

O&S 23 October 2012

Agenda item 4

Ashford Borough Council Business Plan Performance Report –
Quarter 2 2012/13 (to end September 2012)

The attached report was presented to Cabinet on 11 October 2012 and O&S are invited to consider it.

Agenda Item No: 14
Report To: Cabinet
Date: 11 October 2012



Report Title: **Ashford Borough Council Business Plan Performance Report – Quarter 2 2012/13 (to end of August)**

Report Author: Policy and Performance Officer

Summary:	The report seeks to give members and the Borough'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'.
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Key Decision: NO

Affected Wards: ALL

Recommendations: **The Cabinet is asked to note performance against the Business Plan and frontline services for Quarter 2 (to end of August).**

Policy Overview: The quarterly performance report presents progress achieved against the council's strategic objectives – enshrined within the Cabinet's 'Ashford 2030' framework and the Council's Five Year Business Plan. It is important that members are informed and that residents are updated of progress with our plans – formed in consultation with residents.

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: None

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ASHFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL BUSINESS PLAN

Performance Report

Quarter 2 2012/13 (to end August)

Purpose of this report

The following report, the third of its kind, seeks to give members and the Borough'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 it is showing signs of improvement, and the performance of most council services remains steady or slightly improving in the short to medium term, with no services currently particularly at risk.

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) fell in the last quarter, 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, whilst the Council is currently consulting on a new local council tax benefit scheme.

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 in 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 2 Performance	'Traffic Light' Status	Lead Officer / Lead Member(s)
RECYCLING AND THE ENVIRONMENT			
New Waste and Recycling Contract	The tendering process has been completed, with a decision on the awarding of the contract in October. Following contract completion the process would then move to the implementation stage. The project is still on target for a contract operational start on 1 st April 2013 and physical roll-out of new collection arrangements, once fully agreed, within the first three to six months.	GREEN	Head of Environmental Services / Cllr Clarkson (Deputy Leader) + Cllr Blanford (Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services)
Solar Photovoltaic Project	180 Solar Panels were installed on the Civic Centre roof in March. These panels currently generate around £25,000 per year, exceeding target by around 10 per cent. Other potential installations are being evaluated and proposals will be reported to cabinet in due course.	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	A new policy position for the adoption of public open spaces was approved earlier this year with a new SPD ¹ . This now gives a presumption that the Council will not generally adopt new open space. As an example, the Chilmington Green development application (currently under evaluation) includes proposals for local community management of public spaces and local facilities.	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. Initial consultation on local growth and numbers of homes needed is currently ongoing.	GREEN	Planning Policy Manager / Cllr Wood (Leader) + Cllr Clarkson (Deputy Leader)
Introduction of a Community Infrastructure Levy³	The Council is a pilot within Kent for CIL, and officers are currently developing the detail behind its use, with an initial focus on the overarching infrastructure needed, as guided by the <i>Ashford 2030</i> framework. The full CIL policy and detail will be approved in or by 2014.	GREEN	Principal Policy Planner / Cllr Clarkson (Deputy Leader)

¹ Supplementary Planning Document 2012 (Public Spaces and the Water Environment) – 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 2 Performance	'Traffic Light' Status	Lead Officer / Lead Member(s)
Regeneration in Bockhanger and Broomfield Road	Initial public consultation, with 50 attendees, took place in May, and the results considered by a steering group, with further consultations planned. Main risk is that if a regeneration scheme does not proceed, the existing community centre could become vacant.	AMBER	Housing Project Manager / Cllr Clarkson (Deputy Leader) + Cllr Hicks (Portfolio Holder for Housing and Customer Services)
Repton Park Community Facilities	A community consultation on these community facilities is ongoing.	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 was undertaken in July 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	Discussions with key stakeholders are ongoing and a report on progress is now expected to the Council's Cabinet in November.	AMBER	Economic Development Manager
Local Authority New Build of social housing	No change to previous report <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phase 3 - (Orion Way) practically complete. Phase 4 - Number of sites currently in pre-Planning advice stage. Continued financial support from the Homes and Communities Agency is vital for other phases.	AMBER	Housing Project Manager
ACTIVITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE			
New Youth Café at the Stour Centre, mobile youth facility and offer mapping	<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	<p>Impacts of the government's planned welfare reforms and other services and systems requirements are being investigated as part of the development of the new website. In frontline service terms there are issues associated with potential demands arising from the various welfare reform, particularly with short time to prepare fully for implementation.</p> <p>The council's new website is due to go live in December, this will provide enhanced capability for residents to access services, information and transact online.</p>	AMBER	Head of Business Change and Technology / Cllr Taylor (Portfolio Holder for Core Services)
Arts Programming	The second season of the St Mary's arts programme finished in June, with a third season starting this autumn. Outcomes from the past two seasons were hugely encouraging.	COMPLETE	Arts Development Officer

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

2. SERVICE PERFORMANCE SUMMARY (TO END OF AUGUST 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 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, exacerbated by the continued economic uncertainty all residents face. A review of these pressures and future staff resourcing is being carried out, with some changes about to be made to add to the staff capacity, this should reduce wait times and further improve customer service.

Housing:

- ↔ 44 affordable properties were built (to June). 245 were delivered last financial year, compared to 266 the year before.
- ↔ 99% of council tenants' rent was successfully collected.
- ↔ 99.9% of council housing currently has a valid gas safety certificate.
- ↓ An average of 24 households in B&B accommodation at the end of the quarter. This is an increase on the previous quarter, reflecting the tough economic climate.

Planning (all for Quarter 4 2011/2012):

- ↑ Received around 230 'other' (i.e. householder) development applications, and 81% were decided in under 8 weeks.
- ↔ Received around 85 minor development applications, such as from small businesses, with 69% decided within 8 weeks.

Environment:

- ↑ 471,000 vehicles used council car parks in the period April – end of August 2012.
- ↑ 96% of businesses are broadly compliant with hygiene inspections.
- ↑ Since the launch in August 2011 of the 'Recycle for Ashford' - a smartphone "app" to help residents with their waste collection - has been downloaded by 1200 people to date

Culture and Community Support:

- ↓ Directly delivered 1,700 children's sports courses through Courtside or school outreach. Due to the summer holidays there is a natural downturn in the latter.
- ↔ 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 September, over 49% 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 10,200 at the start of the financial year to 10,275 6-months through it, with an average of 300 new cases a month. This is the highest caseload level ever and reflects increasing levels of unemployment, however

the increase is more gradual than for the same period last year (it increased by 225 the first 6-months of the last financial year).

3. GOVERNANCE, RISK AND ACCOUNTABILITY

STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER–

- The Council is a multi-faceted organisation responsible for many £ millions of public expenditure. Its actions have a major impact on the community it is responsible for, so it is very important that the key risks to the Council are identified and managed properly.
- An updated register setting out the key risks to the Council - from financial to resource or staffing - was approved by the Audit Committee earlier this year, with mitigation plans approved by the committee in September.
- Updated risk profiles, which include further details and planned actions to lessen these risks, were submitted in September.

TENANCY STRATEGY–

- In line with the Localism Act, the Council has developed a new Tenancy Strategy, following common principles that were developed at a Kent working group.
- The strategy allows the Council and other social housing providers in the borough to be flexible - to offer new tenants either fixed term or lifetime tenancies as appropriate.

OLYMPIC AND JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS-

- The Olympic Flame arrived in the borough on day 61 and 62 of the Torch Relay, and it is estimated that 28,000 people (including 8,000 schoolchildren) lined the route.
- Another record crowd attendance of 13,000 gathered at this year's Diamond Jubilee Create Music Festival.

COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT -

- During August and September the Council consulted on a new scheme for council tax benefit, to come into force from April 2013 when the current government system ends.
- Details of the proposed scheme can be found at www.ashford.gov.uk/counciltaxsupport

Local Economic Information:

- Average selling prices on the housing market have increased by 5% in Ashford over the last year (to June). [source = <http://www.home.co.uk>]
- The number of residents unemployed – those claiming Job-Seekers allowance – stands at around 1,940 (to August), representing 2.7% of the working-age population. This is 100 lower than in the previous quarter. A year ago the number was around 40 fewer.

Budget Monitoring:

- Overall during quarter one there has been a slight pressure on budgets, mainly due to an expected change to planning fee income as the government has decided not to localise the setting of planning fee levels at this time.

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