

Agenda Item No:

Report To: Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 09/02/2017

Report Title: Ashford Borough Council's Performance – Quarter 3 2016/17

Report Author & Job Title: Nicholas Clayton-Peck, Senior Policy, Performance and Scrutiny Officer

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Shorter
Portfolio Holder for: Finance, Budget & Resource Management



Summary:

This report seeks to update members and the public on the performance of the Council against its Corporate Plan during Quarter 3 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

Significantly Affected Wards: N/A

Recommendations: The Cabinet is recommended to:-

- I. Note the Council's performance against the Corporate Plan in Quarter 3 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

Legal Implications N/A

Equalities Impact Assessment Not required because the report relates to a summary of past performance rather than any item requiring decision.

Other Material Implications: N/A

Exempt from Publication: NO

Background Papers: N/A

Contact: Nicholas.Clayton@ashford.gov.uk – Tel: (01233 300208)

Report Title: Ashford Borough Council's Performance – Quarter 3 2016/17

Introduction

1. The report seeks to provide a headline overview of performance against the Council's Corporate Plan for Quarter 3 2016/17.
2. This report provides a summary of the main developments affecting performance during the quarter, whilst the attached highlight summaries provide the key trend data underlying this.

Background

3. Each quarter the Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny committees receive an update on how and how well the Council is achieving its objectives.
4. In December 2015 the Council agreed a new Corporate Plan - "*The Five Year Corporate Plan – for Aspiration, Action and Achievement*". This 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.
5. 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.
6. 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. As such, in September 2016 the Dashboard was also presented to the Audit Committee.
7. 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. Feedback from more regular use of the site, and further integration of service planning and programme management data will provide further developments (and a deepening) of the overall performance picture.

Summary of Performance Developments in Quarter 3 2016/17

Activity

8. Quarter 3 saw successful activity on a variety of initiatives which will have a positive impact on the outcomes set out in the Council's corporate plan –

October

- a. Plans to build a new £70m junction on the M20 at Ashford went out to consultation following the acceptance of the application for a development consent order by the Planning Inspectorate.
- b. Following a review of homelessness (and public consultation), Cabinet agreed to incorporate the findings of this engagement to inform and approve a new Homelessness Strategy. This Strategy sets a 10-point action plan to address local challenges. These include not placing any 16 or 17 year olds in B&B accommodation, not placing families in bed and breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency (and then for no longer than 6 weeks), and enhancing prevention work and engagement across the private and public sectors.
- c. The borough's first proposed Neighbourhood Plan, covering Wye, was recommended for approval to council by Cabinet members.
- d. Ashford's new state-of-the-art sports centre at Spearpoint Pavillion was officially opened.
- e. Launch of the new Aspire Landscape Management service, covering the day-to-day work of mowing, pruning, planting, clearing and litter picking on various spaces owned by the Council.

November

- f. Final approval was given for funding to construct a mixed-use leisure development incorporating cinema, hotel, food and beverage establishments, car park and retail use in Elwick Road. Work is likely to start early in 2017.
- g. The council held a one-month trial for a new health and fitness activity campaign, called Active Everyday, to encourage those aged over 60 to consider at least 10 minutes of exercise a day. The project provides a monthly calendar of suggested daily activities which range from light exercise, such as NHS health walks, short mat bowls and walking football, to more intense exercises like a bike ride or a Multi Activity Session. The various activities are all fun and local.
- h. Launch of the Report-It app. This improved online reporting system makes it easier for residents to report issues such as fly-tipping, littering, dog fouling, vandalism, anti-social behaviour or planning enforcement issues. The new mobile friendly system replaces some of the council's online forms and allows residents to report incidents and then track their progress via a unique reference number.

December

- i. The latest vacancy rate figures for high street shops were released, standing at just under 9%. This is below the national average of 9.5%, and is the lowest since rates were first recorded here in 2008.
- j. Work continued on the new Ashford College campus, with the building set to welcome its first students in September 2017.
- k. The latest figures on the impact of the visitor economy on the borough were released. This independent research commissioned by Visit Kent showed that Ashford saw a 6% increase in attraction spend in 2015. Visits to the district rose to 4.3 million trips, with the total number of jobs supported by tourism rising to 5,482 (equates to 1 in 10 of all jobs).
- l. Farrow Court was named a joint winner of the Residential-Major category at the 2016 Kent Design and Development awards.
- m. Completed refurbishment works on the Sk8side complex to create a fresh, well insulated, low-maintenance, energy efficient building with a modern finish.
- n. Volunteers from the Ashford Volunteer Centre were awarded a certificate by Ashford Borough Council in recognition for their outstanding contribution and work in the borough recently.
- o. DEFRA's latest recycling league tables confirmed that Ashford remains the top recycler in the county.
- p. The Cabinet agreed to keep the borough's council tax at the lowest level of any Kent authority, subject to consultation of the draft budget.
- q. The Council's external auditors confirmed that the authority continues to deliver good value for money and effective use of its resources, whilst for the second year in a row the Department for Work and Pensions gave an unqualified opinion on the council's housing benefit work – meaning that the authority is working accurately and efficiently in this area.
- r. Whilst the planning department received and decided upon just under 400 applications during the quarter, the Planning Committee considered just over 15 applications, including -
 - a £55m scheme for a new supermarket, 216 homes, a brewery and visitor centre on a brownfield site on Victoria Way.
 - Approved the erection of 40 houses, of which 14 are affordable, in Rolvenden.
 - Approved 31 residential apartments on the former Travis Perkins site, Victoria Crescent, Ashford.
- s. The council also received two awards at the prestigious national Engagement Excellence Awards. The council was not only commended for its work around staff engagement, it was also successful in both the 'Best Branding' and 'Most strategic communications for public sector / charity organisations' categories.

Commentary on performance trends

9. Whilst the majority of the trends captured within the summaries attached to this report have remained broadly steady over the last quarter, the following trends are worth highlighting –
- a. Footfall in September and October reflected a similar upturn in numbers seen in the same months of the previous year, with general performance over the last six months remaining stable at +/- 10% of the around 4,500 daily average visitors.
 - b. As noted above, vacancy rates for both the high street and Ashford's shopping centres continues to fall – with both now sitting at around 9%.
 - c. The overall unemployment rate remains relatively unchanged, having remained at 1.6% (+/-0.1%) since February 2016, although unemployment amongst those 18-24 has risen from 2.6% to 3% in the same period – and is still above the average seen across the rest of the county.
 - d. By the end of the quarter the number of households in Bed & Breakfast (B&B) remained around 20, although there was a similar peak at the same time last year. The overall trend, however, has remained steadily increasing since the beginning of 2016.
 - e. Across the over 1,000 food businesses across the borough, the percentage compliant with hygiene standards when inspected has remained stable over the last six months, remaining within half a percent during that period.

Conclusions

10. The majority of performance goals the council is working towards remain either on-target or near-target, and (a) to € above demonstrate a continuing healthy growth profile for Ashford.
11. 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, which also includes live links to the data behind each graph or table.

Equalities Impact Assessment

12. N/A

Consultation Planned or Undertaken

13. N/A

Other Options Considered

14. N/A

Reasons for Supporting Option Recommended

15. N/A



Ashford Borough Council Performance Dashboard

Headline Report

Enterprising Ashford

Town Centre Footfall



Footfall in September and October reflected an uptick seen in the previous year, and more generally footfall has remained relatively steady during the last three months.

The wider state of Ashford town centre remains generally strong, with footfall during 2015 bucking the national trend and increasing by 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.

In August 2016 a total of 40 new parking terminals were installed across Ashford and Tenterden. These new machines include a larger screen and can accept a wider variety of payment methods.

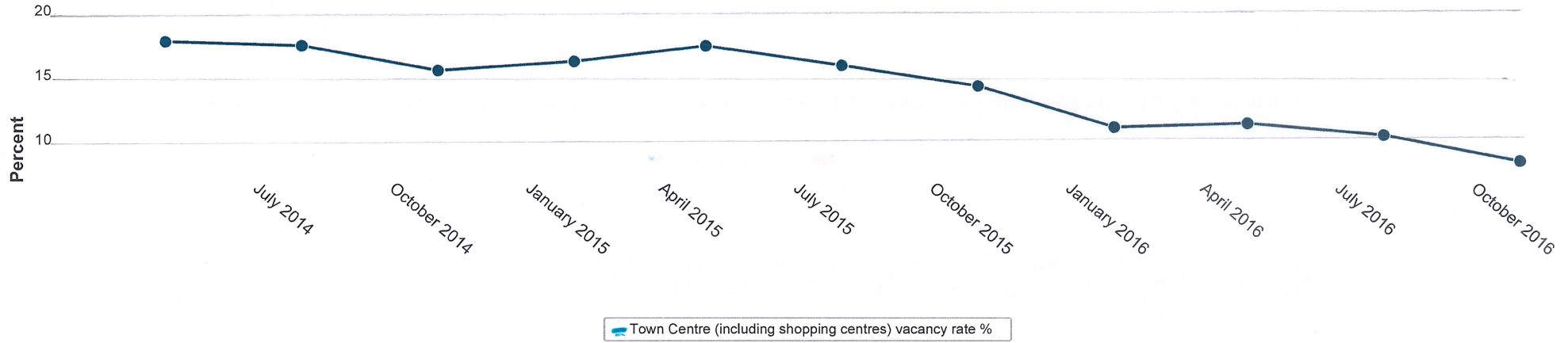
Portfolio Holder's Views

16. Overall, Ashford Borough Council's performance remains strong, with many activities and initiatives, led or supported by this council which will significantly help to deliver our corporate objectives. More specifically, efforts to support our high street and local businesses, such the purchase of Park Mall, have helped support a sustained fall in vacancy rates alongside strong footfall traffic. Equally impressive is the continued increase in not only the number of tourists visiting the borough, but the important economic impact this sector provides for local businesses.
17. The launch of the council's new in-house ASPIRE landscape management team provides opportunities to raise the look and feel across the borough, whilst the new state-of-the-art sports centre at Spearpoint Pavillion and the launch of additional support for residents to make healthy choices represent meaningful support to Ashford's health and wellbeing.
18. It is also good to see that, when areas such as temporary accommodation do show a pressure on council services, we are proactive in putting in place the revised strategies to tackle them.
19. 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.

Contact and Email

20. Nicholas Clayton-Peck, Senior Policy, Performance and Scrutiny Officer,
Nicholas.clayton@ashford.gov.uk

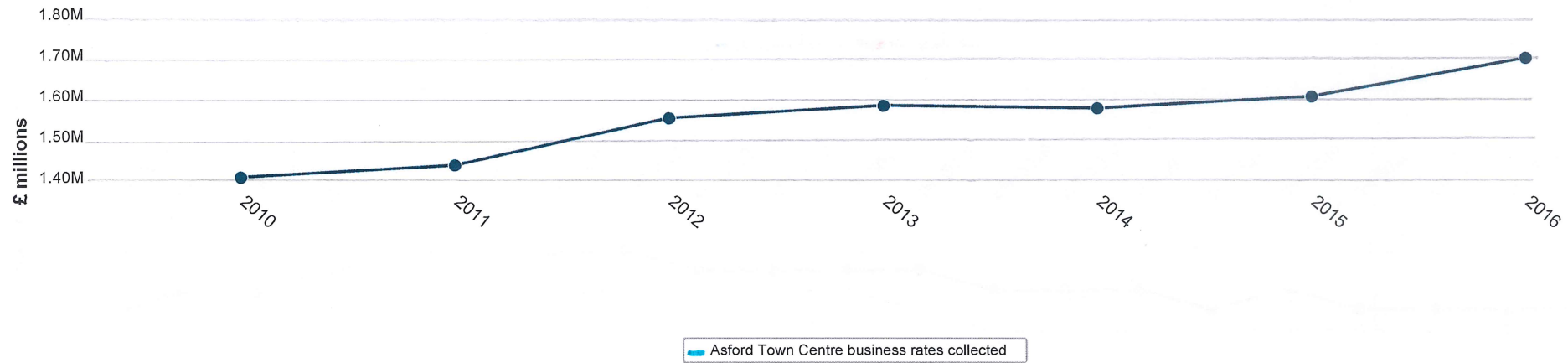
Ashford Town Centre Vacancy Rates



The latest vacancy rate is just under 9%. This is below the national average of 9.5%, and is the lowest since rates were first recorded in 2008.

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, with over half of the vacant units now full and footfall up by around 7%. The rejuvenation has been directly attributed with improving customer spend in neighbouring stores such as Wilko.

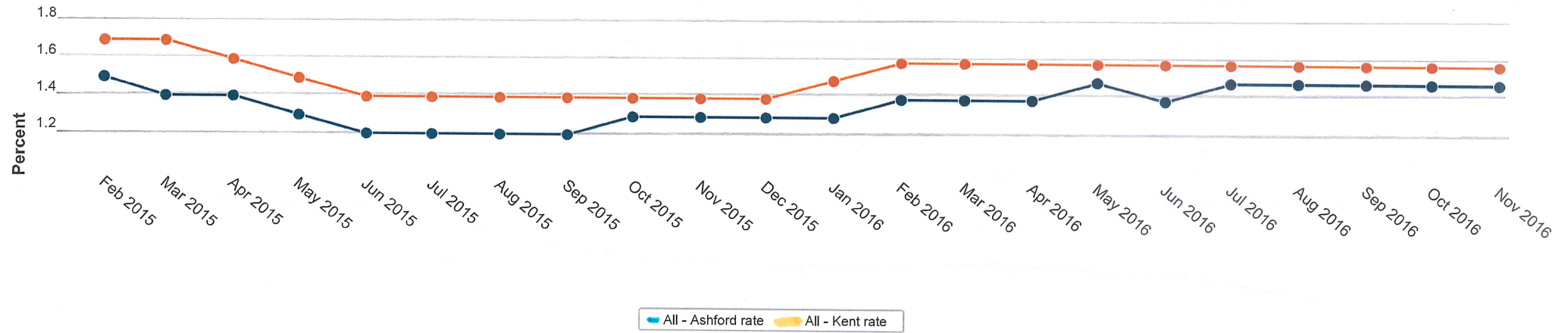
Town Centre Development and Future Plans



In November final approval was given for funding to construct a mixed-use leisure development incorporating cinema, hotel, food and beverage establishments, car park and retail use in Elwick Road. Work is likely to start early in 2017.

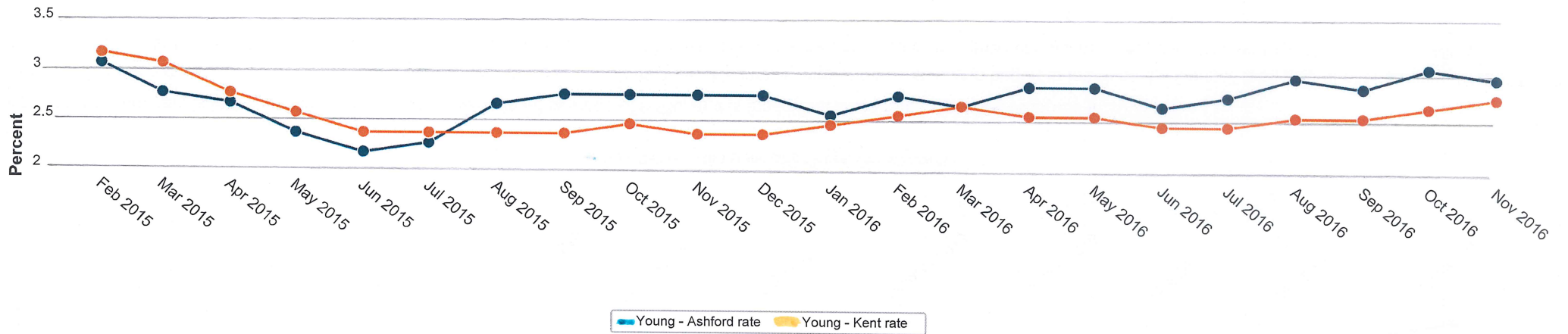
Unemployment

All



Following a small rise in the previous quarters, the total number claiming either Jobseekers Allowance or Universal Credit principally for the reason of being unemployed has levelled out and now stands at just above **1,150**. This is around 10% more than at the same time last year, constituting around **1.5%** of Ashford's working age population.

Young People



The number of young people (18-24) claiming unemployment benefit has also remained steady at around **300**, still slightly higher than the Kent average.



Ashford Borough Council Performance Dashboard

Headline Report

Living Ashford

Affordable Housing

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

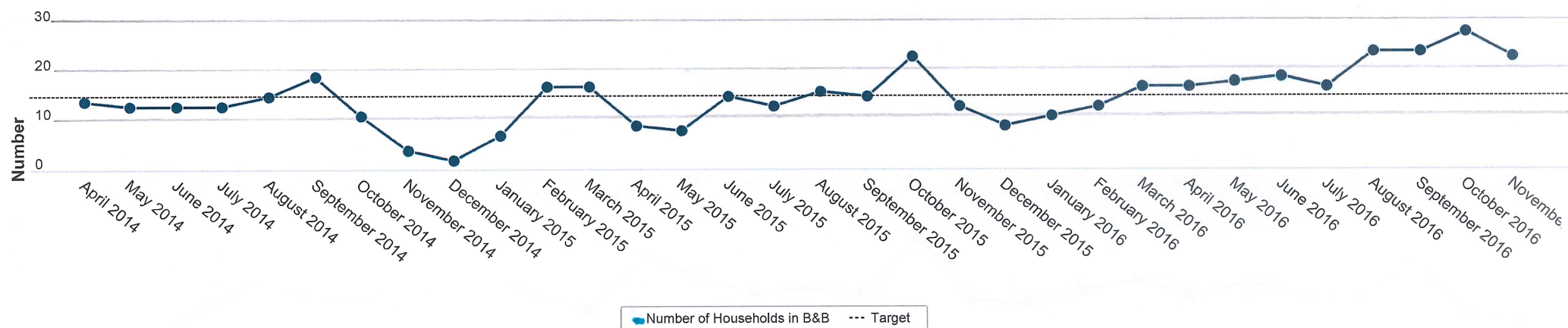
- Intermediate Affordable Homes, which includes intermediate rent and affordable home ownership; and
- Social Rent Homes, which include affordable rent homes



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 somewhat reversed.

In 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.

Temporary Accommodation



By the end of the quarter the average number of households in Bed & Breakfast (B&B) had increased to around 20, (although there was a similar increase at the same time last year). B&B costs for 2015/16 were very marginally below budget, however pressure still remains going forward on the service.

In response, in October Cabinet agreed to incorporate the findings of a recent consultation to inform and approve a new Homelessness Strategy. This Strategy sets a 10-point action plan to address local challenges. These include not placing any 16 or 17 year olds in B&B accommodation and enhancing prevention work and engagement across the private and public sectors.

House prices and the number of homes sold

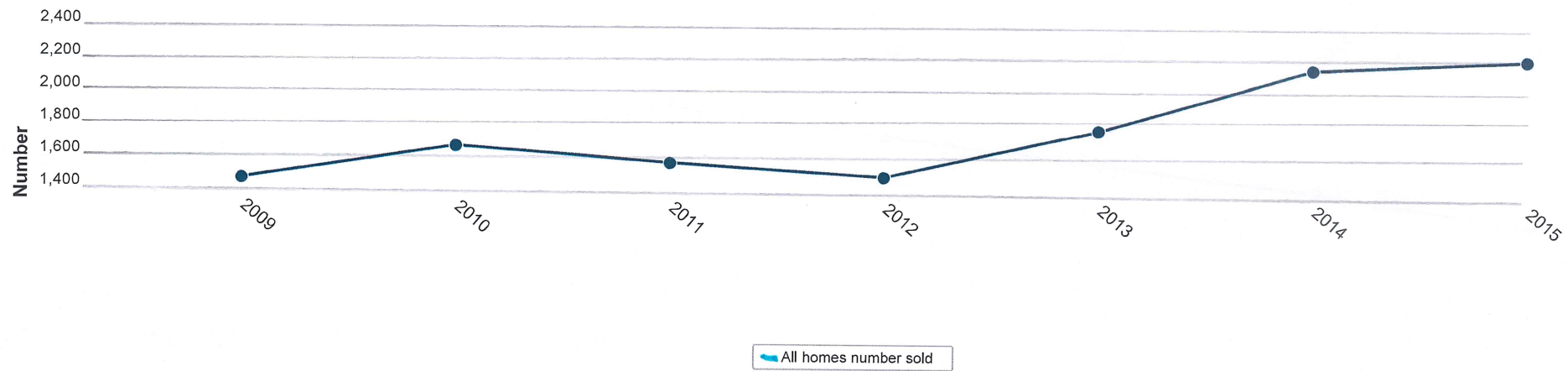
House Price



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.

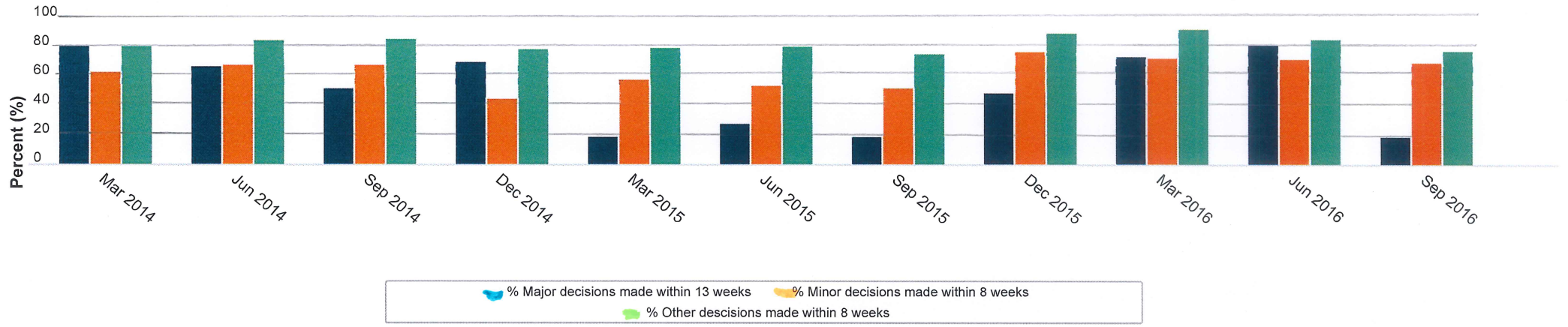
Number of Houses Sold



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.



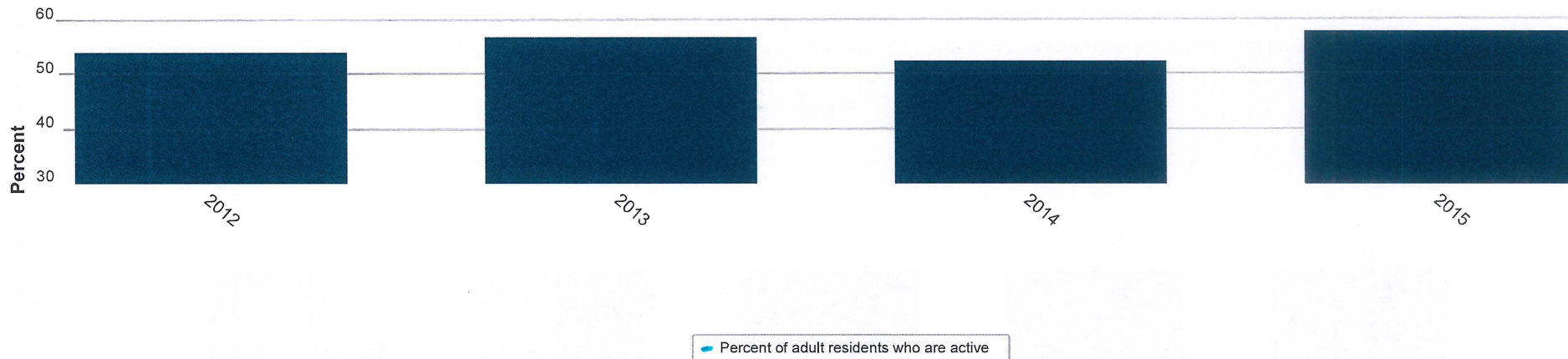


Ashford Borough Council Performance Dashboard

Headline Report

Active and Creative Ashford

Healthy Lives and Active Living



Sport

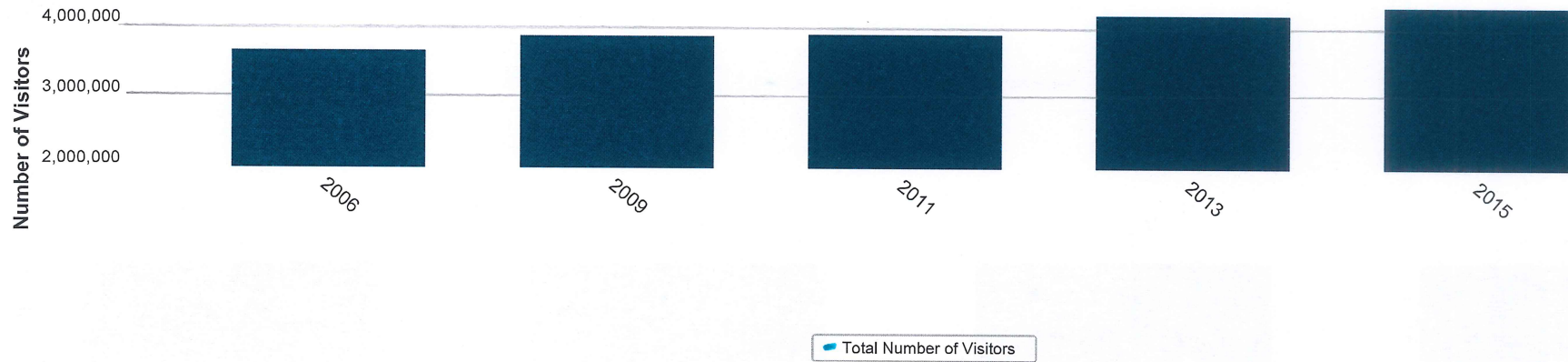
In October Ashford's new state-of-the-art sports centre at Spearpoint Pavillion was officially opened, and by the end of the year a refurbishment of the Sk8side complex had been completed. November later saw the launch of a one-month trail for a new health and fitness activity campaign called Active Everyday to encourage those aged over 60 to consider at least 10 minutes of exercise a day. The project provides a monthly calendar of suggested daily activities which range from light exercise, such as NHS health walks, short mat bowls and walking football, to more intense exercises like a bike ride or a Multi Activity Session.

Supporting Culture and Creativity

The Voluntary and Community Sector

In December volunteers from the Ashford Volunteer Centre were awarded a certificate by Ashford Borough Council in recognition for their outstanding contribution and work in the borough recently.

Tourism



In December the latest figures on the impact of the visitor economy on the borough were released. This independent research commissioned by Visit Kent showed that Ashford saw a 6% increase in attraction spend in 2015. Visits to the district rose to 4.3 million trips, with the total number of jobs supported by tourism rising to 5,482 (equates to 1 in 10 of all jobs). The total value of tourism across the borough, including all visitor spend, as well as associated and indirect spending was £278 million.



Ashford Borough Council Performance Dashboard

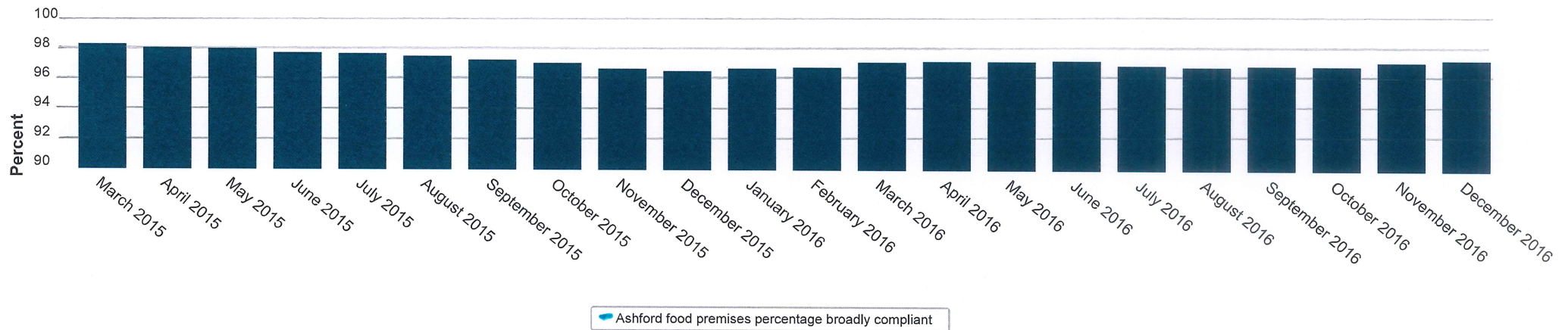
Headline Report

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. The percentage compliant upon inspected has remained within a half percent range during the last six months.

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> (<http://www.ashford.gov.uk/food-hygiene-rating-scheme>).

In September 2016 the Council approved a revised Food Safety Policy, which ensures a consistent approach to food safety inspections, enforcement and food sampling in line with current nationally accepted standards.

ASPIRE - Improving the presentation of the borough

A new in-house ground maintenance service was rolled out during early 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.

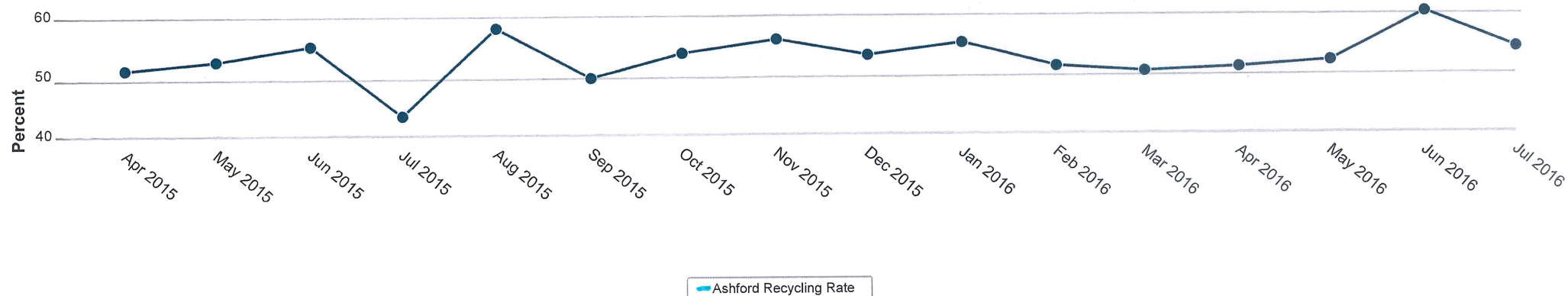
This initiative is a key part of delivering the adopted Land Management Improvement Plan, which aims to make the borough a pleasant and enjoyable place to live, work, visit and enjoy, enhance Ashford's overall appearance and attractiveness and raise civic pride and make the borough more attractive for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

Other Measures to Improve Ashford

In September 2016 the Community Toilet Scheme, which sees local businesses including shops, cafes and restaurants working in partnership with the Council to open up their toilet facilities to the public free of charge, rolled out across Ashford.

November saw the launch of the Report-It app. This improved online reporting system makes it easier for residents to report issues such as fly-tipping, littering, dog fouling, vandalism, anti-social behaviour or planning enforcement issues. The new mobile friendly system replaces some of the council's online forms and allows residents to report incidents and then track their progress via a unique reference number.

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.

December's DEFRA's latest recycling league tables confirmed that Ashford remains the top recycler in the county.