

**Agenda Item No:**

**Report To:** Cabinet

**Date:** 08/09/2016

**Report Title:** Ashford Borough Council's Performance – Quarter 1 2016/17

**Report Author:** Nicholas Clayton, Senior Policy, Performance and Scrutiny 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 against its Corporate Plan during Quarter 1 2016/17. 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.

The organisation's approach to the monitoring of its performance against this plan has been revised. Accordingly, attached are summary highlights from the new online Performance 'Dashboard' for each of the Council's Corporate Plan areas.

**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 1 of 2016/17.**

**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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## **Report Title: Ashford Borough Council's Performance – Quarter 1 2016/17**

### **Purpose of the Report**

1. To provide a headline overview of performance against the Council's Corporate Plan for Quarter 1 2016/17.
2. This report provides a summary of the main developments affecting performance during the quarter, whilst the attached highlight summaries provide key trend data underlying this.

### **Background**

3. Each quarter the Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny committees receive an update on how the Council is achieving its objectives.
4. 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.
5. In December 2015 the Council agreed a new Corporate Plan - "*The Five Year Corporate Plan – for Aspiration, Action and Achievement*".
6. 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.
7. Whilst this approach is naturally an evolving one, the aim is for this Performance Dashboard (the 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.
8. 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.

### **Recent Developments of the Dashboard**

9. Over the last year 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.

10. Following the Quarter 4 2015/16 performance update, Management Team asked that Heads of Service and their teams provide final feedback and thoughts on the Dashboard. Accordingly, the Dashboard was recirculated to Management Team, alongside a series of presentations and meetings with service heads and/or the wider service units.
11. Through this round of engagement, a wide range of suggestions was made, including additional datasets and amendments to the overall look and presentation. Other major changes are summarised below –
  - a. To ensure transparency and allow for further feedback, any information drawn from an external partner (most often KCC but also government departments and other online performance systems) now have a live link to the source alongside the chart.
  - b. Contextual data (often drawn from external partners) is now placed in a separate section alongside the narrative against each performance goal. This will ensure that those interventions and outcomes more directly relating to the Council's efforts against the Corporate Plan will be more distinct.
  - c. Further integration of content to align with other regular performance reporting, for example that provided by Housing Services. A live link has also been set up to these quarterly updates themselves.
  - d. Signposting users to other sections of the Dashboard where additional relevant performance data can be found.
  - e. The highlight summary reports, presented below and drawn directly from the Dashboard system, have been cut-down and reshaped to include the key trend graphs and analysis – in line with the 'Technical Annex' Members and the public have previously received. These provide a fraction of the information available constantly through the live Dashboard site management tool.
12. It should also be noted that this is the first version of the Dashboard, with an emphasis on making sure the core data, components and insight begin to work as a management tool. As such, analysis is constantly being added as the latest data is added to the system and interventions are made. Alongside an ongoing user group which will meet regularly over the next year, feedback from more regular use of the site, and further integration of service planning and programme management data – as this comes on stream before the end of the year – will provide further developments (and a deepening) of the overall performance picture.

### **Summary of Performance Developments in Quarter 1 2016/17**

13. The majority of performance goals the council is working towards remain either on-target or near-target.
14. Quarter 1 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 June Ashford was accepted onto the third year of the national Business in the Community's Healthy High Streets programme. The programme aims to provide intensive corporate support to 100 High

Streets, connecting corporate businesses with established Town Teams to support town centre regeneration and growth.

- b. In light of a challenging position for future growth, in June the Council launched the draft Local Plan for eight weeks of consultation (now closed). The Local Plan sets out the land needed to provide new homes and jobs up to the year 2030. It also addresses retail, leisure transport, community infrastructure and environmental issues.
- c. Following work by the new Policy and Compliance Taskgroup, in June Cabinet agreed a suite of revised Housing enforcement policies, updating the council's approach in the following areas -
  - Private Sector Housing Enforcement and Prosecution Policy
  - Anti-Social Behaviour Policy for Ashford Borough Housing Tenants
  - Housing Income and Arrears Management Policy
- d. The Planning Committee received and decided upon 13 applications including -
  - Approved up to 157,616 square metres of employment led mixed use business space in Sevington
  - Approved 640 dwellings at the former Powergen site in Ashford
- e. July saw Create celebrate its 21st birthday, with around 12,000 people enjoying the various activities available throughout the day -
  - 78% were regular attendees and 22% were new to the event
  - £149,000 estimated spend in the local economy by Create attendees on associated travel, accommodation, food and drink
  - 67,000 people viewed Create's online video campaigns leading up to the event, with the Official Create 2016 film being viewed by over 4,000 people in just 48 hours
  - A large social media presence, with 46,000 tweets about Create in and around the day itself
- f. In June the Council launched a new Ashford Heritage Trail, and handy leaflet, which takes visitors on a journey through history to discover heritage sites around the town centre. The Council has also produced a Museum and Heritage Trail, which introduces visitors to sites further-afield across the borough.
- g. In June the council learnt of its successful application to Historic England to upgrade the listed building status of the Hubert Fountain. This means it has now been listed at Grade II\*, which is significant as this status has been given to only 5.5% of listed buildings in the country.
- h. In May the Cabinet gave its support to the Ashford International Model Railway Education Centre (AIMREC), and agreed to provide a mortgage loan to help the scheme's supporters to purchase the necessary land, owned by Kier, to enable the company to apply for significant funding from various sources including a capital grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund.
- i. In July Cabinet considered a review of T-CAT, and agreed a set of further improvements to the service.
- j. In June the council launched a consultation concerning proposals for a revised council tax support scheme in Ashford. Pensioners remain unaffected by the proposed changes to the scheme and the council has already decided that as disabled claimants of council tax support

will continue to receive additional support (5%). However, residents of working-age will be asked to contribute a little more towards their council tax. Those directly affected were posted hard copies of the documentation and questionnaire.

15. As noted above, the information included within this report provides merely a high-level snapshot of the information available constantly through the live Dashboard site management tool. Whilst the Corporate Plan runs to the end of the decade, the initiatives noted above are intended to provide long-term positive outcomes on the trend analysis the Council undertakes.
16. The majority of the trends captured within these summaries have remained broadly steady over the last quarter. Unemployment, under the revised ONS methodology, remains steady (or slightly increasing) for all claimants and young people, whilst the numbers needing temporary accommodation also remains constant compared to the previous year. Planning response times have improved whilst dealing with a relatively steady level of applications, and recycling rates have levelled off as expected following the large increases over the last few years.

## **Equalities Impact Assessment**

17. N/A

## **Portfolio Holder's Views**

18. Overall, Ashford Borough Council's performance remains strong, and I am reassured by the volume of activity and initiatives the organisation continues to champion in order to make our corporate plan a reality and see real impact across the borough by the end of this decade. In particular, I am pleased to see that our efforts to support our high street and local businesses, through initiatives like TCAT and the purchase of Park Mall, are already supporting a fall in the overall vacancy rate across the town centre. Whilst unemployment is low compared to Kent, it has levelled off recently – the launch of Ashford's new College campus in a year's time will provide additional impetus to create new, sustainable local employment and skills.
19. I am pleased to see that the council's new Performance Dashboard is now available to share with Members and senior management. The wealth of information it includes, accessed simply in an online format, will help immeasurably in informing the work and success of our corporate plan and initiatives. The highlight summaries included in this report present merely a top line snapshot of our performance, and I would urge all colleagues to take the opportunity of consulting with the online Dashboard itself for further context, analysis and data.

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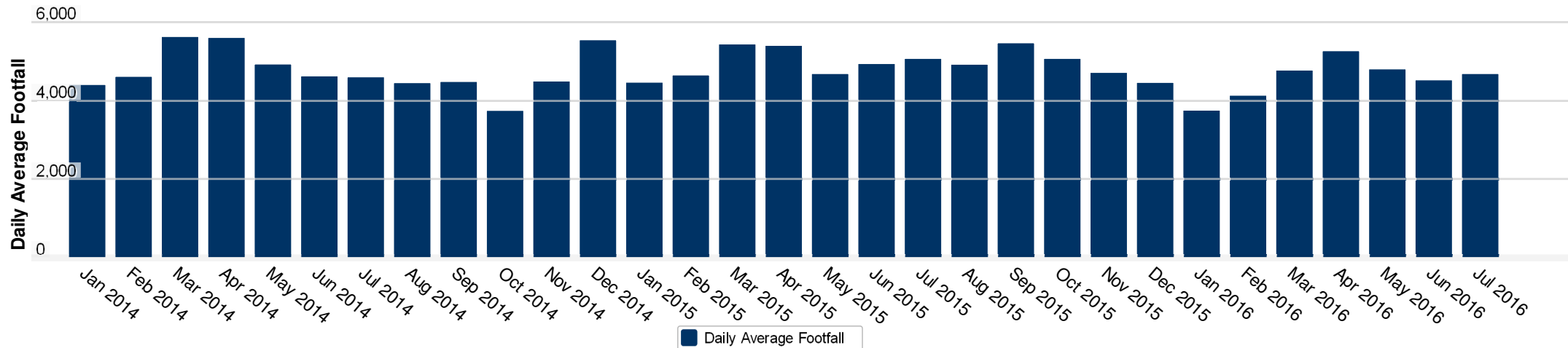
# Ashford Borough Council Performance Dashboard

## Headline Report

# Enterprising Ashford

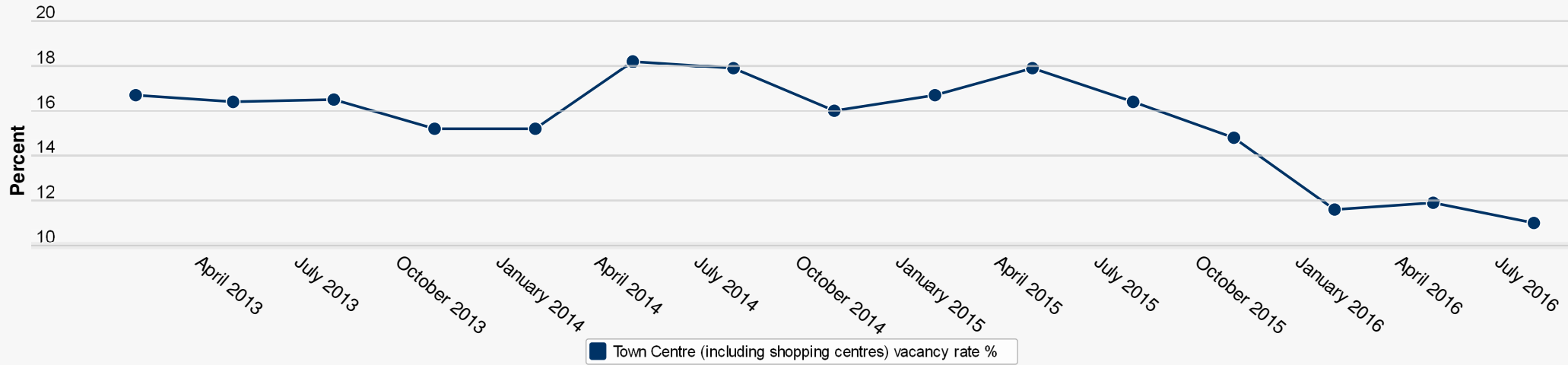
## Town Centre Footfall

A small counting device is mounted on opposite WHSmith, a zone around this to be targeted has been defined, and pedestrians and cars who travel through the zone are recorded. Visitor numbers are recorded using the very latest counting software based on 'Target Specific Tracking' (TST). TST software monitors flows by employing a wide range of characteristics to determine a target to identify and track.



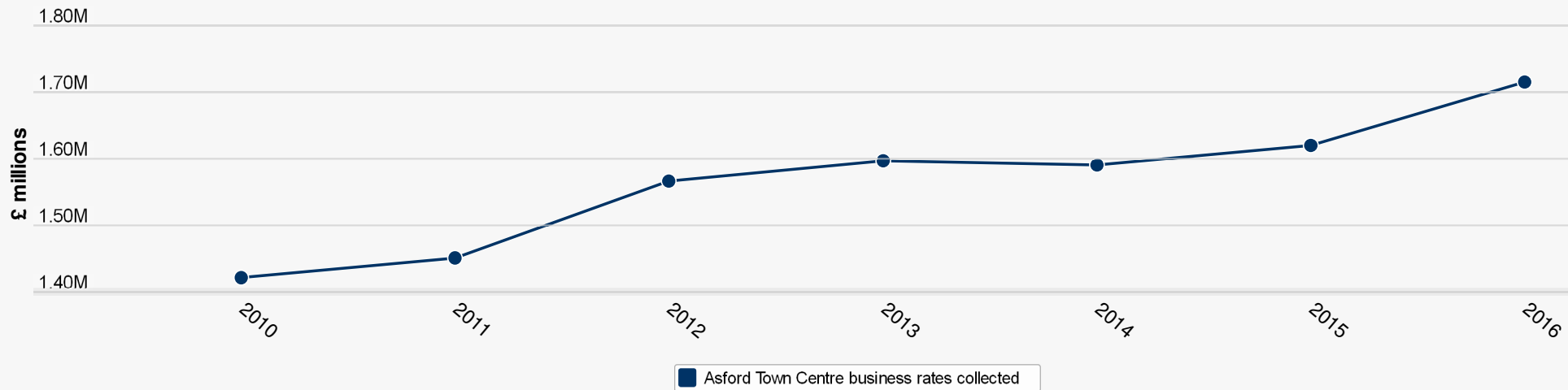
Whilst footfall fell during the end of the previous year, this has been attributed partly to the poor and unsettled weather during and after the Christmas period. However, the state of Ashford town centre remains generally strong, with footfall during 2015 bucking the national trend and increasing by around **5%** against to the year before, compared to a national trend of a **1.6%** decrease. The number of visitors parking has increased slightly, in some part due to the free parking initiative.

## Ashford Town Centre Vacancy Rates



Vacancy rates have fallen across the town centre overall over the last year. Park Mall's historically higher rates have also begun to fall since the Council took over direct operations in 2015.

## Town Centre Development and Future Plans

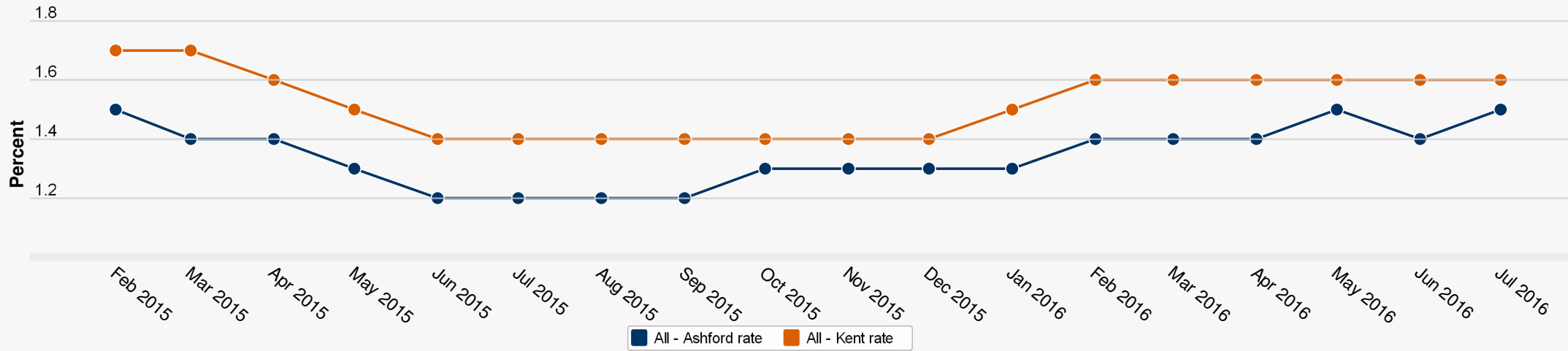


In July 2016 Cabinet approved Phase 1 of the Commercial Quarter Office Development, including the transfer of key parcels of land.



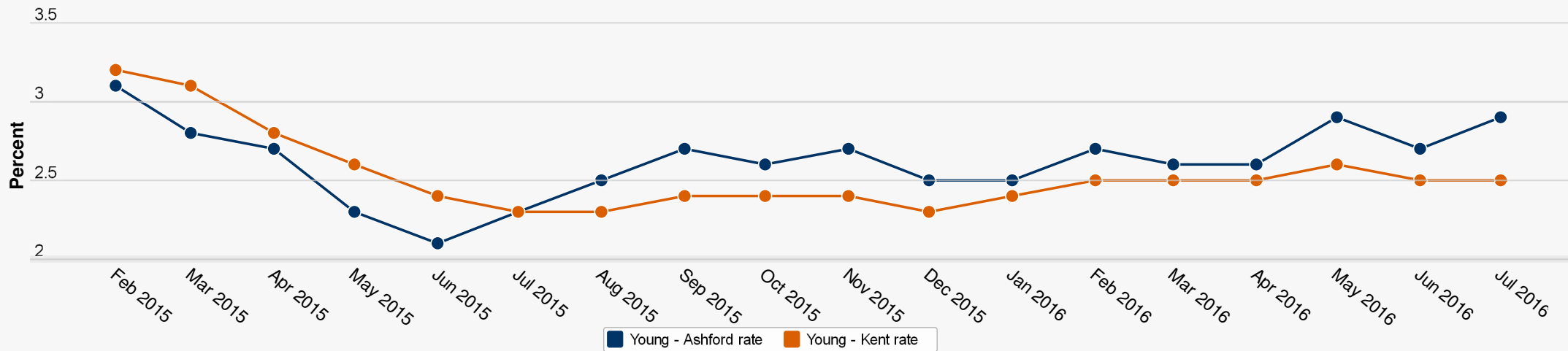
# Unemployment

All

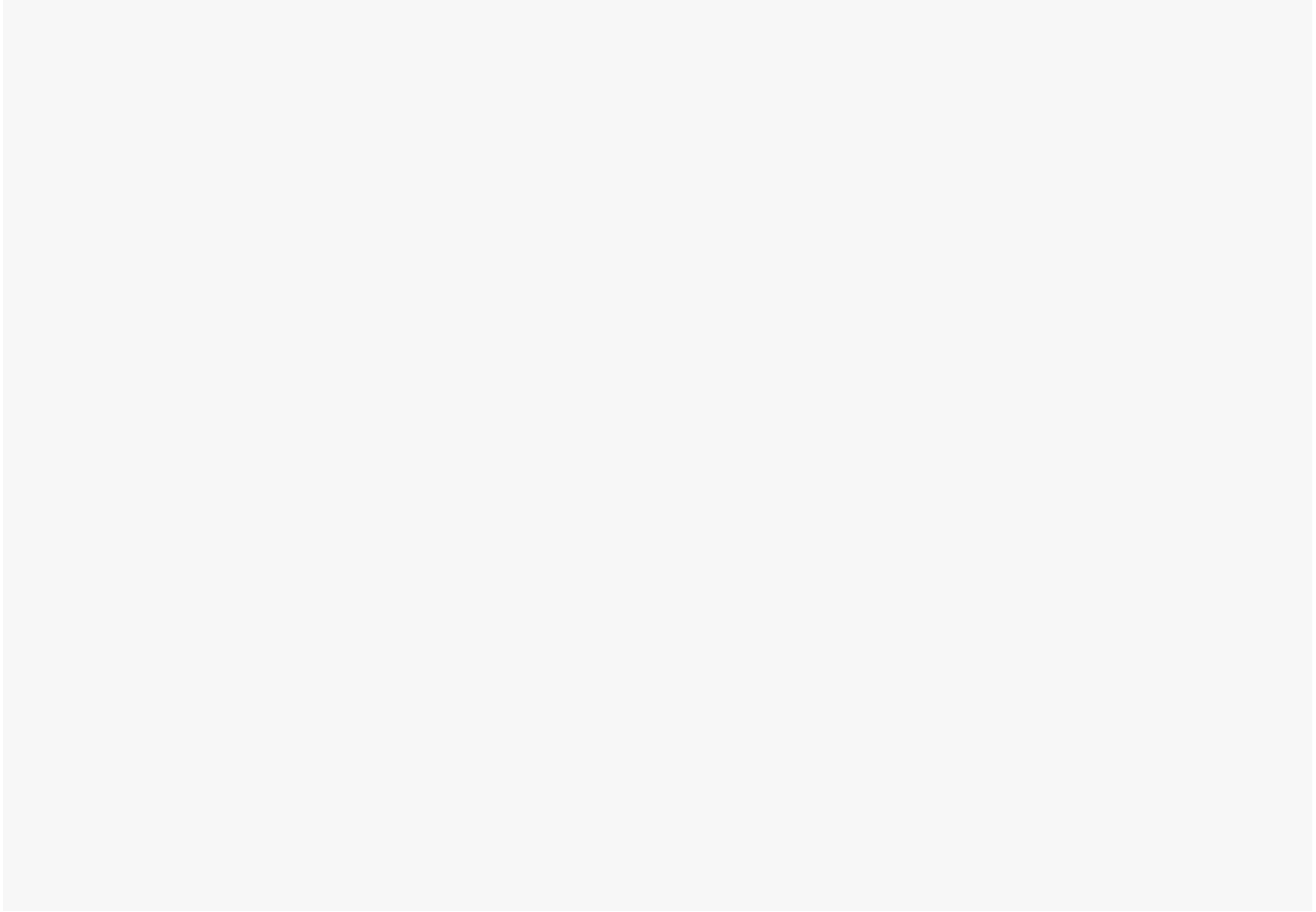


The total number claiming either Jobseekers Allowance or Universal Credit principally for the reason of being unemployed rose slightly over the last two quarters following a period of sustained fall. It now stands at just above **1,000**. This is still around 10% less than at the same time last year, constituting around 1.5% of Ashford's working age population. Just over 100 claimants a month either returned to work or increasing their employment hours.

## Young People



The number of young people (18-24) claiming unemployment benefit has also risen slightly, by around 30 over the last quarter.





# Ashford Borough Council Performance Dashboard

## Headline Report

## Living Ashford

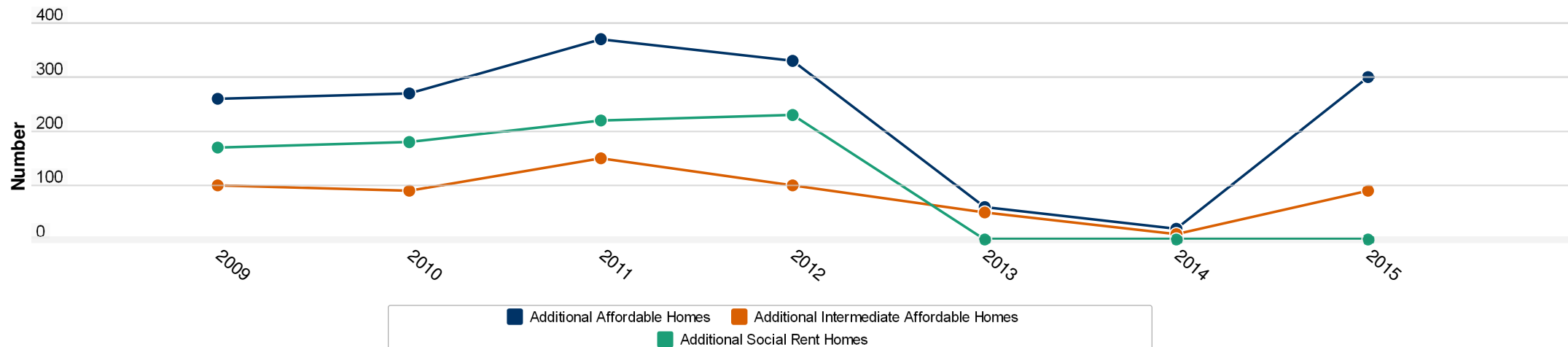
In June 2016 Cabinet agreed a suite of revised Housing enforcement policies, updating the council's approach in areas including -

- Private Sector Housing Enforcement and Prosecution Policy
- Anti-Social Behaviour Policy for Ashford Borough Housing Tenants

## Affordable Housing

The total additional Affordable Homes is made up of the following two main areas -

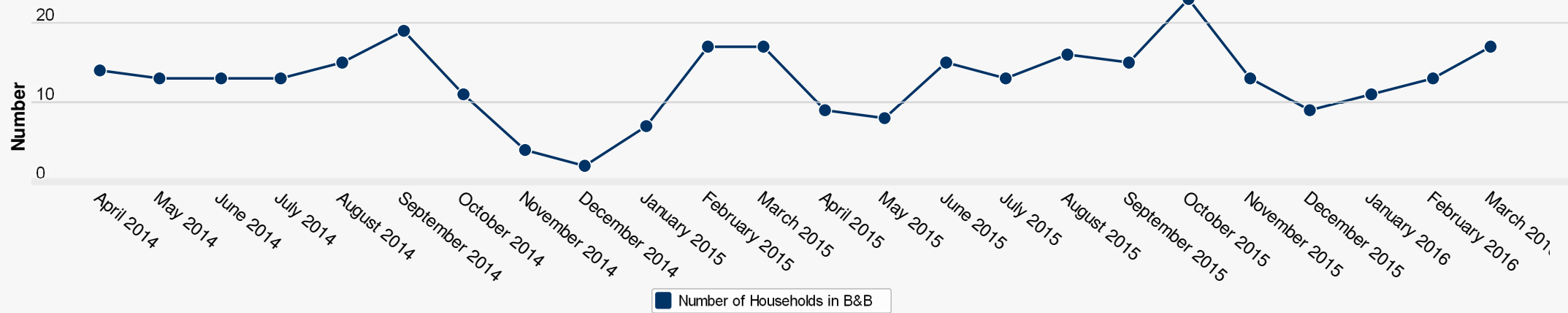
- Intermediate Affordable Homes, which includes intermediate rent and affordable home ownership; and
- Social Rent Homes, which include affordable rent homes



The economic downturn that occurred in 2008 had negative consequences for the housing market, though impacts for affordable housing completions were not felt until later - with a low point occurring in 2013. This position has since reversed during the last year and is expected to return to between 100 and 150 additional properties over the next few years.

In July 2016 Cabinet approved a set of revised eligibility criteria to widen the scope of affordable housing delivery in the Borough to meet local housing needs. This will allow for a wider range of models to be considered in the future whilst maintaining quality development and management, opening up opportunities to explore alternative delivery models to boost supply where traditional forms of affordable housing delivery may not be viable - whilst safeguarding the Council's reputation and financial needs.

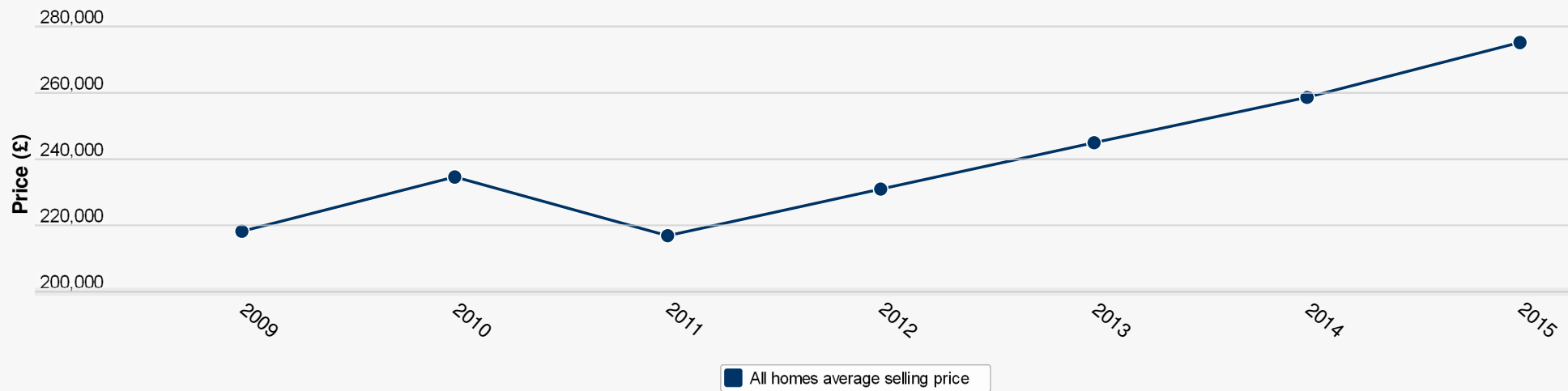
## Temporary Accomodation



At the end of March 2016 numbers of households in Bed & Breakfast (B&B) stood at **17**, (which was the same as March 2015) of which 10 households included children or pregnant women. The B&B costs for 2015/16 were very marginally below budget, however pressure still remains going forward on the service.

## House prices and the number of homes sold

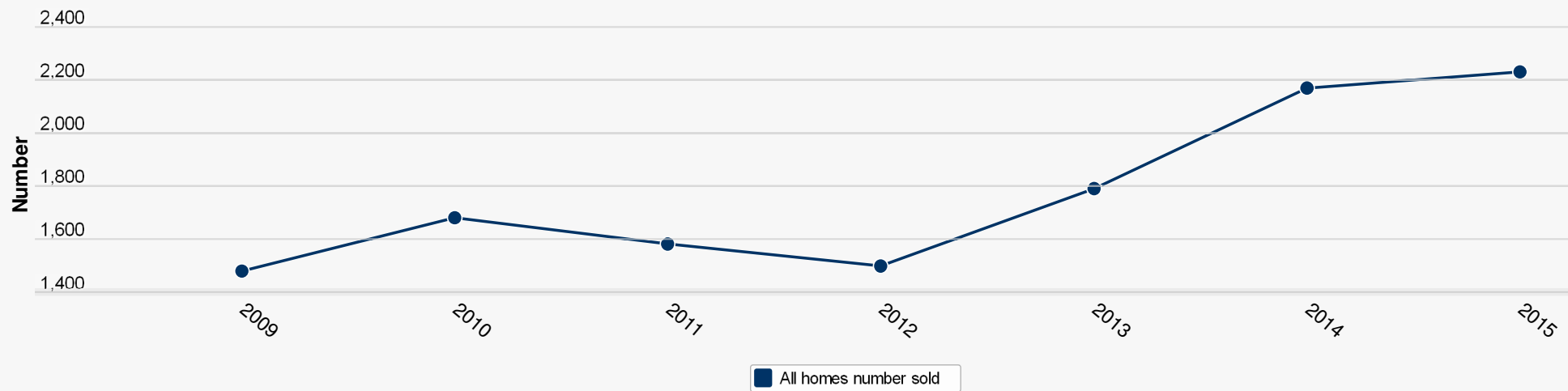
### House Price



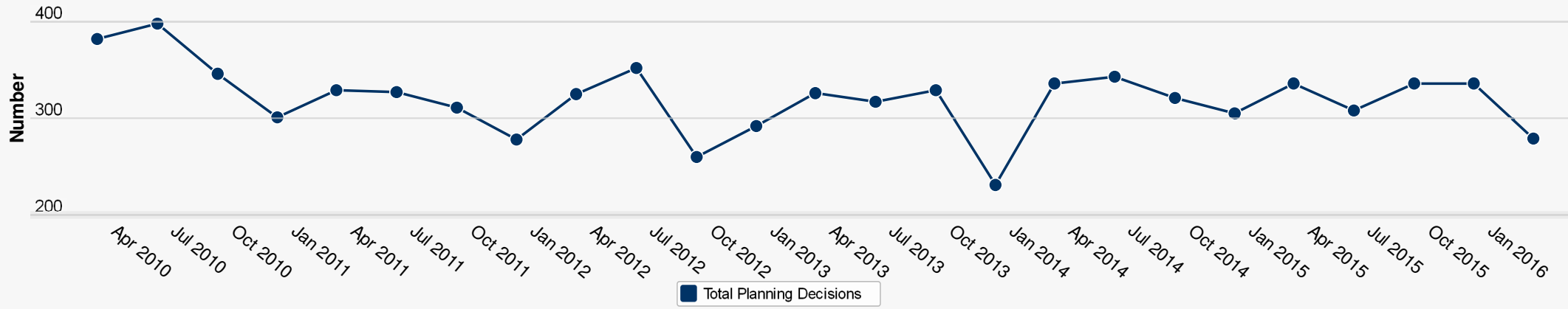
More widely, the average house price in Kent (KCC area) during 2015 was **£283,323**. The average price in Kent (KCC area) has increased for four consecutive years and is now **21%** higher than where they were in 2008.

There were **26,455** property transactions in Kent during the year, **2.87%** lower than in the year before.

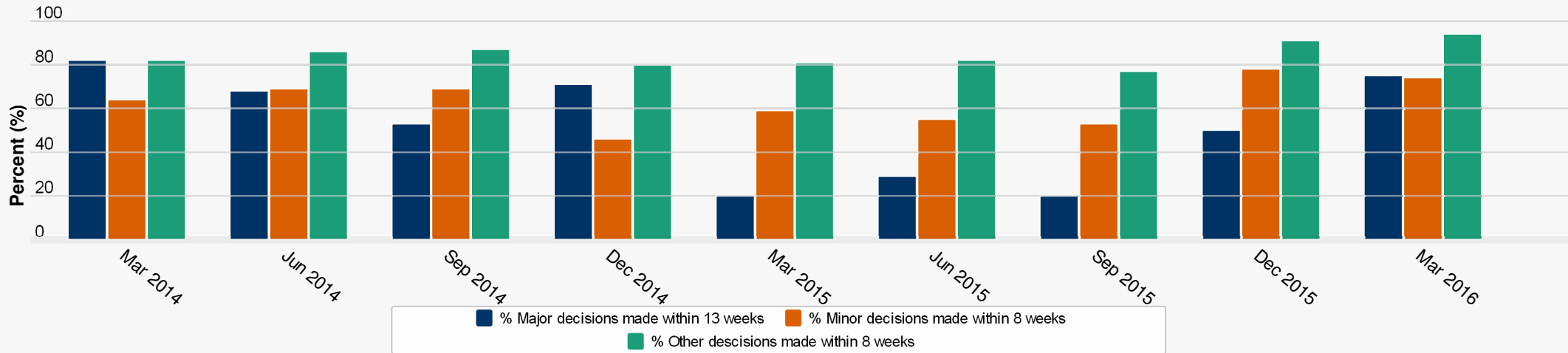
### Number of Houses Sold



# Planning



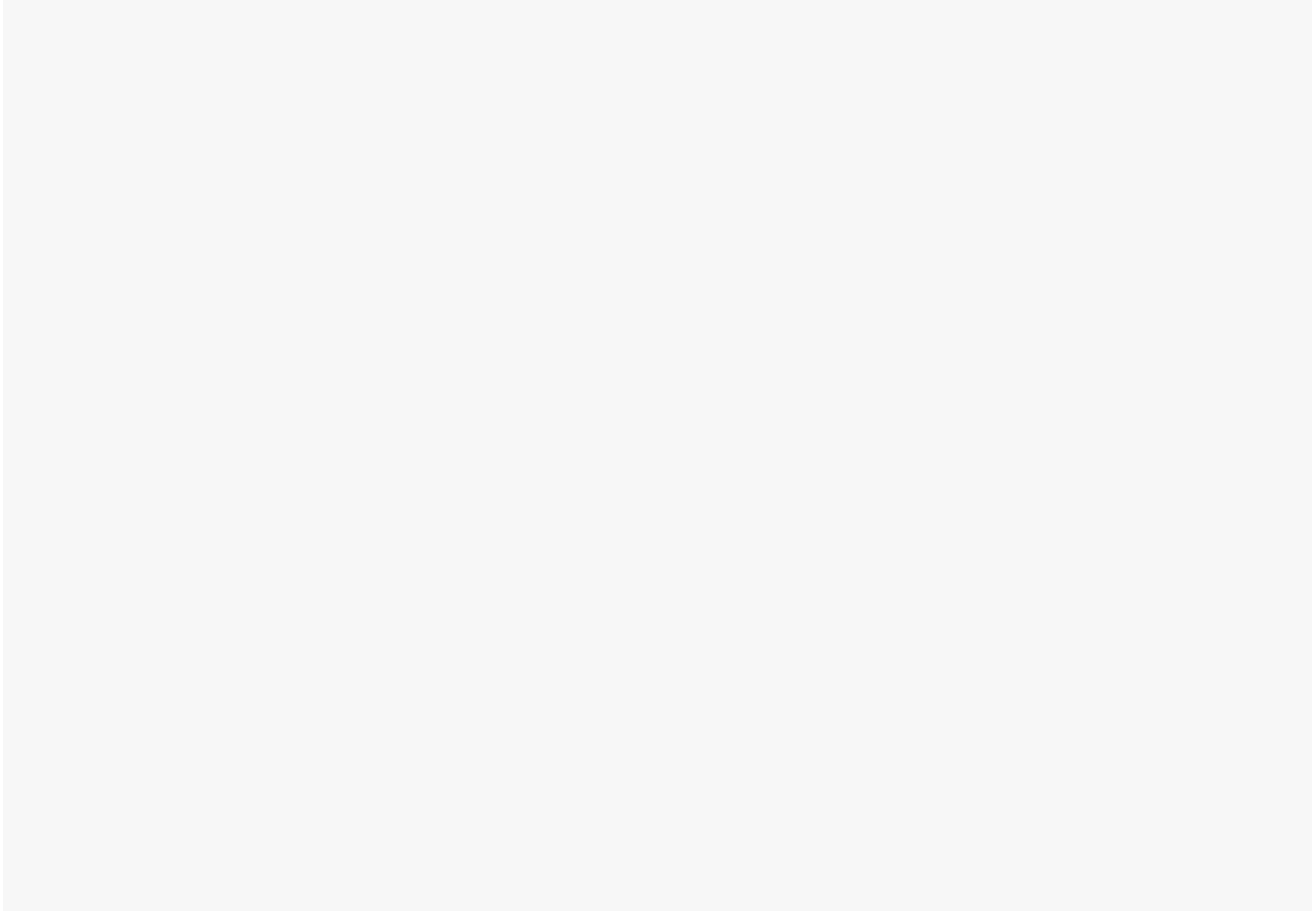
The number of planning applications considered by the council has remained relatively steady, whilst the last year has seen significant improvement in the percent of decisions made within target.



In October 2015 the Cabinet endorsed a new Quality Monitoring approach, which seeks to drive up the standards of new homes built, the places they are part of and the environment around them.

Building upon this, In May 2016 the Cabinet agreed -

- a set of simple and clear terms underpinning the Council's fair but robust approach to enforcement.
- a service-based enforcement plan which sets out the Council's approach to enforcement including performance standards. In parallel with this work the website is being reviewed to provide a user-friendly 'report it' function and accessible explanations of the approach the Council takes in the many areas of enforcement it is involved in.



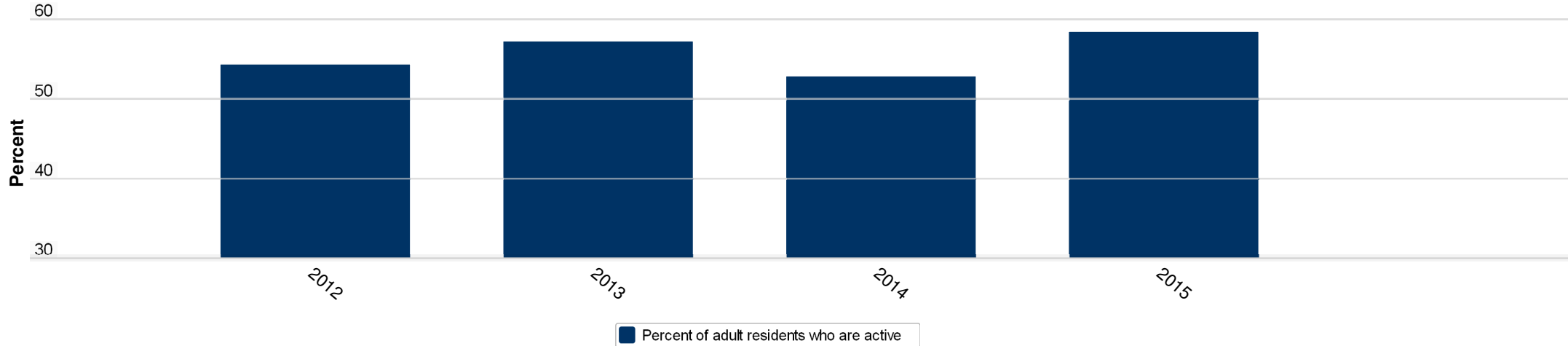


# Ashford Borough Council Performance Dashboard

## Headline Report

## Active & Creative Ashford

### Healthy Lives & Active Living



Sport England conduct an annual survey which gives an overall understanding of the sport and health profile of Ashford, and the proportion of those active across the borough. This has remained remarkably steady of the last few years. Information is drawn from the Department of Health and the Office for National Statistics.



## Sport

The borough provides a wide range of leisure facilities covering a wide range of sports, including -

- **119** grass football pitches
- **3** 3G football pitches
- **4** 2G football pitches
- **32** tennis courts across 12 locations
- the Julie Rose Stadium's world-class athletics track
- **5** golf courses

### ***Courtside***

Since opening in 2006, Courtside provides outside space for six tennis and six netball courts. It is used regularly by the John Wallis Academy and the Ashford Netball league. Current usage (excluding school use and casual bookings) -

- Average winter weekly usage - 431
- Average summer weekly usage - 811
- Average Annual Usage - 28,288

### ***Pitchside***

Since opening in 2008, Pitchside provides a full 3G football pitch (with space for two mini pitches), two five-a-side pitches, three six-a-side pitches and two seven-a-side pitches. The site also contains a Multi Use Games Area. Current usage (excluding school use and casual bookings) -

- Average winter weekly usage - 1,030
- Average summer weekly usage - 510
- Average Annual Usage - 41,260

Ashford currently boasts **63** *Talented Performers* who are supported in a number of ways to help them excel at their chosen sport.

## Supporting Culture and Creativity

### ***The Voluntary and Community Sector***

Ashford has around **850** active charities, community groups and social enterprises.

The Council's Ward Member Grant Scheme and Single Grants Gateway provides support to groups on projects and initiatives across the borough. In 2015 these two schemes helped 142 groups in total -

- **27** through community grants
- **115** through member grants

The Council also levered in just over £1 million in external funding to support its cultural efforts.

### ***The Create Festival***

2016 saw Create celebrate its 21st birthday, with around **12,000** people enjoying the various activities available throughout the day -

- 78% were regular attendees and 22% were new to the event
- £149,000 estimated spend in the local economy by Create attendees on associated travel, accommodation, food and drink
- 67,000 people viewed Create's online video campaigns leading up to the event, with the Official Create 2016 film being viewed by over 4,000 people in just 48 hours
- A large social media presence, with 46,000 tweets about Create in July, with 3512 individual visits and 225 mentions

### ***Revelation St Mary's***

Delivered by the St Mary's Arts Trust, Revelation St Mary's is Ashford town centre's award winning venue, offering a series of quality events in an intimate and awe-inspiring setting.

The Trust delivers -

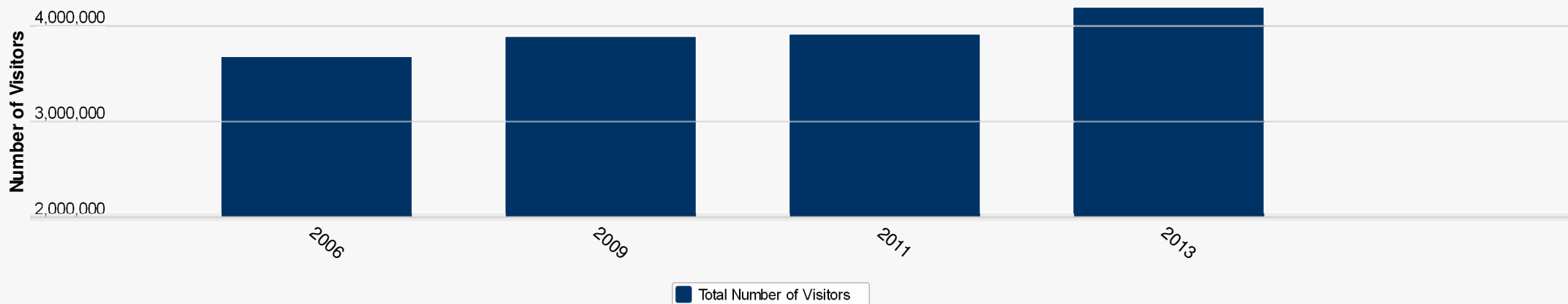
- a broad scope and regularity of events, with well-known names and emerging artists
- dynamic programming with interconnecting strands of work
- a year-round artist development and schools programme
- artistically-driven audience development, backed by targeted campaigns

In 2015 the venue welcomed **8,924** visitors to their productions, and now begins work on phase two of the project.

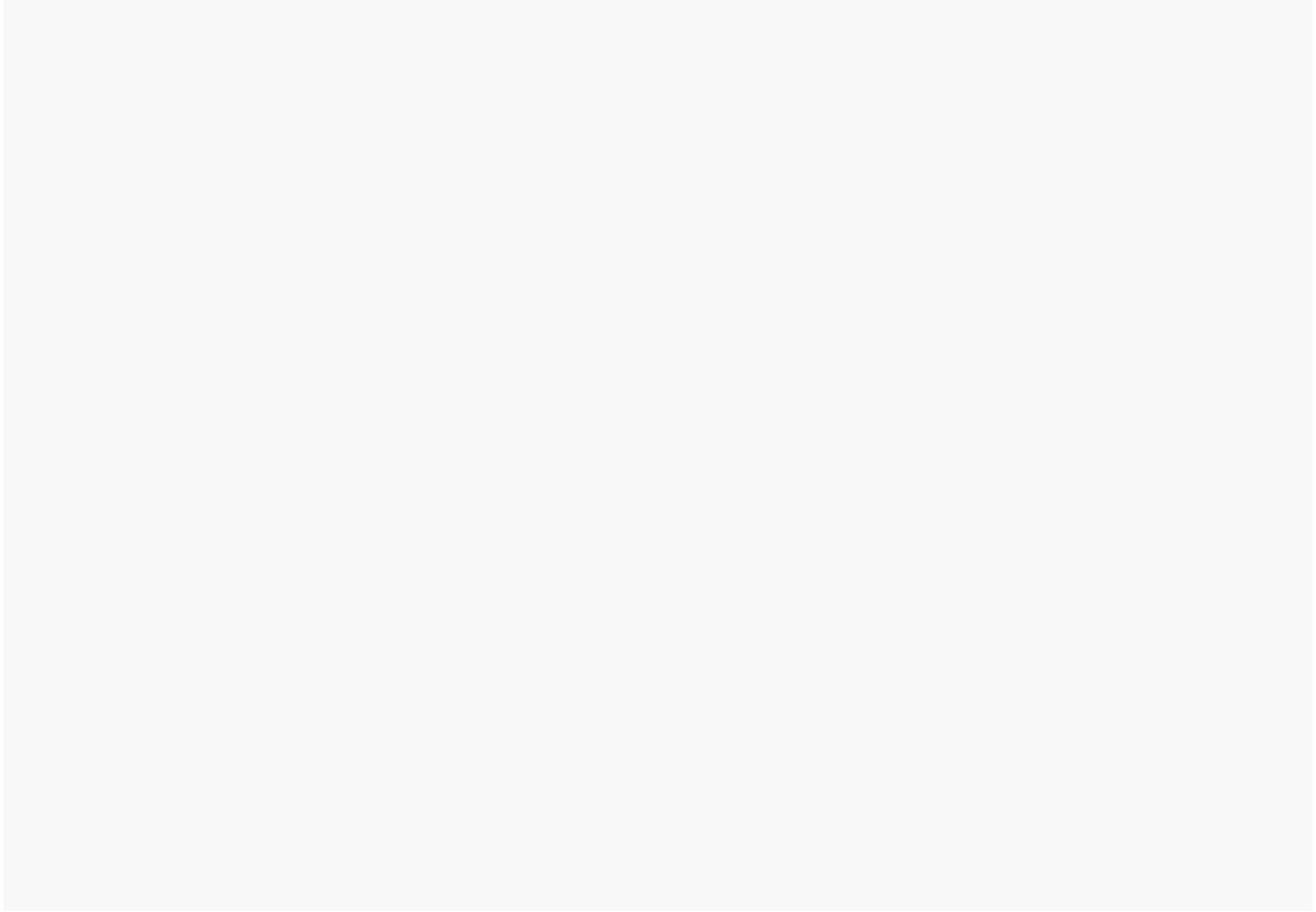
### ***Tourism***

In June 2016 the Council launched a new Ashford Heritage Trail, and handy leaflet, which takes visitors on a journey through history to discover heritage sites around the town centre.

The Council has also produced a Museum and Heritage Trail, which introduces visitors to sites further-afield across the borough.



Ashford continues to show steady growth in the number of those visiting the borough. The number of overseas trips rose by **20%** between 2011 and 2013 (the latest survey), with 433,000 people staying overnight. This places Ashford as the third most visited destination in Kent for overseas staying visitors.





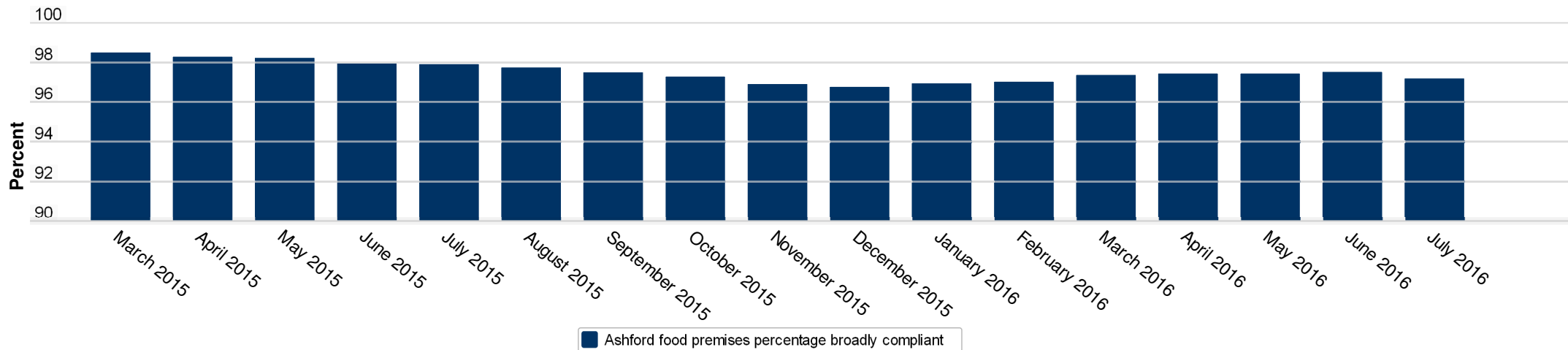
# Ashford Borough Council Performance Dashboard

## Headline Report

## Attractive Ashford

### Quality across the borough

#### *Food Business Hygiene*



There are almost **1,300** registered food businesses within the Borough. All are inspected on a regular basis according to their risk category.

This graph shows the percentage of businesses that are broadly compliant with food hygiene standards. Any business found to be non-compliant either receives a formal letter or a revisit.

Guidance is provided to food businesses in the first instance and notices are service if conditions do not improve. Food businesses are also given a food hygiene rating which can view at <http://www.ashford.gov.uk/food-hygiene-rating-scheme>.

### ***ASPIRE - Improving the presentation of the borough***

A new in-house ground maintenance service will be rolled out in October 2016. The new service, called Aspire Landscape Management, will cover the day-to-day work of mowing, pruning, planting, clearing and litter picking on various spaces owned by the Council including open green space, parks, floral beds, cemeteries, areas around housing sites, open green space, hedges, sports pitches and associated footpaths.

This initiative is a key part of delivering the adopted Land Management Improvement Plan, which aims to make the borough a pleasant and enjoyable place to live, work, visit and enjoy, enhance Ashford's overall appearance and attractiveness and raise civic pride and make the borough more attractive for residents, visitors and businesses.

### ***Other measures to improve the look of the borough***

The Borough Council owns approximately 1,600 amenity and footway lights around the borough as distinct from the Highway and safety lighting that is owned by the County Council.

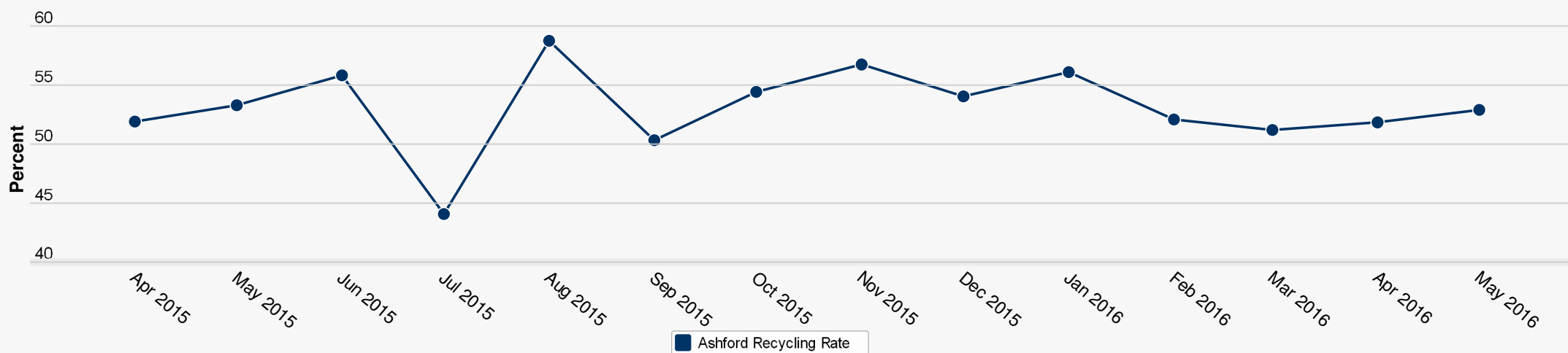
In May 2016 the Cabinet agreed to fund up to £1 million as a capital investment to upgrade and replace as appropriate the Borough Council's amenity and footway lighting columns to adoptable KCC standard and to transfer as many of the assets as possible to KCC.

In July 2016 Cabinet considered a review of the Town Centre Action Team (T-CAT), and agreed a set of further improvements to the service.

T-CAT was formed three years ago with the intention of having a flexible and reactive resource to keep the town centre attractive and well-looked-after. Since that time, T-CAT has extended its role, to encompass work in both Ashford (as the 'urban' centre) and Tenterden (the rural centre), ensuring that the two towns remain clean and tidy, with street furniture kept in state of good repair.

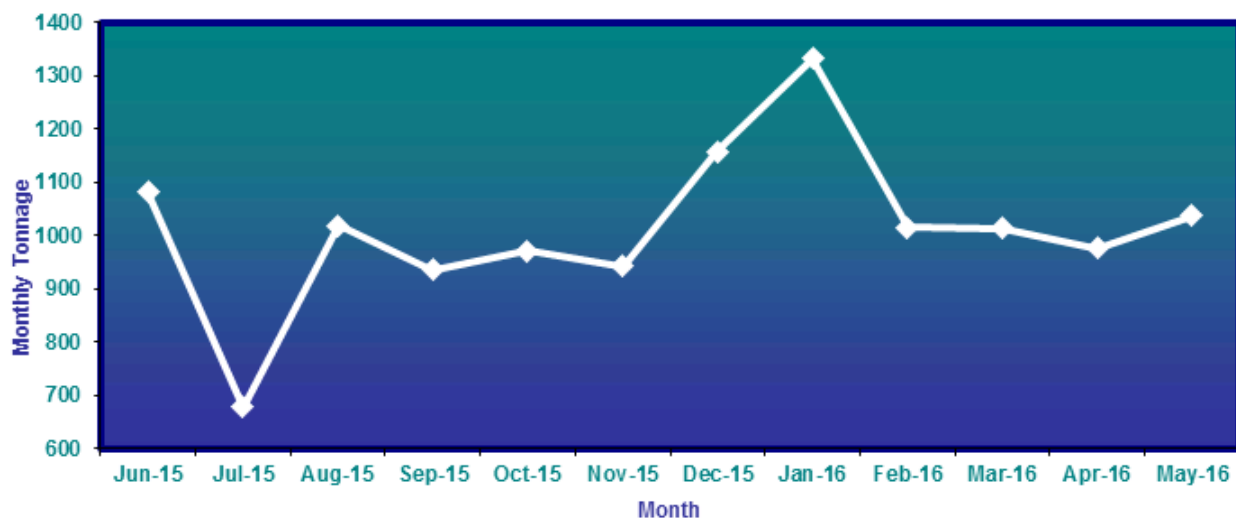
T-CAT's efforts have also been extended, expanding to include support to the council's economic development function: fitting out/decorating shops (particularly in Park Mall), supporting the monthly Farmers' Market (setting up and dismantling), plus constructing planters and bus stop 'libraries'.

### ***Recycling***



As expected, following two straight years of impressive increases in recycling rates, recycling rates have levelled-out over the last year, with the important next step to consolidate this improved performance.

### KCC - Ashford - Monthly Tonnage



In December DEFRA's latest recycling league tables confirmed that Ashford is now in the top 10% recycling councils in the country. During 2014/15 the borough was the best in Kent at producing the least waste per household, and also remained the second most improved recycler across the country - with a recycling rate of 55.3%, an improvement of 13.4% on the year before.

Largest increases in Recycling (2014/15)					
Authority	Region	Authority Type	Percentage Household waste sent for Recycling, Reuse, or Composting 2014/15 (EX NI 192)	Percentage Household waste sent for Recycling, Reuse, or Composting 2013/14 (EX NI 192)	Improvement (Percentage points)
South Bucks District Council	South east	Collection	50.7%	33.4%	17.3%
Ashford Borough Council	South east	Collection	55.3%	41.9%	13.4%
East Cambridgeshire District Council	Eastern	Collection	56.6%	45.5%	11.2%
Gravesham Borough Council	South east	Collection	34.2%	24.5%	9.7%
North Warwickshire Borough Council	W Midlands	Collection	48.7%	39.8%	8.9%
Middlesbrough Borough Council	North East	Unitary	36.3%	27.7%	8.6%
Lambeth LB	London	Collection	28.3%	21.1%	7.2%
Halton Borough Council	North West	Unitary	46.8%	39.8%	7.0%
Dudley MBC	W Midlands	Unitary	42.2%	35.7%	6.5%
Waverley Borough Council	South east	Collection	51.7%	45.2%	6.5%

### Increasing the range of things to do

In May 2016 the Cabinet gave its support to the Ashford International Model Railway Education Centre (AIMREC), and agreed to provide a mortgage loan to help the scheme's supporters to purchase the necessary land, owned by Kier, to enable the company to apply for significant funding from various sources including a capital grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The company's business plan shows that the centre can substantially diversify and boost Ashford's tourism and visitor economy with an anticipated 500,000 visitors per annum.

