

**Agenda Item No:** 6

**Report To:** Cabinet

**Date of Meeting:** 09/11/2017

**Report Title:** Ashford Borough Council's Performance – Quarter 2 2017/18

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

**Portfolio Holder** **Cllr Neil Shorter**  
**Portfolio Holder for:** **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 2 2017/18. 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.

**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 2 of 2017/18.**

**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

<b>Equalities Impact Assessment</b>	Not required because the report relates to a summary of past performance rather than any item requiring decision.
<b>Other Material Implications:</b>	N/A
<b>Exempt from Publication:</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>Background Papers:</b>	<b>N/A</b>
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## Report Title: Ashford Borough Council's Performance – Quarter 2 2017/18

### Introduction

1. The report seeks to provide a headline overview of performance against the Council's Corporate Plan for Quarter 2 2017/18.
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**).

### 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.

## Summary of Performance Developments in Quarter 2 2017/18

### Activity

7. Quarter 2 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 –

#### July

- a. Construction work on Elwick Place, the two-hectare development zone in the heart of Ashford town centre, officially commenced. A new car park, situated opposite the Ashford College, also opened in September.
- b. Cabinet approved proposals to accelerate the delivery of resurfacing of the International House car park, to enhance the Commercial Quarter and facilitate its further development. At the same meeting, the Cabinet also agreed various other works on Station Approach.
- c. Cabinet agreed an updated 'Taxi Licensing Policy' which reflects changes in legislation and good practice.
- d. Cabinet agreed proposals to work in partnership with Cheyne Capital to deliver an Independent living scheme for older people at Repton Park – believed to be the first of its kind in Kent.
- e. Cabinet approved the release of S106 funding for the relocation of Ashford Town Bowls Club to Kingsnorth, and the enlargement and enhancement of Memorial Gardens.
- f. Cabinet received an update on the achievements and projects delivered in the town centre by the Regeneration Team, and how this has had a positive impact on the town in terms of footfall, vacancy rates and consumer confidence.
- g. Cabinet approved plans to redevelop the existing play area near Victory Hall, Hamstreet.
- h. Cabinet received an update on the HRA affordable housing delivery programme, and approved proposals for a new affordable housing programme over the next five years.
- i. A new supported housing scheme for vulnerable young people opened at Belgic Court, The Limes – consisting of eight self-contained fully furnished one-bedroom flats and communal facilities.
- j. As part of the Create Festival's heritage events, *The Ashford Tales* – a theatre trail through the Town Centre telling the stories of some of Ashford's famous residents – was held to promote the town's rich history.
- k. The Council's external auditors provided an unqualified opinion on the 2016/17 Statement of Accounts.

#### August

- l. Work remains ongoing at the new Repton Connect Community Centre, which is due to open in January 2018.
- m. The Council agreed to host the National Wellbeing Symposium at the Ashford International Hotel in February 2018.
- n. Public consultation on a series of proposed changes to the Local Plan ran for public consultation. The final version of the Plan is due to be submitted for public examination in December.

## September

- o. The new Ashford College opened its doors for the first intake of students. The facility will provide courses for more than 1,000 students, employing 100 staff.
  - p. Cabinet received an update on the Council's corporate property performance. The Council has had a good year both in respect of the income generated, and in securing lettings at Park Mall and the continued letting of Block B International House to 2028. At the same meeting Cabinet agreed to move forward with the purchase of 28 light industrial units at Carlton Road.
  - q. Cabinet agreed a new Housing Tenancy Strategy in line with the legislative changes brought in by the Housing and Planning Act 2016.
  - r. Conningbrook Lakes celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a family fun day that attracted over 1,000 people to try canoeing, paddle boarding and other activities.
  - s. A refreshed [www.visitashfordandtenterden.co.uk](http://www.visitashfordandtenterden.co.uk) website, which promotes the tourism offer of the borough, was launched during an event at Eastwell Manor.
8. An online timeline of achievements and milestones in delivering the Corporate Plan is now available through the website, alongside the latest Annual Report - <http://www.ashford.gov.uk/transparency/our-performance/our-annual-report/>
9. As part of efforts to ensure that the Council operates transparently, work is currently underway to make the live Dashboard site available to the public. Once completed, a link to the Dashboard will be provided on the Council's website.

## Commentary on performance trends

10. Whilst the majority of the trends captured within the summaries attached to this report have remained broadly constant over the last quarter, the following trends are worth highlighting –
- a. Footfall over the last two quarters has remained relatively steady, with the monthly average steady at around +/- 5% 4,500 visitors per day.
  - b. Vacancy rates for both the high street and Ashford's shopping centres have fallen over the last year, settling at a level of around 9-10%.
  - c. Following a short period of increase, the total number claiming either Jobseekers Allowance or Universal Credit principally for the reason of being unemployed has remained steady or fallen slightly over the last few months, and now stands at just under 1,250. This is around 10% more than at the same time last year, constituting around 1.6% of Ashford's working age population. Whilst unemployment amongst the 18-24 year olds still remains above the average seen in the rest of the county, it has fallen slightly (3.3 – 3.1%) over the last quarter.
  - d. The number of residents needing temporary Bed and Breakfast accommodation has continued to increase over the last quarter.
  - 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 year, remaining within half a percent during that period and on a generally slightly upward curve.

## **Conclusions**

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

## **Equalities Impact Assessment**

13. N/A

## **Other Options Considered**

14. N/A

## **Portfolio Holder's Views**

15. 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 have helped support a sustained fall in vacancy rates.
16. Good progress is being made in delivering on the council's delivery programme – projects that are making a real difference to the borough. Examples include construction beginning on the Elwick Place development, and the new Ashford College opening to its first group of students.
17. It is obviously unfortunate to see the continued increase in those requiring short-term support with housing – this is of course a national issue, and the Council is active in looking to respond. Cabinet colleagues will be receiving a briefing on the changes brought in by the forthcoming Homelessness Reduction Act before the November Cabinet meeting.
18. 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. I am pleased that work is underway to shortly make the information in the Dashboard available to the public more widely.

## **Contact and Email**

19. Nicholas Clayton-Peck, Senior Policy, Performance and Scrutiny Officer,  
[Nicholas.clayton-peck@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:Nicholas.clayton-peck@ashford.gov.uk)

# Appendix 1



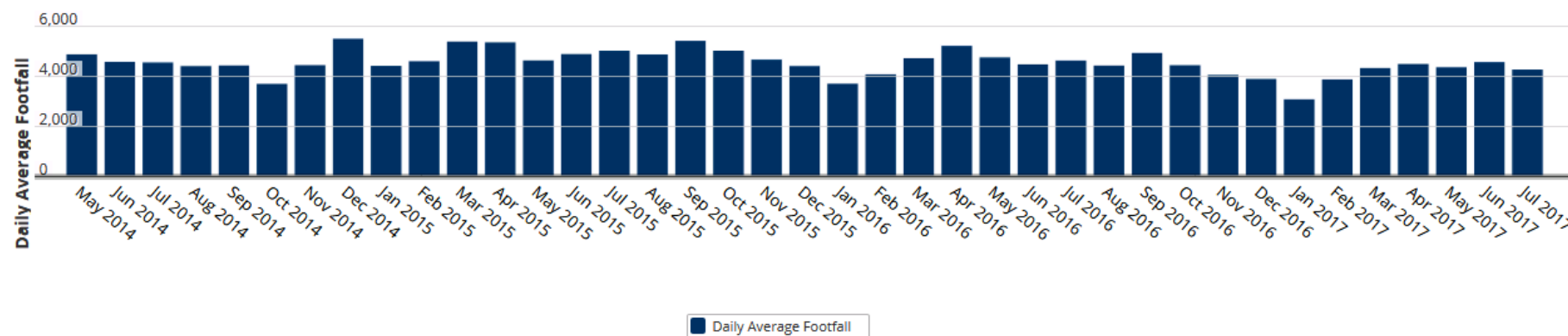
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## Ashford Borough Council Performance Dashboard

### Headline Report

### Enterprising Ashford

#### Town Centre Footfall



Footfall over the last two quarters has remained relatively steady, with the monthly average at around 4,000 per day.

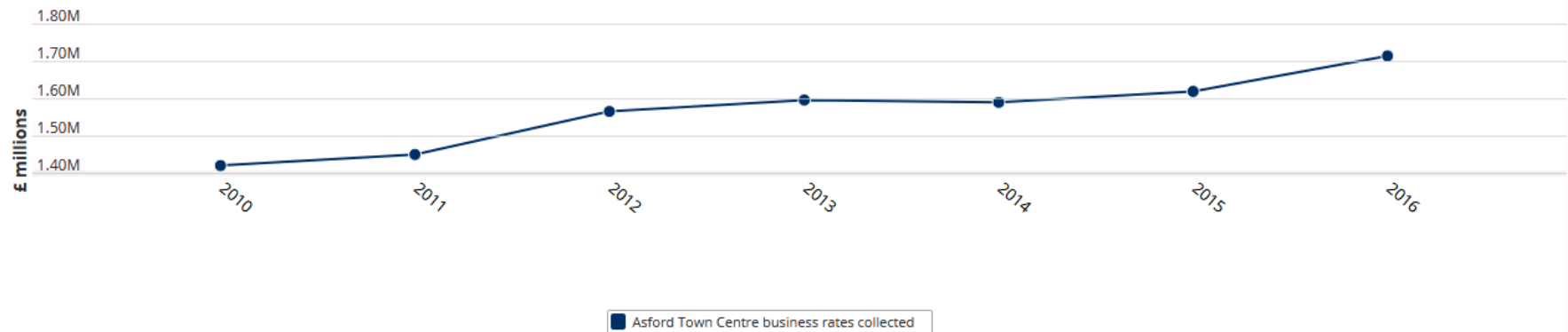
## Ashford Town Centre Vacancy Rates



The latest vacancy rate remain at around 10%, steady at 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.

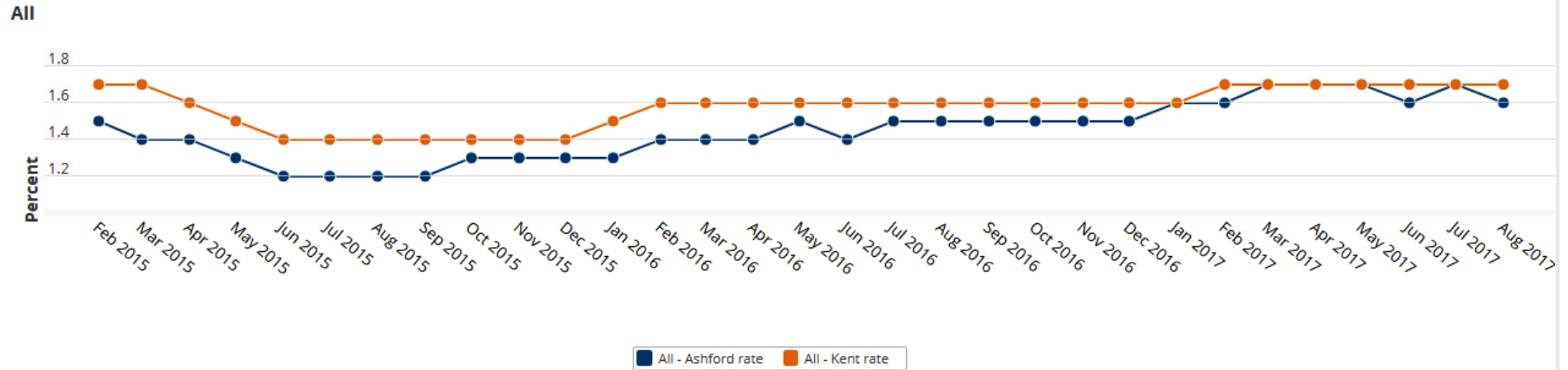
## Town Centre Development and Future Plans



In July construction work on Elwick Place, the two-hectare development zone in the heart of Ashford town centre, officially commenced. A new car park, situated opposite the Ashford College, also opened in September.

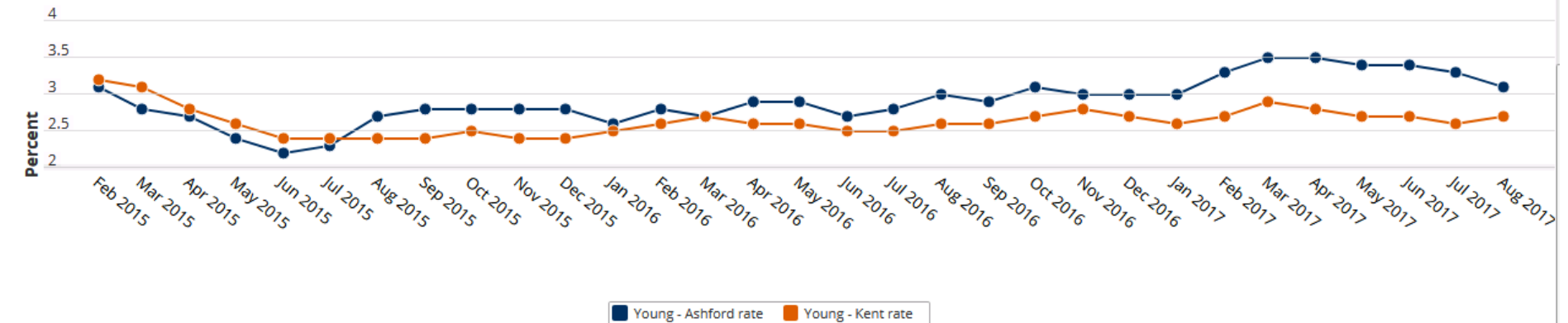


# Unemployment



Following a short period of increase, the total number claiming either Jobseekers Allowance or Universal Credit principally for the reason of being unemployed has remained steady or fallen slightly over the last few months, and now stands at just under **1,250**. This is around 10% more than at the same time last year, constituting around **1.6%** of Ashford's working age population.

## Young People



The number of young people (18-24) claiming unemployment benefit continues to fall, although it remains slightly higher than the Kent average. In September the new Ashford College opened its doors for the first intake of students. The facility will provide courses for more than 1,000 students, employing 100 staff.



# Ashford Borough Council Performance Dashboard

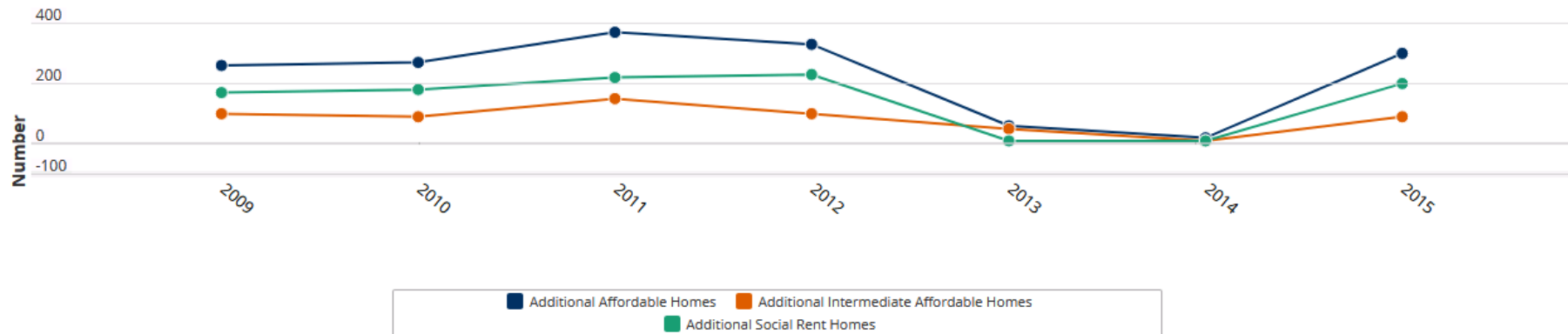
## Headline Report

## Living Ashford

### Affordable Housing

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

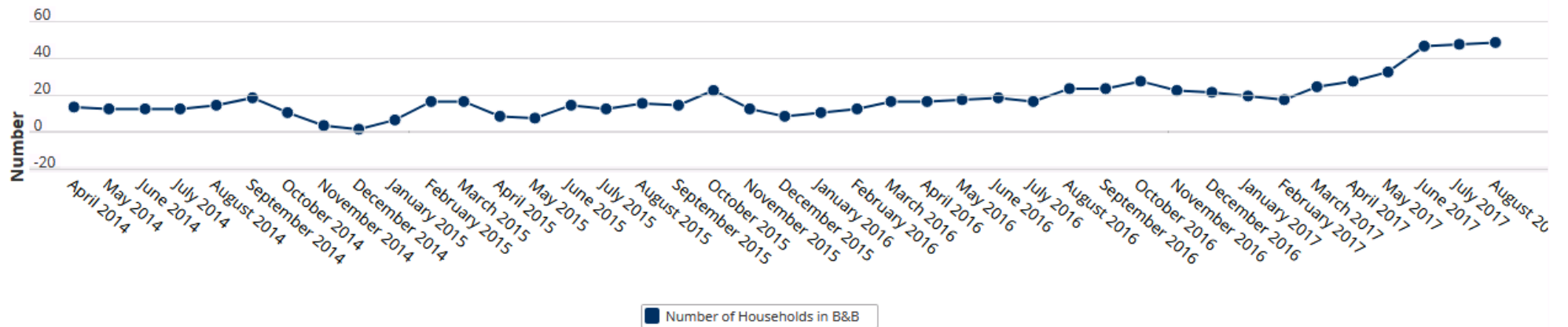
- Intermediate Affordable Homes, which includes intermediate rent and affordable home ownership; and
- Social Rent Homes, which include affordable rent homes



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 July Cabinet received an update on the HRA affordable housing delivery programme, and approved proposals for a new affordable housing programme over the next five years

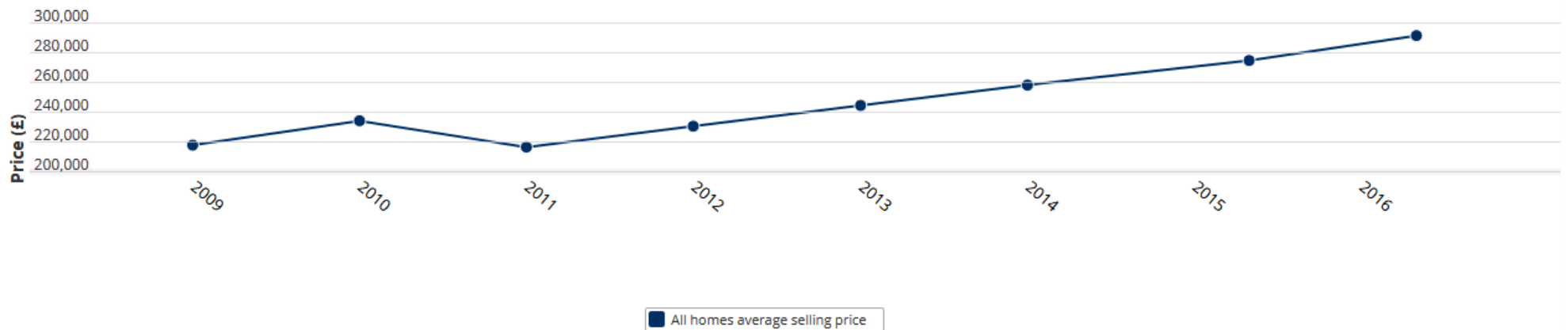
## Temporary Accommodation



By the end of the quarter the average number of households in Bed & Breakfast (B&B) had increased to around 45.

## House prices and the number of homes sold

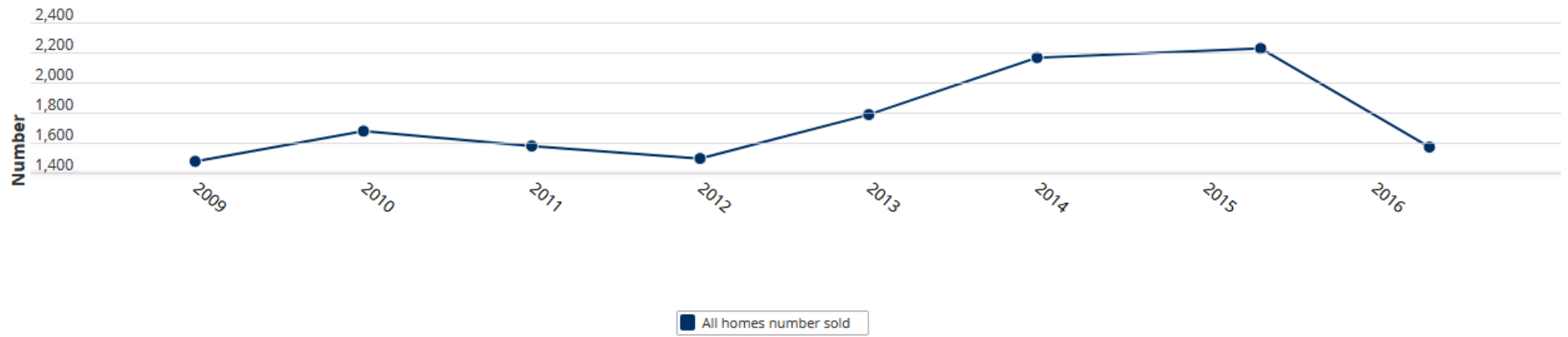
### House Price



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

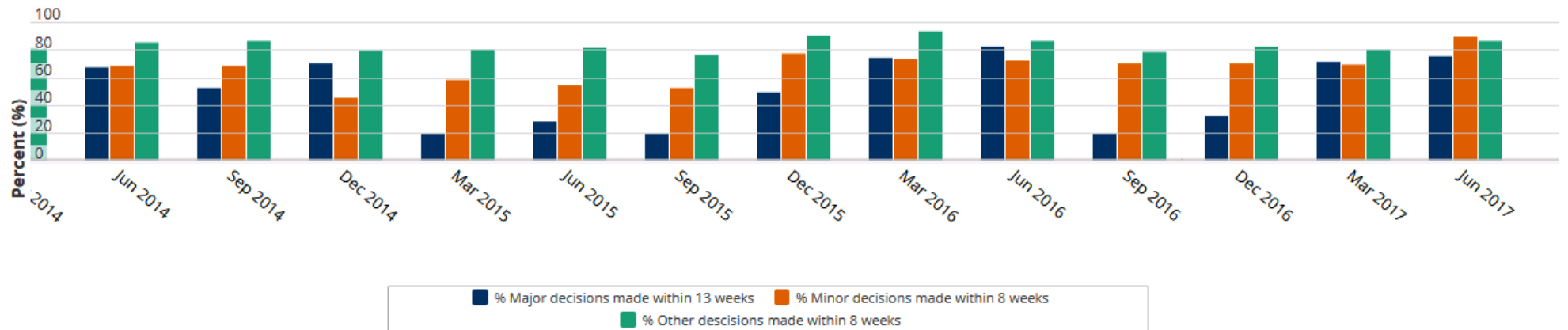


In July a new supported housing scheme for vulnerable young people opened at Belgic Court, The Limes – consisting of eight self-contained fully furnished one-bedroom flats and communal facilities

# 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.





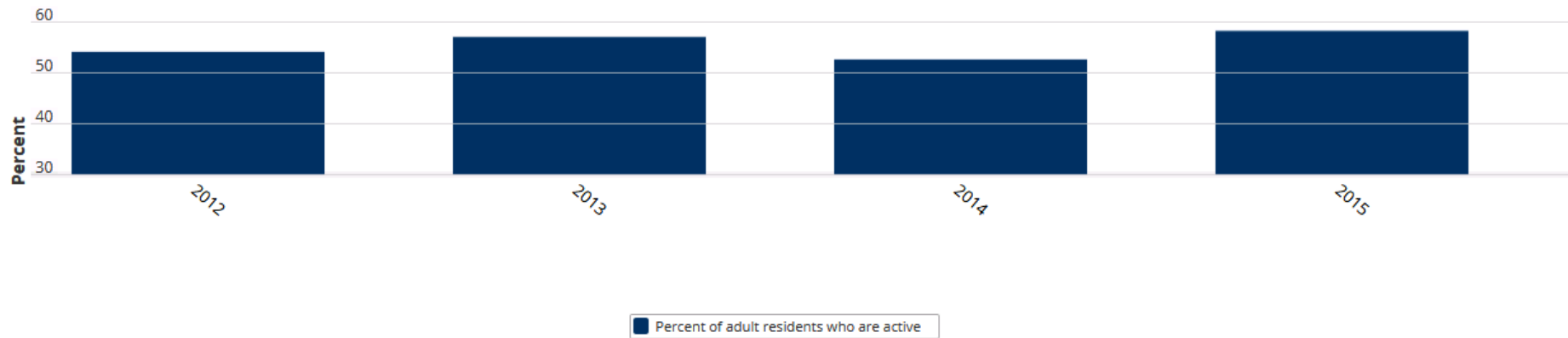
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## Ashford Borough Council Performance Dashboard

### Headline Report

## Active and Creative Ashford

### Healthy Lives and Active Living



### Sport and Health

In June the OneYou Health Shop has been given the go-ahead to continue for a further two years following a successful initial trial.

In July Cabinet approved plans to redevelop the existing play area near Victory Hall, Hamstreet

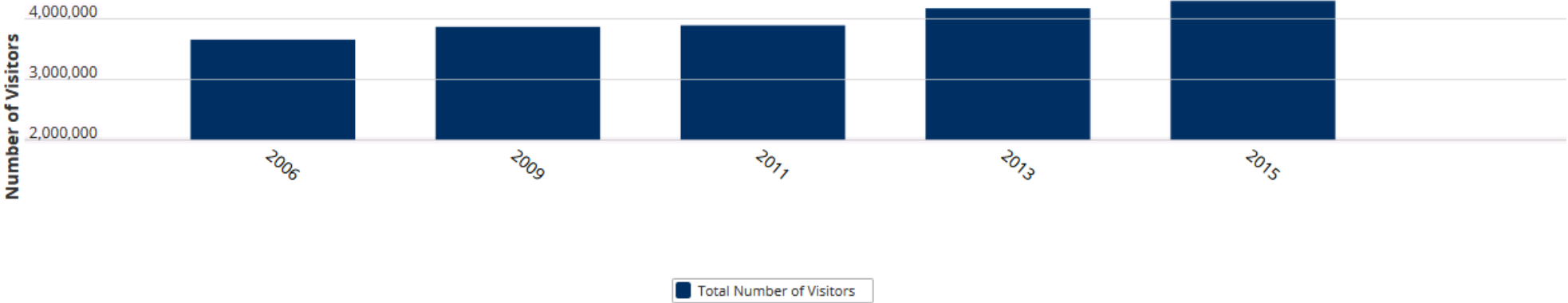
The Council has agreed to host the National Wellbeing Symposium at the Ashford International Hotel in February 2018

In September Conningbrook Lakes celebrated its 20th anniversary with a family fun day that attracted over 1,000 people to try canoeing, paddle boarding and other activities

## Supporting Culture and Creativity

### Tourism

In September a refreshed [www.visitashfordandtenterden.co.uk](http://www.visitashfordandtenterden.co.uk) website, which promotes the tourism offer of the borough, was launched during an event at Eastwell Manor.





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## Ashford Borough Council Performance Dashboard

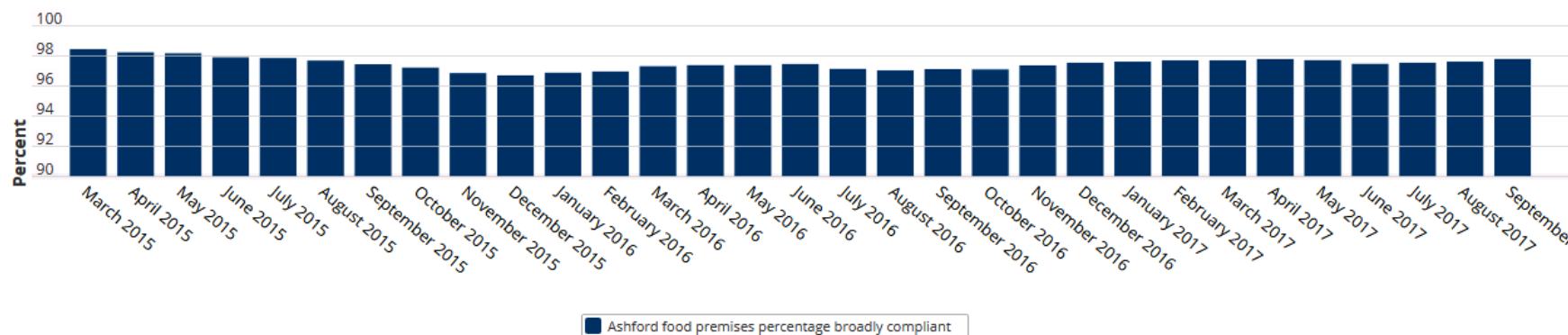
### Headline Report

## 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 July Cabinet approved the release of S106 funding for the relocation of Ashford Town Bowls Club to Kingsnorth, and the enlargement and enhancement of Memorial Gardens.

### Recycling

