



## 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 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2014 at 7.00 pm.

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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

- |   | <b>Page<br/>Nos.</b> |
|---|----------------------|
| 1. <b>Apologies/Substitutes</b> – To receive Notification of Substitutes in accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2(iii)                             |                      |
| 2. <b>Declarations of Interest:-</b> 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 22 <sup>nd</sup> July 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**

4. Report of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group – Informing the next 5 Years 1 - 5

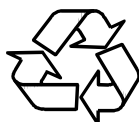
**Part IV – Information/Monitoring Items**

5. ABC Business Plan Performance report Q1 2014-15 7 - 16
6. Future reviews and report tracker. 17 - 21
- 

JV/VS  
15 September 2014

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Queries concerning this agenda? Please contact Danny Sheppard:  
Telephone: 01233 330349 Email: [danny.sheppard@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:danny.sheppard@ashford.gov.uk)  
Agendas, Reports and Minutes are available on: [www.ashford.gov.uk/committees](http://www.ashford.gov.uk/committees)



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Advice to Members on Declarations of Interest:**

- (a) Government Guidance on DPI is available in DCLG’s Guide for Councillors, at [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/240134/Openness\\_and\\_transparency\\_on\\_personal\\_interests.pdf](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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 **22<sup>nd</sup> July 2014**.

### Present:

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

Cllrs. Apps, Bartlett, Buchanan, Burgess, Davidson, Feacey, Hodgkinson,  
Mrs Hutchinson, Mrs Martin, Mortimer, Sims.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 9.3 Councillor Davidson attended as a Substitute Member for Councillor Aaby.

### Apologies:

Cllrs. Aaby, Hicks, Miss Martin.

### Also Present:

Cllr. Smith.

Head of Community and Housing, Housing Strategy Manager, Senior Scrutiny Officer, Member Services & Scrutiny Support Officer.

## 100 Declarations of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Chilton	Announced an 'Other Interest' as a Trustee of the Ashford Volunteer Bureau.	102
Feacey	Announced an 'Other Interest' as the Chairman of the Ashford Volunteer Bureau.	102
Hodgkinson	Announced an 'Other Interest' as a tenant of Ashford Borough Council.	102

## 101 Minutes

### Resolved:

**That the Minutes of the Meetings of this Committee held on the 20<sup>th</sup> May 2014 and 11<sup>th</sup> June 2014 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.**

## 102 Annual Report of the Housing Framework 2013-18

The Housing Strategy Manager introduced the item. She advised the Committee that the Framework had been adopted in July 2013; the report before Members was

an annual progress report. They were continually working to meet the needs of residents by improving existing housing stock and ensuring the best use of housing in the Borough. The Department was more than about bricks and mortar. Good quality homes benefitted residents' health and wellbeing and social and economic agendas. She was pleased to announce that the HCA had made an announcement earlier that day that Ashford Borough Council had been successful in their bid for £2.12m for new build homes as part of the 2015-18 programme. The Social Lettings Agency had also been expanded into Shepway.

During the discussion, the following questions/comments were raised:

- Members were concerned about the low number of housing completions and questioned whether it would be possible to place pressure on developers to provide more affordable housing. The Housing Strategy Manager agreed that the delivery of affordable housing had not been as high as previous years. A high percentage of those houses had been constructed through the Council's own new build programme. Discussions with developers were ongoing regarding provision of affordable housing; however it should be borne in mind that developers could argue for a lower proportion of affordable housing due to the viability of the site. Housing Officers worked closely with Planning Officers on this matter. On a positive note there were over 200 starts on sites with dwellings expected to be completed over the next twelve months. The Head of Community and Housing added that affordable housing was delivered through Section 106 Agreements and as part of this there were many others that were trying to ensure their share of the monies, such as Highways, KCC etc. Working with developers to ensure the required amount of affordable housing was provided was difficult but Officers would continue to push for the provision of affordable housing where possible.
- A Member was concerned about an incident in her Ward whereby a tenant had not been kept informed of when work would be taking place at the property. The contractor had turned up three or four times to carry out the work but had not had the proper equipment and tenants were given the wrong information. She was concerned that issues were not being followed up. The Head of Community and Housing advised that the bad weather had put the Council's contractor under pressure due to unexpected problems within the housing stock. This had created a backlog which was being cleared. Officers were looking at the contract and ways to improve the service, including whether more resources would be required to manage the contract itself.
- Members questioned what action could be taken to encourage tenants to tidy up their gardens. The Head of Community and Housing advised that Officers did try to get tenants to improve their gardens however it was a difficult issue. She drew attention to a report that had recently been to Cabinet regarding the introduction of a 'star' service. This would rate tenants in terms of what level of service they would receive based on a number of factors, including garden tidiness.
- The Head of Community and Housing advised that all of the Council's housing stock had current gas safety certificates. There was an eight month rolling programme to try to ensure that all properties held a current certificate. **Post meeting note:** The Planned Maintenance Manager has confirmed that all Council properties have an up to date gas safety certificate.

- In response to a number of questions from a Member the Head of Community and Housing advised that they had been contacted by the South East Consortium regarding possible access to grants for properties that were in fuel poverty, this would be explored further. The Council did not have any contact with 'care navigators', it was suspected they were able to make referrals to the Occupational Therapist who would then make recommendations to the Council. The Council could only carry out disabled adaptations to properties once a referral from the Occupational Therapist had been received. In respect of the Wilson's announcement that they would be selling their housing portfolio the Council had had some discussions regarding the potential purchase of some of the houses, however the properties were expensive and they had not found the right opportunity to take the matter further.
- Residents affected by the social size criteria (bedroom tax) had the option to pay the difference for the vacant rooms, they were also encouraged to downsize which could be done through a mutual exchange or bidding for a smaller property. They were also encouraged to consider taking in a lodger to not only fill the empty room but fund the gap left by the reduction in housing benefit as a result of under-occupation. Tenants were able to apply for a discretionary housing payment that would last for six to twelve months on the proviso that they were actively trying to move. **Post meeting note:** the welfare reform impacts report can be found at [www.ashford.gov.uk/welfarereform](http://www.ashford.gov.uk/welfarereform)
- There were no HMOs within the Councils housing stock. HMOs that, met the relevant criteria, including those that were three storeys, required a licence which was renewed every five years.
- A Member questioned whether the newly formed national probation service, which now dealt with homelessness, would be involved in the review and refresh of the homelessness strategy. The Housing Strategy Manager advised that all stakeholders would be consulted and fed into the strategy process.
- Were there plans to carry out works on 'Airey' homes within the Council's stock throughout the Borough as highlighted in the papers? The Head of Community and Housing advised that a pilot had been carried out in Egerton. This had been successful with residents happy with the work and the reduction in heat loss. Work to improve 'hard to heat' homes would be built into the planned maintenance programme.
- A Member was concerned about perceived levels of damp and mould in some of the older properties in the housing stock. The Head of Community and Housing advised that properties that had issues with damp would be examined and solutions found where available. In respect of mould it was often the case that this was linked to the ventilation of the property. Drying of clothes inside a property could create a humid atmosphere. It had been necessary to install auto humidity systems into some properties to assist with this.
- The Head of Community and Housing advised that there were fewer than 6,000 homes in the housing stock with approximately 1,400 people on the housing register. She advised that she would provide the exact figures to the Committee after the meeting. **Post meeting note:** At the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014 there

were 4,729 dwellings owned and managed by the Council. In July 2014 there were 1,390 applicants on the housing register.

- The first phase of the Property Company would be to provide affordable housing at 80-85% of market rent. Following that it was hoped to start building dwellings for the rental market at market rent. They had to ensure that any borrowing was within state aid regulations. Properties owned by the Property Company would not be subject to the Right to Buy.

There was further discussion on the viability of sites and the reduction in affordable housing being provided. A Member felt that there was a need to be clear about what was expected from developers. The 35% target for the rural areas seemed fair and needed to be pursued. The Housing Strategy Manager advised that the split of affordable dwellings to market housing was 30% in the urban areas and 35% in the rural areas, on qualifying sites i.e. sites of 15 or more units. Officers agreed that more were needed and the latest Strategic Housing Market Assessment indicated that the figure would be nearer to 50%. Developers argued about the viability of sites with 35% provision of affordable housing which meant that a higher number would be even more difficult to achieve. Some Councils had a different approach when dealing with Section 106 Agreements with the provision of affordable housing the most important priority and effectively 'top-slicing' monies to ensure that this was provided. Members requested that Officers looked at the how other Local Authorities in Kent dealt with Section 106 Agreements and the provision of affordable housing. The Housing Strategy Manager advised that the Planning Task Group would be dealing with affordable housing and its provision through the work on the new Local Plan. The future introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy would also need to be considered. Officers confirmed that they would be able to look at what other Councils did in respect of affordable housing and would report back to the Committee at its September meeting.

#### **Resolved:**

- That (i) the Annual Report of the Housing Framework 2013-18 be noted and the Committee agrees to its publication on the Ashford Borough Council website.**
- (ii) The Committee requests that Officers investigate the arrangements that Local Authorities in Kent have for dealing with the provision of affordable housing through Section 106 Agreements and the Community Infrastructure Levy and report back to the Committee at its Meeting in September.**

### **103 Sickness Absence**

The Chairman advised that Officers were not present to answer questions on the report following the Committee's decision last year for the report to be less detailed than it had been in previous years.

Members were pleased that the number of working days lost through sickness absence had reduced. They felt it would be useful to have an Officer attend when the next yearly report was put before the Committee.

A Member drew attention to the objective in the conclusion of the report in respect of ensuring that support and training would be provided to managers dealing with absence issues. He felt that all managers should be aware of the procedures and was concerned that some had not received the appropriate training.

**Resolved:**

- That (i) The report be received and noted.**
- (ii) The Committee requests that a further report be put before the Committee in a year's time and that an Officer be present to answer any questions arising from the report.**

## **104 Future Reviews and Report Tracker**

The Chairman drew Members' attention to the items scheduled for the next few meetings. He advised that he would be unable to be at the meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> October and so, subject to the agreement of the Committee, he proposed that the October meeting be bought forward to the 21<sup>st</sup> October. Members indicated that they would be content with this proposal.

The Chairman advised the Committee that a number of items had been put forward for inclusion on the future reviews and report tracker. He suggested that the Committee considered each proposed review individually, and highlighted the Chairman's recommendation for each review.

### **Ashford International Model Railway Excellence Centre**

As there was no information available at the current time the Committee felt that the item should not be added to the tracker.

### **Section 106 Agreements**

The Senior Scrutiny Officer reminded the Committee that earlier in the meeting they had requested that Officers investigate the arrangements that Local Authorities in Kent had for dealing with the provision of affordable housing through Section 106 Agreements and the Community Infrastructure Levy and report back to the Committee at its Meeting in September.

The Committee agreed that an information report on Section 106 Agreements and the Community Infrastructure Levy should be presented to the Committee at a future meeting. The report to include; why they had agreements, what contributions could be sought, how the Council worked with Parishes and other organisations to identify projects that could utilise contributions and how payments were obtained and compliance was monitored.

### **Conningbrook Lakes**

The Committee agreed that the report should be rescheduled for October/November 2014.



### **Update and progress report on Ashford Borough Council Commercial Companies and the Overview & Scrutiny Call-in Recommendations**

The Committee agreed that an update be requested for six months' time.

### **Town Centre – Update on the Portas Pilot Project**

Members agreed that the report should be put before the Committee for consideration once it had been to Cabinet.

### **Lorry Parking Problem – Dover to London**

The Committee felt that this item should not be included on the tracker as work was already being carried out on this topic by the Joint Transportation Board.

### **Purchase of Commercial Properties**

A Member requested that a report be put before the Committee on the structure used to acquire commercial property in order to protect the General Fund from exposure to liability which might arise. He had some concerns regarding the way in which commercial purchases had been structured, in particular the purchase of International House.

The Committee agreed that this item should be placed on the tracker.

### **Resolved:**

- That (i) **The following reviews be added to the Future Reviews and Report Tracker; Section 106 Agreements, Update and progress report on Ashford Borough Council Commercial Companies and the Overview & Scrutiny Call-in Recommendations, Town Centre – Update on the Portas Pilot Project and Purchase of Commercial Properties.**
- (ii) **The Future Reviews and Report Tracker be noted.**
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**Agenda Item No:** 4  
**Report To:** Overview and Scrutiny  
**Date:** 23 September 2014  
**Report Title:** Informing the Next 5 Years  
**Report Author:** Senior Scrutiny Officer



**Summary:** At the Cabinet meeting in July 2014 the O&S Budget Scrutiny Task Group were invited to scrutinise the 'Informing the Next 5 Years' report particularly the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) assumptions (appendix A and B), the detailed savings proposals (appendix C) and the Borrowing and Investment strategy (appendix E) and to report back to Cabinet in October prior to the detailed budget build in the autumn.  
The Budget Scrutiny Task Group considered this report and present their findings to the O&S Committee.

**Key Decision:** NO

**Affected Wards:** All

**Recommendations:** **That:-**  
**The Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the report and recommends that the Cabinet:-**

- **Be advised that the O&S Committee broadly supports appendices A, B, C & E of the 'Informing the next 5 Years' report but would like to suggest two additions:-**
  1. **Appendix F (Projected New Homes Bonus receipts) : any surplus should be applied to balances, not new expenditure**
  2. **Any future new Capital Projects should be subject to scrutiny by the O&S Budget Scrutiny Task Group prior to consideration by Cabinet or inclusion in the budget**

**Policy Overview:** N/A

**Financial Implications:** N/A

**Risk Assessment** N/A

**Equalities Impact Assessment** N/A

**Background  
Papers:**

None

**Contacts:**

julia.vink@ashford.gov.uk – Tel: (01233) 330491

## Report Title: Informing the Next Five Years

### Purpose of the Report

1. At the Cabinet meeting in July 2014 the O&S Budget Scrutiny Task Group were invited to scrutinise the 'Informing the next 5 years' report particularly the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) assumptions (Appendix A and B), the detailed savings proposals (Appendix C) and the Borrowing and Investment strategy (Appendix E) and to report back to Cabinet in October prior to the detailed budget build in the autumn.
2. The Budget Scrutiny Task Group have considered this report and present their findings to the O&S Committee

### Issue to be Decided

3. The O&S Committee are asked to support the recommendation from the Task Group to the Cabinet.

### Background

4. The 'Informing the Next 5 Years' report was submitted to Cabinet in July 2014. This was very early in the budget cycle in order that the Budget Scrutiny Task Group could also consider the report to reassure Members that the report had been well scrutinised before being accepted.
5. The original report is available on the Council's website on the agenda for the Cabinet meeting on 10 July 2014 and via this link:  
<http://vm-abcapps/committeeSystem/ViewAgenda.aspx?MeetingId=1739>
6. The report was in preparation for next year's budget, and dealt with revenue budget (day to day costs) and investment/borrowing strategy. There will be further decisions/discussions on the budget before it is set in February 2015. The report will inform the business plan into the next council. Opportunities and risks will be monitored and managed as situations can change – e.g. the outcome and impact of the General and Local elections in May 2015 is unpredictable; it is expected that all parties would honour the government grant for the first year (2015/16) but thereafter the situation will be more uncertain.
7. The report explained the changes to the funding for local government, the continuing reductions in the amount of central government support, and the expectation that district councils will have to become self financing.
8. For future funding the assumption has been made (in common with many other district councils), that Revenue Support Grant (RSG) will continue to be reduced year on year to £0 (or a non-material amount), so other sources of income: Retained Business Rates, New Homes Bonus and Council Tax will become much more important.

9. In addition, Heads of Service have been asked to identify departmental Budget Savings proposals and these have been rigorously reviewed and agreed to be taken forward (Appendix C of the original report).
10. By the end of their discussions, Members were able to support the reported MTPF assumptions, the detailed savings proposals and the borrowing and investment strategy. The Budget Scrutiny Task Group also considered appendix F- projected New Homes Bonus receipts - and suggested that any surplus should be committed to balances and not spent.
11. The Task Group accepted that there was no programme of Capital projects – these would be dealt with on a project-by-project basis, subject to Members’ decision on priority, viability, financial implications etc., and that no money would be spent without a transparent appraisal. Nevertheless, the members of the Task Group considered that it would be desirable for potential projects to be subject to scrutiny by them before being presented to the Cabinet.

## Conclusion

12. The Task Group would like the O&S Committee to support the following recommendation to Cabinet:  
**The Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the report and recommends that the Cabinet:-**
  - **Be advised that the O&S Committee broadly supports appendices A, B, C & E of the ‘Informing the next 5 Years’ report but would like to suggest two additions:-**
    1. **Appendix F (Projected New Homes Bonus receipts) : any surplus should be applied to balances, not new expenditure**
    2. **Any future new Capital Projects should be subject to scrutiny by the O&S Budget Scrutiny Task Group prior to consideration by Cabinet or inclusion in the budget**

## Portfolio Holder’s Views

13. ‘I thank the Task Group for its examination of the report and am pleased they broadly support the Cabinet’s Medium Term Financial Plan, but I do not support the specific recommendations as they are unnecessary for the following reasons.
  - First, the use of New Homes Bonus is most carefully considered by Cabinet. As highlighted in the plan, our strategy is to achieve an appropriate balance between holding New Homes Bonus to support the council’s budget and future financial position, together with a level of investment in new initiatives (projects and grants). There is not a plan to use all future New Homes Bonus to support projects, as may be implied by the Task Group’s comment. Our plan was clear; the future financial prospects are uncertain, but with a high probability that government grants continue to reduce. We cannot be certain

about the future of the New Homes Bonus grant either in its current form. Accordingly, Cabinet's plan is to utilise NHB prudently and make decisions only when NHB is in the bank and with a view to the future and NHB increasingly acting as a contingency.

- Second, on project scrutiny, I should like to remind Members that, as well as Portfolio Holder and collective Cabinet input, several major projects have working group arrangements that involve other Members, as well as our professional officers from a range of disciplines. The Stour Centre remodelling working group, the Conningbrook working group, and the Hothfield regeneration working group are three current examples. The role of this type of group is to provide constructive feedback and challenge.'

**Contact:** Julia Vink, Senior Scrutiny Officer

**Email:** [julia.vink@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:julia.vink@ashford.gov.uk)

Overview and Scrutiny  
23 September 2014

**Agenda item 5**

**Ashford Borough Council's Performance – Quarter 1, 2014 - 15**

The attached report was presented to the Cabinet on 4<sup>th</sup> September 2014 and O&S are invited to consider it.

Agenda Item No:

Report To **Cabinet**

Date: **04 September 2014**

Report Title: **Ashford Borough Council's Performance – Quarter 1 2014/15**

Report Author: Policy and Performance Officer, Nicholas Clayton

Portfolio Holder: Portfolio Holder for Resource Management and Control, Graham Galpin



**ASHFORD**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Summary:

This report seeks to update members and the public on the performance of the council during the quarter. This includes information on what the Cabinet has achieved through its decision-making, key performance data on our frontline services, and consideration of the wider borough picture which impacts upon the councils work.

Following feedback from a number of services, The Portfolio Holder and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the report has been updated to include some additional performance metrics and comparative data, alongside a 'Technical Annex' of all numerical information included within the report which provides comparison and trend data against performance over the previous four quarters.

Key Decision: NO

Affected Wards: ALL

Recommendations: **The Cabinet is asked to note performance for Quarter 1 of 2014/15.**

Policy Overview: The council's strategic direction, which informs the report's content, is enshrined within "Focus 2013-15", the council's corporate plan. It is key that members are updated on progress against this, and that the public are updated on progress against plans which they have helped develop.

Financial Implications: None specifically arising from this report.

Risk Assessment Not specifically applicable, but the report notes key frontline service information which is an important indicator of pressures (external and internal) on the council's resources.

Impact Assessment N/A



Other Material Implications: N/A

Background Papers: None

Portfolio Holder's Comments I am pleased to report that the Council's performance remains strong, improving in most areas over the quarter. There has been a small but significant improvement in indicators tracking local growth, including increasing planning applications numbers.

Some of the decisions taken by the Council over the last year are beginning to bear fruit. Partly due to the agreement of a new strategy, there has been a fall in both the number of individuals applying for homelessness support and the numbers of families needing temporary Bed and Breakfast accommodation. The Council will continue to work hard to make sure that improvement in this area – and others where performance has in fact declined – is maintained over the year, whilst remaining vigilant on how we perform across all our frontline services.

The addition of a 'Technical Annex' to the quarterly performance report makes it easier to compare our performance over the last three months against not only the previous quarter but over the course of the last year too.

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

# Ashford Borough Council

## Our Performance

*April to June 2014*

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### **Introduction from the Portfolio Holder**

*Graham Galpin, Portfolio Holder for Resource Management and Control*

I am pleased to report that the Council's performance remains strong, improving in most areas over the quarter. There has been a small but significant improvement in indicators tracking local growth, including increasing planning applications numbers.

Some of the decisions taken by the Council over the last year are beginning to bear fruit. Partly due to the agreement of a new strategy, there has been a fall in both the number of individuals applying for homelessness support and the numbers of families needing temporary Bed and Breakfast accommodation. The Council will continue to work hard to make sure that improvement in this area – and others where performance has in fact declined – is maintained over the year, whilst remaining vigilant on how we perform across all our frontline services.

The addition of a 'Technical Annex' to the quarterly performance report makes it easier to compare our performance over the last three months against not only the previous quarter but over the course of the last year too.



## Helping to create jobs and economic growth

An average of 308,000 people visited the town centre each month, as calculated by the footfall counter installed on the high street earlier this year. With better weather in June around 20% more visitors (compared to May) visited the town centre.

Just over 290,000 people used the council's car parks during the quarter. This is around 5,000 more than in the previous quarter, comparable to both the busy Christmas period and the same quarter last year.

In May the Council agreed to expand the Ellingham Industrial Estate with three new industrial units, with an estimated build cost of around £400,000 and a return on investment of around 12%.

96.7% of food premises comply with environmental health standards. This number has remained steady over the last year.

We received over 300 applications from householders to develop their homes – around 40 more than the previous quarter. We decided 82% within eight weeks, and around 95% of these applications were approved.

We received just under 90 applications from small business and others to develop their properties – around 20 more than the previous quarter. We decided just over 60% within eight weeks while approving around 88%. This represents slightly improved performance on the previous three months.

Just under 1,250 residents were claiming Job-Seekers Allowance at the end of June. This is around 30% less than at the same time last year and constitutes around 1.7% of Ashford's working age population. The Kent average is currently 2%. The number of young people (18-24) claiming JSA has also almost halved over the last year to 45. At 0.5% of Ashford's working age population this is also below the Kent average of 0.6%.

## Creating quality homes & places to live

In April Cabinet agreed to submit a bid for further funding from the Homes and Communities Agency through the Affordable Housing Programme. This bid was accepted in July, and the £2.1million of funding will enable the construction of 106 affordable homes on various sites across the borough, including 46 units of sheltered accommodation.

The average selling price of homes in Ashford (to April) was around 20% more than at the same time last year.

The building of 110 new homes was started during the quarter, an increase of 20 on the previous three months. The number of homes completed also increased to 40 compared to 20 over the previous quarter.

Although still ongoing, during the quarter a large amount of effort across the Council went into testing and refining proposals in the Chilmington Green planning application. Particular focus was given to community management; open spaces, allotments and parks; sports and community buildings; and applying garden city principles to make sure they meet the aspirations the Council has set in the approved local plan for the area.

In June Cabinet approved the designation of the Boughton Aluph and Eastwell Neighbourhood Area, enabling the local community to help shape local development and growth through production of a Neighbourhood Development Plan.

At the same Cabinet, a 'Dark Skies' supplementary planning document was approved which will minimise the impact of external light in the borough, improving the quality of life for residents and supporting awareness of the impact of light pollution on the night sky, human health and wildlife.

Around 99.9% of properties have a current gas safety certificate, a number comparable with both last quarter's and last year's

performance. This figure includes properties where the annual certificate has lapsed and we are awaiting access to the property.

In response to increasing numbers of requests for temporary Bed and Breakfast accommodation, and as part of the Council's wider homelessness strategy, in April the Cabinet agreed to convert a recently-acquired property on Christchurch Road to provide short-stay accommodation.

Due to additional properties and resources the number of families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation, although still slightly higher than the Council's target, is currently under half the number seen at this time last year (an average of 14 compared to 29). The number of homeless applications has also decreased to around 50 (with around half of these being accepted), in line with the trend seen for quarter 1 in previous years.

In May Cabinet approved the release of over £350,000 of section 106 funds to extend and improve the Singleton Village Hall – allowing a broader range of community activities to take place there.

After a year of the new borough-wide recycling service, Ashford's recycling rate has increased from 14% to around 60% (according to the latest figures from BIFFA), with more recyclable material collected in June than ever before.



## Giving residents value for money services

Our Customer Service Agents at the Gateway +, Civic Centre and elsewhere dealt with an average of 11,000 visitors per month during the quarter – around 2,000 more than the trend over the previous year but 2,000 less than in the previous quarter. March and April are traditionally some of the busiest months of the year, with new Council Tax / Housing benefit notifications going out, as well as around 10,000 garden recycling renewal letters this year. These large-scale correspondences in turn create an increase in enquiries to the Council offices. Despite this, there was an improvement in wait times, with 95% of these face-to-face queries seen within our target of 15 minutes.

The proportion of customers using 'self-service' provision remains steady at just over 15% (against a target of 10%), meaning that they didn't need to speak to a member of staff and freeing up officers to deal with more complex queries.

By the end of June we had collected just over 30% of council tax and business rates, around the same as at this point last year.

Around 67% of residents chose to use direct debit for paying council tax, a figure which remains broadly constant compared to last year.

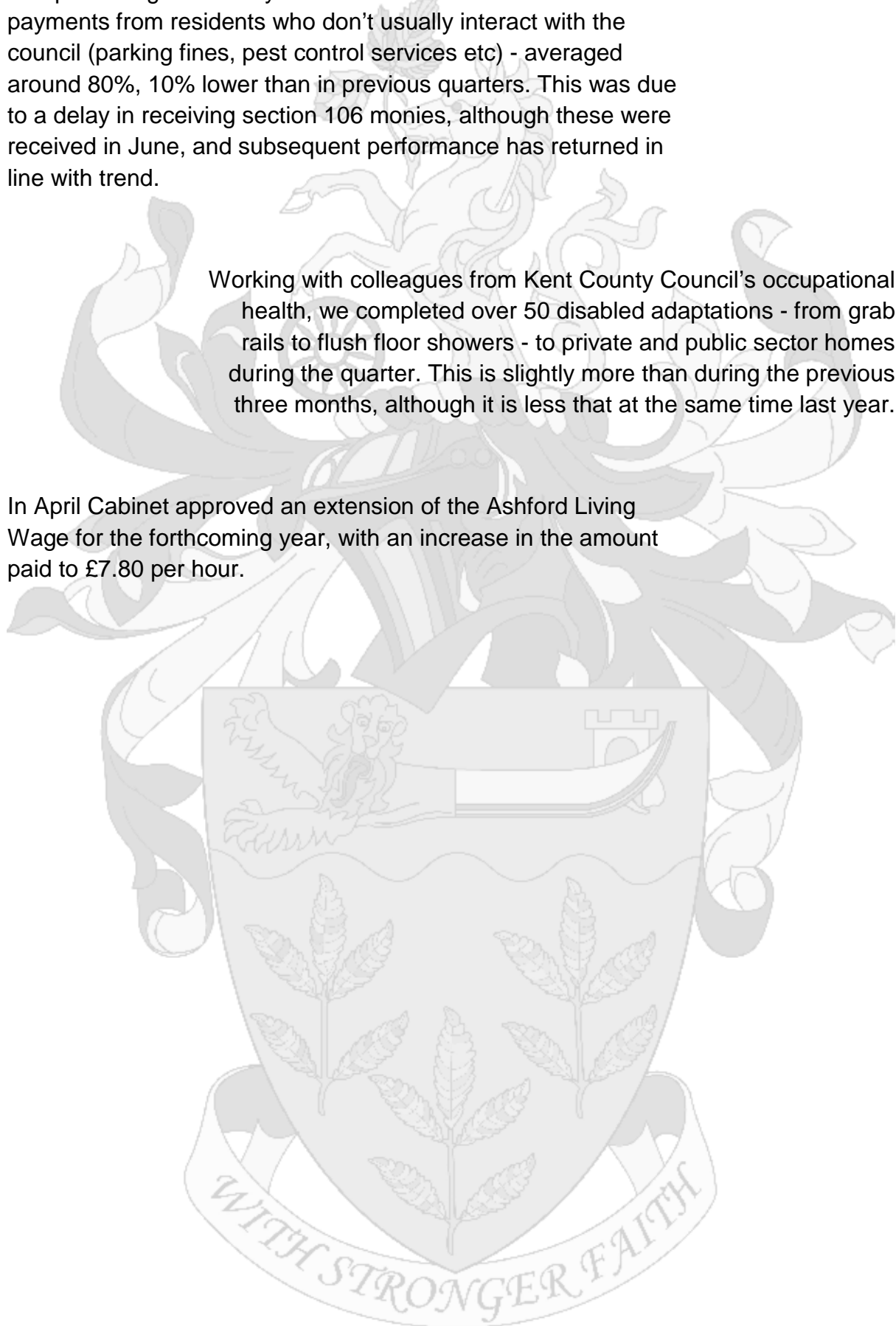
The benefits caseload, which fell slowly and steadily during 2013/14, has levelled out more recently. The caseload remained around 10,100 throughout the quarter. This in turn has meant that the average time taken to process new claims and changes in circumstances has been under 5 days – around a day less than in over the previous quarter.

In June Cabinet received the final financial outturn for 2013/14, which showed that the Council ended the year with a balanced budget, and indeed underspent by around £95,000.

The percentage of sundry debtor income received – small payments from residents who don't usually interact with the council (parking fines, pest control services etc) - averaged around 80%, 10% lower than in previous quarters. This was due to a delay in receiving section 106 monies, although these were received in June, and subsequent performance has returned in line with trend.

Working with colleagues from Kent County Council's occupational health, we completed over 50 disabled adaptations - from grab rails to flush floor showers - to private and public sector homes during the quarter. This is slightly more than during the previous three months, although it is less than at the same time last year.

In April Cabinet approved an extension of the Ashford Living Wage for the forthcoming year, with an increase in the amount paid to £7.80 per hour.



## Technical Annex

Indicator	Quarter 1 2014/15	Quarter 4 2013/14	Quarter 3 2013/14	Quarter 2 2013/14	Quarter 1 2013/14
<b>Helping to create jobs and economic growth</b>					
Town Centre Footfall	308,000	---	---	---	---
Car Park Users	290,000	285,000	289,000	292,000	287,000
% of compliant food premises	97	97	96	96	96
Householder planning applications - number	303	265	240	240	230
Householder planning applications - % decided within 8 weeks	82	80	80	80	78
Householder planning applications - % approved	95	80	87	87	93
Small business planning applications - number	89	72	65	75	80
Small business planning applications – % decided within 8 weeks	63	50	50	50	45
Small business planning applications – % approved	88	80	80	---	---
JSA claimants	1,240	1,450	1,500	1,580	1,800
Long-term (over 12 months) JSA claimants 18-24	45	60	60	80	80
<b>Creating quality homes and places to live</b>					
Average house selling price	---	207,000	208,500	185,000	188,000
Number of homes started	110	90	90	100	40
Number of homes completed	40	20	20	20	30
% of properties with a current gas safety certificate	99.9	100	99.9	99.9	100
Number of families in B&B accommodation	14	19	19	33	28
Number of homeless applications received	53	84	123	84	50
Number of homeless applications approved	27	40	38	49	39
<b>Value for money services</b>					
Average number of face-to-face contacts	11,029	13,048	9,026	9,920	8,977
% of customers seen within 15 minutes	95.1	94.1	90.7	93.4	92
% of customers using 'self service'	15.3	11.8	10.2	16.4	16.3
% Council Tax collected	30.6	98.3	87	58.7	30.6
% Business rates collected	31.6	98.9	88.2	60.2	32
% take up of direct debit for paying council tax	66.9	66.2	66.7	67	66.8
Benefits Caseload	10,100	10,100	10,200	10,300	10,350
Number of days to process new benefit claims / CoC	4.8	5.8	6.3	5.1	5.1
% sundry debtor income	79.2	87.9	88.6	92.7	92.6
Number of disabled adaptations completed	52	44	77	87	97



## Future Reviews and Report Tracker

### October

- Update on Focus 2013-15
- Update on new waste and recycling scheme
- BSTG Information report

### November

- ABC Business plan performance report Q2 2014-15
- Update on Portas Pilot Project
- S106 agreements

### December/January - meetings of Budget Scrutiny Task group

### January

- Report of Budget scrutiny task group
- Update and progress report on ABC commercial companies and the O&S Call-in recommendations

Unfortunately there is nothing further to report in respect of the Conningbrook Project so this item has been deferred until further notice.

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.

Year Plan 2014/15

Month	items	Task Group
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ABC Business Plan quarterly performance report (Q4)</li> <li>• Fly tipping</li> </ul>	
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Call-in meeting re Cabinet Minute No. 397</li> </ul>	
July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sickness &amp; Absenteeism annual report.</li> <li>• Housing Strategy Action Plan Monitoring Report and annual review of Homelessness strategy</li> </ul>	<b>Budget Scrutiny TG meeting</b>
August	<b>No meeting</b>	
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ABC Business Plan quarterly performance report Q1</li> <li>• BSTG Report back on 'Informing the next 5 Years'</li> </ul>	
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BSTG – Information report</li> <li>• Update on progress of Focus 2013 – 15</li> <li>• Update on new waste and recycling scheme.</li> </ul>	
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ABC Business Plan quarterly performance report Q2</li> <li>• Update on Portas Pilot Project</li> <li>• S106 agreements</li> </ul>	
December	<b>Scrutiny of Council's draft 2015/16 budget</b>	<b>Budget Scrutiny TG meetings</b>
January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report of Budget Scrutiny Task Group</li> <li>• Update and progress report on ABC Commercial Companies and the O&amp;S Call-in recommendations</li> </ul>	<b>Budget Scrutiny TG meetings</b>
February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ABC Business Plan quarterly performance report(Q3)</li> <li>• Purchase of Commercial property</li> <li>• Annual review of Community Safety Partnership</li> </ul>	
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.
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		
215/11/13	Update on Conningbrook Project – especially safety aspects.	Nature Conservation & Tourism Officer and Sports Projects Manager & active Ashford co-ordinator	TBA		
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 2014		
57/06/08 199/10/11 115/08/13	Update on new waste and recycling scheme.	Strategic Environmental and Customer Service Manager	October 2014	New contract commenced July 2013.	Report on new contract one year after commencement
102/07/14	Annual report on Housing framework	Housing Strategy Manager/Head of Housing	July 2015		
103/07/14	Sickness and Absenteeism – annual report	Head of Personnel & development	June/July 2015		
104/07/14	S106 agreements & provision of Affordable Housing	Housing Strategy Manager/Head of Housing	Sept 2014	Deferred	
104/07/14	S106 agreements & CIL	Strategic Sites & Design Manager	Nov 2014		
104/07/14	Update on Portas Pilot project	Economic Development Manager	Nov 2014		
104/07/14	ABC commercial companies	Principal Solicitor Property and Projects	Jan 2015		
104/07/14	Purchase of Commercial property	Strategic Housing and Property Manager	Feb 2015		

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	