

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 4th 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.

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Ashford Borough Council

Our Performance

April to June 2014

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.

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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.

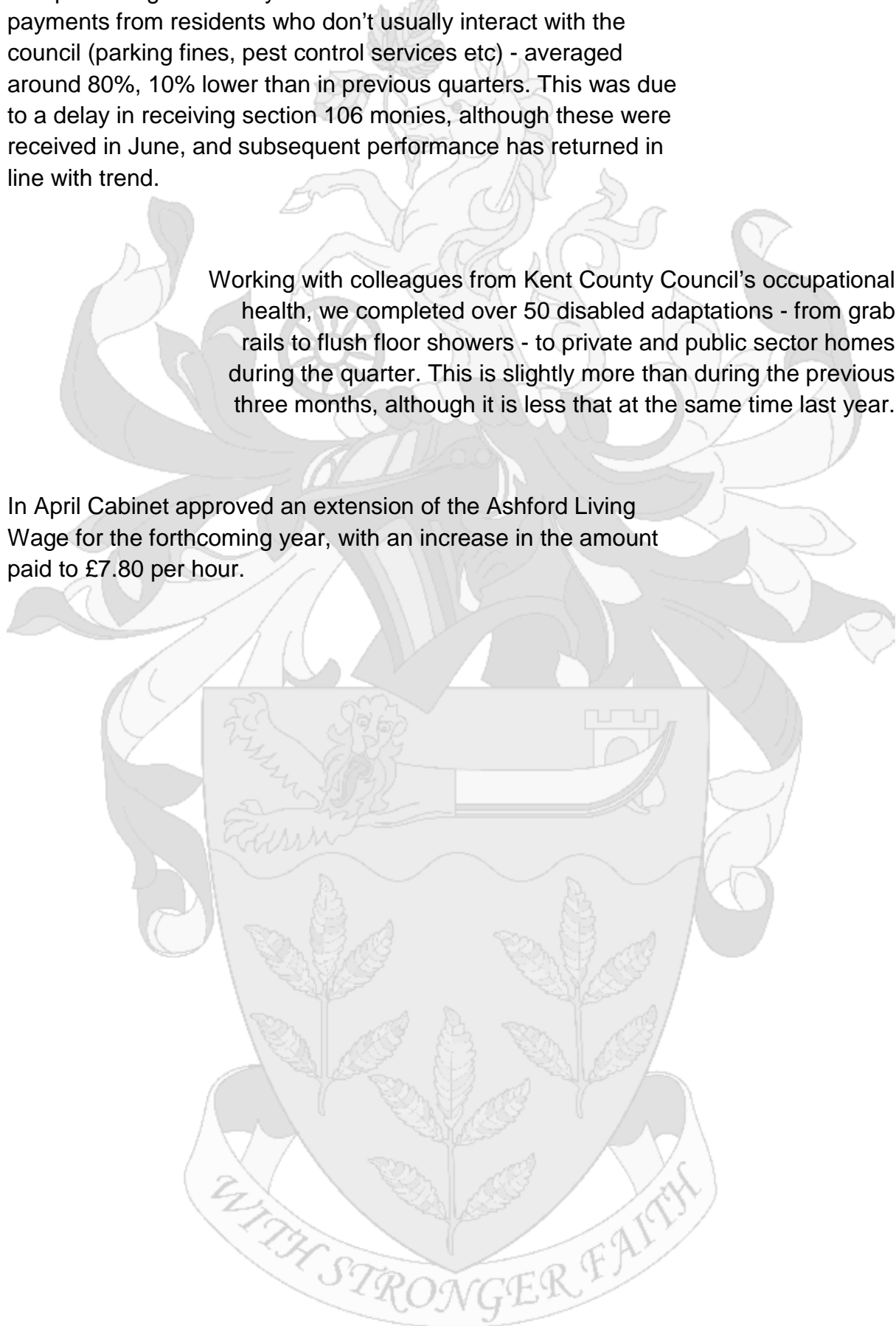
The benefits caseload, which fell slowly and steadily during 2013/14, has levelled out more recently. The caseload remained around 10,100 throughout the quarter. This in turn has meant that the average time taken to process new claims and changes in circumstances has been under 5 days – around a day 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
Helping to create jobs and economic growth					
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
Creating quality homes and places to live					
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
Value for money services					
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