COUNCIL UPDATE 10.2026

COMMUNITY SAFETY UNIT (CSU)

The CSU met on 1st October, key issues included.

- The Youth Festival, held in August 2026, will be repeated in 2027 subject to funding, probably in July 2027.
- Kent Fire & Rescue reported more road traffic accidents than usual.
- 136 fly-tipping reports in September, which is higher than usual.
- Higher than normal catapult reports were seen in September, particularly in Victoria Park.
- KCC are running a campaign "Check Before You Chuck" to ensure that domestic property refuse is taken by licenced waste disposal operators.
- Leaving a bag of excess waste next to your bin is fly tipping.
- The Beacon Centre (which offers advice to homeless) is closed due to problems with the building, but advice is still being given from Bright City Church at the rear of the building twice a week.
- The Eat Well Spend Less Roadshow in November will focus on ensuring residents stay warm in the winter on 11th November 1pm to 5pm at Repton Connect.
- We discussed the risk of the IBF being closed. It's worth remembering it was created in 2021 following Brexit to protect the public and the UK farming industry from animal disease and ensuring food entering the country. It safeguards animal health, welfare and our biosecurity. These issues should never be overlooked or taken for granted. Public health, food safety and animal health should surely remain at the forefront of any decisions that affect the way we trade and protect our country. Maintaining robust border controls and high domestic UK standards safeguards prevents animal diseases that can transfer from animals to humans (e.g., Salmonella, avian influenza, or rabies). Strict biosecurity stops these pathogens from entering the human food chain or spreading to the public. Healthier, disease-free livestock require fewer antibiotics. Reducing antibiotic dependency is a global priority to prevent the rise of drug-resistant bacteria that threaten human medicine.

EKHUFT

The EKHUFT Board met on 1st October. Key issues included.

- The new WHH Same Day Emergency Care (SDEC) facility will open and in phased mobilisation from 16th October. When fully operational, the unit will provide 42 care spaces (up from 24), three procedure rooms, consultation rooms and a waiting area for 25 to 30 patients, supporting the assessment and treatment of 80 to 100 patients each day. The facility enables acute specialists to assess, diagnose and treat suitable patients on the day they arrive, avoiding unnecessary

admission where it is clinically safe to do so. Existing medical and surgical SDEC activity is transferring to the new unit in phases so that services remain safe as capacity expands. The investment is a key part of the Trust's programme to improve patient flow and reduce the use of corridors and other non-care spaces.

- Computed tomography (CT) scan biopsy is an ongoing challenge at WHH due to consultant capacity and lack of recovery space following SDEC moves.
- 60 mixed-sex accommodation breaches were confirmed for August 2026 at Critical Care in WHH.
- Sickness absence at WHH is at 5.2%, above 5% benchmark.

WATER SCRUTINY GROUP

The Council Group set up to discuss water and waste security in Ashford met on 1st October.

The purpose of this review is to examine the resilience, performance and future planning of water supply and wastewater (drainage) infrastructure in Ashford, considering recent supply disruptions due to failing infrastructure such as pumps and pipes/sewers and ongoing system demand pressures including water demand spikes from incidents such as wildfires.

The review will examine how water companies have responded to recent incidents, including communication and support for vulnerable groups, the management of recurrent local issues and the effectiveness of planned investment and infrastructure improvements. It will also consider how well systems are planned and coordinated to support future demand and growth.

Overall, the review aims to provide assurance that water companies are meeting their responsibilities and that Ashford is prepared for future water supply and drainage challenges.



Water companies are required to put in place Water Resource Management Plans to set out the improvements that they will deliver to meet needs, i.e. set out the intended capital investment that they intend to put in place. An issue is that the number of dwellings is established by a Local Plan, but this may not necessarily be the number of occupiers. Partly this is due to the proliferation of Houses in Multiple Occupation; it's the number of occupiers – who they are and what they do that drives water demand. The nature of business demand is also key – agriculture and food/beverage supply have a large demand for water.

In Tonbridge and Malling, the Council been told that the water companies cannot supply water to the new houses in the local plan but the government has said there is an onus on the water company to supply (whether they will or not is in the water company's hands not the government) so the government has said "carry on delivering housing"….a Mexican standoff.

SCHOOL BUS SERVICE FINBERRY / BRIDGEFIELD

Scotland and Bates currently have a pick-up in Finberry on Avocet Way (38 students registered). They also 'serve' Bridgefield but not as directly as they would like. The nearest stop for Bridgefield is Sheepfold Lane in Park Farm (32 students) where a number walk/travel over by car from Bridgefield to use the service. Scotland & Bates haven't been able to include the 'Finn Farm Road' bus stop because it adds too much time to what are already quite long home to school transport routes.

Scotland & Bates have said that if they could use the 'bus only' link when it is open they can add in the 'Finn Farm Road' bus stop and all the parents who currently drive over to Park Farm every morning and afternoon would be very grateful.

I have no information to suggest the aspiration for 2027 for the bus only link will be achieved. ABC are working, together with KCC highways, with the developers of both Finberry and Bridgefield to pull everything together to allow adoption of the road and keep pressure on to maintain momentum achieved this year.

FINBERRY COMMUNITY CENTRE

I am pleased to see the application (finally) from Crest on 5th October following the community consultation event on 18th December 2025. Given the original outline planning application was made in 2002 I don't think we would have thought then that it would take 24 years to see meaningful developments on the Community Centre.

The Community Centre will be part of creating a more vibrant community at Finberry, making a better place to live and work alongside the "village centre" which news is also expected. Both will deliver retail and leisure opportunities for Finberry residents near where they live; hopefully the 502 bus service will be extended to Finberry in 2027.

The scheme will provide a community centre building (a main hall, with a smaller partitioned meeting room, and other ancillary facilities including a kitchen, toilets and storage room in addition to an entrance lobby), a multi-use games area (MUGA) and three tennis courts (one for public use and two for private use). Provision for air source heat pump technology is included.

The site is currently fenced off and the proposed use for the site will enhance the area. The floodlit MUGA is situated as far as possible from residential properties. Car parking is screened by hedges and trees and will soften the appearance from Robin Road, but more screening would be supported around the entire perimeter. Management of the Community Centre is not clear from the application including how the tennis courts will be operated and the noise and disturbance to residents from event (there are only 31 car parking spaces).



EKHUFT – MEETING WITH CEO

I had a meeting with EKHUFT CEO on 6th October. To discuss the external review commissioned following 11 still births beyond 34 weeks. This was an exceptional cluster of issues. NHS England asked for a delay in publishing the report due to ongoing discussion with the Department of Health, but it has now been circulated. Partly this was because they felt EKHUFT was “not

sufficiently humble" about the issue but also because the solutions needed to be better developed as CQC had rated maternity as "good".

The theme of the reports is that EKHUFT maternity units are not adequately timing delivery by high-risk mothers, not care given during labour - care needs to be better during the pre-natal period. This is demoralising for staff and public.

I have asked for a summary of actions that have been taken by EKHUFT to give assurance to expectant high-risk mothers.

ABC AUDIT COMMITTEE

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

- Brexit Renegotiations may impact Ashford Port Health operations at the IBF in Sevington. UK Government has not updated its position and is still suggesting June 27 implementation date for new UK-EU SPS (Sanitary and Phytosanitary Controls) Agreement.
- The administrators appointed to Hodson Developments (Ashford) Ltd and five of its associated companies involved with the Chilmington Green development are in discussions with both Ashford Borough Council and Kent County Council to determine how the scheme can be taken forward. As the situation continues to evolve, the full implications and associated risks cannot yet be fully assessed. The position is being monitored closely, and the risk assessment will be reviewed and updated once further information becomes available.
- There are currently 20+ properties without a current Electrical Installation Condition Report (EICR). A comprehensive review of landlord compliance inspections is underway, including gas safety, electrical testing and stock condition. This is however proving to be a significant project and will roll over into 2027. The maintenance of lifts has been escalated with the legal team after continued poor performance by the lift maintenance company.
- Debt has increased from £291m to £310m (page 79 – in May 2023 it was £238m so up £72m), the costs of servicing this are £22.1m (up by £2.6m) – which is why the proposed parking tariff changes are asked to generate approximately £223k. There has been an increase in the need to borrow by £27m (note 18). The council's Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) has increased from £326m to £349m (£280m in 2023 a change of £69m). In the last year it was mainly due to the redevelopment of Piper Joinery (55 Mabledon Avenue) site, purchase of properties at Tufton Mews, purchase of existing street properties and HRA ***decarbonisation***.

KENNINGTON TOWN COUNCIL

The Town Council met on 7th October. Key issues included.

- The three priorities from the recent community survey are: thefts, ASB & e-scooters/e-bikes.
- Local Police will be advised of early release prisoners. Information is available explaining the changes, what they could mean for victims, and where you can turn for support if you are affected by or worried about the release of an offender. https://www.kent-pcc.gov.uk/what-we-do/commissioning/understanding-the-sentencing-act-2026-changes-and-accessing-support/
- Kennington School (320 pupils) are planning expansion to their Forest School. It is only closed due to high winds and lightning. Shelter is given now by temporary tarpaulins, and they are looking for funding to support acquiring a cabin. The cost is up to £17,900 and the PTA have raised more than £3k. It is hoped the Academy and ward member(s) will be able to support the project. The Town Council can contribute up to £5k.

ABC CABINET

Key issues arising from the meeting on 8th October included.

- An estimated overall total capital investment of £8.363m inclusive of all fees, professional costs, contingencies and other expenses was approved to deliver a small-scale arts, cultural and community venue in the front section of the former Odeon in the Lower High Street. The refined scheme retains the restored Art Deco High Street frontage, a flexible studio theatre with an updated capacity range of approximately 152 to 262 people depending on configuration, a gallery and meeting space, a foyer café/bar and workspace, and the refurbished first floor ballroom. Design development has improved concurrent use and fire escape arrangements and relocated the entrance and box office to strengthen accessibility and visibility from the High Street. It will be in use Summer 2028. The terrazzo floor with the Odeon branding will be retained.
- An additional two Enforcement Officers within the Community Safety and Resilience Team will be recruited (doubling the team). They are responsible for addressing anti-social behaviour involving non-ABC housing tenants, environmental enforcement, the stray dog service, and providing enforcement support to a range of other Council services, including tackling anti-social behaviour, misuse of public spaces and other community concerns. It will enable resources to be deployed flexibly in response to emerging risks, demand and identified hotspots. Reporting ASB and misuse of public spaces is vital so the new resources are properly deployed through the Community Safety Unit and can be reported to CSU@ashford.gov.uk and using the reporting app https://www.kent.police.uk/ro/report/

- Proposed tariff changes were forecast to generate approximately £223,000 of additional annual income. These increases were rejected at Full Council for the following reasons. Free parking after 6pm (3pm in some car parks) alongside free parking on Sundays (in some car parks) has been a fantastic way of encouraging and increasing visitors to our town centres and high streets, improves access to services, help businesses to thrive, and attracts new investment, particularly evening businesses. Continuing this will encourage higher spending in local businesses, supporting employment and may encourage repeat visits and strengthen the local economy. Encouraging residents to visit our town centres will have a positive impact for those put off from visiting our town centres because of fear of receiving a parking fine or worried about their safety because it allows closer, well-lit access to facilities. As the clocks go back and its darker earlier in the evening, it's important at this time of the year that people still go out and socialise with their friends and family. Had this policy of increasing charges been forced through, less people would have done that and that is simply not acceptable.
- It was Ashford's turn to host delegations from Fougères and Bad Münstereifel in 2027 and the provisional dates were 30th September to 4th October 2027. The proposed theme for the visit was 'Towns in Motion', reflecting Ashford's growth and connections with dance. ***However, it has been since agreed that Fougères would host the 2027 Civic Exchange to mark the 60th anniversary of the twinning relationship between Fougères and Bad Münstereifel***. A £12,000 delivery grant had already been set aside to support delivery of the hosting programme in 2027 and this will be rolled into 2028. It feels entirely appropriate for Fougères to celebrate this milestone.

CENTRAL ASHFORD FORUM

The Forum met on 12th October. Key issues included.

- Fly tipping in the Lower High Street next to Soundcraft will be reported (again) to environmental services.
- The Forum will chase up the ownership of the K2 phone box on the Churchyard.
- Positive noise (but limited action) is reported at 54 Lower High Street.
- Speeding in the town council is progressing slowly but conflict between cars and pedestrians is still reported so the CSU will be contacted again.
- The new Edinburgh Road car park is scheduled to be open by Christmas. Additional designated car parking spaces in Edinburgh Road have been requested by businesses.
- Ashford needs a scheme like Tenterden with one-hour free parking on Apsley Street, East Street, Queen Street, Church Road, Godinton Road, Regents Place, Drum Lane, Norwood Street and West Street.

- The precept for Ashford Town Council will be set on 13th October.

IBF – NOISE

The ABC Environmental Protection Team have viewed the acoustic report under planning application OTH/2026/1492 and have not recommended discharge mainly due to the time of the year the assessment was carried out. They have requested further assessment and analysis.

A statutory nuisance investigation may be required if the low-frequency noise continues at intrusive levels.

EKHUFT COUNCIL OF GOVERNORS MEETING

Governors met on 15th October. Key issues noted included.

- Urgent and emergency care deteriorated in August due to higher demand and staff shortages, but visible corridor care was not required.
- Cancer performance deteriorated with 63.7% reaching diagnosis standard.
- Elective performance had more patients waiting more than 65 weeks.
- Diagnostic performance is at 48%. CT, MRI & ultrasound is a concern due to recruitment, staff sickness & equipment failures.
- The Trust is rated 124th out of 134 acute providers and remains within the Intensive Recovery Process.
- Harmonica Care Village provides specialist dementia care with 30 spaces for residents living with dementia and a further 6 spaces for respite care. Significant improvements have been made to the interior and exterior to better reflect patient needs. There is a memory wall/walk and gardens providing opportunities for reminiscence, activity and social engagement.
- The 43-bed St Lawrence Ward at the K&C is closing. It is used of orthopaedic recovery, and average stay has fallen from 3 days to 1 so less space is required. It is part consolidation of orthopaedic and trauma activity. The IRP process requires increased capacity in elective capacity as more are waiting over 65 weeks. It will give decant capacity while other wards require upgrade and could be used in future for wider vascular work when capacity at K&C increases with stroke services moving to WHH.

Not a great report.

LOCAL PLAN NEXT CONSULTATION

The next consultation over sites proposed to be included in the new Ashford Local Plan is scheduled to be in January 2027 (rather than November 2026). This delay gives ABC additional time to consider new sites submitted during the re-opened “Call for Sites” in September 2026. This will be a six-week

consultation and will enable residents and parish councils to assess the Sites according to local circumstances, evidence and priorities.

Any proposed site included in this consultation should be considered against these basic questions:

- Is the location appropriate for the proposed development?
- Can the site's constraints realistically be overcome?
- Can the proposed development realistically be delivered within the Local Plan period?
- Can the infrastructure, mitigation and other requirements realistically be provided at the appropriate time?

Infrastructure is an essential part of this assessment. Water, wastewater, drainage, highways, utilities, schools, healthcare and community facilities should be considered alongside the proposed development.

Local knowledge can help identify existing conditions, pressures and opportunities that may not be apparent from technical evidence alone. This can include:

- Settlement character and important views
- Local infrastructure pressures
- Flooding and drainage
- Landscape, biodiversity and heritage
- Access and transport
- Community facilities and services
- The relationship between neighbouring settlements
- Shared infrastructure and services
- Local effects that extend beyond the parish boundary.

HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION (HMO)

Councillors discussed HMOs on 15th October. HMOs is a property rented by at least three people who are not from the same household but share facilities such as kitchen and bathroom. There has been a 40% increase in the number of HMOs 2018-2024.

Issues raised by residents include the following. Additional cars from HMOs will competing for limited car parking spaces resulting in obstructing the highway which can be particularly an issue affecting disable access. There can be insufficient recycling and pressure on bins storage and waste collection services. Behaviour including late night parties, smoking near neighbours open windows and public urination have been reported. There are reports that HMOs will have a detrimental effect on house prices.

One solution is to ensure that conversion of house into a HMO requires planning permission rather than being done under “permitted development rights”. This has been in place since 2010 and several Councils (Sutton is one example) apply Article 4 to the whole Borough. It will give residents and their councillor additional opportunity to object to an HMO before the committee of councillors.

Aside from planning regulations there is the question of licencing conditions which can include waste and upkeep of the property. If the licence does not exist, the property can be reported. The garden of an HMO can also be an issue; ABC has a duty under the Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949 to deal with rat infestations and can serve notice on the owner.

It was agreed at Council on 15th October that all HMO applications should require planning consent rather than covered by “permitted rights” and further work will be undertaken to achieve this.

PLANTING AT FINBERRY



ABC recently executed an enforcement case regarding full hedge line not in place resulting in unauthorised access by vehicles using the gaps in the hedgerow to enter and exit Finberry as a short-cut down Cheeseman Green Lane. The developer has now planted the gaps up.

SOUTHEAST AMBULANCE SERVICE

Directors and Governors met on 22nd December to discuss strategic prioritoes to 2029.

- A virtual consultation will be given to 55% of patients.
- Reduce avoidable conveyances to Emergency Departments from 54% to 35%
- 999 calls to be answered within 5 seconds
- Category 1 and 2 calls will be responded to within 90% of response time targets
- Increase cardiac arrest survival by 5%
- Reduce the time it takes to get stroke patients to specialist care at Hyper Acute Stroke Units (a new facility is being delivered at WHH)
- Reduce unwarranted health inequalities with the area

- Reduce carbon emissions by 50% by 2032.

WATER SCRUTINY GROUP

The Council Group set up to discuss treated water security in Ashford met for the second time in the month on 22nd October. It focused on water supply with SE Water in attendance.

- 12 new water tankers and extra equipment have been bought which allows extra water to be pumped straight into critical parts of the network.
- New back-up generators and batteries are now being used to provide resilience when power failures hit pumping stations.
- New air valves have been installed to ensure that trapped air does not lock the system which gets tap water running more quickly after a shutdown.
- The number of leak technicians and repair gangs have been increased with a target of repairing leaks within 5 days. A new teams of reliability technicians identify assets that are flagging which are proactively managed. A dedicated work team for accelerated minor works has been created for small but highly effective fixes.
- Permanent sensors and fibre optic solutions for acoustic detection of leaks are being used alongside with satellite imagery (that detect chlorine) and drones.
- In Ashford 23km of mains will be renewed, 741m will be reinforced and 8km of strategic mains is being installed (including between Potters Corner and Charing).
- Kent water storage will be increased by 50ML (15ML at Godmersham) by 2035, Funding and regulatory approval has been granted for the new Broad Oak Reservoir and planning is in the early stages for a desalination plant at Reculver.
- SE Water are addressing growth in housing and commercial development, and proposed developments will be included in the next Water Resources Management Plan in 2029. A position statement will be published in November which will inform ABC on water supply and related infrastructure; this will inform the new Local Plan.
- Social tariff can assist if household income (excluding any disability and housing payment) is between £17,001 and £22,020, you will receive a 30% reduction (50% less than £17,000). ABC will enter into a data sharing agreement with SE Water to identify eligible residents.

MP's COFFEE MORNING

I attended Sojan Joesph MP's Coffee Morning at The Pheasant, Kennington on 24th October. Key issues raised included.

- Eurostar will decide on resuming Ashford services in 2028 and Virgin Trains intend to start using Ashford from 2029/30 providing French

Border checks are made at Ashford and the Home Office are working on that.

- Police visibility is poor and improvements are dependent on educating the public to report all crimes, including catapults and e-scooters/e-bikes.
- High Street vitality will be improved with a national strategy which is expected to include tax breaks including business rate rebates.
- Changes at the IBF are linked to Prime Minister Burnham's EU reset to be held on 20th November. Any significant changes such as re-joining the EU could only be part of a future Labour Manifesto at the next General Election as he respects the Brexit vote in 2026. In the meantime some HMRC operations are transitioning to Dover/Eurotunnel with staff working at the IBF given first refusal of relocated jobs. DEFRA operations will be reviewed in 2027 and there are NO plans to change the Borough Council's use of the site for food checks. However Should the IBF no longer be required for border checks, DfT is exploring options for the site including whether it should continue to play a role in the transport and logistics sector, and a potential role in a future traffic management system.

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@kenningtontowncouncil.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
Public Governor, Ashford, East Kent Hospitals
p.bartlett2@nhs.uk