

Agenda Item No: 5



ASHFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report To: Overview and Scrutiny
Date: 26 March 2013
Report Title: Updated Ashford Borough Council Business Plan
Performance Report – Quarter 3 2012/13
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'. This report was received by the Cabinet on 14th February. Unfortunately, due to scheduling, this meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is the first which the report was able to come to.

In order to keep Members properly informed of the current state of performance, Officers have gathered updated performance information where available. Updated information is presented (in italics) alongside the original information, **with bold to indicate amended pieces of data.**

Key Decision: NO
Affected Wards: ALL
Recommendations: **The Cabinet noted performance against the Business Plan and frontline services for Quarter 3**

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

Portfolio Holder's Comments This report is a key element in our approach to transparency in highlighting the Council's overall performance. I believe it shows not just the considerable number of projects being undertaken, but also the effective way the majority are progressing

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ASHFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL BUSINESS PLAN

Performance Report

Quarter 3 2012/13

Purpose of this report

The following report, the fourth 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

The council is over half way through its five year business plan, brought together through consultation in 2010 with residents. Good progress continues to be made in delivering the priorities identified. 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, such as steadying house prices and a flattening unemployment picture. The performance of most council services remains strong in the short to medium term, with no services currently particularly at risk.

Significant pressures remain on some frontline council services. The relatively high numbers of families currently declaring as homeless reflects an uncertain local economic situation, with large-scale changes such as welfare reform and council tax support due from April 2013. Continued pressures on some key workloads, such as 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 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 3 Performance	'Traffic Light' Status	Lead Officer / Lead Member(s)
RECYCLING AND THE ENVIRONMENT			
New Recycling Contract	Tendering was successfully completed and a decision made to award the contract. Discussions continue on organising implementation with the new contract starting on 1 st April 2013. The new service will be rolled out by the end of July 2013.	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 2012. While the panels are projected to generate around £25,000 per year, a full annual report will be included in the end of year performance report. 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 in 2012 with a new SPD ¹ . Work is focussing on the proposed Chilmington development project and associated open space issues.	GREEN	Deputy Chief Executive
ECONOMIC GROWTH AND HOUSING			
Review of the Core Strategy²	Initial consultation on local growth and numbers of homes needed continues.	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. Initial focus will be on the overarching infrastructure needed, as guided by the <i>Ashford 2030</i> framework. While the scope of this has been agreed, officers are currently developing the detail behind its use. The full CIL policy and detail will be approved in or by 2014.	GREEN	Principal Policy Planner / Cllr Clarkson (Deputy Leader)
Regeneration in Bockhanger and Broomfield Road	The lease is currently up for review. A second consultation is set for early 2013 with the local community to agree a way forward.	AMBER	Housing Project Manager / Cllr Clarkson (Deputy Leader) + Cllr Hicks (Portfolio Holder for Housing and Customer Services)

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 3 Performance	'Traffic Light' Status	Lead Officer / Lead Member(s)
Repton Park Community Facilities	A community consultation on these community facilities is complete, a project brief is in place and the Cabinet has approved the allocation of s106 ⁴ funding to deliver the project.	GREEN	Deputy Head of Cultural Services
New park and wildlife project at Conningbrook Lake	DPD ⁵ Policy U22 (Conningbrook) has been submitted to the Secretary of State. Planning application for the park submitted November 2012, alongside a Park Early access application.	GREEN	Head of Cultural Services / Cllr Wood (Leader) + Cllr Heyes (Portfolio Holder for Culture and Recreation)
Commercial Quarter – Dover Place area	A context report was presented to the council's Cabinet in November showing some progress already, and work continues with the Homes and Communities Agency on the site.	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 with consent and a number in the planning process. Continued financial support from the Homes and Communities Agency is vital for other phases and discussions are ongoing.	AMBER	Housing Project Manager
ACTIVITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE			
New Youth Café at the Stour Centre, mobile youth facility and offer mapping	HANG 10 mobile youth outreach and HOUSE Youth Cafe completed and up and running. The membership at Ashford HOUSE consists of around 250 young people who access the centre, with a core group of 80 who are regular weekly attendees. Total Attendances stood at around 4,000 after the first year of operation.	COMPLETE	Cultural Projects Manager / Cllr Howard (Portfolio Holder for Youth and Sport)
THE BEST SERVICES RESOURCES ALLOW			
Increasing the number of services available online	The council's new website went live in December, providing enhanced capability for residents to access services, information and transactions online. A review of this new functionality will be carried out in due course.	AMBER	Head of Business Change and Technology / Cllr Taylor (Portfolio Holder for Core Services)
Arts Programming	The third season of the St Mary's arts programme began in the autumn. Outcomes from the past two seasons were hugely encouraging.	COMPLETE	Arts Development Officer

⁴ Section 106 agreements are contributions by developers towards community facilities

⁵ Development Plan Document - outlines the key development goals of the project

2. SERVICE PERFORMANCE SUMMARY

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:

- ↔ With changes to welfare reform and council tax, alongside the Council's new waste and recycling scheme, 2013 is anticipated to bring high volumes of work for front-line staff. To help staff focus on the most complex cases, from the start of 2013 a target of 10% will be set for customers using 'self-help'. This is using automated machines to answer queries. Currently the rate is 5% but is expected to rise throughout the year.

Housing:

- ↓ 56 affordable properties were built (to November). 245 were delivered last financial year, compared to 266 the year before.
67 affordable properties were built (to February). 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.
99.9% of council housing currently (to February) has a valid safety certificate.
- ↓ An average of 28 households in B&B accommodation at the end of the quarter. This is an increase of four on the previous quarter, reflecting the tough economic climate.
An average of 26 households in B&B accommodation (over the last 3 months to end of February). This is an increase of two on the previous quarter, reflecting the tough economic climate.

Planning:

- ↔ Received around 220 'other' (i.e. householder) development applications, and around 80% were decided in under 8 weeks.
Received around 200 'other' (i.e. householder) development applications (over the last 3 months to end of February), and around 80% were decided in under 8 weeks.
- ↔ Received around 103 'minor' development applications, such as from small businesses, with 68% decided within 8 weeks.
Received around 75 'minor' development applications, such as from small businesses, (over the last 3 months to end of February), and around 70% were decided in under 8 weeks.

Environment:

- ↔ 280,000 vehicles used council car parks.
270,000 vehicles used council car parks over the last 3 months to end of February.
- ↑ 97% 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 1,650 people to date

Culture and Community Support:

- ↑ Directly delivered 2,100 children's sports courses through Courtside or school outreach. This is a good figure bearing in mind the school Christmas holiday period.

- ⇔ Since the start of 2012/13, the Single Grants Gateway has allocated £42,500 to local voluntary and community groups, leveraging other funding in at a ratio of 4:1.

Revenues and Benefits:

- ⇔ By the end of December, 87 and 88% of Council Tax and Business Rates respectively 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 10,375 nine months through it, with an average of 200 new cases a month. This continued high caseload reflects higher levels of unemployment, however the increase continues to be more gradual than for the same period last year (it increased by 325 the first nine months of the last financial year).

*The benefits caseload continues to rise – from 10,200 at the start of the financial year to **10,450 eleven** months through it, with an average of 250 new cases a month (**although this average is currently skewed by the large number of new cases always experienced at the start of the new calendar year**). This continued high caseload reflects higher levels of unemployment; however the increase continues to be more gradual than for the same period last year (it increased by **500** the first eleven 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.
- Risk, where managed correctly, is not necessarily undesirable. Riskier models of delivery can often be the most innovative and effective.
- Following approval for an updated register and mitigation plans by the Audit Committee in September, it was adopted by the Council in December.

DRAFT BUDGET 2013-14–

- In December the Cabinet approved the draft budget for the next financial year. At that time no date had been set for the announcement of the local government finance settlement, which sets the level of central government funding for councils. Accordingly, the draft budget uses estimate figures for grant funding which are likely to change.

NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT-

- In January the Council agreed to the first designated neighbourhood area in the Ashford borough (at Wye). This allows for future development of a Neighbourhood Plan and Neighbourhood Development Orders.

EXTERNAL AUDITOR ANNUAL AUDIT LETTER 2011-12-

- Auditors Grant Thornton informed the Audit Committee in December that there were no matters to be highlighted regarding the efficiency and effectiveness of the council's accounts.

COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT CONSULTATION -

- During August and September the council consulted on a new scheme for council tax benefit, which was agreed by the Cabinet in December. The council also received accreditation from the Consultation Institute for its work on this consultation.

Local Economic Information:

- Average selling prices on the housing market have increased by 11% in Ashford over the last twelve months (to October). [source = <http://www.home.co.uk>]
- The number of residents unemployed – those claiming Job-Seekers allowance – stands at around 1,901, representing 2.6% of the working-age population. This is 50 lower than in the previous quarter. A year ago the number was around 30 more.
The number of residents unemployed – those claiming Job-Seekers Allowance – stands at 1,932 (to the end of January), representing 2.6% of the working-age population. This is around 15 lower than in the previous quarter. A year ago the number was around 75 more.
- Occupation of completed housing rose by 800, with around a third being in affordable properties. This was significantly more than expected; showing that developers remain confident in Ashford, and has positive implications for future New Homes Bonus funding.

Budget Monitoring:

There is currently a slight pressure (around £50,000) in the Council's budget, but this reflects the local economic and unemployment situation. This gap is being managed down and a balanced budget is expected by the end of the year. Council reserves remain healthy.

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