

**Agenda item 5**

**Ashford Borough Council's Performance – Quarter 3, 2014 - 15**

The attached report was presented to the Cabinet on 11<sup>th</sup> February and O&S are invited to consider it.

Agenda Item No:

Report To **Cabinet**

Date: **11 February 2015**

Report Title: **Ashford Borough Council's Performance – Quarter 3 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, 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 3 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

The performance of this council generally continues to meet expectations. There are two points of particular interest within the figures. One is the continued fall in those claiming unemployment benefit, to levels not seen in years, and the pleasing numbers of those moving from this to meaningful employment. The other is the remarkable reduction in the need to use expensive B&B accommodation for families and individuals in need of temporary support. Such a fall is a reflection of this council's proactive work in delivering the Christchurch Road project, developing more responsive and cost-effective services to meet the needs of residents.

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 maintain the current positive levels of performance.

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# Ashford Borough Council

## Our Performance

### *October to December 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 280,000 people visited the town centre per month during the quarter, as calculated by the footfall counter installed on the high street earlier this year. This is an increase of around 15,000 compared to the previous quarter.

Source: Compiled by the Economic Development Team

An average of just over 100,000 people per month used the council's car parks during the quarter. This is similar to the previous quarter.

Source: Compiled by the Parking Services Team

In December the Cabinet received a review of tourism across the borough, agreeing a programme of short-term projects and longer-term programmes to support and promote this sector.

Source: Cabinet 04/12/14, minute #263

97.6% of food premises comply with environmental health standards. This number has remained steady over the last year, and is around 1% higher than in the previous quarter.

Source: Compiled by the Environmental Health Team

We received 250 applications from householders to develop their homes over the quarter – around 20 less than the previous quarter. Our latest response rates showed that we decided 82% within eight weeks while approving around 90%.

Source: Compiled by the Planning and Development Service

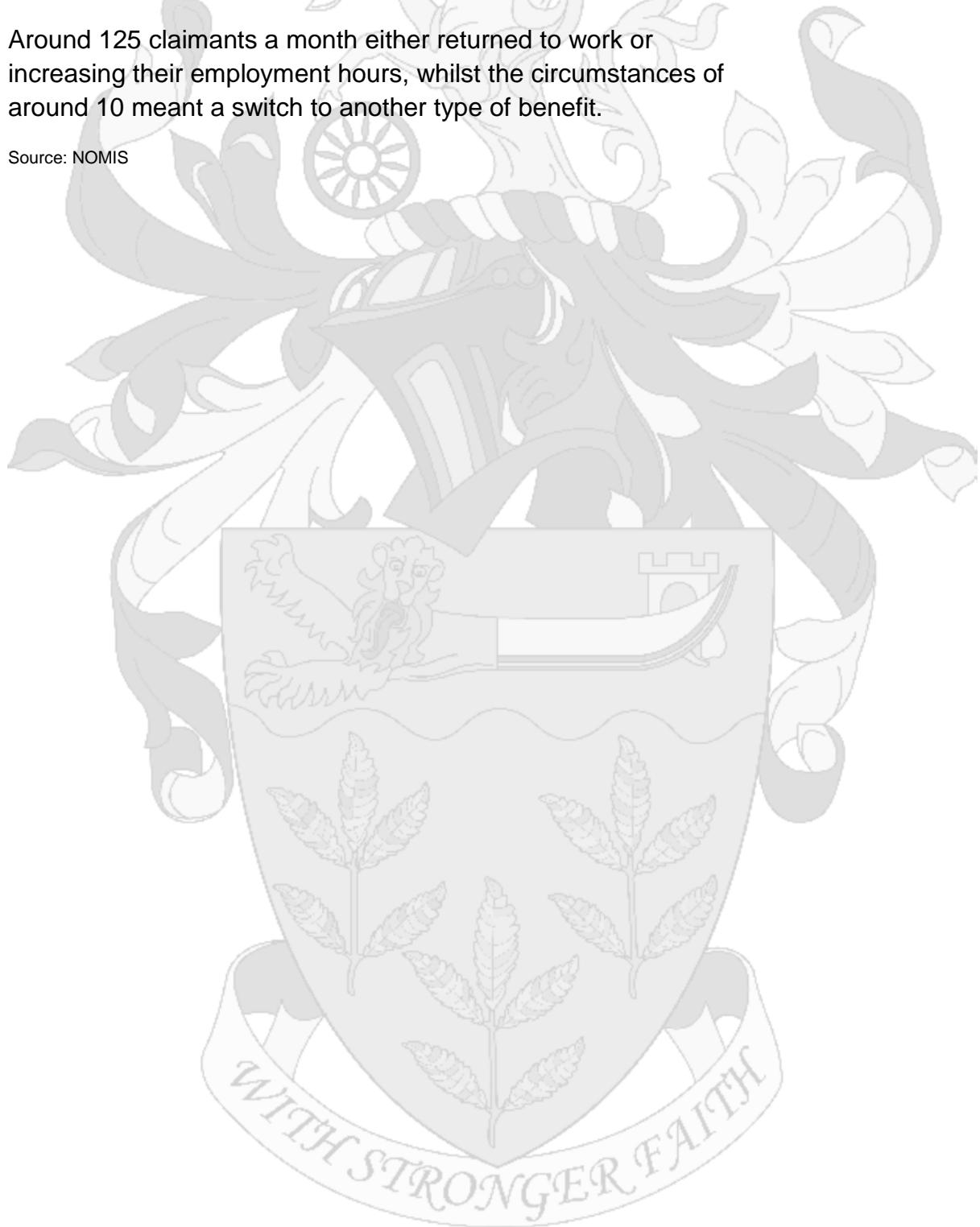
We received 90 applications from small business and others to develop their properties over the quarter – around 20 less than the previous quarter. Our latest response rates showed that we decided just under 70% within eight weeks while approving around 85%. This represents slightly improved performance on the previous three months.

Source: Compiled by the Planning and Development Service

The number of residents claiming Job-Seekers Allowance has fallen below 1,000 for the first time in five years, and now stands at around 980. This is around 35% less than at the same time last year and constitutes around 1.3% of Ashford's working age population. Ashford is also below the Kent average, which is currently 1.6%. The number of young people (18-24) claiming JSA long-term (over 12 months) has also fallen by 10 to 35.

Around 125 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



# Creating quality homes & places to live

In October the Cabinet provided authority to begin procurement arrangements for a new visitor centre and café at Hothfield Heathlands, to provide a much improved facility for visitors and address anti-social behaviour.

Source: Cabinet 09/10/14 minute #183

The average selling price of homes in Ashford (to October) was around 1% less than at the same time last year.

Source: Home.co.uk

The building of 170 new homes was started during quarter 2, an increase of 60 on the previous three months – with the vast majority of these coming from private enterprises. The number of homes completed also increased to 50 compared to 40 over the previous quarter. (*Quarter 3 figures yet to be released by DCLG*)

Source: Department for Communities and Local Government)

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 increased during the first full year of the new arrangements 12% to around 55%, 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. The borough was also named the most improved in the latest DEFRA league tables

Source: BIFFA official stats

Thanks in large part to the recent opening of the temporary accommodation at Christchurch Road, the need for the Council to house families in temporary Bed and Breakfast accommodation has reduced dramatically. The average during the quarter fell to just over five a month - with only two families needing this support by the end of the year. The most recent numbers (quarter 2) of homeless applications have also remained lower at around 60 (with just over 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 over 8,000 visitors per month – around 2,000 less than in the previous quarter. This reflects both the quieter holiday period and the previous quarters, which are traditionally some 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 94% of these face-to-face queries seen within our target of 15 minutes.

The proportion of customers using 'self-service' provision continues to rise to just under 18%, 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 December we had collected just over 86% 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 9,850 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 November Cabinet approved the renewal of the council's utilities through the KCC-run LASER consortium, bulk-purchasing which secures a better price on electricity and gas.

Source: Cabinet 13/11/14 minute #231

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%, slightly less than the previous quarter.

Source: Compiled by the Revenues and Benefits Team

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

Source: Compiled by Community and Housing Services

In December the Audit Committee received two reports from the council's external auditors. Their Annual Audit Letter concluded that (for the year up to March 2014) the council has put into place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

Source: Audit Committee 02/12/14 minute #252

In December Cabinet approved a new customer services strategy for the next five years. This strategy aims to take into account changes in customer behaviour, their preferred methods of contact and how developments in technology will facilitate future service provision.

Source: Cabinet 04/12/14 minute #260



## Technical Annex

Indicator	Quarter 3 2014/15	Quarter 2 2014/15	Quarter 1 2014/15	Quarter 4 2013/14	Quarter 3 2013/14
<b>Helping to create jobs and economic growth</b>					
Average Town Centre footfall per month	282,484	263,500	308,000	---	---
Average car park users per month	101,000	101,000	97,000	95,000	96,000
% of compliant food premises	98	97	97	97	96
Householder planning applications - number	253	270	303	265	240
Householder planning applications - % decided within 8 weeks	82	86	82	80	80
Householder planning applications - % approved	90	95	95	80	87
Small business planning applications - number	90	110	89	72	65
Small business planning applications – % decided within 8 weeks	70	69	63	50	50
Small business planning applications – % approved	85	90	88	80	80
JSA claimants	980	1,060	1,240	1,450	1,500
Long-term (over 12 months) JSA claimants 18-24	35	45	45	60	60
<b>Creating quality homes and places to live</b>					
Average house selling price	N/A	209,000	213,000	207,000	208,500
Number of homes started	---	170	110	90	90
Number of homes completed	---	50	40	20	20
% of properties with a current gas safety certificate	100	100	99.9	100	99.9
Average number of families in B&B accommodation per month	5	15	14	19	19
Number of homeless applications received	---	60	53	84	123
Number of homeless applications approved	---	35	27	40	38
<b>Value for money services</b>					
Average number of face-to-face contacts per month	8,253	9,977	11,029	13,048	9,026
% of customers seen within 15 minutes	94	93.6	95.1	94.1	90.7
% of customers using 'self service'	17.8	16.7	15.3	11.8	10.2
% Council Tax collected	86.8	58.7	30.6	98.3	87
% Business rates collected	86	58.5	31.6	98.9	88.2
% take up of direct debit for paying council tax	66.6	67.1	66.9	66.2	66.7
Benefits Caseload	9,860	10,000	10,100	10,100	10,200
Number of days to process new benefit claims / CoC	5.6	5.5	4.8	5.8	6.3
% sundry debtor income	94.6	96	79.2	87.9	88.6
Number of disabled adaptations completed	68	78	52	44	77