



Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Notice of a Meeting, to be held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane,
Ashford, Kent TN23 1PL on Tuesday, 21st May 2013 at 7.00 pm.

The Proposed Members of this Committee are:-

Cllr Aaby (Chairman);
Cllr Chilton (Vice-Chairman);
Cllrs. Apps, Bartlett, Bennett, Burgess, Davison, Feacey, Hodgkinson, Mrs Hutchinson,
Link, Miss Martin, Mrs Martin, Mortimer, Smith, Yeo.

Agenda

- | | Page
Nos. |
|---|----------------------|
| 1. Apologies/Substitutes – To receive Notification of Substitutes in accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2(iii) | |
| 2. Declarations of Interest:- To declare any interests which fall under the following categories, as explained on the attached document: | 1 |
| a) Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI) | |
| b) Other Significant Interests (OSI) | |
| c) Voluntary Announcements of Other Interests | |
| See Agenda Item 2 for further details | |
| 3. Minutes – To approve the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 23 rd April 2013 | |

Part I – Matters Referred to the Committee in Relation to Call-In of a Decision made by the Cabinet

None for this Meeting

Part II – Responses of the Cabinet to Reports of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

None for this Meeting

Part III – Ordinary Decision Items

- | | |
|--|--------|
| 4. Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2012/13 | 3 - 10 |
|--|--------|

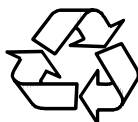


Part IV – Information/Monitoring Items

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------------------|-------|
| 5. | ABC Business Plan Q4 Report | 11-20 |
| 6. | Future Reviews and Report Tracker | 21-25 |

HC/JV/VS
10th May 2013

Queries concerning this agenda? Please contact Hayley Curd:
Telephone: 01233 330565 Email: hayley.curd@ashford.gov.uk
Agendas, Reports and Minutes are available on: www.ashford.gov.uk/committees



Declarations of Interest (see also “Advice to Members” below)

- (a) **Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI)** under the Localism Act 2011, relating to items on this agenda. The nature as well as the existence of any such interest must be declared, and the agenda item(s) to which it relates must be stated.

A Member who declares a DPI in relation to any item will need to leave the meeting for that item (unless a relevant Dispensation has been granted).

- (b) **Other Significant Interests (OSI)** under the Kent Code of Conduct as adopted by the Council on 19 July 2012, relating to items on this agenda. The nature as well as the existence of any such interest must be declared, and the agenda item(s) to which it relates must be stated.

A Member who declares an OSI in relation to any item will need to leave the meeting before the debate and vote on that item (unless a relevant Dispensation has been granted). However, prior to leaving, the Member may address the Committee in the same way that a member of the public may do so.

- (c) **Voluntary Announcements of Other Interests** not required to be disclosed under (a) and (b), i.e. announcements made for transparency reasons alone, such as:

- Membership of outside bodies that have made representations on agenda items, or
- Where a Member knows a person involved, but does not have a close association with that person, or
- Where an item would affect the well-being of a Member, relative, close associate, employer, etc. but not his/her financial position.

[Note: an effect on the financial position of a Member, relative, close associate, employer, etc; OR an application made by a Member, relative, close associate, employer, etc, would both probably constitute either an OSI or in some cases a DPI].

Advice to Members on Declarations of Interest:

- (a) Government Guidance on DPI is available in DCLG’s Guide for Councillors, at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/5962/2193362.pdf plus the link sent out to Members at part of the Weekly Update email on the 3rd May 2013.
- (b) The Kent Code of Conduct was adopted by the Full Council on 19 July 2012, and a copy can be found in the Constitution at <http://www.ashford.gov.uk/part-5---codes-and-protocols>
- (c) If any Councillor has any doubt about the existence or nature of any DPI or OSI which he/she may have in any item on this agenda, he/she should seek advice from the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer or from other Solicitors in Legal and Democratic Services as early as possible, and in advance of the Meeting.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **23rd April 2013**.

Present:

Cllr. Adby (Chairman);
Cllr. Chilton (Vice Chairman);

Cllrs. Apps, Bennett, Davison, Feacey, Hodgkinson, Mrs Hutchinson, Link, Mrs Martin, Mortimer, Smith.

Apology:

Cllr. Yeo.

Also Present:

Cllrs. Mrs Blanford, Claughton, Galpin

Mr Huttson Lo – Director – Stour Valley Arts

Community Safety Service Manager, Arts and Cultural Industries Manager, Community Safety Office Co-ordinator, Senior Scrutiny Officer, Member Services & Scrutiny Support Officer.

414 Declarations of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Hodgkinson	Declared an "Other Interest" as she had taken part in street and store collections for the Royal British Legion Ashford Branch, the RNLI and the RSPB. In addition she was the Secretary of the RNIB Ashford Fundraising Group.	417
Mortimer	Declared an "Other Interest" as he was a Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinator	418

415 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 26th March 2013 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

416 Stour Valley Arts – Investing in Ashford – A 12-Month Review and Presentation to O&S Committee

The Arts and Cultural Industries Manager introduced the item and gave an overview to the working relationship and 3-year Service Level Agreement that Ashford Borough Council had with Stour Valley Arts (SVA). SVA was a significantly important arts organisation based in both Ashford Town Centre and Kings Wood, Challock and its aim was to increase awareness and enjoyment of contemporary art while encouraging greater interest in the environment through arts commissions, school education projects, public exhibitions, publications and international collaborations.

Ashford Borough Council, together with the Arts Council England (ACE) and Kent County Council (KCC) had, a year ago, responded constructively and quickly to support SVA with their Recovery and Stabilisation Strategy to ensure that they continued to deliver top quality arts development in the Borough whilst improving their administration and operational arrangements.

In the past it had been a concern of Members that SVA's focus was not sufficiently based on Ashford priorities and were not adequately investing in Ashford. Since the Council and others had committed to supporting SVA, the organisation had made significant strides to meet these expectations.

Mr Hutton Lo – Director of Stour Valley Arts, then addressed the Committee and explained that since he had joined SVA as Director, he had refocused their Business and Funding Strategy, and through increased partnership working - was able to better involve the public and other locally based stakeholders in their work within the natural environment. There was much evidence that they were working towards meeting the Council's expectations and these had been listed in the report.

Stour Valley Arts had been present in Kings Wood for 20 years, where 8 or 9 art pieces remained intact within the forest. Their most well known piece was 'Score For A Hole In The Ground' <http://www.scoreforaholeintheground.org> which was due for refurbishment and repair.

SVA's vision was to make Kings Wood become Ashford's equivalent of The Tate Modern's 'Turbine Hall', commissioning one major piece (like Score For A Hole In The Ground) a year and to work in partnership with other organisations inside and outside of Ashford to achieve this. They were also seeking possible investment to increase public facilities in the forest such as a Visitor Centre, Café and toilets.

In terms of bringing quality artistic work closer to the people of Ashford, and supporting the growth of the local cultural industries - SVA had set up a Town Centre Gallery at Elwick House, which was intended to become a creative hub and local resource to host regular exhibitions, local artist meetings and provide hot desking for creative organisations. It would also enable Ashford and Kings Wood to be better connected.

Continued investment for new work and maintenance of the existing, was a key priority for SVA and whilst the investment from ABC, KCC and Arts Council England was crucial, further funding from a wider field would be sought to enable changes within SVA and assist with its plan to become the UK's leading Arts and Environmental Organisation. SVA was now about Ashford but with international ambitions.

During the discussion the following points were raised.

- The work of the SVA incorporated all age ranges, including schools and the elderly, with regular forests walks being popular. Work with young carers and children at risk was particularly important.
- There was some vandalism, but this was accepted as part of art in the public domain. What was a priority was to educate people and deepen the engagement of the community with the art around them. The work itself was extremely considerate of the environment. Kings Wood was a man made wood and as such needed maintaining and this was taken into account when planning work pieces.
- Funding opportunities from Europe were being explored and a Member's suggestion to approach McArthur Glen for partnership work with their proposed investment in Ashford would be taken away for further consideration. Mr Lo was now sitting on the Council's Public Art Working Group so their involvement with developments and initiatives would happen more easily. Mr Lo detailed their small, part time staffing structure and the current funding that the SVA were receiving.
- SVA confirmed they were fully part of the East Kent City of Culture 2017 bid, as one of the founding organisations. A Member encouraged other Members to support the bid through Facebook, Twitter and other social mediums.
- One Member raised the issue of the lack of transport links from the Town to the forest, citing the need for this to be improved and because of this, how important it was to have an active gallery space in the Town Centre.
- Overall Members were very pleased and impressed with the work of SVA and content that the agreement in place with ABC was effective.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be received and noted.

417 Face-to-Face Street Collections in Ashford Town Centre

The Community Safety Service Manager introduced the item and explained that this formed part of his remit in his previous role as Licensing Manager before taking up his current role as Community Safety Service Manager. He explained the legislation

and what the Council was able to regulate and what was outside its remit. Complaints had been received and as such the Council wished to find some solution.

It needed to be born in mind that these types of collections raised some £45 million nationally for some very worthwhile charities but that the way that these collections were carried out could appear pressurising and at worse, threatening, so a balance needed to be found. The proposed agreement was set out on page 7 of the agenda and the code of conduct that would be adhered to was also described. The main control would be through the booking process detailed within the report.

During the discussion Members raised the following points:

- The days chosen were considered to be the best based on other collecting regulations. Members were advised that there were exceptions such as the poppy appeal where it was deemed acceptable for them to collect outside of this agreement.
- The agreement had been signed so that it could be put into place quickly, if Members had concerns or determined the agreement to be flawed; they were assured that it could be withdrawn if this was necessary. So far though, the evidence suggested it was being effective and finding the necessary balance, but Members would be kept informed.
- The most obvious way to monitor the success of the agreement was to monitor the level of complaints still received and the Licensing Team would be responsible for this. The agreement had been promoted and had featured in the press.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

418 Ashford Community Safety Partnership: an update on the new arrangements for delivering the Community Safety Plan in the Borough.

The Community Safety Service Manager introduced the item and explained that the O&S Committee was responsible for Crime and Disorder under the Police Justice Act 2006. Annually the Committee would review various aspects of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP). Since this was reviewed last year there had been several changes to the structure of the Community Safety Unit and changes in the leadership of the CSP. There had also been a new strategic assessment and the production of the tactical delivery plan for 2013/14. Moving forward, it was hoped that reporting to Members would allow thought to be put to what could be done in the future to achieve more outcomes and Members were assured that the report would be better presented than it had been previously.

In addition the report detailed that there was to be a project to better understand the performance of the Community Safety Unit and the Ashford Monitoring Centre to identify how they could be better supported and optimised as part of the new structure. The Community Safety Service Manager was able to illustrate how these two units, working together, had had a positive input on the quality of life of residents within the Borough. The approach was going to be more integrative and there were some excellent teams involved and very much on board.

During the discussion the following points were raised:-

- The CSP had been very successful in the past but with these improvements it was hoped that more would be achieved with the same budgets. Members were given some examples of the work carried out by the partners and the successful achievements within the Borough.
- Members discussed various areas within the Borough where they had concerns regarding community safety. There was also some discussion regarding the crime levels and how the statistics could be misinterpreted. An area may be high in some crime areas but not all.
- Members showed concern for the increase in the levels of domestic abuse and substance misuse and the Community Safety Service Manager explained that one of the problems in the past had been the lack of a lead agency in tackling domestic abuse and substance misuse and in relation to domestic abuse, no national agency having responsibility to lead on tackling the issues. Encouragingly the Ashford Domestic Abuse Forum had agreed to take the lead agency role in delivering the CSP's domestic abuse tactical delivery plan. Similarly a combination of Turning Point, KCA and KDATT were taking lead roles in delivering the substance misuse plan. It was also hoped that the troubled families' initiative would make an impact in this area and the Community Safety Manager gave Members a brief outline as to what this initiative entailed.
- Funding continued to be a concern with the funding received likely to reduce in the coming years. Members were assured that as many funding avenues as possible would be explored.
- Members were keen to see Street Pastors have a greater involvement. It was agreed that they were an invaluable support, but as what they achieved could not be formally evidenced, it was unlikely that they would be awarded funds. Members were assured that the CSP was attempting to reach out to as many organisations as possible, without over stretching itself.
- The Community Safety Service Manager accepted that there was work to be done with regard to the relationship with, and support for, neighbourhood watch teams. He agreed to take this from the meeting.
- Members were also informed about the Safety In Action Fortnight, which saw all the relevant CSP partners educating young people through 9 minute sessions on matters of safety. Ashford was the only CSP to do this.

To conclude the Community Safety Service Manager explained that there were plans to increase the powers of the Borough's Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs). He detailed what the PCSOs could currently do, and explained that Kent Police were considering regulations to give them new powers including; being able to issue fines for school truancy, throwing fireworks and drinking in public; fine those caught spraying graffiti and fly posting; break up groups of youngsters and take those under 16 home; and search youngsters for alcohol and tobacco.

Resolved:

That the annual update from the Community Safety Partnership be noted.

419 Future Reviews and Report Tracker

The Senior Scrutiny Officer introduced the report.

Resolved:

That the Future Reviews and Report Tracker be noted.

Agenda Item No: 4
Report To: Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date: 21 May 2013
Report Title: Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report
Report Author: Senior Scrutiny Officer



Summary:	The Council's constitution requires the O&S Committee to make an annual report to full council. This is the report for the Municipal Year May 2012 – April 2013.
-----------------	--

Key Decision: No

Affected Wards: None

Recommendations: **The Committee is asked to note this report and to agree for it to be presented to Full Council later this year.**

Policy Overview: None

Financial Implications: None

Risk Assessment No

Background Papers: O&S Committee Agendas and Minutes from May 2012 – April 2013

Contacts: julia.vink@ashford.gov.uk 01233 330491

Report Title: Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report

Purpose of the Report

1. The Council's constitution requires the O&S Committee to make an annual report to full Council on the work they have undertaken during the year.
2. This report will give an overview of the work the O&S Committee and its Task Groups have been involved in during 2012/13.

Background

3. Under Section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has power to make reports and/or recommendations either to the Cabinet or to the Authority on any aspect of Council business. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee also has the power to make reports and/or recommendations about other matters which affect the authority's area or its population.
4. The O&S Committee has 19 members, representing all political groups on the council, who work together to ensure that the Council and its Services are acting effectively and efficiently. Reviews may be undertaken by the whole Committee or a Task Group.

Issues Scrutinised by the Committee since May 2013

5. Since May 2012 items considered by the main O&S Committee have included: -
 - ABC Business Plan quarterly performance report
 - Shared Space 3 year post implementation report
 - Post 2010 Mayoralty review – update on effect of changes
 - Apprenticeships
 - Listed Buildings
 - Presentation from the Ashford Clinical Commissioning Group on Health Care provision in Ashford Borough
 - Stour Centre – Biomass/CHP review
 - Briefing on Welfare reform
 - Community safety partnership update
 - Code of conduct for charity street collections.
 - The council's draft 2013/14 budget

Further information about some issues reviewed by the main committee/Task Groups (to read the full reports please see www.ashford.gov.uk/committees for agendas, reports and minutes of O&S meetings)

Budget Scrutiny

6. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has a duty to scrutinise the council's draft Capital and Revenue budget. The Budget Scrutiny Task Group's remit was to ensure that the draft 2013/14 budget was achievable and in line with the council's 5 year business plan.
7. By the end of the scrutiny process the Task Group were confident that the Budget was achievable. The biggest potential risk was in relation to the introduction of the forthcoming Universal Benefit, the changes to the way Housing benefit was paid and changes to Council Tax support. The Task Group suggested five Recommendations for O&S to put to the Cabinet and the full Committee agreed these. At the subsequent Cabinet meeting all five Recommendations were Resolved. These recommendations included:-
 - Noting that the O&S Committee regarded the Council's draft 2013/14 budget as achievable;
 - Encouraging Portfolio Holders to attend the Budget Scrutiny meetings dealing with their relevant service areas; and,
 - In terms of the consequences of the Makro case, the Council to take a robust approach in countering claims which should, if necessary, include supporting lobbying to overturn case law and supporting any other council which challenges it in higher courts.

Review of changes made to the Mayoralty following O&S review in 2010

8. In May 2011 the amendments to the operation of the Mayoralty, as proposed by O&S and agreed by full Council in Dec 2010, were implemented.
9. These amendments included reduction of the Mayor's entertainment allowance, restrictions on the number/type of engagements which could be attended outside of the Borough, terminating the lease on the Mayor's car and using a private hire firm as and when necessary, and, as a result of deleting the Mayor's attendant's post, Mace bearing and other duties to be covered on an ad hoc basis by an employee of the Council.
10. When these amendments were agreed, O&S required a progress report, to review the situation, to be provided in September 2012.
11. The Mayor for 2011/12 and the Mayor for 2012/13 were both at the meeting when the review was presented to the Committee. The Mayor for 2012/13 had been Mayor before and so was able to compare the two regimes. In his opinion the conditions were not onerous and he found no difficulty working within the guidelines or the budget. He now only attended events outside of the Borough if it was a Civic or ceremonial event where his attendance to represent Ashford was essential. If he wished to attend other non-ceremonial events outside of the Borough, he funded these himself from his personal mayoral allowance. With regard to the arrangements with the private car hire firm, he found these most satisfactory and commented on the professionalism and helpfulness of the private hire chauffeurs.

12. The Mayor for 2011/12 also said that he had no concerns over the reduced budget, but considered that the restrictions might discourage people from putting themselves forward for becoming Mayor.
13. Figures presented to the Committee showed that the cost of the Mayoralty was reducing - in 2007/08 the outturn on the Mayoral budget was £70,781, by 2010/11 this had reduced to £57,750. In 2011/12, following the changes, outturn was £43,225. The number of engagements also showed a reduction – from 287 in 2007/08 to 187 in 2011/12, however it was important to note that the number of engagements was more a reflection of the demand for, and capacity of, the Mayor to attend events. The number of events did not necessarily indicate high expenditure especially if many of them were within the Borough.
14. Overall the Committee were happy with the alterations to the budget and functioning of the Mayoralty as long as this did not diminish the Mayor's role as ambassador for the Borough.

Apprenticeships

15. Apprenticeships are work based training programmes designed around the needs of employers. They give rise to nationally recognised qualifications and can be used to train both new and existing employees.
16. Ashford Borough Council has an apprenticeship scheme, most of the training given is 'on the job' i.e. at the council's premises. The council currently offers two levels of apprenticeship –Intermediate level: a one year contract leading to a Level 2 competence qualification and Advanced level: a two year contract leading to a Level 3 competence qualification.
17. The Council has been offering apprenticeships since August 2008 and, at the time of presenting the report to O&S, 14 people had been employed as apprentices.
18. There is a National Minimum Wage for Apprentices (not to be confused with the National Minimum Wage) but employers are free to pay above that level if they wish, apprentices also have a statutory entitlement to 28 days paid holiday (inclusive of bank holidays) per year. The council pays slightly above the minimum wage for apprentices and provides for 30 days paid holiday (inclusive of bank holidays) per year.
19. The number of apprentices in the Council at any one time has to reflect what there was for them to do and how available other members of staff were to train them. In order to gain their qualifications, apprentices have to be offered good quality work in order for them to be able to demonstrate their competence.

Stour and Civic Centres – Biomass/Combined Heat and Power (CHP) for heat provision to the buildings.

20. In January 2013, the Cabinet approved the recommendation for implementation of the Stour Centre essential repairs and Proposed Invest to Save Project (including the choice of a CHP plant for heating and power supply to the buildings)
'subject to more sensitivity work being undertaken, and a reappraisal of the financial aspects of this scheme and subject to any recommendations following a review by the Overview and Scrutiny committee..'
21. A comprehensive review was carried out by officers including
 - A reappraisal of the financial savings and environmental benefits
 - A sensitivity analysis identifying the impact of changes in gas and electricity prices on predicted savings
 - A refreshed comparison of the pros and cons of the two systems
 - A visit with Members to see three Biomass boilers at leisure centres in the south east.
22. The findings from this review were that the use of biomass heating could generate local environmental and employment benefits if the wood fuel supply contact was won by a local firm, but the size of this contract would mean that it would have to be advertised in the European Journal which could mean that the wood might not even come from this country. Also, the use of Biomass would cost the council £140,000 more than its current utilities cost. However, the CHP option would save the council £1.384m.
23. Based on these significant savings the O&S Committee recommended that Cabinet confirmed its decision in January to proceed with the choice of CHP plant for heating and power and that consideration be made to using biomass boilers for other more suitable and less sensitive buildings. Both these recommendations were resolved by Cabinet.

Reviews on the Forward Plan

24. The Overview and Scrutiny committee sets its own work programme. Future reviews/other items on the Forward Plan include:-
 - Quarterly Updates on the ABC Business Plan performance
 - Update on Stour Valley Arts agreement
 - Refurbishment of the Stour Centre
 - Communication and consultation with the public (re planning policy)

The Future

25. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee's work is aimed at ensuring the effective and efficient provision of Council services for the residents of the Borough. However the O&S Committee can also act as a 'critical friend' in reviewing the services of other 'partner' organisations e.g. KCC.
26. With the agreement of the Chairman, items can be put on the O&S agenda following a request from Cabinet or another Committee (e.g. Audit). Members

of the O&S Committee are also able to suggest items to the Chairman that he may wish to put on the Committee's agenda – such items must represent a Borough wide perspective and provide the opportunity to influence, to improve services or contribute to policy development. The Chairman will then decide if the item is appropriate for O&S to consider and, if so, is there room on the work programme.

Conclusion

27. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has received reports, commented on and made recommendations to Cabinet on a variety of issues which directly affect the Council or residents of the borough. Should the Committee consider that a decision made by the Cabinet is unwise then Members are always able to Call-in that decision.

Contact: Julia Vink

Email: scrutiny@ashford.gov.uk

Overview and Scrutiny
21 May 2013

Agenda item 5

**Ashford Borough Council Business Plan Performance Report – Quarter 4
2012/13**

The attached report was presented to the Cabinet on 9th May 2013 and O&S are invited to consider it.

Agenda Item No: 12
Report To: Cabinet
Date: 9 May 2013



ASHFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report Title: Ashford Borough Council Business Plan Performance Report – Quarter 4 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 has performed over the last quarter, whilst presenting an overview of the performance trend for the last year. 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 4.**

Policy Overview: The quarterly performance report presents progress achieved against the council's strategic objectives – enshrined within 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: Whilst entering a busy period, it was envisaged that frontline services would experience high levels of public interface. While this has been evident, the customer services team have coped well. We do not believe we have seen the end of this peak, and indeed the implementation of Universal Credit later in the year will create another bow wave of demand. The fact that our teams are aware, and can plan for this – whilst having helped our residents to prepare for these changes by good advanced communication – promises well for the services we offer our residents.

Contacts: Nicholas.clayton@ashford.gov.uk – Tel: (01233 330208)



ASHFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL BUSINESS PLAN

Performance Report

Quarter 4 2012/13

Purpose of this report

The following report, the fifth of its kind, seeks to give Members and the Borough's residents an overview of how the council performed in the last quarter, and performance trends over the last year. 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 in to the third year of 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 quarterly 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, as shown preemptive recruitment of specialised staff to help support residents adapt to the large-scale changes brought in from April 2013 by Universal Credit and council tax support. 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 4 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 Blanford (Portfolio Holder for Culture and Environment)
Solar Photovoltaic Project	180 Solar Panels were installed on the Civic Centre roof in March 2012. While the panels had been projected to generate around 35,000 kwh of energy over the year, they performed around 17% better than expected and generated around 42,000 kwh. Other potential installations are being evaluated and proposals will be reported to Cabinet in due course. Another renewable energy project to place a Combined Heat and Power generator in the Stour Centre, was agreed by Cabinet in March.	FIRST PHASE COMPLETE	Strategic Housing and Property Manager + Cllr Blanford (Portfolio Holder for Culture and Environment)
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 . This approach is now being applied across the Borough and secures contributions to new open spaces and facilities from the smallest sites to developments as large as Chilmington Green.	GREEN	Head of Planning and Development
ECONOMIC GROWTH AND HOUSING			
Review of the Core Strategy²	Initial consultation on local growth and numbers of homes needed carried out and responses received; local initiatives (e.g. Plan-It) now underway to assess what local communities want; work continuing to assess capacity issues (e.g. Junction 10a).	GREEN	Planning Policy Manager / Cllr Clarkson (Leader) + Cllr Robey (Planning Portfolio)
Introduction of a Community Infrastructure Levy³	The Council has pioneered work on CIL and related issues and shared this around Kent. Work continues on the infrastructure plan and draft charging schedules. It is likely that CIL will be introduced in the Borough in 2014.	GREEN	Principal Policy Planner / Cllr Clarkson (Leader)
Regeneration Bockhanger / Broomfield Road	Second consultation exercise with residents completed. We will shortly be collating the outcomes and producing an action plan.	GREEN	Housing Project Manager + Cllr Hicks (PH 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 4 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. The scheme is set to go to the council's Planning Committee in May.	GREEN	Head of Cultural Services + Cllr Blanford (Portfolio Holder for Culture and Environment)
Commercial Quarter – Dover Place area	Work continues with the HCA (site owners) and a prospective developer to bring forward the first phase office building (c 6,000 sq m) and the public realm linking it to the station. A design and delivery framework for the whole area has been approved by the Council.	AMBER	Economic Development Manager
Local Authority New Build of social housing	HCA funding is in place and schemes are progressing, including a recent start on site at Hawthorn in Appledore. We are pursuing a bid for additional funding from the Department of Health, which if successful, will help deliver the re-modelled Farrow Court project.	GREEN	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. Another Youth Café in Tenterden was opened this month	COMPLETE	Cultural Projects Manager / Cllr Howard (Portfolio Holder for Youth and the Elderly)
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. The council is set to roll-out a new 'Report-It' web application for the public to report pot holes and other problems.	AMBER	Head of Business Change and Technology / Cllr Shorter (Portfolio Holder for Resource Management and Control)
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 already bringing higher 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% has been set for customers using 'self-help'. This is using automated machines to answer queries. Currently the rate is 12% but is expected to rise throughout the year. The customer services team have also recruited a number of specialised staff to help with enquiries related specifically to welfare changes.

Housing:

- ↓ 68 affordable properties were built during the year. 245 were delivered last year, compared to 266 the year before.
Comment from Housing Services – *“The main reasons for the reduction in unit numbers over the last year has been the national economic situation , reduced grant and funding to Registered Providers from central government and banks respectively , the reduced supply of mortgages from banks to potential house purchasers . Overall the major developers have been unable to make (in their calculations) a viable profit/return on their development sites so have therefore in most cases stalled/ reduced delivery of open market sale units which in turn has affected the delivery of s106 affordable housing quotas. On a number of sites which are yet to be commenced or being delivered in phases we as an authority have had to renegotiate S106 contributions which have included a reduction of the percentage of affordable housing against policy”*
- ↔ 99% of council tenants' rent was successfully collected.
- ↔ 99.9% of council housing currently has a valid gas safety certificate. An average of 2 properties are currently without them.
- ↔ An average of 27 households in B&B accommodation at the end of the quarter. This is an increase of one on the previous quarter, whilst the average of 25 over the entire year (5 higher than the previous year) reflects the tough economic climate.

Planning:

- ↔ Received around 230 'other' (i.e. householder) development applications, and around 80% were decided in under 8 weeks.
- ↓ Received around 80 'minor' development applications, such as from small businesses, with 45% decided within 8 weeks. This is around 30 less than at the same time last year, and reflects the lack of spare resources small businesses have for development.

Environment:

- ↔ 277,000 vehicles used council car parks. Over the year, 1,125,000 vehicles used council car parks – around 20,000 more than in the previous year.
- ↔ 96.5% 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 1,700 people to date

Culture and Community Support:

- ↑ Directly delivered 2,400 children's sports courses through Courtside or school outreach.
- ↔ Over the course of 2012/13, the council allocated at least £270,000 to local voluntary and community groups (through community services grants and capital and revenue grants). During the previous year it allocated funding of at least £285,000.

Revenues and Benefits:

- ↔ By the end of the year, 98 and 99% of Council Tax and Business Rates respectively had been collected – a level equitable performance over the previous year. 52 fraud investigations gave positive outcomes during the year – 12 over target.
- ↔ The benefits caseload continues to rise – from 10,200 at the start of the financial year to 10,435 at the end of it, with an average of around 300 new cases a month. This continued high caseload reflects higher levels of unemployment, however the increase continues to be more gradual than over the previous year (it increased by 530 during 2011/12).

3. GOVERNANCE, RISK AND ACCOUNTABILITY

EXTERNAL AUDITOR'S UPDATE–

- In March the Council's new external auditors Grant Thornton provided an update to the Audit Committee on emerging issues and developments in the wider environment.
- This report provided advice and suggested questions to the Audit Committee on how to move ahead with investigating ongoing financial risks, accounting standards and future audit reports.

BUDGET 2013-14–

- In February the Cabinet approved the budget for the next financial year following the formal process of scrutiny by Members and confirmation of the grant settlement from government. The budget was set against the backdrop of fundamental change to local authority funding from central government, and recommended a £5 a year increase in the Borough Council's council tax and Band D.

HANDOVER OF PUBLIC CONVENIENCES-

- As part of its push for localism, from April the Council transferred the running of a number of public conveniences to local Parish Councils.

PAY POLICY STATEMENT-

- As part of wider transparency, in March the Cabinet reviewed and adopted the Council's latest Pay Policy Statement. This sets out the pay and rewards for senior staff, and the authority's approach to pay in general.

DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF CONSULTATION -

- During January and February the Council consulted on a new policy for the award of discretionary rate relief to charities, sports clubs and other organisations. The policy was approved by Cabinet in March, and will be implemented during 2013. All current recipients of discretionary rate relief will be protected for the next year, with revised awards for current recipients against the new policy beginning in April 2014.

Local Economic Information:

- Average selling prices on the housing market have fallen by 1% in Ashford over the last twelve months (to January). [source = <http://www.home.co.uk>]
- The number of residents unemployed – those claiming Job-Seekers allowance – stands at around 1,970, representing 2.7% of the working-age population. This is 70 higher than in the previous quarter. A year ago the number was around 150 more.

Budget Monitoring:

The Cabinet approved the budget for 2013/14 in February. This budget sets a net budget requirement of around £14 million and incorporates savings of around £700,000 including from the new recycling contract.

**If you would like any further performance information, please contact
Nicholas Clayton, Policy and Performance Officer - nicholas.clayton@ashford.gov.uk**

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

21 May 2013

Future Reviews and Report Tracker

June

- Sickness & Absenteeism annual report.
- Communication and Consultation Strategy re Planning Policy

New items:-

Apart from items such as scrutinising the council's draft budget, which the Constitution requires the committee to do every year; the O&S Committee sets its own work programme for the year. Some items recur on a regular basis e.g. the yearly update from the community safety Partnership and the quarterly Business Plan performance report; others are of a 'one-off' nature.

With the agreement of the Chairman, items can be put on the O&S agenda following a request from Cabinet or another Committee (e.g. Audit). Members of the O&S Committee are also able to suggest items that the Chairman may wish to put on the Committee's agenda (by putting their proposal in writing to him) – such items must represent a Borough wide perspective and provide the opportunity to influence, to improve services or contribute to policy development. The Chairman will then decide if the item is appropriate for O&S to consider and, if so, is there room on the work programme.

Any such item will be put to the Committee for Members to decide if they wish to add it to the work programme.

Year Plan 2013/14

Month	items	Task Group
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • O&S annual report. • ABC Business Plan quarterly performance report. 	
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sickness & Absenteeism annual report. • Communication and Consultation Strategy re Planning Policy 	
July		
August		
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Membership of Budget Scrutiny Task Group • ABC Business Plan quarterly performance report. 	
October		
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ABC Business Plan quarterly performance report. 	
December		Scrutiny of Council's draft 2014/15 budget – Budget Scrutiny TG meetings
January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report of Budget Scrutiny Task Group 	Budget Scrutiny TG meetings
February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ABC Business Plan quarterly performance report. 	
March		
April	Community Safety Partnership – annual update	

O&S Committee – Report Tracker – Current position

Minute No.	Report Title	Officer	Date due	Current position	Recommended action
299/10/06	Stour Centre	Head of Cultural & Project Services	TBC – after completion of claim work	Work ongoing	Await completion of claim work.
62/06/11	Housing Strategy Action Plan Monitoring Report	Head of Housing /Housing Strategy Officer		Housing Strategy under review. New Strategy/Action Plan not yet in place. Monitoring will recommence One year after adoption of new Strategy.	Timetable for one year after adoption of new Strategy.
432/03/11	Annual Review of Homelessness Strategy	Head of Housing		The Homelessness Strategy to be included in the Housing Strategy in future.	
61/06/12	Sickness and Absenteeism – annual report	Head of Personnel & development	June 2013		Timetable for June each year.
14/05/12	Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report	Senior Scrutiny Officer	May/June 2013		Timetable for May/June each year
142/09/12	3 year review of Mayoralty		Sept 2015		
312/01/12	Street Markets	TBA	TBA		
431/04/12	ABC Business Plan performance report – 2013/14	Policy & Performance Officer	May/Sept/ Nov/Feb		
62/06/12	Sports & Leisure		TBA		

303/01/13	Review of 'Best Services resources allow' activity	TBA	TBA		
396/03/13	Communication and consultation strategy – Planning Policy	Policy Manager	June 2013		
398/03/13	Refurbishment of the Stour Centre	TBA	TBA	Final Report from Task Group to be presented to O&S	
418/04/13	Community Safety Partnership – annual update	Community Safety Service Manager	April 2013		

Low Priority & other proposed reports

	Report Title	Officer	Date due	Current position	Recommended action
57/06/08 199/10/11	Recycling and the Blue box scheme	Street Scene and Open Spaces Manager Services	TBC	To be considered when procurement process completed and new contract in operation.	
135/08/08	Cultural strategy.	Head of Cultural & Project Services			
291/12/08	The effectiveness of a single O&S committee		TBA		