Agenda Item No:

**Report To:** Cabinet

**Date of Meeting:** 15/06/2017

**Report Title:** Ashford Borough Council's Performance – Quarter 4 2016/17

& The Annual Report

**Report Author &** 

Job Title:

Nicholas Clayton-Peck, Senior Policy, Performance and

Scrutiny Officer

**Portfolio Holder** 

Cllr. Clarkson, Cllr Knowles & Cllr Shorter

Portfolio Holder for: Leader, Human Resources and Customer Services &

Finance and IT

**Summary:** This report seeks to update members and the public on the

> performance of the Council against its Corporate Plan during Quarter 4 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 online

Performance 'Dashboard' for each of the Council's Corporate

Plan areas.

The report also includes the council's Annual Report, and details of how this will be presented digitally on the Council's

website.

**Key Decision:** NO

Significantly Affected Wards: N/A

The Cabinet is recommended to:-Recommendations:

> I. Note the Council's performance against the Corporate Plan in Quarter 4 of 2016/17.

II. **Approve and endorse the Annual Report** 

**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-Peck@ashford.gov.uk – Tel: (01233

300208)

## Report Title: Ashford Borough Council's Performance – Quarter 4 2016/17 & The Annual Report

#### Introduction

- 1. The report seeks to provide a headline overview of performance against the Council's Corporate Plan for Quarter 4 of 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 (**Appendix 1**).
- 3. As this is also the end-of-year performance report, it also includes the council's Annual Report. This year the report will be hosted online for the first time, available to read alongside an interactive timeline of the achievements made against the corporate plan over the last year, and links to further information held elsewhere.

#### **Background**

- 4. Each quarter the Cabinet and Overview & Scrutiny Committees receive an update on how and how well the Council is achieving its objectives.
- 5. 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.
- 6. 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.
- 7. 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.

#### **Summary of Performance Developments in Quarter 4 2016/17**

#### **Activity**

8. Quarter 4 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 –

#### **January**

- a. DEFRA's latest recycling league tables confirmed that Ashford remains the top recycler in the county. The borough's recycling rate of 53.1% also makes it the 44th best recycling local authority in the country. To tackle a number of contamination issues which, if left unresolved, might impact upon future recycling rates, Cabinet approved a range of communication activities designed to improve the recycling performance in the borough.
- b. Work began at the Commercial Quarter (CQ38) site, the first phase of which will see 80,500 sq ft of office space developed, along with retail and restaurants whilst opposite the Ashford College building is nearing completion, and will welcome its first intake of students this September.
- c. Construction works commenced on the new community centre at Repton Park, with the building programmed to open in January 2018.

#### **February**

- d. Following receipt and independent examination of the business case, Cabinet and Full Council decided no longer to pursue discussions on the proposed creation of a single East Kent district council. The Council still retains the flexibility to consider working with the other authorities and partners, throughout Kent or those outside the county, in the future.
- e. Work commenced on the construction of 34 sheltered scheme apartments for local residents and four bungalows for private sale at Danemore, Tenterden.
- f. Cabinet agreed a range of measures to improve the quality of the water at Conningbrook Lakes and Country Park. The investment of up to £150,000 will ensure the ongoing establishment of the lake as a key water facility for the borough for the enjoyment of the many clubs who regularly use it.
- g. Full funding for the Ashford spurs signalling project was secured, being awarded £4.8m from the Local Growth Fund, and will leverage an additional £112m in private sector funding.
- h. 'One You', the new health shop, opened in Park Mall, Ashford. The health venue encourages people to quit smoking, lose weight and be more active. Services will include: stop smoking support, healthy weight advice for adults and children, on-the-spot blood pressure checks, a weigh-in service, plus support and advice on a range of lifestyle issues.
- i. Stagecoach launched a fleet of new Mercedes buses across Ashford, called 'Little and Often'.

#### March

- j. Clarion Housing Group completed a deal for Conningbrook Lakes site. The new development of around 300 homes will comprise two, three, four and five bedroom houses, as well as a small number of apartments, all for private sale. This deal will also lead to developer payments being made to the Council for investment in the Country Park facilities.
- k. Council representatives and developers behind the Chilmington Green development agreed and signed the section 106 agreement, whilst a similar agreement was also signed to expand the Ashford Cineworld meaning that planning permission to develop an IMAX can be issued.
- The planning department received and decided upon just over 300 applications during the quarter, and the Planning Committee considered almost 20 applications, including -
  - Granting outline planning permission for up to 25 homes in Smarden
  - Granting outline planning permission for up to 28 homes in Willesborough

#### **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 at the start of the calendar year reflected the slight downturn seen in the previous year, and more generally footfall has increased over the last couple of months. Other than in January, performance over the last six months has remained stable at +/- 5% of the around 4,250 daily average visitors.
  - b. Vacancy rates for both the High Street and Ashford's shopping centres have fallen over the last year, and have stabilised at a lower level of around 9%.
  - c. The overall unemployment rate has increased in the last quarter, reflecting a more general increase since February 2016.
     Unemployment amongst the 18-24 year olds continues to rise from 3% to 3.5% 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) had risen to 25, although the average for the quarter was only slightly higher than the previous quarter's 20. 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 and on a generally slightly upward curve.

#### People Serving People – The Annual Report, 2016/17

- 10. The Annual Report (**Appendix 2**) provides a transparent and accessible summary of the achievements and milestones of Ashford Borough Council over the course of the 2016/17 financial year. Production of an Annual Report offers another means by which the Council can embrace the transparency agenda and provide a high-level reflection on the previous financial year.
- 11. The production of an annual report also forms a crucial part of the council's overall arrangements to demonstrate good governance and accountability. The revised 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government' framework, produced by CIPFA and SOLACE, published in April 2016, notes that such reporting demonstrates good practices in reporting, openness and engagement to deliver effective accountability.
- 12. It had previously been agreed that the last year would be the final iteration to be printed and delivered across the borough. Accordingly, this year's report will be made available through a dedicated page on the website in digital copy, alongside the interactive timeline and links to further information. This page will go live in early July following Full Council.

#### **Conclusions**

- 13. The majority of performance goals the council is working towards remain either on-target or near-target, and (a) to (e) above demonstrate a continuing healthy growth profile for Ashford.
- 14. As noted above, the information included within these reports provides merely a high-level snapshot of the information available constantly through the live Dashboard site and interactive Annual Report page.

#### **Equalities Impact Assessment**

15. N/A

#### **Consultation Planned or Undertaken**

16. N/A

#### **Other Options Considered**

17. N/A

#### **Reasons for Supporting Option Recommended**

18. N/A

#### **Portfolio Holder's Views**

19. The Portfolio Holder for Finance & IT has commented as follows:

"This final quarterly report clearly shows excellent progress on the Corporate Plan with delivery on a number of the "Big 8"projects (Commercial Quarter, Elwick Place cinema/hotel, Conningbrook, Chilmington Green and Ashford College) all now well under way. These projects will all deliver renewed prosperity to the town as well as enhancing the cultural and commercial offer to residents of the borough.

Disappointing rising trends in both homelessness and unemployment require close monitoring, but the reduction in vacant commercial property in the town centre is very pleasing and reflects the effort put in by officers to support traders and make the town centre more attractive.

20. Overall, a satisfactory year end quarterly report that will be fully reviewed in the annual report."

#### **Contact and Email**

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

## **Appendix 1**

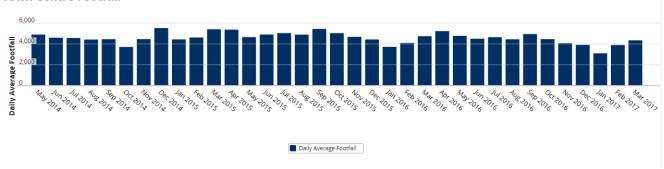


#### **Ashford Borough Council Performance Dashboard**

#### **Headline Report**

#### **Enterprising Ashford**

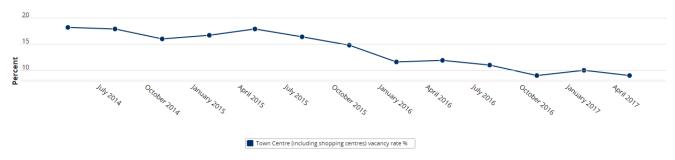
#### **Town Centre Footfall**



Footfall at the start of the calendar year reflected a slight downturn an uptick seen in the previous year, and more generally footfall has generally increased over the last couple of months.

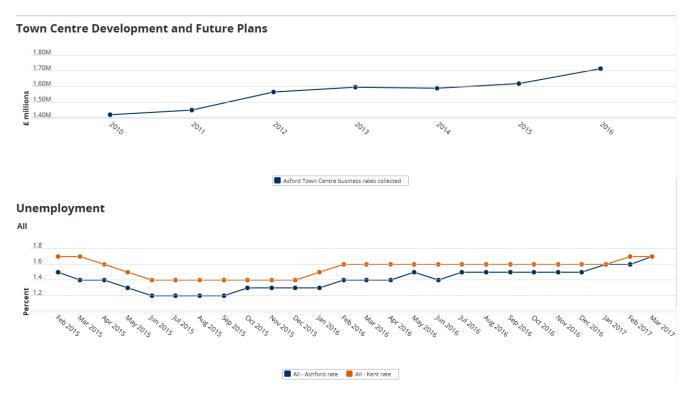
In January 2017 work began at the Commercial Quarter (CQ38) site, the first phase of which will see 80,500 sq ft of office space developed, along with retail and restaurant.

#### **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



Following a long period of relatively stable levels, the total number claiming either Jobseekers Allowance or Universal Credit principally for the reason of being unemployed has increased slightly over the last quarter, and now stands at just under 1,300. This is around 15% more than at the same time last year, constituting around 1.7% of Ashford's working age population.



The number of young people (18-24) claiming unemployment benefit has also risen slightly to around 320, and remains higher than the Kent average.



#### **Ashford Borough Council Performance Dashboard**

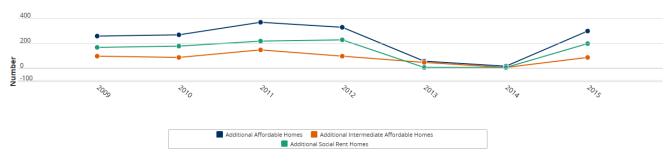
#### **Headline Report**

#### **Living Ashford**

#### Affordable Housing

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

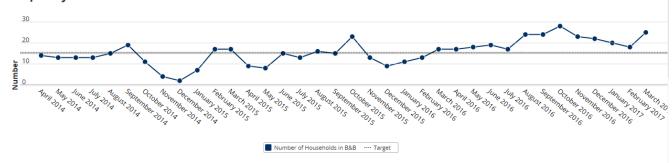
- · Intermediate Affordable Homes, which includes intermediate rent and affordable home ownership; and
- Social Rent Homes, which include affordable rent homes



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.

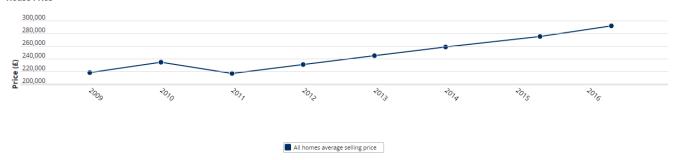
#### **Temporary Accomodation**



By the end of the quarter the average number of households in Bed & Breakfast (B&B) had increased to around 25, (although there was a similar increase at the same time last year). 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

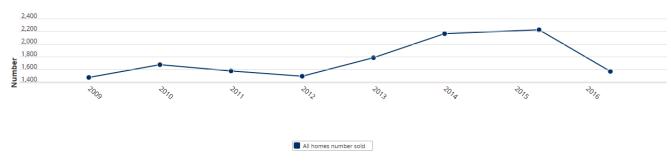
#### House Price



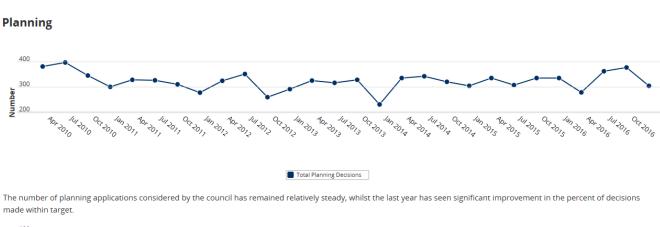
The average house price in Kent (KCC area) during 2016 was £283,323. The average price in Kent (KCC area) has increased for five consecutive years and is now 30% higher than where they were in 2008.

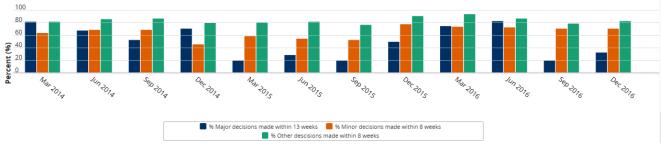
There were 19,117 property transactions in Kent during the year, 28% lower than in the year before and reflecting the fall in sales seen in Ashford.

#### **Number of Houses Sold**



In February work commenced on the construction of 34 sheltered scheme apartments for local residents and 4 bungalows for private sale at Danemore, Tenterden, while the following month Clarion Housing Group completed a deal for Conningbrook Lakes site. The new development will comprise two, three, four and five bedroom houses, as well as a small number of apartments. This deal will also lead to developer payments being made to the Council for investment in the Country Park facilities.





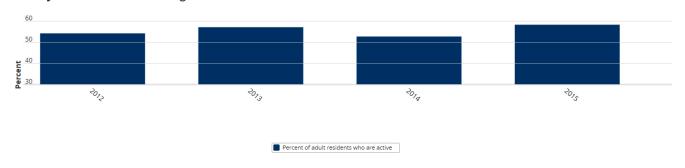


#### **Ashford Borough Council Performance Dashboard**

#### **Headline Report**

#### **Active and Creative Ashford**

#### **Healthy Lives and Active Living**



#### **Sport and Health**

In February 'One You', the new health shop, opened in Park Mall, Ashford. The new health shop encourages people to quit smoking, lose weight and be more active.

The 'One Stop' initiative builds on the council's earlier initiative of a health and fitness activity campaign called Active Everyday, which 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.

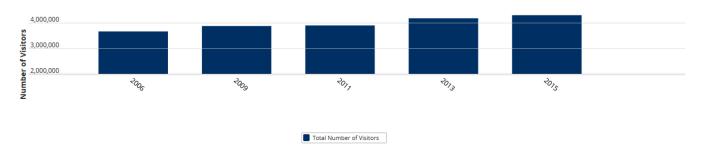
#### **Supporting Culture and Creativity**

In January construction works commenced on the new community centre at Repton Park, with the building programmed for opening in January 2018.

#### The Voluntary and Community Sector

At the end of 2016 volunteers from the Ashford Volunteer Centre were awarded a certificate by the Council in recognition for their outstanding contribution and work in the borough recently.

#### Tourism





#### **Ashford Borough Council Performance Dashboard**

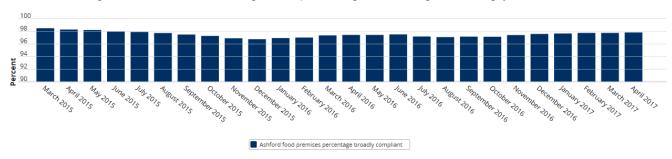
#### **Headline Report**

#### **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.

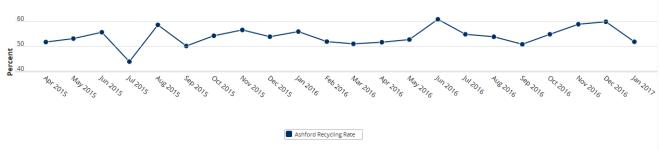
Guidance is provided to food businesses in the first instance and notices are service if conditions do not improve. Food businesses are also given a food hygiene rating which can view at http://www.ashford.gov.uk/food-hygiene-rating-scheme.

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.

#### Other Measures to Improve Ashford

In February, Stagecoach launched a fleet of new Mercedes acrossAshford, called 'Little and Often'. This service provides buses every five or six minutes along routes serving the hospital, town centre/rail station, Kennington and Park Farm.

#### Recycling



DEFRA's latest recycling league tables confirmed that Ashford remains the top recycler in the county. The borough's recycling rate of 53.1%, also makes it the 44th best recycling local authority in the country. To tackle a number of contamination issues which, if left unresolved might impact upon future recycling rates, in January Cabinet approved a range of communication activities designed to improve the recycling performance in the borough.



## **Contents**

message from the <b>Leader</b>	3
message from the Chief Executive	3
enterprising <b>Ashford</b>	4
living Ashford	5
the <b>borough</b>	6
the future	8
active and <b>creative</b> Ashford	9
attractive <b>Ashford</b>	10
<b>financial</b> information	- 11





## GERRY CLARKSON, CBE

LEADER, ASHFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

Welcome to the fourth of our Annual Reports, which reflects on the achievements and milestones seen across our borough over the course of the last year.

From the building of a brand new town centre college, to work beginning on the Commercial Quarter, Ashford is developing fast – while a new heritage trail now helps residents and visitors explore the unique history of our borough.

Exciting plans for a town centre brewery and supermarket, a boutique cinema and entertainment development, and a mixed-use regeneration on Victoria Way, have all progressed. Alongside the fewest empty shops since records began, and staying at

the top of Kent's recycling table, Ashford has much to be proud of.

Our Five Year Plan is helping to make the borough a great place to live, work and play. Launching ASPIRE, a new in-house landscape team, shows this commitment to quality local services.

I look forward to sharing news of Ashford's continued progress with you all in next year's Annual Report.





## TRACEY KERLY

CHIEF EXECUTIVE, ASHFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

Through an entrepreneurial approach, careful planning and working with local partners, our services remain effective and good value for money – while we retain the lowest council tax level in Kent. Indeed, our innovative approach to delivering local housing led to the borough being named 'housing business ready' last year, and the newly-opened dementia-friendly accommodation at Farrow Court was named joint winner in the residential category of the Kent Development Awards.

The 'One You' hub in Park Mall now helps everyone lead a more healthy life, and the new community toilet scheme has opened up more

facilities to the public free of charge.

I hope that you enjoy reading our Annual Report – it offers just a snap shot of all of the good work which has gone on over the last year. We agreed our priorities in 2015, covering up to 2020, so please check out the dedicated web page for the report, including an interactive Timeline with more details on all of the achievements which are making this vision a reality.

Tracey Kerly

## enterprising Ashford





# A vibrant town centre and strong local businesses

The vacancy rate in Ashford town centre fell to its lowest ever rate during the year, standing at just 8.9% by March 2017 - half of what it was four years ago. Since the council purchased the Park Mall shopping centre off the high street, footfall there is up 7% year-on-year, while an average of over 135,000 people visit the high street each month. Initiatives such as the Farmers' Market and free parking are very popular, and are clearly having a positive impact on the town centre's fortunes.

With a borough that boasts beautiful countryside, the 'Jewel of the Weald' that is Tenterden, alongside award-winning vineyards and producers, tourism remains crucial. The latest figures from independent research commissioned by Visit Kent showed that the total value of tourism across the borough is £278 million. Ashford saw 400,000 more visitors than in the year before (4.3 million in total), while the sector supports 1 in 10 of all jobs in Ashford.

## **Major developments**

Building on the success of being named the number one business location in Kent, a number of major developments have seen real progress in the last twelve months -

- Since 'topping out' in September, the new Ashford College is nearing completion, and will play a major part in unlocking the aspiration, opportunity and skills of the borough's young people.
- More and more businesses are moving to the borough, seeking to capitalise on Ashford's excellent location. The Commercial Quarter, where work started in August, will create almost 600,000 square feet of office space and create hundreds of jobs.
- Work has begun to build a boutique cinema, family hotel, restaurants and bars at Elwick Place, while plans were also approved to expand the cinema complex off Junction 9.
- In October plans were approved for a £55 million scheme for a new supermarket and homes along Victoria Way. A brewery will also open, offering a visitor centre and tours.

## living Ashford

## **Delivering quality homes for all**

It is important that we keep growing the borough and providing the homes all residents need. In June plans were approved for a mixed-use redevelopment of the former Powergen site in the town centre, and in March 2017 a deal was signed to move forward with 300 new homes at Conningbrook Lakes.

The council also received over 1,300 Planning applications during the year, including almost 1,000 from householders and companies seeking to develop their properties. It is important to determine these quickly, and we have decided over 85% within eight weeks – with over 95% approved.

The council also works hard to ensure that homes are affordable, having been declared 'Housing Business Ready' for its strength in delivering affordable housing in the borough.

The innovative dementia-friendly facilities at Farrow Court in Ashford, where the first phase opened during the year, and Danemore at Tenterden will make sure that those who need additional support to lead fulfilling lives receive it.



# THE UK'S INTERNATIONAL TOWN









PARIS 1HR 52MINS

BRUSSELS 1<sub>HR</sub> 37<sub>MINS</sub>











TOURS Nover 4MILLION !!

TO OVER



attractions across the borough

224.5 MILES



HORE THAN

OVER BRANDS





## the future

## Planning for the future

Meeting the future challenges of an expanding borough are also important. That is why the council is currently preparing a new Local Plan, which sets out the land that needs to be provided in the borough to accommodate new homes and jobs up to 2030 – with the first draft of the plan having a public consultation over the summer of 2016. March 2017 also saw a crucial milestone in the Chilmington Green development, with the signing of the Section 106 funding agreement with developers.

It is crucial that the borough has the facilities to meet the needs of the future, through new community buildings like Repton Connect – a community centre which will have space to host activities such as sports clubs, educational courses, cooking workshops and social events - which is set to open in November 2017.

January 2017 saw the launch of a high-specification minibus service, branded 'little & often', which now provides buses every five or six minutes along key routes serving the hospital, town centre/rail station, Kennington and Park Farm.



## active and creative Ashford

# Making Ashford a great place to live, work and play

June saw the launch of the new Ashford Heritage Trail, taking 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.

The council invests a lot of money to support local good causes and community groups. Over the last year the council and ward members have given over £110,000 to over 140 local voluntary and community groups and parish councils in both the urban and rural areas.

The summer again saw 12,000 people enjoy the sights and sounds of the Create festival, and by the end of the year Revelation St Mary's, the arts space in the heart of town, had welcomed its 10,000th visitor.

## **Healthy, vibrant communities**

Local facilities for sport and leisure form the focal point for many communities. That is why the council has supported new facilities such as the newly refurbished Spearpoint Pavilion in Kennington, and new play areas like Kestrel Park in Kingsnorth.

It is important that residents have ways to stay fit and healthy. A new spin room at the Stour Centre, opened in June, quadrupled the number of spin cycle classes that can be held - while in early 2017 a new 'Health Hub' opened in Park Mall, offering support and advice on how to adopt a healthier lifestyle.

The council also held a successful 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 – including fun and local sports sessions.



## attractive Ashford



## **Upholding quality and high standards**

We all want to live in a clean and pleasant borough, which is why from Autumn 2016 the council began trialling a new enforcement regime to tackle littering and other environmental blights in the borough. To complement this, in November the council launched a new online reporting system – making it easier for residents to report issues such as fly-tipping, littering, dog fouling, vandalism, anti-social behaviour or planning enforcement issues.

To make sure Ashford keeps looking its best, the council brought responsibility for grounds maintenance across the borough back in-house and created Aspire Landscape Management. Aspire covers 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, hedges, sports pitches and associated footpaths.

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 in September.

DEFRA's latest recycling league tables have confirmed that Ashford remains the top recycler in the county, and the borough's recycling rate of 53.1% makes it the 44th best recycling local authority in the country.



## **financial** information

Earlier this year, the council agreed to keep the borough's council tax at the lowest level of any Kent authority. This, alongside an entrepreneurial approach, means that the council can continue to provide well-resourced services in the most efficient ways.

## **Our budget**

Service	2016/17 £000	2017/18 £000	Per Head £
Cultural	1,851	1,966	15.82
Environmental	8,108	8,339	67.09
Planning	3,455	3,424	27.55
Parking & Highways	1,641	1,680	13.52
Housing	68,558	72,396	582.43
Central services to the public	9,033	8,846	71.17
Gross expenditure	92,646	96,651	777.58
Less grants & other income	(78,547)	(82,965)	(667.46)
Net expenditure	14,099	13,686	110.12
Contribution to/(from) reserves	1,464	1,141	9.18
Budget requirement	15,563	14,827	119.30
Financed by:			
Government grants	(9,001)	(7,926)	(63.77)
Collection fund surplus	0	0	0.00
Funding requirement	6,562	6,901	55.53

