

O&S 24 July 2012

Agenda item 5

Ashford Borough Council Business Plan Performance Report -
Quarter 1 2012/13 (to end May)

The attached report was presented to Cabinet on 12 July 2012 and O&S are invited to consider it.

Agenda Item No: 20
Report To: Cabinet
Date: 12 July 2012



ASHFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report Title: Ashford Borough Council Business Plan Performance Report – Quarter 1 2012/13 (to end May)

Report Author: Policy and Performance Officer

Summary: The report seeks to give Ashford's residents an overview of how the council is performing. It seeks to do this in a transparent and easily-accessible manner, giving a key performance 'snapshot'.

Key Decision: NO

Affected Wards: ALL

Recommendations: The Cabinet is asked to:-

Note performance against the Business Plan and frontline services for Quarter 1 to end of May.

Policy Overview: The quarterly performance report presents progress achieved against the council's strategic objectives – enshrined within the 'Ashford 2030' Vision and the council Five Year Business Plan. It is important that the council keeps residents and members informed of these activities to demonstrate transparency in how its' strategy – formed in consultation with residents – is implemented.

Financial Implications: None specifically arising from this report

Risk Assessment Not specifically applicable, but the report notes the progress with our review of strategic risks, and that no major business plan priority is highlighted with 'RED' status at this time.

Equalities Impact Assessment N/A

Other Material Implications: N/A

Background Papers: Quarter 4 Performance Report

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ASHFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL BUSINESS PLAN

Performance Report

Quarter 1 2012/13 (to end May)

Purpose of this report

The following report, the third of its kind, seeks to give Ashford's residents an overview of how the council is performing. It seeks to do this in a transparent and easily-accessible manner, giving a key performance 'snapshot' on three areas –

- Those key projects which the council has prioritised, following the 'Have Your Say' consultation with residents in 2010 - our Five Year Business Plan.
- Our principal front-line services. This data will be common to each quarterly performance report to allow comparison over time.
- Other changes that affect how the council delivers services, such as the local economic outlook and central government legislation.

Executive Summary

Most projects brought together through the 2010 consultation with residents (five year business plan) remain on course. These are subject to monthly review by the council's senior management team.

Although the wider outlook - both locally and nationally - remains difficult, the performance of most council services remains steady or slightly improving in the short to medium term, with no services currently particularly at risk. A good financial outcome is also demonstrated in the latest budget.

Significant pressures remain, though, in key external factors – principally the continued difficulties in the wider economic landscape. Although the historically-high levels of unemployment (as measured by numbers of Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) claimants) have not continued, numbers remain high and continue to exert pressure on some frontline council services. Continued pressures on some key workloads, especially with regard to reactive services such as homelessness, social housing and the provision of benefits are therefore expected.

1. Business Plan Progress highlights:

During the summer of 2010 the council consulted with its residents on what priorities it should focus on for the next 5 years. The Five Year Business Plan reorganised the council's priorities to three areas, providing a clear focus that will help to ensure that the council continues to provide residents with decent, cost-effective services.

2012/13 Priorities	Quarter 1 Performance	'Traffic Light' Status	Lead Officer / Lead Member(s)
RECYCLING AND THE ENVIRONMENT			
New Waste and Recycling Contract	Currently on course, with the recent emphasis being on procurement-phase discussions with interested contractors. The anticipated Contract Award date is now October 2012 and the project is still on target for a contract operational start on 1 st April 2013.	GREEN	Head of Environmental Services / Cllr Clarkson (Deputy Leader) + Cllr Blanford (Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services)
Solar Photovoltaic Project	The council took advantage of a shift in the government's deadline for reducing the Feed-In Tariff from December to March to install 180 Solar Panels on the Civic Centre roof. These panels currently generate around £25,000 per year.	FIRST PHASE COMPLETE	Strategic Housing and Property Manager / Cllr Clarkson (Deputy Leader) + Cllr Blanford (Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services)
Open Spaces and Public Realm Review	The review has had input in to a new public space SPD ¹ , which has been agreed by the Cabinet. This SPD now gives a presumption that the Council will not adopt new open space.	GREEN	Deputy Chief Executive
ECONOMIC GROWTH AND HOUSING			
Review of the Core Strategy²	Final version of National Planning Policy Framework approved by government April 2012. Consultation on potential housing and job numbers due to start in the next couple of months.	GREEN	Planning Policy Manager / Cllr Wood (Leader) + Cllr Clarkson (Deputy Leader)
Introduction of a Community Infrastructure Levy³	The Council is a pilot for CIL, and officers are currently developing the detail behind its' use.	GREEN	Principal Policy Planner / Cllr Clarkson (Deputy Leader)
Regeneration in Bockhanger and Broomfield Road	Public consultation, with 50 attendees, took place in May. Main risk is that if project does not proceed, the community centre will become vacant.	AMBER	Housing Project Manager / Cllr Clarkson (Deputy Leader) + Cllr Hicks (Portfolio Holder for Housing and Customer Services)

¹ Supplementary Planning Document - This is an important planning document that once approved sets down council policy for this area in the future

² The council's strategic land use policy.

³ Allows local authorities in England and Wales to raise funds from developers undertaking new building projects in their area. The money can be used to fund a wide range of infrastructure that is needed as a result of development.

2012/13 Priorities	Quarter 1 Performance	'Traffic Light' Status	Lead Officer / Lead Member(s)
Repton Park Community Facilities	A community consultation on these community facilities has recently finished.	GREEN	Deputy Head of Cultural Services
New park and wildlife project at Conningbrook Lake	DPD ⁴ Policy U22 (Conningbrook) has been submitted to the Secretary of State. Public examination expected in May / June 2012. The Council expects a planning application on this to be submitted in the near future.	GREEN	Head of Cultural Services / Cllr Wood (Leader) + Cllr Heyes (Portfolio Holder for Culture and Recreation)
Commercial Quarter – Dover Place area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outline Planning Application for the Phase II office development gained the approval of Planning Committee on 19th October 2011. • The impact of the local economy is still being felt, although public sector utilisation is currently under discussion. 	AMBER	Economic Development Manager
Local Authority New Build of social housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phase 3 - (Orion Way) practically complete. • Phase 4 - Number of sites currently in pre-Planning advice stage. Continued support from the Homes and Communities Agency is vital	AMBER	Housing Project Manager
ACTIVITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE			
New Youth Café at the Stour Centre, mobile youth facility and offer mapping	<i>No change to previous report.</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HANG 10 mobile youth outreach launched and up and running. • HOUSE Youth Cafe completed and opened on 11th November 	COMPLETE	Cultural Projects Manager / Cllr Howard (Portfolio Holder for Youth and Sport)
THE BEST SERVICES RESOURCES ALLOW			
Increasing the number of services available online	Work on updating the website is progressing well, with a new site set to go 'live' in the late summer.	GREEN	Head of Business Change and Technology / Cllr Taylor (Portfolio Holder for Core Services)
Arts Programming	The second season of St Mary's arts programme finishes in June, with a third season announced for the autumn.	COMPLETE	Arts Development Officer

⁴ Development Plan Document - outlines the key development goals of the project

2. SERVICE PERFORMANCE SUMMARY (TO END OF MAY UNLESS STATED)

The council operates a number of important public-facing services. The following indicators give an indication of how well these functions are performing, although a lot more information is available upon request.

Symbols against each indicate if this quarter's performance is better (↑), worse (↓) or generally equal to (↔) performance in the previous quarter.

Customer Service:

- ↔ Since the switch to the Ashford Gateway+ the number of enquiries handled by Customer Service Assistants has increased significantly, putting a pressure on current resources, made worse by the continued economic uncertainty all residents face. A review on these pressures and future resourcing is currently being carried out.

Housing:

- ↔ 26 affordable properties were built (to May). 245 were delivered last financial year, compared to 266 the year before.
- ↔ 99% of council tenant's rent was successfully collected.
- ↔ 100% of council housing currently has a valid gas safety certificate.
- ↔ Average of 19 households in B&B accommodation at the end of the month. This reflects the tough housing market effecting households in the borough.

Planning (all for Quarter 4):

- ↑ Received over 200 'other' (i.e. householder) development applications, and 82% were decided in under 8 weeks.
- ↑ Received around 80 minor development applications, such as from small businesses, with 70% decided within 8 weeks.
- ↑ Received around 500 Land Charge Searches, with 99% completed within 2 days.

Environment:

- ↔ 255,000 cars used council car parks in Quarter 4 2011/12. Income has dropped slightly accordingly due to this seasonal variation.
- ↔ Since the expansion of the Blue Box recycling scheme by 9,000 in spring 2011, two thirds of the borough (37,000 homes) now have a Blue Box.
- ↑ 95% of businesses are broadly compliant with hygiene inspections (to May).
- ↑ Since the launch in August 2011 of the 'Recycle for Ashford' a smartphone "app" to help residents with their waste collection, so far it has been downloaded by 1,100 people.

Culture and Community Support:

- ↑ Directly delivered 2,400 children's sports courses through Courtside or school outreach.
- ↔ To the end of 2011/12, the Single Grants Gateway has allocated £170,000 to local voluntary and community groups, leveraging other funding in at a ratio of 4:1. The council also rolled out an additional £2,500 Member Grant Fund to individual ward members, and £250 to support community activities to celebrate the Jubilee.

Revenues and Benefits:

- ↔ By the end of 2011/12, over 98% of Council Tax and Business Rates had been collected – a level equitable with the same time last year.
- ↔ The benefits caseload continues to rise – from 9,650 at the start of the financial year to 10,200 by the end of it, with an average of 300 new cases a month. This is the highest caseload level ever and reflects increasing levels of unemployment (section 3 of this report).

3. GOVERNANCE, RISK AND ACCOUNTABILITY

ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2011/12–

- This statement summarises the Council's approach to good governance, and draws conclusions about their effectiveness for the past financial year.
- The report was approved by the Audit Committee in June, concluding that governance arrangements are appropriate, effective and adaptive to change. The Audit Commission continue to regard financial governance as a strength.
- Good progress was made on risk management and partnership governance, both highlighted as weaknesses in last year's statement. One area (Data Protection) has been highlighted for review.

NEW HOMLESSNESS PREVENTION SCHEME–

- Approved by the June Cabinet, the scheme assists households who would not normally be able to access private rented housing due to lack of deposit or rent in advance.
- The scheme aims to secure good quality accommodation which will help in stabilising the costs of providing emergency bed and breakfast placements for homeless families.

JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS-

- The Council helped publicise all events in the borough (around 150), and directly supported a range of Jubilee and Olympic projects totalling £13,500.
- The council agreed to introduce a Diamond Jubilee Civic Award Scheme to recognise and celebrate the achievements and activities of those that have had a positive impact on the borough.
- As noted above, ward councillors were also allocated £250 to support local community Jubilee celebrations.

CURRENT GOVERNMENT CONSULTATIONS / COMPLIANCE REQUIREMENTS –

1. Community Infrastructure Levy – Consultation completed
2. National Planning Policy Framework – Introduced April 2012
3. Government's Housing Strategy – Consultation completed

The Council responded to these major consultations.

Local Economic Information:

- Average selling prices on the housing market have fallen by 2% in Ashford over the last year (to March). [source = <http://www.home.co.uk>]
- The number of residents unemployed – those claiming Job-Seekers allowance – stands at around 2,030 (to May), representing 2.9% of the working-age population. This is 100 lower than the highest rate recorded in February. A year ago the number was around 100 fewer. The greatest rise has been seen in young people, 16-24 years old.

Budget Monitoring:

- Against the overall budget for 2011/12 of £14 million a total underspend of over £200,000 was achieved. Reserves at 31st March 2012 totalled £7.2 million, with half earmarked for future purposes.

**If you would like any further performance information, please contact
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