

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL**LOCAL BOARDS****NOTES OF MEETING****ASHFORD LOCAL BOARD****Date: Tuesday, 27 January 2009****Venue: Ashford Borough Council Civic Centre****Present:****Local Board Members: Mike Angell (Chairman), Mike Hill, OBE, Richard King, George Koowaree, Derek Smyth and Elizabeth Tweed****Apologies for absence: Charles Findlay****KCC Officers: David Geoghegan (Community Liaison Manager)**

A1.	Welcome to the meeting - Mr M Angell, Chairman
A2.	An Overview of Kent County Council Budget
	<p>Nick Chard, Cabinet Member and portfolio holder for Finance gave a presentation as attached.</p> <p>The proposed KCC budget will be decided on 19 February 2009.</p> <p>Derek Smyth, Deputy Leader for the Labour Group said he was pleased when KCC got its four star rating as it reflected the hard work and dedication of its staff. However, Mr Chard's presentation and the emphasis on the Governments formula grant of 2% did not convey all the grant that Central Government gave KCC. Derek said the grant formula represented only 12% of the gross spending and the totality of Council spending is 74% funded from Central Government. He also said these funds had seen real increases every year from the Government.</p> <p>Derek made a second point about the 2.8% proposed increase in Council tax. He wondered whether this was too low relative to what services were required by residents. He said he was suspicious of this low level increase and said all too often in our election year the Council kept the Council tax low to only raise it considerably in the following year after election.</p> <p>George Koowaree said he agreed with Derek and in Election years the Council tax always goes down.</p> <p>Q Surely the money spent on Highway's needs to increase. There must be 4 -6 million pot holes on rural roads. KCC will have to spend more on claims. If you live in a rural area you need a 4x4 vehicle but then you get penalised in road tax.</p> <p>A. I take issue that Kent has the worst roads. If there was a clear business case and more claims, we would review the Highways budget. However, we need to get the balance right.</p> <p>Richard King said he warmly welcomed the £16 Million additional money for</p>

	<p>Highways and contested the number of pot holes mentioned.</p> <p>Q. Sue Sawyer said she was worried that local residents were not at this meeting to ask questions and make their views known. She was concerned about the low level of council tax and how it would adversely impact on services.</p> <p>A. It was acknowledged that public participation was difficult but we were on a journey to increase community engagement and KCC was making more use of web casting and Kent TV.</p> <p>Nick Chard said he could honestly say the proposed 2.85% tax increase was more to do with the economic situation and nothing to do with the impending election.</p> <p>Q. Does the 1% salary increase for staff include performance related pay and what was the pay increase last year.</p> <p>A. No. The increase does not include performance related pay which is in the gift of each KCC Directorate to give or not to give to their employees not sure about last year but it was roughly 2 - 2½%.</p> <p>Q. Does the level of pay offered look forward or backward at the rate of inflation?</p> <p>A. In KCC we have a local pay bargaining and the increase is set at the budget day meeting of the Council.</p> <p>Q. Concerned that older people will be expected to self fund their care and support and not everyone has family assets. Within Ashford there are not many residential homes either.</p> <p>A. We recognise that and there is a consultation on future care of the elderly and how that might be funded.</p> <p>The Chairman thanked Mr Chard for his presentation and attendance at the meeting...</p>
A3.	An Overview of Ashford Borough Council Budget
	<p>Paul Bartlett, Deputy Leader from ABC gave a presentation as attached. He said their Council tax increase will be 4.7%. This was because the Central Government Grant was only 1.8% so ABC needed to pass the shortfall to Council tax payers. In addition, income receipts had dried up and they were also making some staff redundant. Nonetheless the increase only amounted to about 50p per month and the district still had the least Council tax in Kent.</p> <p>Paul Naylor said ABC were the 16th most efficient Council in the country and the finance administration was deemed to be excellent and run at the lowest cost.</p> <p>Mike Hill said the new library is still on course to be built and will be an excellent</p>

	<p>resource for Ashford. He also hoped the Julie Rose sports stadium would continue as it is an asset for the 2012 Olympics.</p> <p>Paul said the Julie Rose will not close but it is not used enough and ABC might limit its opening times.</p> <p>Q. We don't see any real economies in the Council. Every project is way over budget and there is so much waste. No one in the Council takes a blind bit of notice what the public thinks or says.</p> <p>A. That is not the case, if it were why don't they come and complain. In polls and surveys the vast majority of Ashford Residents are happy with their services.</p> <p>Q. There is a view that not enough Council tax is being levied by ABC. To remove 36 people will impact adversely on services.</p> <p>A. There is a school of thought that we should spend our way out of recession. I don't agree with that. The vast majority of people in Ashford would go for a modest Council tax increase. They don't trust Council administrators can spend their money wisely. Council tax does represent a large percentage of some people's income and we would prefer to keep it as low as we can.</p> <p>As a growth area, Central Government supports much of the infrastructure funding. ABC sets the framework and strategy on how this Government money might be used. They require a growth of open spaces but this will require monitoring from ABC and we are constrained financially so there are issues to be sorted.</p> <p>Q. You can't deliver services with cutbacks in staff.</p> <p>A. There is always a balance on service delivery whether it is adequate. Out of hours services cost. We need to assess whether there is really a demand. Some services are nice to have but we don't have the resources. However, if 43 elected Councillors want a service they will have it.</p> <p>Q. Why was there no consultation on the learning pool and the new leisure centre? It's not fit for purpose and was vastly over budget?</p> <p>A. The leisure centre is worth every penny and the visitor numbers are much higher than expected. ABC consulted widely on the facilities but there was no consensus.</p>
A4.	Any Other Business
	The Chairman, Mike Angell, asked if there were any other questions or issues. He thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.