

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.

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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
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