



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 22nd July 2014 at 7.00 pm.

The Members of this Committee are:-

Cllr Chilton (Chairman)

Cllr Davison (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs. Aaby, Apps, Bartlett, Buchanan, Burgess, Feacey, Hodgkinson, Mrs Hutchinson,
Miss Martin, Mrs Martin, Mortimer, Sims, Yeo, Conservative vacancy.

Agenda

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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: | (i) |
| 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 Meetings of this Committee held on the 20 th May and 11th June 2014 | |

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

None for this meeting

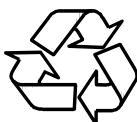


Part IV – Information/Monitoring Items

- | | | |
|----|--|---------|
| 4. | Annual Report of the Housing Framework 2013-18 | 1 - 27 |
| 5. | Sickness absence | 29 - 31 |
| 6. | Future reviews and report tracker. | 33 - 40 |

JV/VS
11 July 2014

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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/240134/Openness_and_transparency_on_personal_interests.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, with revisions adopted on 17.10.13, 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 **20th May 2014**.

Present:

Cllr. Chilton (Chairman);

Cllr. Davison (Vice-Chairman);

Cllrs. Buchanan, Davidson, Feacey, Hodgkinson, Mrs Martin, Mortimer, Sims.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2 (iii) Councillor Davidson attended as a Substitute Member for Councillor Aaby.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Aaby, Apps, Bartlett, Mrs Blanford, Burgess, Mrs Hutchinson, Miss Martin, Yeo.

Also Present:

Cllr. Galpin

Interim Waste and Street Scene Manager, Street Scene Officer, Policy and Performance Officer, Senior Scrutiny Officer, Member Services and Scrutiny Manager.

14 Declarations of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Feacey	Made a Voluntary Announcement as he was on the Management Committee of UK LPG.	17
Hodgkinson	Made a Voluntary Announcement as a member of the Steering Committee of Ashford Community Woodland.	16

15 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 22nd April 2014 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

16 Fly Tipping – Powers and Obligations for the Council

The report provided Members with an overview of the legislation on powers relating to fly tipping. Current issues and considerations for Ashford were also included. The Interim Waste and Street Scene Manager and the Street Scene Officer were present at the meeting.

The Interim Waste and Street Scene Manager conveyed the apologies from Councillor Mrs Blanford as Portfolio Holder for not being able to attend the Committee. He explained that Councillor Mrs Blanford had wished the Committee to be advised that fly tipping was an issue which Environmental Services took very seriously and that fortunately the figures showed that fly tipping had not increased significantly since the introduction of the new Waste Management Service. He explained that Councillor Mrs Blanford had said that the service was looking at ways of controlling dumping in the countryside which might explore the use of more covert surveillance and it was intended that action would be taken when it was possible to identify people fly tipping.

The Interim Waste and Street Scene Manager then took the Committee through the report in detail and drew attention to a guide which had been produced by the Environment Agency (www.gov.uk/manage-waste-on-land-guidance-for-land-managers) and said he was happy to leave copies of that document for Members. He also had a supply of informational leaflets which dealt with community cleaning events. The Committee then asked a number of questions and a summary of the responses given is shown below:-

- Information regarding the number of prosecutions for fly tipping over the previous 12 months period could be provided.
- There were no differences in terms of the legislation for either private or social tenants, however, some social landlords made their own arrangements for dealing with litter and fly tipping.
- The leaflets available at the meeting emphasised the need for residents to manage their own waste and if they employed a disposal contractor, it was their responsibility to check the status of that contractor as they would be responsible if it could be proven that the disposal of such waste had been subject to fly tipping. If any Member had any evidence to identify the fly tipper, this should be reported to the Street Scene Team.
- If the Kent County Council received any notifications of fly tipping they would check whether it was located on adopted public highway and if it was they would report this to Ashford Borough Council as the responsible Authority who would arrange for contractors to clear the area.
- Litter from fast food outlets did not constitute fly tipping, however, Officers were keen to encourage the reporting of litter to the Cleaning Team who would arrange for the litter to be dealt with. In some cases evidence might

show that it was a particular hotspot and therefore additional cleaning resources could be applied.

- In terms of street cleansing, the contractor was required to clean all areas to the appropriate standard and if this had not been done it was important to report it to the Cleaning Team.
- There were very good voluntary groups in the area who helped keep areas of their community clean from litter. The contractor Biffa was also available to help. Clarification was given on paragraph 5.9 regarding the household green waste collections and associated bin deliveries. The paragraph had been incorporated in the report to illustrate that there was greater demand which had to be dealt with via a small team and therefore limited resources were available to assist in areas such as enforcement.
- In terms of the Council possibly assisting in tracing evidence of fly tipping and the source of that fly tipping was a resources issue. The legislation stipulated that it was the Council's responsibility to clear up fly tipping and if evidence was available this would be followed up.
- It was accepted that for certain items which were illegally dumped such as old cookers and fridges and such appliances, it was impossible to trace who had actually owned that equipment.
- Assistance was available for Members from the Cleaning Team in terms of community clean up initiatives.
- Relationships with the various schools were fostered and higher cleaning regimes were in place around the school vicinities. However, the Council had no enforcement powers to go on to school premises.

In terms of any recommendations to make to the Cabinet on this issue, the Committee agreed that the Cabinet be asked to consider the placement of covert camera traps to identify the perpetrators of fly tipping.

Resolved:

- That (i) the report be received and noted.**
- (ii) the Cabinet be asked to consider the placement of covert camera traps to identify the perpetrators of fly tipping.**

17 Ashford Borough Council's Performance – Quarter 4 2013/14

The Policy and Performance Officer introduced the report. He explained that the report aimed to provide Members and the public with a transparent overview on the performance of the Council during the Quarter. The report included information on what the Cabinet had achieved through its decision-making processes, key

performance data and consideration of the wider borough picture which impacted on the Council's work. The report was focussed around the 2013-2015 Corporate Projects. The Policy and Performance Officer drew particular attention to a number of issues set out within the report which included the purchase of International House; the extension of the popular PopUp Ashford Initiative; the addition of two more priority projects making eight in total, the performance of which he explained was monitored by the Ashford Strategic Development Board. The reduction throughout the year in terms of the number of households in B & B accommodation reflected the additional resources made available to enable the Council to be more proactive on the homelessness issue.

A Member referred to the statement that of those checked in the last three months, 100% of the Borough's Council homes had a Gas Safety Certificate and said that he believed this was misleading as he understood that there were three properties which still did not have such a Certificate. The Policy and Performance Officer confirmed that the report only dealt with those properties checked in the last three months and said that he understood that the Portfolio Holder had raised this issue with the Housing Department. He also agreed to provide Members with information relating to the staffing of the team which dealt with the recycling roll-out now compared to those employed during the peak period last Summer.

In response to a question and comment from a Member regarding the PopUp Shop Initiative and the figures for the use of the Ashford International Railway Station, the Portfolio Holder explained that none of the users of the PopUp Initiative had opened premises in Ashford but this was not one of the driving forces behind the Initiative. He said that they had, however, benefitted from exposure in the business world and had received significant support from the Town Team Manager. Many, however, traded via the Internet and the longer tenancies which would now be offered would allow the Initiative to bed in for a longer period of time. In terms of the International Station, the Portfolio Holder said the future would see competitors other than Eurostar being able to operate services and therefore that was why the Council and Kent County Council were pursuing a project with Network Rail to ensure that the signalling at the Station would be able to take the next generation of high speed trains using the station.

In terms of current figures for "bedroom tax and welfare issues", the Policy and Performance Officer said that at the Cabinet meeting in May there had been a full report on welfare which had examined the whole welfare issue in detail.

A Member commented that he believed the report presented a comfortable picture and explained in his view it should be an operational document and therefore references to benchmarking and comparative data should be incorporated.

The Policy and Performance Officer advised that at the end of every performance year, he met with each Head of Service to discuss the appropriate measures to form the basis of monitoring over the next twelve month period. He said he would welcome any feedback that Members had on the future format of the report and the information it contained.

In response to a question about the electric vehicle charging points, the Policy and Performance Officer said he understood that they would have the mechanism of recording the usage of each meter, however, he could not confirm whether they were all installed and operational.

Following discussion the Committee agreed to make two recommendations to the Cabinet, one regarding Gas Safety Certificates and the other about suggested changes to the format of the Quarterly Performance Report.

Resolved:

- That (i) the report be received and noted.**
- (ii) the Cabinet be advised that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers that steps should be taken to ensure that all Borough Council owned properties have a current Gas Certificate.**
- (iii) the Cabinet be asked to consider the view of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that the Quarterly Performance Report be improved by providing more comparative performance information.**

18 Future Reviews and Report Tracker

The Chairman explained that as the Committee was meeting to consider the call-in on the 11th June 2014, it was his view that as the report on sickness and absenteeism was the only item currently scheduled for the 24th June 2014 and which would be presented for information only with no presenting Officers present, this meeting should be cancelled and the sickness report be deferred to the July meeting.

The Chairman then asked the Committee whether there were any suggestions from Members for items to be considered by the Committee in 2014/15.

A Member suggested that he would like to see an update report in terms of the Portas Pilot Project for the Town Centre.

The Vice-Chairman advised that he had a number of suggestions which included the operation of 106 Agreements and Parish Council involvement; an update as to the position in terms of the Conningbrook Country Park (which is on the agenda tracker for the July meeting); an update on the operations of the two commercial companies the Council had agreed to establish; lorry parking (although he accepted that it might be sensible to wait for a report from the Truck Stop Task Group) and the Railway Museum.

In view of the lack of attendance from several Members, the Committee considered it appropriate for the suggestions made at the meeting to be considered by the Committee at the next Ordinary Meeting of the Committee in July. The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Budget Resource Management and Procurement said he wished to express a plea for caution in terms of the reviews the Committee were considering

undertaking particularly in terms of the amount of Officers' time which might be required to support those reviews. He therefore asked that when the programme was determined that it would be scheduled accordingly.

Resolved:

- That (i) the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be held on the 24th June 2014 be cancelled in view of the call-in meeting established for the 11th June 2014 and the sickness and absenteeism report be considered at the July meeting.**
- (ii) a list of the suggestions made at the meeting, together with any others which may be sent to the Senior Scrutiny Officer in due course, be included within the Agenda for the July meeting of the Committee.**

(KRF/AEH)

MINS:OSCX 20.05.14

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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 **11th June 2014**.

Present:

Cllr. Chilton (Chairman);
Cllr. Davison (Vice-Chairman);

Cllrs. Aaby, Apps, Bartlett, Burgess, Clokie, Hodgkinson, Mrs Hutchinson, Miss J Martin, Mrs M Martin, Mortimer, Sims, Wedgbury, Yeo.

In accordance with Procedural Rule 1.2 (iii) Councillor Clokie attended as Substitute Member for Councillor Feacey.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Feacey, Marriott, Shorter.

Also Present:

Cllrs. Davey, Mrs Dyer, Galpin, Michael, Ovenden, Robey, Smith.

Head of Planning and Development, Policy Manager, Principal Solicitor (Strategic Development), Senior Scrutiny Officer, Member Services & Scrutiny Support Officer, KCC Major Projects Manager, KCC Head of Transportation.

31 Declarations of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Bartlett	Made a 'Voluntary Announcement' as he lived in Sevington, near to Junction 10.	32
Mortimer	Made a 'Voluntary Announcement' as he lived near to Junction 10, and was also the Ward Member for North Willesborough.	32
Wedgbury	Made a 'Voluntary Announcement' that he was a Member of the KCC Planning Committee. He said he would not be swayed by the view of Ashford Borough Council if an application came before KCC's Planning Committee, but would look at all the information available at that time.	32

32 Part I – Matters Referred to the Committee in Relation to Call-in of a Decision made by the Cabinet - To consider the Call-in of Cabinet Minute 397: M20 Junction 10A

The Chairman introduced this item. He said that a list of questions had been supplied by Cllr Bartlett and if any Members wished to have more information on Question 23, a pink paper was available to provide further details. However, because it would be necessary to exclude members of the public if it were discussed, he would circulate this paper at the end of the meeting if Members wished to see it.

The attending officers from KCC and ABC introduced themselves and explained their roles.

The Head of Planning and Development advised that this meeting had been called to review the decision made by Cabinet in April with regard to the J10A SELEP interim scheme. He explained that there had subsequently been developments in relation to the original full J10A scheme. Within the last week an announcement had been made that the Highways Agency Investment Board were to recommend to the Minister that the full J10A scheme was brought back into the government programme. This indicated a firm degree of commitment to the full scheme, subject to ministerial approval, which was believed to be a relative formality.

The Head of Planning and Development advised that the main issues for the Council related to guarantees regarding the delivery of the full scheme. The Council would need reassurance that there was a strong probability of the scheme being brought forward. The Council would also need clarification on how much funding would have to be provided from the private sector. The first indications from the Department for Transport were that the private funding level that was to support the SELEP scheme would be sufficient to bring forward the necessary public funding for the full scheme. He felt that it would be in the Council's best interests to maintain both schemes in case the funding for the full scheme did not materialise. In answer to a question, he clarified that the £20m available from the Local Enterprise Partnership would be considered public sector funding. He also explained that the Department for Transport had indicated that the absolute sum required from the private sector would remain the same for either the full or interim scheme.

During the ensuing discussion, the following points were covered:

- It was queried whether the Sevington East development was essential to support the interim scheme, and The Head of Planning and Development responded that there was no assumption that the Sevington East development would be necessary to fund the interim scheme. However, he could not give assurances about development contributions to the full scheme from future site allocations.
- There was concern that the full scheme would trigger larger developments, in view of the fact that the interim scheme was expected to give rise to 7,000 houses and 5,000 jobs. The Head of Planning and Development said that

there was no relationship between the size and capacity of the junction and the rate of development. The additional capacity of the full scheme would make life easier for residents throughout the Borough, but would not necessarily lead to greater housing development.

- There was a question about the implications of taking no action. The Head of Planning and Development explained that the Highways Agency would object to the Local Plan if it was considered that the strategic road network could not cope with proposed development. However, future housing numbers were not influenced by one junction alone, and the Local Plan included all types of access, including railway networks.
- It was noted that the Council was only a consultee and had no major role in making the final decision. Not all of the town's residents were concerned. One Member asked what useful action the Overview and Scrutiny Committee could take. The Head of Planning and Development acknowledged that permission for the full scheme to be constructed would be sought via a Highways Agency application to the Planning Inspectorate, which would effectively remove local decision-making. However, he pointed out that the Council was an important consultee and would need to be part of the decision making process, especially with regard to more detailed local issues. He considered the Council had a credible voice to influence the scheme, especially working together with KCC, who also wanted to achieve the full scheme.
- A Member welcomed the news about the full junction scheme, although felt that more commitment and reassurance was needed from government and was concerned that the Council would be open to challenge regarding the Duty to Cooperate. The Head of Planning and Development agreed that this was an important consideration, and the Council should consider all requests very carefully. Infrastructure was important, but there were other critical issues to be considered, such as environmental impact, employment development, availability of services, and impact on villages.
- In answer to a question about traffic flow to the William Harvey Hospital, KCC Major Projects Manager responded that more in-depth surveys would be taking place, lasting between 6-10 months, to get a full picture with regard to where vehicles were travelling to and from.
- A Member noted that the call-in meeting had originally been convened to discuss the interim scheme, but the recent press release had clouded discussion. The Council's Core Strategy stated that the Council wanted a full scheme at J10A, and it was a very different proposition to build an interim junction. The Member considered that the interim scheme failed on many levels. There were concerns with regard to increased traffic congestion on the Hythe Road approach to the M20 London bound on-slip, as well as the danger of Kingsford Street becoming a 'rat run', and that the Cabinet had moved from the agreed and accepted policy by supporting the interim scheme. The Head of Planning and Development responded that although there was no interim scheme envisaged in the Core Strategy, it was referred to in the Urban Sites Development Plan Document, which was produced after the Core Strategy. He considered that for this reason it was recognised in

Council policy. He also pointed out that the issues in relation to M20 access at Hythe Road had been dealt with in the Highways Agency's presentation earlier in the evening. KCC Major Projects Manager said that with regard to either the interim or full scheme there would be full consultation with affected residents, when both sides of the argument would be taken into consideration, and it was early days at present. The Member reiterated that the policy of the Council was a full junction, and the Urban Sites Plan should not be used as an excuse to support the interim scheme. He considered that this was such an important development issue that it should not have been agreed by Cabinet without recourse to Council. He considered that it did not reflect well on Cabinet that Overview and Scrutiny had to call-in their decision.

- Several Members considered that there was a need to understand the issues better in relation to the interim scheme, and to validate the traffic figures quoted by the Highways Agency. There was some discussion about the benefits of considering other options and the possibility of commissioning a consultant to identify and evaluate other solutions. The Policy Manager assured the meeting that many options had been considered over the years, including a flyover, tunnelling and different locations for the scheme. The full scheme had been considered the best option in terms of environmental impact, value for money and traffic management. He said it might be helpful to recirculate details of all the previously considered options for the sake of transparency and to set Members' minds at rest that all alternative solutions had been considered.
- Some Members felt that both schemes should be pursued in parallel; others that the full scheme alone should be sought.

After further debate, it was resolved that:

This Committee notes that

- (a) the interim scheme is fundamentally different from the full scheme for 3 reasons:-**
- 1 Highfield Lane**
 - 2 Hythe Road**
 - 3 Single carriageway rather than dual carriageway**
- (b) The interim scheme poses a risk to the Council because it is so different and could have a negative effect on the quality of life of the residents of the whole Borough.**
- (c) Council policy is for a full scheme at Junction 10A.**

This Committee refers the Cabinet's decision to support the interim scheme to full Council under part 4 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules.

This Committee believes that further consideration at full Council should include the following items:-

- **Independent traffic data**
- **A report on alternative options for Junction 10A**
- **A traffic census on the impact of the interim scheme**
- **Details of compulsory purchase**
- **Details of the funding scheme**
- **Full and detailed consultation with affected residents Borough-wide (only if a planning application for the interim scheme is submitted).**

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Agenda Item No:4

Report To: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 22nd July 2014

Report Title: Annual Report of the Housing Framework 2013-18

Report Author: Jennifer Shaw, Housing Strategy Manager



Summary:	This report summarises the 2014 annual report of the Housing Framework 2013-18. It highlights work that is ongoing to achieve the five priorities of the Framework and opportunities and constraints that have presented over the last 12 months since the Framework was adopted.
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Key Decision: NO

Affected Wards: All

Recommendations: **The committee be asked to:
Note the annual report and agree its publication on the
Ashford Borough Council website**

Policy Overview: Ashford Housing Framework 2013-18
Corporate Plan, Focus 2013-15
Kent Forum Housing Strategy 2012-15
Laying the Foundations, A Housing Strategy for England
2011

Financial Implications: None

Risk Assessment NO

Equalities Impact Assessment Undertaken for Housing Framework 2013-18

Other Material Implications: None

Exemption Clauses: N/A

Background Papers: N/A

Contacts: jennifer.shaw@ashford.gov.uk – Tel: (01233) 330451

Report Title: Annual Report of the Housing Framework 2013-18

Purpose of the Report

1. To present an update on achieving the five priorities of the Ashford Housing Framework 2013 - 18 since its adoption in July 2013.
2. To provide members with a copy of the annual report for agreement to publish on the ABC website

Issue to be Decided

3. To note the progress towards delivery of the five priorities of the Housing Framework 2013-18
4. To agree the publication of the Housing Framework Annual Report 2014.

Background

5. The Housing Framework 2013-18 was developed during 2013 and adopted in July that year. The document can be viewed at <http://www.ashford.gov.uk/our-strategic-approach-to-housing> The Framework details the five broad priorities to achieve over the next five years. The action plan gives the structure to develop work-streams that will contribute to achieving the five priorities.
6. The five priorities of the Housing Framework are:
 - a. Improve the supply of affordable housing to meet local housing needs in Ashford borough's urban and rural areas
 - b. Improve environmental quality of homes and address fuel poverty in all tenures
 - c. Increase availability and choice of accommodation including for vulnerable people
 - d. Increase resident satisfaction with homes and neighbourhoods and increase opportunities for resident involvement
 - e. Prevent and reduce homelessness and increase access to settled accommodation for homeless households and those at risk of homelessness
7. The Annual Report (appendix 1) highlights work that has been undertaken in the previous year. The emphasis is on illustrating how in delivering the five priorities good quality housing has far reaching beneficial impacts on residents' lives, neighbourhoods and the wider environment, both directly and indirectly.

8. Members receive a quarterly performance update from Community and Housing that provides a statistical update on performance. Previous quarterly performance reports are available on the ABC website.
<http://www.ashford.gov.uk/housing-services-quarterly-performance-report>
9. Operating within a changing legislative and policy environment, continuing financial austerity and budgetary pressures the Housing Service is flexible and innovative in seeking ways to achieve the Framework's priorities. The annual report also highlights constraints and opportunities that have presented since the adoption of the Framework.

Summary of the Annual Report

10. Priority 1: Improve the supply of affordable housing to meet local housing needs in Ashford borough's urban and rural areas.

Both the Council and Housing Association partners are delivering new build affordable homes. Although a low number of completions in 13/14 (24) this is expected to increase significantly during 14/15 given there are currently 286 starts on site. The Council wishes to increase its ability to build more affordable housing by seeking an increase to HRA debt cap and implementing a programme of conversions alongside bidding to the HCA for grant funding. In addition the Council has purchased empty homes and formed the Property Company to take a more commercial approach and open up other mechanisms to deliver housing in the borough.

Where site viability constrains the delivery of affordable housing alternative ways of delivery are investigated, such as the model used at Newtown Works and using a flexible quota of affordable housing to move sites forward.

Where supply is limited and demand continues to be high, together with impacts of the spare room subsidy, initiatives such as assisted moves, encouraging mutual exchange, flexible tenancies and tenancy fraud investigations all contribute to making best use of existing stock.

11. Priority 2: Improve environmental quality of homes and address fuel poverty in all tenures.

Measures in the Council's own stock to reduce the cost to tenants of heating homes and the work undertaken to encourage private sector landlords to make energy efficiency improvements has contributed to a reduction year on year of the number of households defined as being in fuel poverty.

A more targeted approach could yield greater results in the private sector but would require evidence gathered through a stock condition survey to enable this. Given the cost of a survey and lack of resources to implement any targeted actions a reactive process remains in place.

12. Priority 3: Increase availability and choice of accommodation including for vulnerable people.

Using private rented sector properties helps relieve pressure on the affordable housing stock. The social lettings agency and private sector leasing scheme provide in the region of 100 properties for homeless households. Other work with private landlords aims to improve access to homes, the standard of accommodation and their management. However, high demand from the open market, is restraining the number of properties and landlords becoming involved in Council led schemes.

Disabled Facilities Grants and supported housing schemes assist vulnerable people to remain living as independently as possible. Working with partners and through its own sheltered remodelling programme an increase in high quality older person's accommodation will have the added benefit of releasing family accommodation in the borough.

13. Priority 4: Increase resident satisfaction with homes and neighbourhoods and increase opportunities for resident involvement.

The Housing Service works with partners, the tenants' panel, community forums and Parish Councils to deliver good housing management services and identify and undertake neighbourhood improvements.

Area managers have individual budgets to take forward small scale improvements. These projects could include clearing a pond or upgrading a play space and these contribute to reducing anti-social behaviour, improving the usability of an area and bringing a community together.

New build projects can also improve an area where small disused sites are brought into use for housing and can offer an opportunity to incorporate other benefits such as improved car parking.

The Council's stock continues to meet 100% decent homes standard and in the private sector complaints relating to disrepair often result in an action that results in an improvement to the property.

14. Priority 5: Prevent and reduce homelessness and increase access to settled accommodation for homeless households and those at risk of homelessness.

Prevention of homelessness is always the priority and there are a number of prevention tools that Housing Options Officers can use such as the Sanctuary Scheme for Domestic Abuse victims, Homeless Prevention Bond Scheme, Homeless Prevention Payment Scheme, Homeless Repossession and Eviction Scheme as well as negotiation and crisis intervention. Raising awareness with partner agencies through the 'come to us early' approach encourages early liaison with housing to find out what can offered before a crisis occurs.

The two Welfare Reform Intervention Officers are being successful in assisting people to make informed choices where affected by changes to welfare reform. They dealt with 355 cases in the previous 12 months.

Where homelessness cannot be prevented, options other than the use of bed and breakfast accommodation are preferable. The Social Lettings Agency homes have enabled the discharge of homelessness duty for 15 households.

Recently the Council purchased a property; this will be refurbished into short stay accommodation for homeless people.

The annual review of the Homelessness Strategy will be carried out during the remainder of 2014 to consider if the priorities are still relevant, where there are gaps in advice or the provision of accommodation and how joint working can further enhance prevention work.

Handling

15. Following Members agreement the annual report will be formatted to meet ABC communications criteria and published on the ABC internet.
16. A link to the published document will be circulated to all members and relevant stakeholders.
17. A light review of the Housing Framework will be carried out in 2014 to consider any external influences that impact both positively and negatively on achieving the 5 priorities and consider ways of embracing and addressing these.
18. A further review of the Housing Framework is planned for 2015, following the general election.

Conclusion

19. With continuing budget pressures Housing Services continues to deliver a range of initiatives and projects that are improving housing and housing related services to residents across the Borough
20. Opportunities to bring in further resources, such as bidding to the HCA, increasing the HRA debt cap and continuing to sustain a high level of rent collection allows Housing Services to maintain its objective to meet the 5 priorities of the Housing Framework 2013-18.
21. A strong HRA position will allow sustained expansion of current projects such as LA new build, purchase of empty homes, right to buy 'buy back' and replacement and the sheltered housing scheme remodelling programme.
22. Development of initiatives such as the Social Lettings Agency and the Property Company are enhancing the range of housing services that the Council provides on a more entrepreneurial footing.
23. The Annual Report highlights many achievements which to a large extent are reliant on personal relationships. The depth of skills and knowledge that the housing officers have and their ability to build strong, constructive relationships with individuals and other organisations are vital in ensuring good quality accommodation for people with a range of housing needs across all tenures.

Portfolio Holder's Views

24. "With the current difficulties many people are experiencing in being granted a mortgage to buy their own homes the pressure on rented properties, both in the private sector and publicly funded affordable housing is high. The Borough receives over 200 applications per month for a limited housing stock. The report shows how a range of activities are contributing to achieving the five priorities of the Housing Framework to provide safe, sustainable homes for residents of the borough. I would like to highlight the work carried out by our officers in trying to prevent and reduce homelessness as this is indicative of the high standards of the department."

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ASHFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Housing Framework 2013-2018

Annual Report 2014

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Housing Strategy Manager

June 2014

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Introduction

This report provides an update on progress towards meeting the five priorities set out in the Housing Framework 2013 – 18. Achieving these priorities will make a significant contribution to the Corporate Plan (Focus 2013-15) aim of ‘Quality Homes and Places To Live’.

Adopted in July 2013, The Housing Framework’s five priorities are:

1. Improve the supply of affordable housing to meet local housing needs in Ashford borough’s urban and rural areas
2. Improve environmental quality of homes and address fuel poverty in all tenures
3. Increase availability and choice of accommodation including for vulnerable people
4. Increase resident satisfaction with homes and neighbourhoods and increase opportunities for resident involvement
5. Prevent and reduce homelessness and increase access to settled accommodation for homeless households and those at risk of homelessness

The Housing Framework 2013-18 document is available at <http://www.ashford.gov.uk/our-strategic-approach-to-housing>

This report seeks to highlight actions that have made or are making a difference to residents’ lives. Given the diverse range of work undertaken across the breadth of the Housing Service, many actions contribute to achieving more than one specific priority. Similarly other agendas benefit positively from housing related interventions, such as health and wellbeing, the local economy and employment, prevention and fear of crime, education and skills.

The Housing Service continues to seek more effective ways of maintaining a high standard of service across its mandatory and discretionary areas of work. Performance is monitored and reported to members through the Community and Housing quarterly performance reports which can be accessed through the Council website at <http://www.ashford.gov.uk/housing-services-quarterly-performance-report>

Many of the activities undertaken by the Housing Service have positive social benefits to both the recipient and the wider community. This can be inherently difficult to measure in a monetary dimension. Some projects will be selected throughout the forthcoming year to pilot measuring social value, through a wellbeing

valuation¹ that helps place a value on activities through looking at their impact on individuals' life satisfaction to demonstrate the value of community investment.

1. Priority 1: Improve the supply of affordable housing to meet local housing needs in Ashford borough's urban and rural areas

1.1 Local Authority Initiatives:

LA new build programme - The securing of grant under the 2011-15 Homes and Communities Agency affordable homes programme will see a further 59 affordable rented homes built by end of March 2015. A further bid has been made to the Homes and Communities Agency funding programme 2015-18. If successful this will enable the building of 60 homes for affordable rent and the remodelling of another sheltered housing scheme.

Empty Homes – Grant Funding of £577,550 from the Homes and Communities Agency has enabled the purchase of 25 empty properties, 4 x one bed flats, 6 x two bed flats, 5 x two bed houses and 10 x three bed houses. With legal and works costs the total expenditure will be approx. £3,377,000. 14 of the properties are let and occupied. There is further grant funding to purchase 5 more properties.

Utilising right to buy receipts – At the end of March 2014, the Council currently has £3,786,010 available to invest in affordable homes to replace the 47 properties sold through the right to buy in 2012/13 and 2013/14. This will initially support 14 additional homes funded from the Housing Revenue Account.

Property company - The formation of the Property Company in May 2014, will offer a commercial solution that contributes to a dual strategy of transforming the Council in to a more entrepreneurial organisation and to help address the housing shortfall in the borough, including cross subsidy of affordable housing through the development of open market housing.

1.2 Registered Providers (Housing Associations):

Since the adoption of the Housing Framework in July 2013 up until 21 May 2014, 2 homes have been built by Housing Associations in the borough, these were for shared ownership. There are a further 34 homes due to be completed by the end of 2014 and approximately a further 200 general needs homes and 67 extra care flats by end of March 2015. Some Housing Associations have developed 'open market' trading arms which enables them to cross subsidise the affordable housing. A site which is benefiting from this approach is at Chilham where Orbit Homes have purchased the whole site to develop mixed tenure, delivering 35% affordable housing on site.

¹ <http://www.hact.org.uk/social-value-services>

1.3 Site viability:

On mixed development sites (s106 sites) the percentage of affordable housing provision is negotiated with developers to achieve the policy target of 30% or 35% in urban and rural areas respectively. Where financial viability is threatening the delivery of the site, a lower percentage may be agreed or a mechanism used to 'catch-up' the affordable housing provision in later phases. Housing Officers work closely with colleagues in Planning to optimise ways of delivering the maximum amount of affordable housing on each site.

Newtown Works - Phase 1 of Newtown Works is being brought forward by Town and Country Housing Group having agreed with developers of the site, Kier, to purchase all 108 units within that phase on a combined build and land cost basis with payment being made at 'golden brick' stage (construction of all 108 units up to the first course of bricks beyond DPC level). This enabled Kier during the market downturn to bring forward construction on this site which would not have occurred using the traditional payment methods to the contractor. The delivery of the required affordable housing is being met as per the S106 agreement as well as additional affordable housing which will see at least a minimum 82% affordable housing quota, on this phase. The percentage of affordable housing in subsequent phases may differ dependent on financial viability at the time.

1.4 Maximising use of stock:

Void turn around - ensuring void properties are re-let as soon as possible maximises the use of existing stock. The average void period for 2013/14 for ABC properties was 20 days.

Reducing under occupation – assisted moves is a way for tenants over 50 to move to a smaller property, freeing up family sized accommodation. Although tenants of pension age, claiming housing benefit, are not subject to the social size criteria, the Council encourages those older people under occupying a home to consider moving to a smaller home by offering a range of incentives. Between July 2013 and end of May 2014, 32 households have moved supported by the assisted moves scheme.

A couple who moved from a 3 bed house in Ashford Town Centre to a 2 bed bungalow in Smarden through the assisted move scheme are delighted with their new home. Due to health reasons the stairs in their existing home were increasingly difficult to manage. The move to a bungalow has, in their words, been 'life changing for the better'. They commented that the assisted move scheme definitely helped them make the decision to move as they would not have been able to afford to move without assistance and on how helpful everyone had been to ensure the move ran very smoothly.

Mutual exchanges – With the introduction of welfare reform tenants are encouraged to consider their circumstances and alternative options, such as mutual exchange, if they are under occupying their homes. It was felt that tenants who were under-

occupying, particularly those in 3 or 4 bed houses, sought out a mutual exchange so that they could still have a house rather than a flat. 104 tenants mutually exchanged during 2013/14.

Tenancy fraud investigations – There is ongoing joint working between Revenues and Benefits, the Area Managers and Housing Options Officers to investigate cases of fraud in social housing stock. Since July 2013, 4 properties have been recovered and 2 housing applications cancelled where the applicants have been found to be intentionally homeless. One of the properties recovered was linked to a prosecution for benefit fraud but doing the investigation as one enabled the situation to be viewed in its entirety rather than in separate elements. There are currently 18 cases open with a housing link, they are primarily referrals of non residency / subletting but can include false applications, RTB queries or successions. There are also ongoing tenancy audits and one joint investigation with an RSL.

1.5 Strategy and Policy:

Strategic Housing Market Assessment – Housing and Planning Service worked together to commission a Strategic Housing Market Assessment. The full report is available at <http://www.ashford.gov.uk/local-plan-to-2030> The report identified a need for 368 new affordable homes per year.

Affordable Housing Policy – in line with the review of the Core Strategy, Housing Officers are collaborating with planning colleagues to develop, with members, an affordable housing policy that will best meet the needs of those unable to afford open market housing, without constraining development.

1.6 Constraints:

The number of sites being built over the last year has been low, which together with developers using the affordable housing provision to 'balance' site viability has impacted on delivery. Government policy now allows developers to challenge the affordable housing percentage in existing s106 agreements and the government is proposing to increase the threshold for affordable housing to 10 units. Although would not have a negative impact under the Council's current policy it could undermine any future ambition to lower the threshold particularly in relation to rural areas where smaller sites are more prevalent and the delivery of local needs housing schemes is diminishing. During the last year there have not been any completions of local needs housing, potentially due to landowners submitting sites for allocation as part of the Core Strategy review, and that two thirds of parishes have one of more local needs housing schemes already.

Capital grant available for the delivery of affordable housing is very limited and the Homes and Communities Agency maintains its position that on s106 sites affordable housing should be delivered without grant.

1.7 Opportunities:

The Council has applied for an increase in the HRA debt cap to enable greater borrowing to fund the development of affordable housing. Together with a programme of conversions from social rent to affordable rent in the council's housing stock (that has been approved by members to commence in April 2105) and a bid for grant funding from the Homes and Communities Agency 2015-18 programme will further enhance the Council's ability to build new homes.

The development of a new affordable housing policy presents an opportunity to investigate how the Council could be more flexible in its approach given the variety of sites coming forward in the borough. Housing will continue to work alongside Planning to evidence and promote the need for affordable housing.

Site viability training is to be delivered by the Homes and Communities Agency and two Officers will benefit from this which will aid a greater understanding of this complex issue and assist in ensuring an appropriate percentage of affordable housing is provided on site.

The development of a resident reward scheme is currently being considered. This, if implemented could include an incentive to encourage tenants leave their properties in a good state of repair. This could improve the turn-around between outgoing and incoming tenants, reducing void times and increasing the number of weeks each home is occupied.

2. Priority 2: Improve environmental quality of homes and address fuel poverty in all tenures

2.1 Increasing energy efficiency and reducing fuel poverty:

Fuel poverty indicator– The definition of fuel poverty was amended in 2013 to the Low Income High Costs (LIHC) indicator. Under this measure in 2011, 7.6% of households in Ashford were defined as in fuel poverty, equivalent to 3586 households. This compares favourably to the Kent average of 9%. Using the previous definition there was a 1.3% fall in households in fuel poverty between 2010 and 2011

Energy efficiency for tenants – measures to reduce the costs to tenants of heating their homes include; the installation of air source heat pumps, electric panel heaters to replace oil boilers with the electricity subsidised by solar photo voltaic panel, cavity wall and loft insulation upgrades, replacing communal lights in blocks of flats with low energy light fittings which are controlled by PIR sensors to maximise energy efficiency and maximising opportunities in the maintenance programme such upgrading insulation when replacing the flat roofing at Luckley House.

Four 'Airey' houses, in the council's stock, were treated with an innovative system to increase energy efficiency. This has provided a benefit both to the tenants who now have warmer easier to heat homes and to the Council in terms of the long term maintenance. The installed system has exceeded current building regulation standards. The full case study is presented in Appendix 1.

In the private sector – The Council is committed to supporting the aims of the Kent Environment Strategy and as part of the Kent and Medway Green Deal Partnership and the Kent Energy Efficiency Partnership to promote and signpost residents to schemes that can assist in reducing domestic energy consumption. Under the HeatSeekers initiative 124 measures have been installed in the borough (70 loft insulation and 54 cavity wall insulation).

2.2 Constraints:

In the private sector an increased knowledge of areas where of housing stock is the least energy efficient would assist in taking a more targeted approach. A housing stock condition survey would provide such information but stretched resources currently prevent this being undertaken or being able to implement any actions based on its findings.

2.3 Opportunities:

We are establishing data on the energy efficiency rating of our residential accommodation by undertaking an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC's) every time a heating system is installed or upgraded and upon every void that does not currently have a valid certificate.

To encourage improvements to energy efficiency in the private sector we work with landlords to encourage them to increase the energy efficiency of their properties. EPC's are currently a requirement when considering a Rent Deposit Bond for homeless households moving into the private sector. Within the landlord accreditation scheme there is a loan facility specifically for energy efficiency works, including insulation and replacement boilers.

On the Council's new build properties, energy efficiency is high priority and wherever feasible the use of renewable energy is included. The Housing Service is also working with one Housing Association to support them investigate the development of a passivhaus standard housing scheme.

3. Priority 3: Increase availability and choice of accommodation including for vulnerable people

3.1 Utilising the private rented sector:

Social lettings agency – The social lettings agency has 51 homes under full management option. This initiative is increasing the amount of homes available to those who ordinarily would not be considered suitable tenants by private landlords and are either homeless or at risk of homelessness.

A young woman and her 2 year old son have been rehoused out of bed and breakfast in to a social lettings agency property providing them with suitable, settled accommodation.

From June ABC Lettings expanded its management service into Shepway and in partnership with Shepway Council will commence working with landlords in the area to provide homes for people from Shepway.

Private sector leasing – this scheme continues with 67 homes leased from private sector landlords at end of March 2014

3.2 Increasing the availability of well managed private rented homes:

Landlord accreditation scheme – There are two fully accredited landlords with three or so more in the pipeline that have completed the training and are due to have their properties inspected.

Landlord working group – A focused group which meets every 3 to 4 months, there are terms of reference for this group and it considers issues facing the borough in terms of private sector housing and how they can be addressed together with other items that are relevant and of interest to the landlord.

Landlord Forum – Annual event, last July attracted 70 landlords. The forum covered items such as services the Council offer, green deal, how to finance properties and how to recognise and address damp and mould issues.

Houses in Multiple Occupation – Several new HMOs, that fall under the mandatory licencing requirement of the Housing Act 2004 were licenced in the past 12 months. Together with relicensing brings the overall number of licenced HMOs to 67. The licence runs for 5 years and relicensing provides an opportunity to re-inspect and update any conditions ensuring the property remains safe for occupation.

3.3 Disabled adaptations:

Adaptions in Council homes – 305 adaptations were completed in 2013/14 with a total spend of just under £300,000. The most commonly fitted adaptations are grab rails, flush floor showers and ramps to improve access to the property.

A husband and father who was suffering from a hereditary medical condition, which their children also have, needed a Flush Floor Shower, which would enable him to look after himself without depending on the care of others. Living in a two story property it was difficult to provide a FFS on the first floor as access and space was tight. As his bedroom was to be located on the ground floor, it was decided that the redundant outbuilding attached to the property would be an ideal area that could provide him with this facility. In partnership with Occupational Therapy and with a local builder the outbuilding was turned into a flush floor shower area, which consisted of an electric thermostatic shower, a new WC and basin with lever taps, a humidistat fan and light fitting, as well as appropriate grab rails and other associated fittings. A ramp externally and level access internally was also provided, which allowed clear access to and from the new shower area. Once completed, the family seemed to be exceptionally pleased with the transformation and appeared to be very happy, as it has improved their living conditions and has made life easier for the whole family.

Disabled facilities grants – 47 disabled facilities grants were authorised and works completed during 2013/14 at a total cost of £342,142.

3.4 Supported Housing:

Young people – planning permission has been granted for a scheme of 8 units to prevent homelessness and help young people at risk of homelessness into more settled lives, training, employment and independent living. The scheme is being developed by Golding Homes and the support service will be tendered for under the Supporting People programme

Move on accommodation – The Kent PFI agreement, signed and sealed in June, includes for Ashford the development of 11 units of supported move on accommodation in South Ashford.

Sheltered and extra care accommodation – The remodelling of 8 of the Council's sheltered housing schemes commenced with Farrow Court, with phase one well under way and due for completion by April 2015. In addition the redevelopment of Little Hill sheltered scheme in Tenterden to a 41 unit extra care scheme will come forward through the Kent PFI. The Housing and Care 21 extra care scheme at The Warren is due for completion by April 2015, providing 67 flats with a mix of affordable rent and shared ownership. Their other scheme at Aldington, with 33 flats, is due to start on site by September after the ecological mitigation works are completed.

Adapted property for disabled people – As part of the Council's new build programme a home has been designed specifically for a large family with a disabled child. This has been brought forward in consultation with the family and the occupational therapist. A further two homes designed to wheelchair standards are also due for completion by January 2015.

3.5 Constraints:

High demand for private rented homes is restricting the number of landlords working with social lettings agency due to landlords achieving rent higher than the local housing allowance rates by letting on the open market.

Demand for disabled adaptations and disabled facilities grant outstrips funding available. Some households experience long waiting times for work to commence.

Reduction in the percentage of affordable housing delivered on sites, can negatively impact on the capacity to provide more supported housing that forms part of the overall affordable housing quota.

The delivery of sheltered housing scheme remodelling programme is constrained by borrowing available through the HRA and the programme timescales are dependent on the financial capacity available.

3.6 Opportunities:

The bid for further grant funding from the Homes and Communities Agency programme for 2015-18 includes the re-provision of another of the Council's sheltered housing schemes. In addition the bid to increase the HRA debt cap in the 15/18 programme also assists in the delivery of supported affordable housing.

Where there are planned maintenance works for upgrading bathrooms in council homes, designated for older people, wet rooms are incorporated to reduce the need for adaptations at a later date. A prioritisation process for disabled adaptations, will be introduced to provide greater clarity about the process of assessing the need for work and time spent on the waiting list. In addition adaptations that cost over £1000 will not be undertaken where the tenant is under occupying the property by two or more bedrooms. The tenants will be offered assistance to move to more suitable accommodation.

4. Priority 4: Increase resident satisfaction with homes and neighbourhoods and increase opportunities for resident involvement

4.1 Good housing management:

Housing Associations – the Council continues to facilitate a meeting with all social and affordable housing providers to share good practice, highlight any areas of concern and maintain good relationships so any issues can be resolved swiftly.

ABC Tenant Panel - the ABC Tenant's Panel works with the Council, as its landlord, to seek improvements across a range of services that relate to homes and neighbourhoods.

The Tenants Panel is taking on more responsibility, for instance estate inspections which have evolved as commented on by one member of the Panel ' In the future we will be able to complete our own Estate Inspections and report any concerning issues whenever we want/feel appropriate to. This will ensure that problems don't become out of hand. They can be addressed quickly and with less expense to our landlord. We can also audit our Area Managers and ensure that they are identifying everything in a timely manner. The Tenant Inspections aren't a process of catching the Council out but one of working with them to ensure that our services run as smoothly and efficiently as possible. Because the Area Managers are only able to complete 1-2 inspections a year they rely on us to give them this information.'

Using the social wellbeing toolkit, the wellbeing value of the Tenants Panel (for nine members) has been calculated as equivalent to £48,896 per year. That is the equivalent amount of money needed to increase the Panel's wellbeing by the same amount.

Tenant initiatives – the annual tenants garden competition is one way of encouraging tenants to take a pride in their immediate surroundings. The results are published in Housing News, the quarterly magazine for tenants, which provides information, articles and news items to help foster good relationships. Many of the sheltered schemes run activities which contribute to wellbeing and social inclusion. As an example of this using the wellbeing valuation tool for the 6 people who regularly attend the gardening club the equivalent overall value that would need to be paid to them is £8366 (£1394 each).

Sheltered housing review – Following consultation with residents, new working arrangements for the sheltered scheme managers have been introduced.

The Seniors Forum members commented that the scheme managers are very important, especially for older single people who can feel very isolated and its comforting knowing there is help available if needed. The Forum felt more resources should be directed towards sheltered housing to ensure each scheme had its own dedicated manager and to ensure there is sufficient cover for leave and illness. The Forum members highlighted that there is a good network of neighbour support but there needed to be more accommodation such as extra care, for older people when their needs increased and sheltered housing was no longer suitable. Increased dementia awareness was thought to be very important for both residents of sheltered schemes and staff supporting them.

Improvements at Chilmington gypsy site - In addition to regular site clearances, in the last year there has been one resident and officer 'clear up day', fencing works to the site and improvements to the utility blocks for drainage and electrics which included the installation of smart meters to all blocks to improve and protect the electrical supply.

4.2 Neighbourhood Improvements:

Area Manager projects – a number of small projects, identified through estate inspections and/or resident consultation, are undertaken to improve areas with local residents input. This includes, pond improvement works, fencing to play areas and initiatives such as litter picking and communal shrub border tidying. Each Area Manager is responsible for agreeing projects with residents and allocating their budget.

Community Safety Unit – Housing Services is represented at the CSU, which allows for swift, joint action where issues of concern arise and to work together on a preventative agenda to improve safety and reduce fear of crime across the Borough.

Clean sweeps – Joint operations between agencies continue as part of the Community Safety Unit initiatives to tackle problems in a specific area. This includes tackling a range of problems like fire prevention, poor housing, licensing and rubbish clearing. The police commissioner visited a clean sweep in Ashford parishes at the end of 2013.

4.3 High quality homes:

Decent homes standards – The Council's own housing stock continues to meet 100% decent homes standard

Park homes – In response to the government consultation a briefing session is to be held in June for all residents of commercially licenced sites to discuss how the proposed changes will affect them. Housing Services is also consulting with the residents regarding the introduction of fees for inspecting licenced sites. This will feed into formulating a park homes policy.

Private sector improvements – the private sector housing team responds to complaints about disrepair, any enforcement action taken to rectify the issue will normally result in an improvement to the property, such as replacing a faulty boiler

4.4 Constraints:

The majority of homes in the borough (69%) are in owner occupation and a further 13% privately rented. With a small private sector housing team, work to tackle areas of disrepair or empty homes is in the main a reactive service. The last Stock Condition Survey was undertaken in 2002, prior to the introduction of the Health and Housing Safety Rating System. Evidence from an up to date Stock Condition Survey would provide a strong foundation on which to develop robust Private Sector Housing Policies.

4.5 Opportunities:

A proposal to introduce a residents' reward scheme to ABC tenants is being developed with the aim to incentivise tenants to take greater responsibility for their

homes and surroundings. A number of housing associations run such schemes and have noted a reduction in low level complaints, such as noise, untidy gardens as well as improved rent collection rates.

A number of the Council's new build schemes are often built on small areas of land or garage sites that are not overlooked these may attract anti-social behaviour and the development of these sites reduces these nuisances. They can also include benefits to the wider community, such as improved car parking and open space.

5. Priority 5: Prevent and reduce homelessness and increase access to settled accommodation for homeless households and those at risk of homelessness

5.1 Preventing homelessness:

Come to us early – an awareness raising approach with external agencies of what the Housing Options Officers can offer and that the best prevention is to make contact early. Presentations have been made to the Early Intervention team at Social Services, and all the Family Liaison Officers in schools. A review of the Whole Needs Assessment Tool will enable more agencies to be contacted and promotion undertaken.

A range of other homelessness prevention initiatives are used, including the Sanctuary Scheme for Domestic Abuse victims, Homeless Prevention Bond Scheme, Homeless Prevention Payment Scheme, Homeless Repossession and Eviction Scheme as well as negotiation and crisis intervention

Welfare reform intervention – the two officers provide a vital link to vulnerable people who are facing difficulties as a result of changes to benefits. In the 12 months to June they have dealt with 355 cases; direct enquiries and those referred from other agencies such as Citizens Rights for Older People, Early Intervention Team at Social Services, Adult Mental Health Team and the Family Liaison Officers in primary schools and CAB . Referrals have been related to issues such as under occupancy, benefit cap and council tax support. This service is helping people make informed choices as two examples demonstrate.

An unemployed single person receiving employment and support allowance, living in 3 bed Council property was awarded 26 week Discretionary Housing Payment with the stipulation that she would look to downsize. Although initially very reluctant to move and suffering from depression with encouragement from her Housing Manager and the Welfare Reform Intervention Officer she managed to source an exchange and has moved into a 2 bed property and has also returned to work. She has been granted a further DHP on her new property but on the understanding that she needs to gradually increase her working hours and therefore have no further need for either housing benefit or DHP.

A single person in part time work living in a 1 bed property was unable to meet all her rent as her benefits were not covering the full amount. She was encouraged to increase her working hours which enabled her to claim working tax credits. The tenant is not always able to cope with paperwork but by meeting with her regularly and helping her understand how to budget she now works 3 separate part time jobs and is paying her rent and council tax without any help.

5.2 Accommodation for homeless households:

Temporary accommodation - The Council has purchased a property to refurbish into short stay accommodation for people who find themselves homeless or at risk of homelessness. This will also reduce costs incurred through the use of bed and breakfast accommodation. The homes and communities agency has agreed a grant of £150,000 towards the total costs of £560,000.

Social lettings agency – has enabled the discharge of homelessness duty for 15 households

5.3 Constraints:

The lack of affordable housing means fewer opportunities to develop appropriate accommodation pathways for vulnerable people, to enable a structured move from supported accommodation through to independent living.

The increasing demand for private rented accommodation has increased rental values, making landlords less interested in letting properties to people in receipt of benefits.

5.4 Opportunities:

The Homelessness Strategy will be reviewed during 2014 to ensure that the priorities are still relevant and meeting the need of homeless people and those at risk of homelessness in the borough.

Prevention of homelessness is a priority and opportunities to expand this work in partnership with other agencies will be brought forward wherever possible.

The government has recently announced additional funding to tackle homelessness. Any opportunities to bid for the fund will be considered.

6. Conclusion

The Housing Service is delivering against the five priorities of the Housing Framework 2013-18. The diverse nature of the work of Housing Services means that actions often cannot be solely attributed to one priority but have a beneficial outcome on several.

The new build programme and the purchase of empty properties has increased the amount of affordable housing available in a time when the more traditional routes are constrained.

Good housing management ensures the Council's stock is well maintained and residents are involved in neighbourhood improvements which instils increased 'ownership' and pride in an area.

Residents across the Borough are supported with a range of advice services, both directly by officers and through partner organisations, whether it is in the Council's own housing stock or the private sector. Vulnerable people are assisted to live as independently as possible. Preventative work is key to tackling homelessness and reducing costs to the Council for temporary accommodation.

Working in cooperation with other departments and outside agencies strengthens the ability to deliver good services and respond to an ever changing environment, which contributes to making the Borough one of high quality homes and places to live.

7. Appendix 1: Tackling Hard to Heat Homes

Airey House Case Study:

1. The Airey House:

There are a significant number of non-traditional dwellings within ABC's housing stock. These homes don't have a wall cavity that can be filled with insulation, to help lessen heat loss. Unless the walls have been upgraded in some way, they are homes that are "hard to heat".

Most of the non-traditional buildings have had an external wall insulation system (EWI) installed at some stage in the past. Those that haven't are lacking, due to the absence (until recently) of an appropriate insulation technique. This is particularly relevant in the case of our Airey houses. There are approximately 80 Airey-style houses, in the Council's ownership, similar (or identical) to the one shown below



Airey's were a fast-build system to help ease the housing shortage, following WW2. Due to problems with the concrete supporting frame, they were structurally repaired, on a nation-wide scale, in the late 1980's or early 1990's. The external walls were provided with some insulation, in the form of insulated plasterboard, on the inside. Even though improved however, the thermal performance is still inferior, when compared to traditional external wall construction.

In addition to thermal transmittance, heat losses are also made through air leakage. Although the repair system carried out was considered suitable for its day it did not take this into account. The concrete panels have (more or less) open joints, giving freer passage for air leakage to occur than compared to traditional external wall construction.

2. Energy Consumption:

Complaints from Airey house tenants about their homes being draughty and cold are common place, especially as fuel poverty is becoming an ever increasing cause for concern.

Preventing heat loss through the building fabric is a key factor in reducing fuel consumption. With good insulation, a comfortable internal temperature can be maintained for less expenditure of energy. The direct benefits of this include:-

- Reduced Carbon (and other harmful) emissions, to the atmosphere.
- Reduced household running costs.
- Reduced risk of damage (through condensation and mould) to the décor and fabric of the building and;
- Improved health and wellbeing of the tenant.

Generally, the Council's Aireys have already benefitted from:-

- Loft (top-up) insulation.
- Double glazed windows and doors and;
- Reasonably efficient gas-fired central heating.

Despite this the Aireys are still "hard to heat". Being incompatible with standard EWI systems they are amongst our most inefficient homes.

Given that some 50% of heat losses from a home are through the external walls, it is felt that efforts need to be concentrated in this area.

3. Key Design Considerations:

We looked into several improvement proposals. In doing so, we felt the following issues needed to be addressed:-

3.1: Building regulations, compliance: The building regulations set minimum performance standards for exposed elements of a structure. An exposed element is an area where heat loss occurs (e.g. an outside wall, window, etc.). The thermal performance is known as its U-Value. The lower the U-Value, the more thermally efficient that element is. A system was required that exceeded current boundaries, knowing full well that thermal efficiency targets were likely to become more rigorous in the near future.

3.2: Ongoing maintenance: There are signs of deterioration in some properties where panels have slipped or become dislodged. Remedial works are difficult because the panels are interlocking thus one or two panels cannot be worked on in

isolation. Large areas need to be stripped just to “get to” one defective area. Replacing the panels would reduce an ongoing maintenance liability.

3.3: Cost Effectiveness: There are a number of systems for refurbishing Aireys. Some involve construction of foundations and/or underpinning of the existing structure. Entire reconstruction of the external walls (together with associated, rewiring, redecorations, new skirting boards and carpet adjustments, etc.), is also required. Although a small number of Aireys have been refurbished in this way it was felt that work to this extent was not justified nor would it be financially viable and looked at other, simpler, proposals.

3.4: Disruption: Works along the lines of the above, would result in decanting the tenants during the work. This would have a further financial impact on cost due to removal costs and loss of rent. A system that could be installed with the tenant’s in-situ, with minimal disturbance was required.

3.5: Appearance: One of the other major benefits of the work was that it provided and opportunity to improve the aesthetic appearance of the dwellings. A system that could offer flexibility in choice of the external finish was sought.

4. Deciding Factors:

A lightweight, structural, insulated render system (SIRS) was the preferred option. This was an innovative approach as this type of product is normally fixed to a masonry surface. Although slightly unusual, we discovered that it could be fixed to a structural framework with equal success. It “ticked the boxes” because:-

- Calculation showed that the current standards were easily exceeded*.
- The defective concrete panels would be removed. The insulated render system provides the weather-tightness, as well as the thermal efficiency. This truly is a huge side- benefit and is likely to save the authority many thousands of pounds in the long term.
- It is a lightweight solution, no costly ground works or reconstruction.
- Non-Intrusive. Apart from being asked to remove pictures, etc. from the walls and some unavoidable noise, there was no internal disruption.
- The appearance of the building could be vastly improved. Flexible options for “brick-effect” or plain rendering were available, as shown in below.



5. Installation and Review:

5.1: The SIRS was trialled on all four of our Aireys within a small hamlet. The basic work comprised:-

- Removal of the existing concrete panels.
- Fitting of 80mm thick, composite insulation panels/stainless steel, structural caging. The panels were mechanically fixed to the structural steel frame of the houses, as shown in below.



- The application of 1-3 coats of proprietary render system.

5.2: Tenant Feed Back: The pilot scheme was completed before the on-set of winter 2013 and is being monitored over the heating season. Early tenant feedback

suggests the system performs well and there is a marked improvement in ability to maintain and control ambient internal heating levels.

One tenant reports that their hallway, still feels cold; compared to the rest of the house. The hallway however, contains a disproportionate amount of glazing; which is less thermally efficient than the surrounding walls. This could give rise to a distorted and exaggerated effect.

5.3: Officer Feed Back:

Negatives: The main criticism of the system is that it was time consuming and “fiddly” to install. The cage spars and panels have to be cut and adapted around windows and other openings. Each joint also requires seam-crimping to lock abutting panels together.

Another slight “negative” is the cost. Despite huge savings (compared to other methods) the work is still quite costly at around £25,000 per property.

Positives: Calculations show that prior to the works, the U-Value of the walls was 0.56; post works, it was found to be 0.25 (remembering the lower the U-Value - the better). The rating required by Building Control (at the time) was only 0.35. Logic would suggest that, the heat loss prevented through air leakage must also be considerable. The open-jointed panels have been removed and replaced with a seamless and impervious wall surface. The generally positive tenant feedback would appear to confirm this.

Apart from the time taken, the SIRS installation was relatively stress and trouble free. The work can be done in stages (if required) to avoid exposing too much of the structure to the elements (and possible inclement weather) at any one time. This would be particularly important if work were to be undertaken through the winter months.

The render system can be applied by spray machine or by hand. Two of the houses underwent machine application and two hand application. It was considered that the most successful, was the hand application. There was much less mess, due to accurate placement of the render and less wastage.

There are now other innovative solutions available that could achieve similar performance levels, but are perhaps, less arduous and time consuming to install. A system that could be fitted quicker would realise a cost reduction.

Agenda Item No:5

Report To: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 25 June 2014

Report Title: Sickness absence

Report Author: Ian Smith, Personnel Officer.



Summary: This report provides information on sickness absenteeism for 2013/14.

Key Decision: No

Affected Wards: None

Recommendations: That the Committee consider the information provided in this report and advise Officers:

- If any further information is required
- If the Committee would wish to receive a further update in a year's time

Contacts: ian.smith@ashford.gov.uk – Tel: (01233) 330411

Report Title: Sickness Absence –Annual Report 2013/14

Purpose of the Report

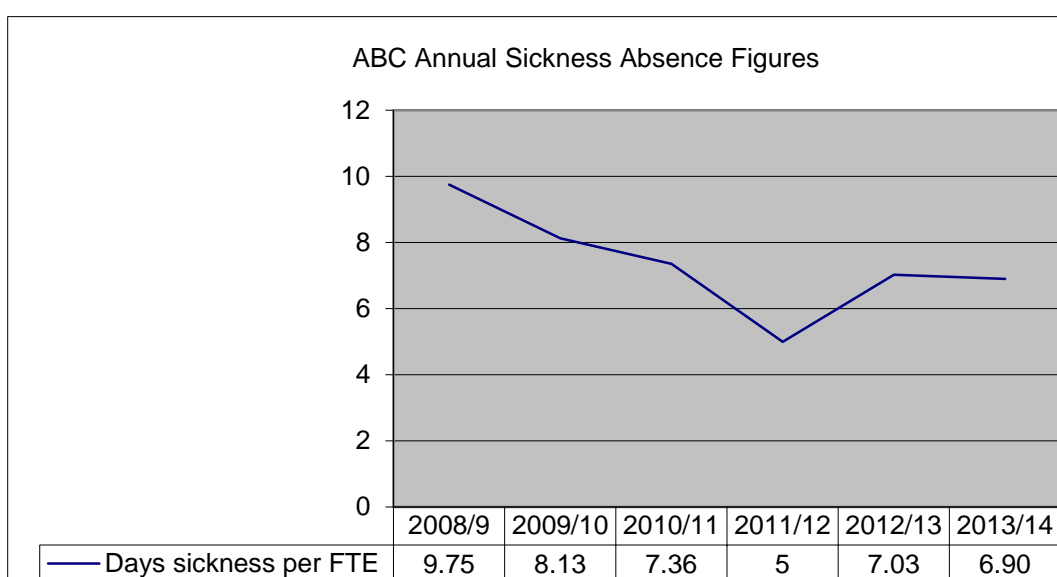
1. This report presents the level of sickness absence incurred by employees of Ashford Borough Council for the financial year 2013/14.

Background

2. The Council's sickness absence figures have been obtained from all sickness absences recorded on the Council's iTrent Payroll and HR system.
3. The figures are presented as the average number of working days lost per FTE (full time working equivalent) employee during the period.
4. The content of this report reflects Members' preference to receive less detail than provided in previous years; there has been no significant change in the sickness absence level reported from the previous year.

Sickness Absence 2013/14

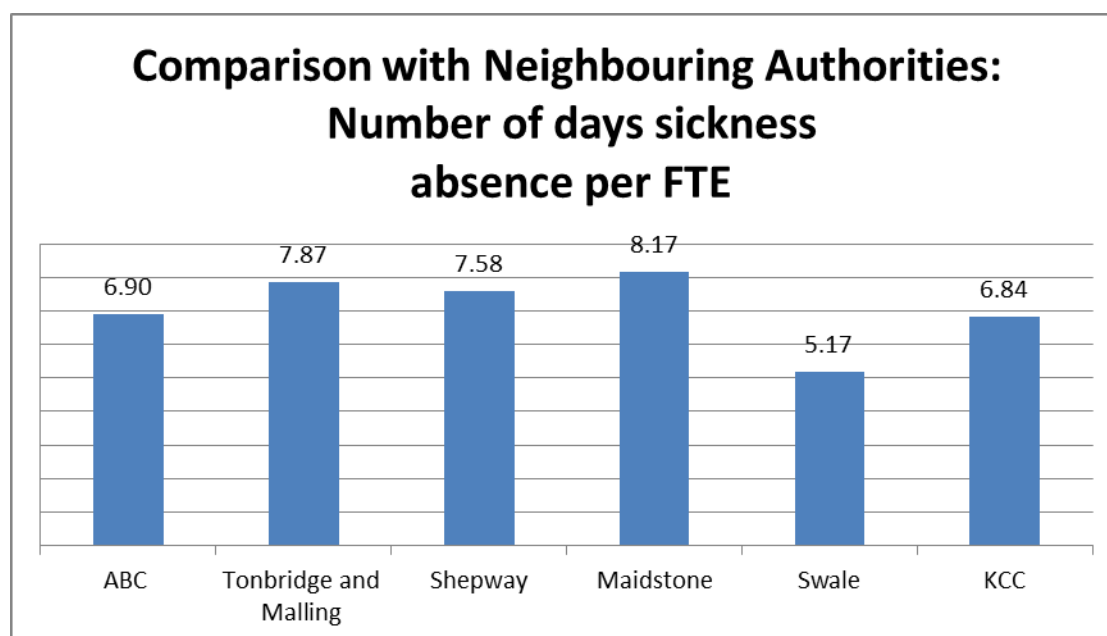
5. Based on the average number of 378.34 FTE employees, the total amount of working days (2590.24) lost due to sickness equates to 6.90 days per FTE. This figure represents a decrease of 0.13 days reported for 2012/13.
6. **Chart 1** shows the average number of days sickness absence for each financial year over the past six years. Excluding the exceptional reported figure for 2011/12, there has been a year on year reduction with a fall of 2.85% from the highest recorded figure in 2008/9.



7. **Long term cases (20 continuous days or more).** There were 24 cases which represents 46% (1194.5 days) of the total number of sickness absence days. The average period of absence per employee within this category was 48.66 days; the longest individual period being 126 days.

Comparison data

8. The latest available Local Government Workforce Survey (2012/13) highlighted that the average sickness absence level in English local authorities was 8.8 days per employee.
9. The 2013 survey report produced by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development showed that there was a sickness absence rate of 8.7 days per employee in whole of the UK Public sector with 7.2 days in the private sector.
10. **Chart 2** shows how the Council compares with five neighbouring authorities who provided their average sickness absence figures for 2013/14.



Conclusion

11. It is encouraging to report that the Council has seen a continuing reduction in its level of sickness absence. The reported figure for 2013/14 is well below that of the latest reported national averages for the public sector and is largely comparable to some of our neighbouring authorities for the same period. To maintain this position it is essential that the management of sickness absence is effective, fair and consistent. To ensure that the Council meets this objective, we will continue to support and train our line managers in dealing with absence issues and review the policy and its procedures to determine where improvements can be made.

Contact: Ian Smith Personnel Officer
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Future Reviews and Report Tracker

Forward plan

July – meeting of Budget Scrutiny Task Group - to consider the report 'Informing the next Five Years' , from the Cabinet Agenda of 10th July 2014.

September

- **ABC Business plan performance report Q1 2014-15**
- **Update on new waste and recycling scheme**

October – change of date of meeting - the Chairman is unable to be at the meeting on 28th October and, with Members' agreement, would like to move the meeting to the 21st October.

- **Update on progress of Focus 2013-15**

November

- **ABC Business plan performance report Q2 2014-15**

December/January - meetings of Budget Scrutiny Task group

New items:-

Apart from items such as scrutinising the Council's draft budget, which the Constitution requires the O&S 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.

Suggested items for O&S to consider if they are to be added to the work programme.

Ashford International Model Railway Exhibition Centre

Background information – nothing has happened since officers met with the promoters earlier this year. www.aimrec.co.uk

Action – no action at the present time

S106 agreements

Background information – there is an annual report to Cabinet:-
July 2014 – Section 106 Cabinet Annual Monitoring 2013/14,
June 2013 making S106 agreements work for your community.

Information available on the council's web site:-

S106 – what they can cover

- Which contribution is best for you
- How contributions are spent
- Legal tests

Christina Fuller works with parishes to determine where S106 money received by ABC is spent – e.g. on sport/open space etc.

Some contributions (e.g. for education, library facilities, social services) go to KCC as they are responsible for distributing them.

Action - if desired O&S could ask for an information report, this could cover:

1. Why we have agreements
2. What we can seek contributions for and the legal justification
3. How we work with parishes and other organisations to identify projects which could utilise contributions
4. How we obtain payments and monitor compliance

Conningbrook lakes

Background information – This was reported to O&S last November (2013) and an update, particularly on safety aspects, was due this summer. Officers have advised that there is nothing further to add to the report that O&S received in November and the Portfolio Holder has suggested that this be scheduled for a date in the autumn.

Action – reschedule for October/November 2014.

Update and progress report on ABC Commercial Companies & the O&S Call-in recommendations

Background information – The Property Company is not trading at all at the moment and the Building Control Company has only been trading for two months.

Action - If the O&S Committee wishes to put this item on the forward plan it is suggested that this be to come forward in 6 months time. An update on each of the O&S call-in recommendations and a financial statement can be provided at the same time.

Town centre – update on the Portas Pilot Project

Background - An update is reported annually to Cabinet (November 2012, October 2013) and this year's will be going to Cabinet in October / November time.

Action - O&S could request that the report comes to them for consideration after it has been to Cabinet.

Lorry Parking Problem Dover to London

Background - this is an issue which is being dealt with by KCC and being reported to the Joint Transportation Board. A consultants' report has been commissioned, by KCC, to explore Lorry Parking options along the M20/M2 corridor. The consultants' report has not been made public yet.

Action – this issue is already being reported to another committee (JTB), which Members are at liberty to attend. It is important that double handling is avoided and therefore it is suggested that the matter be left with the JTB for the time being.

Year Plan 2014/15

Month	items	Task Group
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ABC Business Plan quarterly performance report (Q4) • Fly tipping 	
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call-in meeting re Cabinet Minute No. 397 	
July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sickness & Absenteeism annual report. • Housing Strategy Action Plan Monitoring Report and annual review of Homelessness strategy 	Budget Scrutiny TG meeting
August		
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ABC Business Plan quarterly performance report Q1 • Update on new waste and recycling scheme. 	
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update on progress of Focus 2013 – 15 	
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ABC Business Plan quarterly performance report Q2 	
December	Scrutiny of Council's draft 2015/16 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(Q3) • Annual review of Community Safety Partnership 	
March		
April		

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	July 2014	Housing Framework 2013 -18 and Homelessness Strategy 2013 –18 adopted July 2013. 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	July 2014	The Homelessness Strategy to be included in the Housing Strategy in future.	As above
51/06/13	Sickness and Absenteeism – annual report	Head of Personnel & development	July 2014		Timetable for June each year.
13/05/13	Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report	Senior Scrutiny Officer	May/June 2015		Timetable for May/June each year
142/09/12	3 year review of Mayoralty		Sept 2015		
431/04/12	ABC Business Plan performance reports – 2013/14	Policy & Performance Officer	May/Sept/ Nov/Feb		
62/06/12	Sports & Leisure		TBA		

398/03/13	Refurbishment of the Stour Centre	TBA	TBA	Final Report from Task Group to be presented to O&S	
335/02/14	Community Safety Partnership – annual update	Assistant Health, Parking & Community Safety Manager	February 2015		
216/11/13	Council play parks	TBA	TBA	Awaiting confirmation of date of report	
216/11/13	Update on progress of Focus 2013 - 15	TBA	Oct/Nov 2014		
215/11/13	Update on Conningbrook Project – especially safety aspects.	Nature Conservation & Tourism Officer and Sports Projects Manager & active Ashford co-ordinator	Autumn 2014		
57/06/08 199/10/11 115/08/13	Update on new waste and recycling scheme.	Strategic Environmental and Customer Service Manager	September 2014	New contract commenced July 2013. .	Report on new contract one year after commencement

Low Priority & other proposed reports

	Report Title	Officer	Date due	Current position	Recommended action
291/12/08 216/11/13	The effectiveness of a single O&S committee			Reconsider having a report November 2014	