 8th April 2025 be received and noted.

Queries concerning these minutes? Please contact Democratic Services
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