


COUNCIL UPDATE 10.2025

LOCAL GOVERNANCE REVIEW (LGR)

The draft leaflet for the LGR of unparished areas was discussed by councillors on 29th September, it was subsequently distributed to all households in the unparished area. Key points included:

- In the unparished areas of Ashford, without a town council only the unitary council will provide council services and this which will cover several towns and may not have a focus on Ashford.
- A newly parished area will therefore retain a more local layer of local government than unparished ones.
- A town council has the same powers as a parish council. The only difference is the name, and they often have a mayor.
- Some services currently delivered by Ashford Borough Council could be transferred to the new town council.
- Like parishes, town councils get their money from a 'precept'. This is an extra charge added to your Council Tax and collected at the same time.
- Have your say at <https://haveyoursay.ashford.gov.uk> or contact corporatepolicy.team@ashford.gov.uk.
- There will be an event in the town centre at the bandstand to coincide with the Makers Market.

Which parts of Ashford are included?




**We want your views –
Tell us before 5 December 2025.**

It's important we hear from as many people as possible to help shape our proposals, so please spare a few minutes to complete the survey.


Have your say at <https://haveyoursay.ashford.gov.uk> or scan the QR code. If you need a paper copy, contact corporatepolicy.team@ashford.gov.uk or phone 01233 331111.

You can also respond to this consultation by email or send your comments in writing to:

Corporate Policy Team,
Ashford Borough Council,
International House, Dover Place,
Ashford, Kent, TN23 3HU



**Change is coming
- Is a local voice
important to you?**




**CONSULTATION ON PROPOSALS
FOR AN ASHFORD TOWN COUNCIL**

Ashford Borough Council is conducting a Community Governance Review and would like to know what you think about the creation of a town council for the unparished, urban area of Ashford.

Do you think Ashford should have a town council?

Please read through this leaflet and tell us your views by completing the questionnaire online or ask for a paper copy.

**We need to know what you think by
5 December 2025**



- If residents are minded supporting a Town Council, there will be a final consultation once the boundaries and details relating to the transfer of regalia are confirmed. The new Town Council will be in place from May 2027.

The consultation opened on 25th October and will close on 5th December.

LGR AND CARE SERVICES

The County Councils Network (CCN) has warned that local government reorganisation will see more vulnerable young people fall between the gaps and threaten adult social care services. The CCN says its analysis suggests that abolishing district councils and dividing county council areas into smaller unitary authorities of under 500,000 people will drive an increase in social care costs of between £180m and £270m, with a need for up to 1,100 more senior staff to administer services in a greater number of smaller areas. By contrast, it found, costs could be cut by around £65m through the creation of larger authorities of at least 500,000 people. LGR could make or break care services, with a risk of creating significant upheaval and leaving worse services with too few staff.

KALC PLANNING COMMITTEE

The Group met on 1st October. Key issues raised:

- Community benefit requirements for developments of less than 10 properties would be welcomed (but this is a national policy).
- It is critical that there is a high quality and imaginative landscape framework with scale and density of landscaping and screening including as part of the open space policies – can this cover view protection? Countryside Stewardship money may potentially allow green spaces to receive funded income should it qualify for any of the management options.
- Where an arable field has one or two one mature trees in it, policies must preserve these trees and make them a feature for everyone to enjoy.
- Ashford does not currently have a Local List of Heritage Assets, and the council should prepare a Supplementary Planning Document setting out guidance and recommended methodology on Historic England's Guiding Principles for Local Heritage Listing which will support local groups wishing to prepare Local Heritage Lists.
- We need a policy in the new local plan to work with PROWs staying in place rather than moving them.
- Resilience in power/water/sewage and infrastructure in the rural area is needed.

COMMUNITY SAFETY UNIT

The Unit met on 2nd October. Key issues raised:

- 4 Fixed Penalty Notices (a financial penalty issued for committing certain environmental or public health offenses, such as littering, fly-tipping, or dog fouling) were issued in the last month. Three for vehicles, one for ASB.

- Fly tipping and dog fouling two main issues arising from a survey in Newtown.
- 17 stray dog reports with 9 now in kennels.
- McDonalds has a new manager and is looking at how they work with Ashford Partnership Against Crime (APAC).
- Shoplifting repeat offenders now being picked by APAC / CCTV and reporting them to police.
- No Building Regulation approval has been granted by ABC for Sevington Mill (<https://dignityhomes.co.uk/our-homes/>) despite the fact it is advertised as open as a “specialised care for individuals experiencing severe emotional trauma that significantly impacts their mental health.”

SEACAmb BOARD

The Board met on 2nd October and noted the following feedback and challenge from the Council of Governors (COG):

- The steps being taken to ensure a supportive working environment given the stresses they experience.
- Focus on health inequalities, related to access to Community First Responders and Public Access Defibs in particular communities.
- The impact and ongoing evaluation of the Unscheduled Care Navigation Hubs.
- There is confidence in achieving the Category 2 (emergency incidents that are not immediately life-threatening but require rapid assessment, intervention, and urgent transport, such as a stroke or a heart attack) mean target time (25 mins) and in terms of the current time of 27 mins.
- SECAmb have included in their 2025/26 Winter Plan mental health (MH) therapeutic interventions to include patient safety as a pilot. This is to start by Jan 2026 with referrals into MH Trusts.

INTEGRATED CARE PARTNERSHIP

The Partnership met on 6th October. Key issues included.

- Kent will be launching the Kent Marmot Coastal Region in Spring 2026. The principles are to improve the social determinates of health and will concentrate of barriers to employment to be addressed include mental health, housing, and transport. A single point of contact and better coordination was agreed as essential. They are also looking at social prescribing and the effectiveness of the Joy Platform.
- The 10 Year Health Plan, “Fit for the Future”, was published on 3rd July, setting out the ambitions for the NHS. Key areas:
 1. Digital: This includes the online digital hospital and includes AI to triage as a trusted assistant – the NHS will be a global leader. Digital exclusion is a concern.

2. A new Neighbourhood Health Programme Board will deliver the Integrated Care Strategy with multi-year budgets. It includes exploring Public-Private Partnerships for capital but I expressed concern on how Private Finance Initiatives have been delivered in the past (details are awaited from the government).
 3. The plan outlines the intention to abolish Integrated Care Partnerships.
 4. As local government reorganisation (and devolution) progresses there is a clear intention for the Integrated Care Boards to align with strategic authority boundaries and cluster into 7 regions.
 5. Bring joy back to working in the NHS so more people join, learn and stay. The Social Partnership Forum will develop new staff standards and a 10-year workforce plan.
 6. 2% year on year productivity gain.
- Patients who have tried to contact their GP practice were asked to describe their experience of contacting their GP practice – 61% of patients said, “fairly good” or “very good”.
 - The proportion of carers who report that they are very satisfied or extremely satisfied with social services Kent: 38.3% to 31.0% (K&M was lower than England in 2021/22 by 5.6 % points).
 - Proportion of deaths in hospital across Kent and Medway Kent & Medway all ages: 38.4% (England: 42.8%).
 - A Task and Finish group is writing a Suicide Prevention Pathway/Protocol (consultation ended 6th October). The purpose is to establish a framework aimed at preventing suicide among individuals who access services across statutory and non-statutory organisations within Kent and Medway. It will:
 1. Facilitate coordinated working between agencies to ensure timely, effective, and compassionate responses to individuals presenting with suicidal ideation or intent.
 2. Promote co-production with service users and their support networks, including families and carers, to develop personalised and trauma-informed care plans.
 3. Encourage the sharing of intelligence, resources, and best practices across agencies to enhance suicide prevention efforts.
 4. Ensure that individuals receive consistent support regardless of their point of entry into the system, thereby reducing fragmentation and gaps in care.
- The aimed completion date is December 2025.
- Ashford is an early adopter to become an Age Friendly Community.

Vision: make Kent an Age Friendly county



- KCC are working with early adopter districts (Ashford, Folkestone, and Faversham) to become Age Friendly Communities
- WHO - **8 domains** that shape our **physical, social, and economic environments**
- A **place-based and bottom-up approach**
- Bring everything together and **makes it visible**
- Working through **partnerships**
- Beneficial to **all ages**
- **Embeds older people's voices** in planning and delivery
- **AFC gives clear direction, free resources, peer network as well as local flexibility**
- Create a **MOVEMENT FOR CHANGE**

- Medway has implemented a new care technology called Lilli, which uses small sensors and artificial intelligence to understand a person's daily routines. The system helps people stay at home and avoid unnecessary moves into residential care, saving £1.6m in its first year. The technology supports the ICB's health and care goals by moving services into communities and using digital tools to improve care. The system works without cameras or microphones, tracking movement, eating, sleeping, bathroom use, and home temperature.

ASHFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL CABINET

The Cabinet met on 9th October. Key issues included.

- A new renewable system to replace the gas installation reaching the end of its life is being installed at Julie Rose Stadium. Teratherm Energy, a local company specialising in innovative heat generation will install technology using a resin-bound systems to harvest energy from solar, ambient air and ground. This project, supported by the Rural England Prosperity Fund, and private investment has benefits include lower maintenance, cost savings, higher efficiency, and potential for net zero operation.
- EVCP number of sessions in Q1 2025 was 865 (about 8 per day).
- I requested about a new Key Performance Indicator "Number of households in temporary accommodation outside the Borough".
- The Stour Centre partnered with Kent Kindness to facilitate social 5 a-side football sessions for young refugees under the care of the local council.
- Together We Thrive launched – a wellbeing initiative focused on connection, support and positive mental health, specifically designed for adults with special educational needs and disabilities. The sessions, held weekly at the Stour Centre, provide a space for adults to come together, engage in light activities, share experiences and access support in a relaxed, judgement free environment.

- A budget of £550,000 to continue the preparation of a planning application (expected to be March 2026) for the repurposing of the Civic Centre and Suite. Cost analysis of the Civic Centre and Suite has shown that it will be cheaper to refurbish the building rather than demolish it and start again.
- An additional budget of £10.6m was approved to enable the continued acquisition of council homes. There are currently around 1,800 households on the Council's Housing Register and as of 10th September 2025, there were 289 households in Temporary Accommodation. Last year (2024/25) a total of only 24 new Council homes were built including Fortis House. A further 29 homes were purchased from the open market; this progress is too slow. In addition to new council homes, Registered Providers delivered just 10 new homes. Applicants to the Council House Register are required to have a local connection to the Borough to qualify to join the Register. A revised scheme will further strengthen the need to have a local connection to Ashford borough and have an identifiable housing need to be able to join the Register and access affordable homes (see meeting on 28th October).
- Broadband is one of the workstreams in the Borough Plan and the work being undertaken:
 - i. Ensure the council has clear and pro-active processes across departments that allow providers to engage and invest
 - ii. Work with broadband providers to support improved connections and increase investment
 - iii. Continue the coordination of the Ashford urban area Fibre To The Premises rollout
 - iv. Support the rollout of FTTP to the council's housing stock
 - v. Proactively engage with Mobile Network Operators and Mobile UK to seek improved mobile connectivity in the borough
 - vi. Support the Local Plan Review with evidence and the development of policies relating to digital infrastructure improvements needed during the lifetime of the new Local Plan
 - vii. Support KCC and liaise with City Fibre around the Government's Project Gigabit Programme and delivery of this government investment in future years and to seek maximum coverage
 - viii. Support the promotion of UK Gigabit Vouchers, once these become available, and related community projects to deliver digital infrastructure improvements in rural areas.
- The Ashford Monitoring Centre (AMC) provides 24/7 services including public space CCTV monitoring, surveillance of Ashford Borough Council (ABC) assets, out-of-hours (OOH) call handling, and support for emergency response via Kent Police radio system and community safety operations, including acting as town control for the business crime reduction partnership. The AMC operates 24/7, 365 days a year, monitoring and recording footage from 86 public space cameras, 9

cameras on behalf of Tenterden Town Council, and 37 cameras covering ABC assets. AMC played an active role in 2,265 incidents during 2024/25, leading to 828 follow up service actions such as footage reviews and downloads. With the decommissioning of the Civic Centre, the proposal is to join Swale BC in a CCTV partnership. Any reduction or cessation of CCTV monitoring may result in political sensitivity, public concern, and a loss of confidence from key partners, including Kent Police. While ABC may accept a limited, short-term perception risk, this must be clearly explained and actively mitigated through effective engagement. Ongoing, live liaison with Kent Police and community safety partners is essential. Swale has a state-of-the-art control centre, which is due to be expanded in coming months, but they provide security solutions for both public and private sectors. Their control room is staffed 24/7, 365 days a year and they provide comprehensive range of services such as CCTV monitoring, Out of Hours call handling and Radio links. CCTV in Housing will be subject to an audit to see whether they use the Swale operation or will simply record the data ready for downloading to the Police if required but without active monitoring.

ALLOTMENTS

I met with Ashford Allotments Society, the Portfolio Holder and Council Officers to discuss the following.

- ABC agreed an improved way of liaising with the Society to discuss charges, s106 and management issues.
- The Lower Vicarage Road disused allotment site discussions confirmed of capital contributions of £9,624 (KCC) and maintenance £2,462 (ABC). The agreement provides for the restoration of the disused site. The land is registered with ABC and designated as “allotment gardens”; it is overgrown with no visible restoration or plot reinstatement. The money has been received from the developers of the Highmead House site in Willesborough but is unspent.

BANK HOLIDAY PLANNING ENFORCEMENT

The Council met on 16th October to discuss how cover should be provided by planning enforcement at bank holiday weekends. Over the recent August Bank Holiday weekend, urgent support regarding potentially unlawful development activity was sought but no officer with enforcement or emergency planning responsibility was available. On previous bank holidays, enforcement cover has been provided, particularly to address unauthorised development or gypsy and traveller related planning breaches, which have historically occurred outside normal working hours. The public rightly expects Ashford Borough Council to have robust arrangements in place to respond to urgent planning or environmental incidents at any time, including weekends and Bank Holidays. A lack of emergency cover risks reputational damage

undermines public confidence and may compromise effective enforcement where swift action is required. In particular, the absence of weekend or Bank Holiday cover can prevent the Council from taking urgent legal measures such as issuing Stop Notices or, where necessary, contacting a duty judge to seek an injunction to prevent further unlawful development.

SECamb/SCAS “MERGER”

The Council of Governors met on 17th October. South Central Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust (SCAS) and South East Coast Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust (SECamb) operate within a challenging performance and financial environment that now requires organisational transformation to ensure sustainable service delivery. The Ambulance Service NHS budget for 2026/27 has not been set (at the time of writing) but is expected to be flat in real cash so any improvements to service must come from productivity gains. The environment, particularly within public finances in the UK, has become increasingly challenging since July 2024, due to broader national and geo-political decisions and socio-economic factors.

Neither trust meets NHS constitutional response time standards. Category 1 response times across the Southeast averaged 8 minutes and 38 seconds against the 7-minute target in 2024/25 and Category 2 was 30 minutes and 11 seconds against the 18-minute target. You are more likely to survive a cardiac arrest under SECamb rather than SCAS. There are opportunities for clinical model standardisation across the Southeast, which can lead to better, more equitable clinical outcomes, and improved performance for our patients. The experiences, training, and support staff receive, are also very different. Both SCAS and SECamb seek to level up care and staff experience across a wider region, whilst maintaining local ownership and connectivity with places and neighbourhoods, a key imperative in the NHS 10-year plan. In addition to the challenges, it is projected that the population will age in the South East, with an over 60% increase in people living over the age of 85 by 2034, along with other demographic trends including variations between urban, coastal and rural area, will increase demand on services by over 20% over the next decade. ***The analysis identified over £10m efficiency gains through collaboration between SCAS and SECamb.***

A recent C4 Dispatches programme highlighted a group of 999/111 callers showing the pinch point in the NHS and the public perception of how the ambulance service operates. An undercover reporter took 700 calls in her 3 month employment and only 7 were shown; so it is questionable if the public interest test was met for undercover reporting as SECamb is open and transparent on its targets. Perception needs to change, maybe a rebrand as emergency paramedic service, a mobile emergency treatment service, not a taxi to hospital. The police no longer support mental health calls in the way they used to under “Right Person; Right Care Initiative”.

The first sensible step proposed is to move towards a Group that retains two independent Boards under the leadership of a single CEO and Chair who can progress the necessary integration work over a Transition period.

Standardised clinical pathways will reduce care variation across the region, working through a single regional commissioner to support the appropriate commissioning of alternative pathways. Enhancing care navigation will reduce inappropriate Emergency Department conveyances, improve patient experience and ensure we deliver the right care, at the right time and in the right place for our patients. Aligning operational clinical models will reduce variation and improve outcomes for patients. Reducing overall corporate and support service spending will enable more resources to be spent directly into patient care. ***The Case for Change identified four distinct opportunity areas with quantified financial benefits totalling potential savings of £47.7m - £95.7m.***

HIGHWAYS SEMINAR

I attended the KCC Highways Seminar on 22nd October. Key issues included.

- A new fault reporting tool which is focussing on potholes which will replace the existing reporting tool for Highway issues. The tool is to be used to log any new potholes (other services to follow soon).
https://kentcc-self.achieveservice.com/en/AchieveForms/?form_uri=sandbox-publish://AF-Process-1fad4ed5-8be6-43ae-838d-be1ec462d3d0/AF-Stage-3066648e-abb-4561-b013-01703c61d141/definition.json&redirectlink=%2Fen&cancelRedirectLink=%2Fen&consentMessage=yes. It is not yet fully developed to automatically log the location when reported at the time a photo is taken; this will come later. Also coming later is the ability to report streetlights and drainage issues.
- A new Highways Management Contract will be announced in November 2025 (not Amey).
- No school Travel Plan has been developed by Finberry Primary School, but officers offered support to the Academy should they wish to develop one. Having a Travel Plan is a gateway to funding for road/crossing improvements such as a Lollypop Person – funding for which will be maintained in the KCC 2026/27 budget.
- The initial roll out of the new Entry Exit System (EES) has not had a material expected impact, Brock has not (yet) needed to be deployed. A possible alternative to Brock called mini-Brock was discussed with Toby Howe. This starts the lorry holding area between J8 and J9 (rather than at J8) meaning that J8 can remain open for local traffic. Plans for this will be explored in Summer 2026 once the full impact of the EES is known as it will reduce the capacity to hold lorries. In the meantime, two contingency sites have been identified to hold tourist

traffic at Lyden Hill and at an undisclosed site should EES require this once ESS starts in earnest at Easter 2026.

- Powers for levying traffic enforcement (fines) for those waiting on yellow hatched areas are being considered by KCC.

FINBERRY LAND MANAGEMENT

Management of the site adjoining Finberry shown below are now fully landscaped and managed / maintained under the management service charge levied by HML. It is really good lowland meadow priority type habitat which was sown with an expensive native provenance seed mix by Crest and now requires ongoing management to retain the wetland grassland; this could be carried out mechanically or ideally using livestock to prevent domination by scrub and tree specie

Regarding Captains Wood, Crest have recently carried out repairs to the footpaths, and they had a further tree condition survey carried out although a finalised management plan has not yet been produced. The bulk of the woodland work has been in relation to public access, but Crest has a responsibility for managing the nature conservation value of the woodland too unless this transfers to HML as well (as I expect it to in due course).



A follow-up meeting is arranged for 5th November.

STONESTREET SOLAR

The Secretary of State issued his decision on the Stonestreet Solar planning decision on 23rd October. It can be read here: <https://nsip-documents.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/published-documents/EN010135-001289-Decision%20Letter%20-%20Stonestreet%20Green%20Solar.pdf>.

Key extracts include:

The Secretary of State considers that the need for the Proposed Development is established and notes the contribution the Proposed Development would

make to the established need and targets for low carbon, renewable energy generation. The Secretary of State ascribes substantial positive weight to the need case.

The Secretary of State is content that the Proposed Development will result in a net gain of at least 100% in area-based habitat units, at least 10% in hedgerow units, and at least 10% in watercourse units. The Secretary of State ascribes moderate positive weight to biodiversity in the overall planning balance.

The Secretary of State notes the matters raised in the post-examination submission received on behalf of CPRE Kent. The Secretary of State has considered the impacts of the Proposed Development on heritage assets and concludes that whilst great weight is afforded to the conservation of heritage assets and their settings, the benefit of the Proposed Development outweighs the less than substantial harm to designated heritage assets. The Secretary of State therefore ascribes moderate negative weight to Heritage in the planning balance.

Under section 118 of the Planning Act 2008, an Order granting development consent, or anything done, or omitted to be done, by the Secretary of State in relation to an application for such an Order, can be challenged only by means of a claim for judicial review.

CENTRAL ASHFORD FORUM

The Forum met on 27th October. Key issues included:

- The Forum will write in support of a new Town Council because of the democratic deficit without one when the Borough Council is replaced with a much larger unitary. It will also protect a mayoralty for Ashford. The Forum will post some information on the CACF FB page.
- Park Mall development (PA/2025/179). The Forum will raise visual amenity of the area between the upper High Street / Castle Street and the new car park; instead of demolished fenced off area the area should be landscaped with sitting areas (a local food pop up could be sited there). A footpath should be provided from the new car park to Taylor's Passage. The Forum would welcome information on the Grade I tank in Castle Square.
- 52 High Street. The building is listed and a complex case. A notice has been served to the owner of the site requiring steps to improve the appearance of the building, which is also on the market. This is after an enforcement notice was previously served to stop "unauthorised works" taking place on the Grade II-listed unit.
- A meeting with Keli Lyons is to be scheduled in November 2025 to discuss town centre issues.

- Flat 1, 6-10 North Street (Ref PA/2025/1725). This is a retrospective for a 6 person HMO. The Forum will make comments about the number of people occupying a 3-room flat, is this overcrowding – see policy below? The Forum will ask the ward members to call in the application as there are 11 applications in the town centre.

Policy HOU11 – Houses in Multiple Occupation

Proposal for Houses in Multiple Occupation (small or large) will only be permitted where the proposed development, taken by itself or in combination with existing HMOs in the vicinity of the site, would not result in an unacceptably harmful impact in respect of any of the following:

- a) Residential amenity, caused by increased noise and disturbance;**
- b) Highway safety, caused by insufficient onsite parking provision thereby resulting in an unacceptable increase in on street parking; or**
- c) Visual amenity, including that from inappropriate or insufficient arrangements for dustbin storage.**

Permission granted will normally be subject to a condition that restricts the number of occupants allowed to reside at the property as their main residence.

RENTERS RIGHTS

The Renters' Rights Act 2025 received Royal Assent on 27 October 2025 and has effect from 27 December 2025. It will

- Abolish section 21 evictions and move to a simpler tenancy structure where all assured tenancies are periodic – providing more security for tenants and empowering them to challenge poor practice and unfair rent increases without fear of eviction.
- Ensure possession grounds are fair to both parties, giving tenants more security, while ensuring landlords can recover their property when reasonable. The bill introduces new safeguards for tenants, giving them more time to find a home if landlords evict to move in or sell, and ensuring unscrupulous landlords cannot misuse grounds.
- Provide stronger protections against backdoor eviction by ensuring tenants can appeal excessive above-market rents which are purely designed to force them out. As now, landlords will still be able to increase rents to market price for their properties and an independent tribunal will make a judgement on this, if needed.
- Introduce a new Private Rented Sector Landlord Ombudsman that will provide quick, fair, impartial and binding resolution for tenants' complaints about their landlord. This will bring tenant-landlord complaint resolution on par with established redress practices for tenants in social housing and consumers of property agent services.
- Create a Private Rented Sector Database to help landlords understand their legal obligations and demonstrate compliance (giving good

landlords confidence in their position), alongside providing better information to tenants to make informed decisions when entering into a tenancy agreement. It will also support local councils – helping them target enforcement activity where it is needed most. Landlords will need to be registered on the database to use certain possession grounds.

- Give tenants strengthened rights to request a pet in the property, which the landlord must consider and cannot unreasonably refuse. To support this, landlords will be able to require pet insurance to cover any damage to their property.
- Apply the Decent Homes Standard to the private rented sector to give renters safer, better value homes and remove the blight of poor-quality homes in local communities.
- Apply 'Awaabs Law' to the sector, setting clear legal expectations about the timeframes within which landlords in the private rented sector must take action to make homes safe where they contain serious hazards.
- Make it illegal for landlords and agents to discriminate against prospective tenants in receipt of benefits or with children – helping to ensure everyone is treated fairly when looking for a place to live.
- End the practice of rental bidding by prohibiting landlords and agents from asking for or accepting offers above the advertised rent. Landlords and agents will be required to publish an asking rent for their property, and it will be illegal to accept offers made above this rate.
- Strengthen local authority enforcement by expanding civil penalties, introducing a package of investigatory powers and bringing in a new requirement for local authorities to report on enforcement activity.
- Strengthen rent repayment orders by extending them to superior landlords, doubling the maximum penalty and ensuring repeat offenders have to repay the maximum amount.

HOUSING ALLOCATION POLICY

Councillors discussed changes to the policy that allocates social rented homes (both its own and homes owned by registered housing association providers) to residents on 28th October.

There are 8 criteria which give rise to local connection:

- a. Residence in the borough for 3 years (previously 1 year).
- b. Close family in the borough for 5 years, where there is a need to move to give or receive support.
- c. Current employment, which consists of at least 16 hours per week which is intended to last for 12 months or more (previously working in Ashford).
- d. Armed forces personnel or being a member of their family.
- e. Care leavers (new).

- f. Those who are owed homelessness duties by Ashford Borough Council.
- g. People fleeing domestic abuse.
- h. Returning residents, where they had previously lived in Ashford for at least 10 years.

Only those with a housing need will be able to join the register:

- a. Homeless.
- b. Overcrowded by 1 or more bedroom.
- c. Under occupying social rented homes in Ashford.
- d. A member of the Armed Forces who are unable to remain in their Ministry of Defence accommodation (new).
- e. Living in accommodation which does not medically meet their needs.
- f. Living in unsuitable accommodation owing to disrepair.
- g. Experiencing hardship, including but not limited to affordability, needing to give or receive care, domestic abuse, other forms of violence or abuse and needing to leave supported accommodation in Ashford.

The new scheme has been updated to reflect ongoing housing needs of residents within Ashford and increasing financial pressures owing to the increasing demand for temporary accommodation. A more robust definition of who will be excluded from the housing register owing to inappropriate behaviour. Housing need criteria has been added, ensuring that only those in need of social rented homes can access them. Waiting time is considered alongside housing need, those waiting longer will be prioritised. These changes allow significant changes in the frequency at which those most in need, including homeless households, are offered homes in Ashford.

PARK MALL – TENANT RELOCATION

Councillors discussed the package offered to tenants in Park Mall to enable them to relocate to replacement town centre sites at its meeting on 28th October.

Town Centre Empty Premises Grant: provides financial support for bringing empty commercial units in the town centre back into use. It covers up to 80% of the cost of eligible works including fit out, to a maximum of £10,000, to fund improvements and renovations ***but only if they stay within the town centre.***

Three-month rent refund: Tenants who have fully settled their rent and service charge by the date of vacating their premises will be eligible to receive a refund equivalent to three months' rent (***but not Service Charges***). This measure is intended to provide financial support to tenants as they establish and transition into new business premises.

Extended Vacancy Date: Subject to the completion of the necessary documentation, tenants are permitted to retain occupancy until 9th January

2026. This extension provides an additional four months to facilitate their relocation and enables them to benefit from the Christmas trading period.

Flexible Departure Date: To facilitate the relocation process, tenants are permitted to vacate their premises as soon as they have secured suitable alternative accommodation. Given the uncertainty around when each tenant may find new premises, this flexible arrangement allows tenants to move at a time that best suits their individual circumstances. Importantly, tenants will cease to be liable for rent and Non-Domestic Rates from the date they leave, with no notice period required.

Of the 32 available units, tenants in 20 of the units have already secured “alternative solutions”: (12 have successfully transitioned to new premises – 11 in the town centre - or are scheduled to do so in the coming months, while 3 have opted to close their businesses, and 4 units are vacant).

This leaves tenants across 12 units, with 6 tenants currently engaged in proactive discussions and support to facilitate their relocation and 6 not in discussions (some are national chains).

LOCAL PLAN UPDATE

The draft Local Plan to 2042 was consulted on over an 8-week period from Monday 18 August until Monday 13 October 2025. 290 people in person the “Reg 18” events held across the Borough. The highest attendance at Sandyacres and Mersham events and the lowest attendance was at Ashford Cinema (20) and Kingsnorth (21). 5 people attended the virtual event. 450 comments were received via the online consultation portal, and 150 comments were received via email or post. There were high levels of support for the S7 “Separation of Settlements” policy ambition including proposals for ‘Mersham Wall’ (buffer area). Concerns were expressed over the level of traffic and infrastructure capacity on land north of Ashford and south and east of Ashford. The next step is for the Council Team to process and review the consultation responses before they are made available for the public to view online. This will take place over the coming weeks.

Paul Bartlett - 0773 929 3502

Mersham, Sevington South and Finberry Ward, ABC

paul.bartlett@ashford.gov.uk

Grosvenor Hall Ward, Kennington Community Council

paul.bartlett@kenningtoncc.gov.uk

Sevington Ward, Sevington with Finberry Parish Council

cllrbartlett@sevingtonwithfinberry-pc.gov.uk

Public Governor, Kent & Medway, Southeast Coast Ambulance Service

Paul.ABartlett@secamb.nhs.uk