

Overview and Scrutiny  
25 November 2014

**Agenda item 5**

**Ashford Borough Council's Performance – Quarter 2, 2014 - 15**

The attached report was presented to the Cabinet on 13<sup>th</sup> November 2014 and O&S are invited to consider it.

Agenda Item No: 11  
Report To **Cabinet**  
Date: **13 November 2014**



**ASHFORD**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report Title: **Ashford Borough Council's Performance – Quarter 2 2014/15**  
Report Author: Policy and Performance Officer, Nicholas Clayton  
Portfolio Holder: Portfolio Holder for Resource Management and Control, Graham Galpin

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, sources 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 2 of 2014/15.**  
Policy Overview: The council's strategic direction, which informs the report's content, is held 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 say that performance remains strong, with some of the external pressures seen over the previous year continuing to ease. Of particular note is the number of Jobseekers allowance claimants, which is back around 1,000 for the first time in six years. Around 150 claimants a month are either returning to work or extending their working hours. Positive trends such as these are taking some of the strain off of our frontline services.

A year after the successful launch of the new borough-wide recycling scheme, it is pleasing to see that our residents have helped us achieve levels of recycling which would put us amongst the best in the country.

This report's technical annex, alongside the continued monthly monitoring of services and budgets by the council's Management Team, will allow us to remain vigilant and hopefully to maintain the current positive levels of performance.

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# Ashford Borough Council

## Our Performance

*July to September 2014*

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

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

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## Helping to create jobs and economic growth

An average of 264,000 people visited the town centre in July and August, as calculated by the footfall counter installed on the high street earlier this year. The contract for this is currently being renewed, meaning that no figure is available for September.

Source: Compiled by the Economic Development Team

Just over 302,000 people used the council's car parks during the quarter. Although a high number is to be expected over the summer months, this is around 10,000 more than in the same quarter last year.

Source: Compiled by the Parking Services Team

In July the Cabinet approved the Highways Agency's decision to press ahead with the delivery of the full Junction 10a by 2019, representing a significant step forward in delivering the full benefits of the Council's Local Plan.

Source: Cabinet 10/07/14, minute #70

96.8% of food premises comply with environmental health standards. This number has remained steady over the last year.

Source: Compiled by the Environmental Health Team

We received 270 applications from householders to develop their homes – around 30 less than the previous quarter. We decided 85% within eight weeks, and around 95% of these applications were approved.

Source: Compiled by the Planning and Development Service

We received 110 applications from small business and others to develop their properties – around 20 more than the previous quarter. We decided just under 70% within eight weeks while approving around 90%. This represents slightly improved performance on the previous three months.

Source: Compiled by the Planning and Development Service

Just over 1,050 residents were claiming Job-Seekers Allowance at the end of September. This is around 45% less than at the same time last year and constitutes around 1.4% of Ashford's working age population. The Kent average is currently 1.8%. The number of young people (18-24) claiming JSA long-term (over 12 months) has remained steady at 45. At 0.5% of Ashford's working age population this is the same as the Kent average.

Around 140 claimants a month either returned to work or increasing their employment hours, whilst the circumstances of around 10 meant a switch to another type of benefit.

Source: NOMIS

In July Cabinet agreed a revised approach to supporting the employment and employability of local young people following a review and pilot of a new scheme. Its three themes include Work Placements, Apprenticeships and Graduate Placements, and will initially mentor up to six young apprentices.

Source: Cabinet 10/07/14 minute #73

In September the Cabinet agreed a scheme for free Sunday and Bank Holiday, reduced parking fees in designated car parks after 3pm in Ashford and Tenterden Town Centres, which was rolled out during October. This followed a full review of parking across the borough, and hopes to support local traders and economic development.

Source: Cabinet 04/09/14 minute #119



## Creating quality homes & places to live

In October the Planning Committee approved outline planning permission to the Chilmington Green development of up to 5,750 homes, with schools and associated infrastructure. This approval for a hybrid outline application, on a mixed use development applying the Garden City principles, is subject to the completion of a section 106 agreement.

Source: Planning Committee 15/10/14 minute #194

The average selling price of homes in Ashford (to July) was around 15% more than at the same time last year.

Source: Home.co.uk

The building of 110 new homes was started during quarter 1, 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. (*Quarter 2 figures yet to be released by DCLG*)

Source: Department for Communities and Local Government)

In September the Cabinet agreed to the dedication of the part of the Memorial Gardens which houses the Memorial to the two World Wars in perpetuity to honour the memory of those who lost their lives in World War 1.

Source: Cabinet 04/09/14 minute #120

Just under 100% of council-owned 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.

Source: Compiled by the Community and Housing Service

Ashford's recycling rate has increased from 12% to around 55% in July, according to the latest figures from BIFFA. This would have

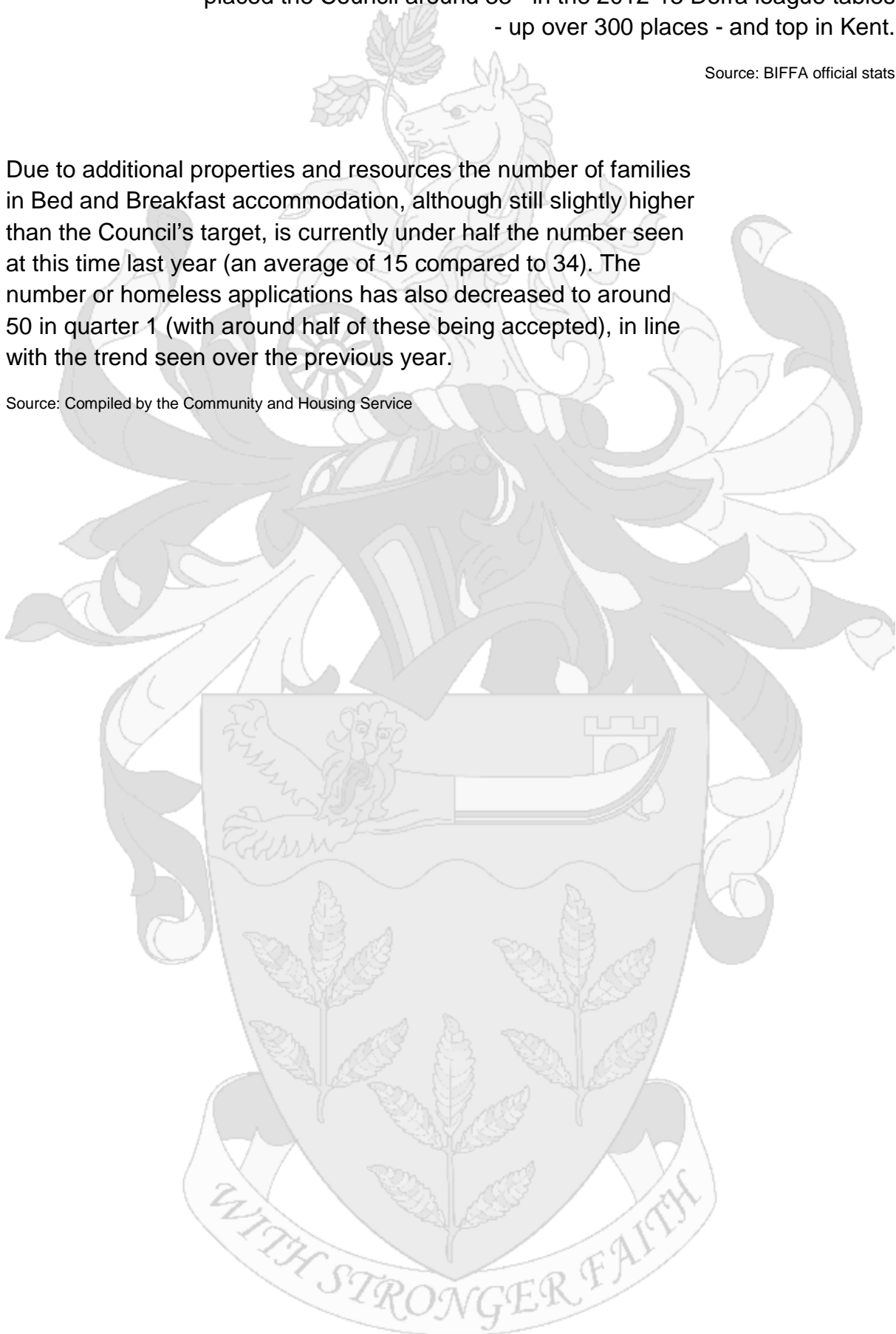


placed the Council around 33<sup>rd</sup> in the 2012-13 Defra league tables  
- up over 300 places - and top in Kent.

Source: BIFFA official stats

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 15 compared to 34). The number of homeless applications has also decreased to around 50 in quarter 1 (with around half of these being accepted), in line with the trend seen over the previous year.

Source: Compiled by the Community and Housing Service





## Giving residents value for money services

Our Customer Service Agents at the Gateway +, Civic Centre and elsewhere dealt with an average of just under 10,000 visitors per month – around 1,000 less than in the previous quarter. It should be noted that the previous quarter is traditionally one of the busiest, with new Council Tax / Housing benefit notifications going out, as well as around 10,000 garden recycling renewal letters this year. Wait times also remained strong, with around 94% of these face-to-face queries seen within our target of 15 minutes.

The proportion of customers using 'self-service' provision rose slightly to just under 17%, it remains above our target of 10% - meaning that customers didn't need to speak to a member of staff and freeing up officers to deal with more complex queries.

Source: Compiled by the Customer Services Team

By the end of June we had collected just under 60% 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.

Source: Compiled by the Revenues and Benefits Team

The benefits caseload has fallen to around 10,000 throughout the quarter. This in turn has meant that the average time taken to process new claims and changes in circumstances has levelled-out at around 5 and a half days.

Source: Compiled by the Revenues and Benefits Team

In July Cabinet updated a 'suite' of policies which review and strengthen the council's approach to tackling fraud, corruption and money-laundering whilst providing a framework for officers to speak up about concerns they might have.

Source: Cabinet 10/07/14 minute #72

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 95%, 15% higher than in previous quarters.

Source: Compiled by the Revenues and Benefits Team

Working with colleagues from Kent County Council's occupational health, we completed over 70 disabled adaptations - from grab rails to flush floor showers - to private and public sector homes during the three months (to July). This is slightly more than during the previous three months, and comparable to the same time last year.

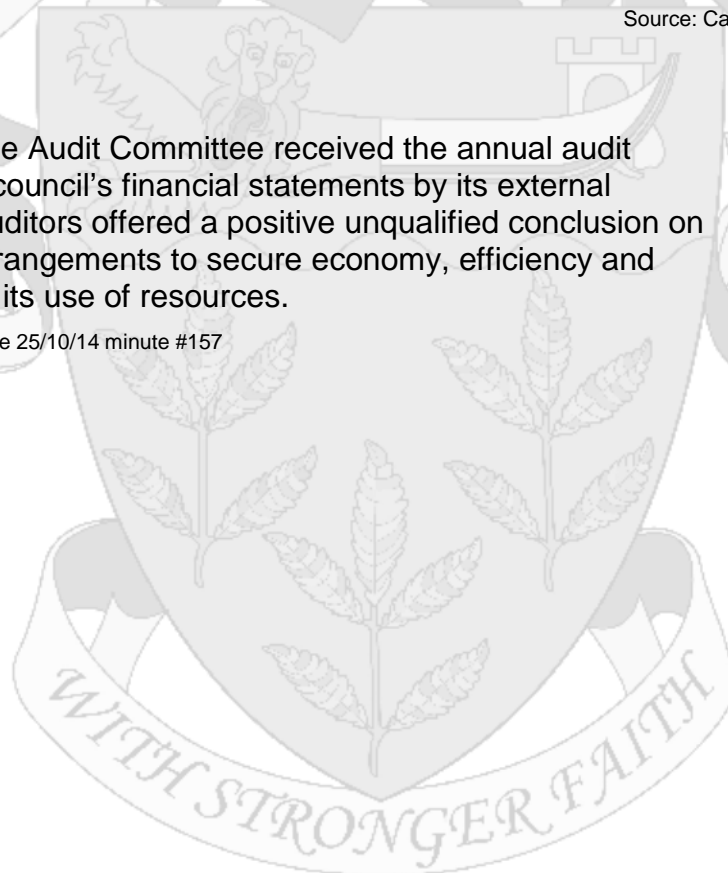
Source: Compiled by Community and Housing Services

In July Cabinet reviewed its disabled adaptations work for council tenants, approving a revised eligibility policy to ensure the best use of available funding and better prioritisation of works based on need, alongside authority to the Head of Community and Housing to set an appropriate budget to achieve this.

Source: Cabinet 10/07/14 minute #75

In September the Audit Committee received the annual audit findings on the council's financial statements by its external auditors. The auditors offered a positive unqualified conclusion on the Council's arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

Source: Audit Committee 25/10/14 minute #157



## Technical Annex

Indicator	Quarter 2 2014/15	Quarter 1 2014/15	Quarter 4 2013/14	Quarter 3 2013/14	Quarter 2 2013/14
<b>Helping to create jobs and economic growth</b>					
Town Centre Footfall	263,500	308,000	---	---	---
Car Park Users	302,000	290,000	285,000	289,000	292,000
% of compliant food premises	97	97	97	96	96
Householder planning applications - number	270	303	265	240	240
Householder planning applications - % decided within 8 weeks	86	82	80	80	80
Householder planning applications - % approved	95	95	80	87	87
Small business planning applications - number	110	89	72	65	75
Small business planning applications – % decided within 8 weeks	69	63	50	50	50
Small business planning applications – % approved	90	88	80	80	---
JSA claimants	1,060	1,240	1,450	1,500	1,580
Long-term (over 12 months) JSA claimants 18-24	45	45	60	60	80
<b>Creating quality homes and places to live</b>					
Average house selling price	N/A	213,000	207,000	208,500	185,000
Number of homes started	---	110	90	90	100
Number of homes completed	---	40	20	20	20
% of properties with a current gas safety certificate	100	99.9	100	99.9	99.9
Number of families in B&B accommodation	15	14	19	19	33
Number of homeless applications received	---	53	84	123	84
Number of homeless applications approved	---	27	40	38	49
<b>Value for money services</b>					
Average number of face-to-face contacts	9,977	11,029	13,048	9,026	9,920
% of customers seen within 15 minutes	93.6	95.1	94.1	90.7	93.4
% of customers using 'self service'	16.7	15.3	11.8	10.2	16.4
% Council Tax collected	58.7	30.6	98.3	87	58.7
% Business rates collected	58.5	31.6	98.9	88.2	60.2
% take up of direct debit for paying council tax	67.1	66.9	66.2	66.7	67
Benefits Caseload	10,000	10,100	10,100	10,200	10,300
Number of days to process new benefit claims / CoC	5.5	4.8	5.8	6.3	5.1
% sundry debtor income	96	79.2	87.9	88.6	92.7
Number of disabled adaptations completed	71 (to July)	52	44	77	87