

Agenda Item No: 13
Report To: Cabinet
Date: 09/06/2016
Report Title: Ashford Borough Council's Performance – Quarter 4 2015/16
Report Author: Nicholas Clayton, Policy and Performance Officer
Portfolio Holder: Portfolio Holder for Finance, Budget & Resource Management, Neil Shorter



Summary: This report seeks to update members and the public on the performance of the Council during Quarter 4. This includes information on what the Cabinet has achieved through its decision-making, key performance data, and consideration of the wider borough picture which impacts upon the Council's work.

More widely, and following agreement of the Council's new Corporate Plan in December, the organisation's approach to the monitoring of its performance against this plan is being revised.

Accordingly, the Council is currently rolling out a new online Performance 'Dashboard' to change the way we view performance and its relevance to our operations.

Key Decision: NO
Affected Wards: N/A
Recommendations: **The Cabinet be asked to:-**

- 1. Note the Council's performance against the Corporate Plan in Quarter 4 of 2015/16.**

Policy Overview: In December 2015 the Council agreed a new Corporate Plan - "*The Five Year Corporate Plan – for Aspiration, Action and Achievement*".

This also provided an opportunity to refresh the way in which performance against this new Corporate Plan (and its priority areas) was measured, presented and engaged with by officers and members.

Financial Implications: N/A

Risk Assessment N/A

Equalities Impact Assessment N/A

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Purpose of the Report

1. To provide a headline overview of performance against the Council's Corporate Plan for Quarter 4 2015/16, and update members on the aims and progress of the Council's new 'Performance Dashboard'.

Background

2. Each quarter the Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny committees receive an update on how the Council is achieving its objectives.
3. Historically, this has been in the form of a short, paper-based report which could only provide a snapshot of how the Council was doing at a fixed point in time.
4. In December 2015 the Council agreed a new Corporate Plan - "*The Five Year Corporate Plan – for Aspiration, Action and Achievement*".
5. This also provided an opportunity to refresh the way in which performance against this new Corporate Plan (and its priority areas) was monitored, presented and engaged with by officers and members. The section below provides an update on the aims and progress of this initiative.

The Ashford Borough Council 'Performance Dashboard'

6. Following Full Council endorsement of the new corporate plan, the Council's senior leadership agreed that a refreshed, regularly updated, visual and interactive online performance system would help senior managers, members and (in time) the general public get an up-to-date picture of strategic performance.
7. Accordingly, over the last six months the Policy and Performance team have worked with a leading open data and visualisation company to design a Performance Dashboard, held workshops with performance leads within services to see what information the Council collects and what should or could be collected; gathered contextual data from KCC and other partners; and kept senior managers apprised of developments.
8. The Performance Dashboard uses data and insights from across the authority to monitor progress against the goals set out in the new Corporate Plan. It focuses on the Council's four priority areas –
 - a. Enterprising Ashford
 - b. Living Ashford

- c. Active and Creative Ashford
 - d. Attractive Ashford
9. The overriding approach has been to use the data already collected by services for their management statistics, alongside including new data where appropriate, and presenting them on a single user-friendly system so as to build a comprehensive overall picture.
 10. The system will be updated regularly from across the organisation with the latest data as it becomes available. Updates on the Council's initiatives, projects and priorities (as they relate to the corporate plan areas and the performance data) will also be regularly refreshed to provide context, narrative and analysis. The site itself is always available, so once colleagues have access to the system they can monitor performance at their own pace at any time.
 11. Whilst this approach is naturally an evolving one, the aim is for the Performance Dashboard to inform the work of both officers and members, providing an ongoing tool which facilitates insight and understanding across the organisation on the state of progress against our goals.
 12. Alongside the complementary work of the Programme Manager to build a comprehensive picture of the Council's projects and delivery plans, this insight will provide an enhanced understanding of the Council's success in delivering upon its strategic objectives.
 13. As part of the Council's wider governance arrangements, such performance information is used to reflect on the organisation's approach – leading to doing things differently where needed In order to offer efficient services and effective outcomes.
 14. Longer-term, the Dashboard will also help the Council meet its duties as an open and accountable body, allowing the public to see how we are doing in meeting our agreed goals.

Summary of Performance in Quarter 4 2016/17

15. The majority of performance goals the council is working towards remain either on-target or near-target.
16. Whilst trend figures are available in the Technical Annex below, the following provides a short contextual summary of key changes during the last three months -
 - a. The state of Ashford town centre remains generally strong, with footfall bucking the national trend and increasing by around 5% in 2015 compared to the year before, compared to a national trend of a 1.6% decrease. The number of visitors parking has remained steady – with a slight underlying upward trend - in some part due to the free parking initiative. It is important to remember that this is one element of a package of measures, including the Farmers Market, *Made In Ashford* and TCAT, to boost the High Street.

The corresponding business picture has improved. Vacancy rates have fallen in both County Square and the town centre overall over the last year, while in Park Mall - while historically higher - rates have begun to fall since the Council took over direct operations in the second half of 2015.

For the year ending March 2016, the crime rate in Ashford town centre was about the same as the average crime rate across similar areas, with a slightly downward trend in overall crime levels.

- b. Whilst average house prices fell slightly during the last three months, the wider trend remains upwards. The average house selling price in Ashford now stands at around £220,000, while the last two quarters have seen especially strong performance in terms of new properties either starting to be built or being completed. During the last year the building of over 450 homes were started across the borough, with over 550 completed. This is around 300 more homes being completed compared to 2014/15, and around 450 more being completed compared to the year before that.
- c. Whilst full figures relating to planning applications are available a quarter in arrears due to the need to ensure applications are finalised, the longer-term trend indicates strong performance across the range of application types, with generally increasing decision and approval rates.
- d. The total number of people claiming either Jobseekers Allowance or Universal Credit principally for the reason of being unemployed rose slightly over the last two quarters following a period of sustained fall. It now stands at just above 1,000. This is still 13% less than at the same time last year and constitutes around 1.4% of Ashford's working age population. Ashford is below the Kent average, currently at 1.6%. Accordingly, the council's benefits caseload continues to fall, although at a slower rate compared to previous quarters.

Of note in this area is the recent change in the calculation methodology from the Office for National Statistics. Historically, the Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) claimant count was used by local authorities as a proxy for unemployment. However, the introduction of Universal Credit (UC) meant that increasing numbers of claimants moved from JSA to UC, without necessarily remaining unemployed. This in turn meant that JSA figures increasingly underestimated the rate of unemployment.

As more claimants received UC the Department for Work and Pensions have been able to calculate new experimental figures which give a more accurate total for the number of people claiming either Jobseekers Allowance or Universal Credit principally for the reason of being unemployed.

- e. During the quarter, 97.4% of food premises comply with environmental health standards. While the percentage has remained steady over the last year, the council has maintained its effort in this area with a

continued focus and resources. Any food premises found to be non-compliant either receive a formal letter or a revisit, and officers always seek to work with the premises in the first instance. If non-compliance is severe, or does not improve after these initial interventions, officers would then serve a notice.

17. Furthermore, Quarter 4 saw activity on a variety of initiatives which will have a positive impact on the outcomes set out in the Council's corporate plan –
 - a. In December the Planning Committee approved an application to develop land along Elwick Road, while work continues on the Commercial Quarter between the International Station and the Town Centre.
 - b. The Council was awarded £1.92 million towards the cost of providing care-ready homes at Danemore in Tenterden. By 2026, it is anticipated that around 40% of residents in the Ashford borough will be aged over 50, and may require additional care and support. The council is fully committed to do all it can to help meet the housing needs of those who need extra support.
 - c. As part of the Council's support for active and vibrant communities, the demolition and preparation work on a new pavilion at Spearpoint began in February, while planning permission for a community building and multi-use games area in Repton was also approved in the same month.
 - d. In March the Council's face-to-face customer services returned to the Civic Centre, in part to reflect the changing ways residents use council services.

Risk Assessment

18. N/A

Equalities Impact Assessment

19. N/A

Portfolio Holder's Views

20. I am pleased to see that performance measures remain strong across the Council's key objectives, as can be seen from a consideration of the trends over the last year in the annex below.
21. More broadly, I welcome the steps underway to increase the depth and impact of understanding the Council is seeking to achieve against its new corporate plan. While this is naturally an evolving system, I look forward to sharing the results of this work with colleagues at the earliest opportunity.

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Technical Annex

Indicator	Quarter 4 2015/16	Quarter 3 2015/16	Quarter 2 2015/16	Quarter 1 2015/16	Quarter 4 2014/15
Average Town Centre footfall per month	264,000	282,000	316,600	310,000	300,000
Average car park users per month	102,000	104,000	101,950	99,650	98,600
Householder planning applications - number	---	230	218	234	215
Householder planning applications - % decided within 8 weeks	---	91	92	88	84
Householder planning applications - % approved	---	95	93	93	98
Small business planning applications - number	---	93	82	97	83
Small business planning applications – % decided within 8 weeks	---	78	80	80	57
Small business planning applications – % approved	---	94	84	84	79
Numbers unemployed	1,080	965	930	895	1,075
% of working age population unemployed	1.4	1.3	1.2	1.2	1.4
Number of 18-24 year olds unemployed	240	230	250	200	265
% of 18-24 year olds unemployed	2.6	2.5	2.6	2.1	2.8
Average house selling price (to January)	220,638	230,919	226,827	215,340	217,500
Number of homes started	150	110	80	120	100
Number of homes completed	120	230	150	80	80
% of Ashford Borough Council properties with a current gas safety certificate	100	100	100	100	100
Average number of families in B&B accommodation per month	14	18	15	10	14
Number of homeless applications received	51	59	56	38	65
Number of homeless applications approved	35	39	42	23	40
Benefits Caseload	9,533	9,650	9,700	9,800	9,900
% Council Tax collected	98.3	86.7	58.5	30.5	98.5
% Business rates collected	99.5	84.1	60.2	33.2	98.5
% take up of direct debit for paying council tax	66.6	66.6	67.1	67.1	66.7
Number of disabled adaptations completed	108	132	75	50	65
% of compliant food premises	97	97	97	97	98